

CALASANZ AND THE INTUITIVE METHOD

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"The foundation of all teaching is to present sensible objects well to our senses so they can be easily understood." This phrase by Juan Amós Comenio appears in the prologue of "Orbis sensualium pictus" (1658). A few years earlier, in 1617, an Aragonese zoologist, Francisco Marcuello, had also used the same procedure in his Natural History and moral of birds.

The intuitive method is ancient in the Church. It has been used in theatrical performances, painting, sculpture, and architecture to transmit teaching linked to the transmission of faith.

Joseph Calasanz also used the intuitive method for the pupils of the Pious Schools despite the precariousness of the didactic means he had. He used it mainly in the lower classes because it gave good results to the children, especially the poorly gifted ones.

He used images engraved on paper and religious prints. He sent them to different schools to be distributed as rewards for his pupils. He also used medals, little pictures, and wax Agnus Dei and painted posters to celebrate feasts with the mandate to decorate the schools and the oratory. He mentions "pictures of the Holy Scriptures" of enormous size in the letters.

Contrary to the practice of the Jesuits, who distinguished themselves by the educational use of school theatre, Calasanz did not look favorably on it because he said that its staging and rehearsals consumed time that he considered precious for the rapid training of poor schoolchildren. On occasion, however, he does allow theatre, but without scenery. However, in the school's library of San Pantaleo, there were little plays inspired by the fairy tales of Perrault and the Brothers Grimm.

Calasanz preferred allegorical representations in which human virtues and qualities were personified. He expressed this in a letter: "Send me a book you have there, entitled Iconology, which we need for compositions to be made for the feasts of Justo and Pastor" (20-5-1628). This is the book by Cesare Ripa, which was so famous that celebrities of the fine arts used it as a source of inspiration for their works.

The fame of Cesare Ripa could have come to Calasanz for the 39 virtues that he represented in Rome on March 12, 1622, on the occasion of the canonization of Isidro Labrador, Ignatius of Loyola, Francis Xavier, Teresa of Jesus, and Philip Neri, saints to whom he had great devotion and whose medal he gave as a gift to the benefactors of the Pious Schools.

In these allegorical representations, Calasanz combined corporal expression with oratorical declamation and did not hesitate to give the floor to the children in the mass.

Calasanz was also very fond of nativity scenes, the origin of which is attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, whose spirituality he got to know closely with the friars of the convent of the Twelve Apostles in Rome. The cribs made by Gaspar Dragonetti, a collaborator of the saint in the early days of the Pious Schools, were very famous.

Calasanz's pedagogical practice led him to employ intuitive instruction in which the iconic and the symbolic contributed authentically audiovisual teaching with great efficacy for pupils' learning.