

The Beauty of Holiness: Sacred Art and the New Evangelization

Jem Sullivan

CATHOLIC INFORMATION SERVICE



GENERAL EDITOR

Michelle K. Borras, Ph.D.

Catholic Information Service

© Copyright 2012-2019, Knights of Columbus. All rights reserved.

Quoted works are copyright their respective authors.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Thomas Serafin

Scripture citations adapted from the Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994).

NIHIL OBSTAT

Susan M. Timoney, S.T.D.

Censor Deputatus

September 4, 2012

The *nihil obstat* and *imprimatur* are official declarations that a book or pamphlet is free of doctrinal or moral error. There is no implication that those who have granted the *nihil obstat* and the *imprimatur* agree with the content, opinions, or statements expressed therein.

IMPRIMATUR

Donald Cardinal Wuerl

Archbishop of Washington

Archdiocese of Washington

COVER IMAGE

Detail of the Virgin Mary bending over the infant Christ. From the *Wall of the Nativity*, Chapel of the Holy Family, Knights of Columbus Supreme Council, New Haven Connecticut. The chapel mosaics were completed by Fr. Marko Ivan Rupnik, SJ and the artists of Centro Aletti in 2005.

***The Beauty of Holiness:
Sacred Art and the New Evangelization***

Jem Sullivan

Contents

From Seeing to Contemplation to Adoration

- 2 From the Visible to the Invisible
- 4 Seeing with the “Eyes of Faith”
- 5 The Challenge of a “Sensory Dissonance”

Four Reasons to Place Sacred Art at the Service of the New Evangelization

- 9 Jesus Christ, the Icon of God
- 10 The Witness of Christian Art History
- 11 Responding to the Beauty of Faith
- 13 A “Culture of Images” and the New Evangelization

Toward another Way of Seeing

- 15 Awakening the Spiritual Senses
- 17 *Lectio Divina* Adapted to Art at the Service
of the New Evangelization
- 20 Purifying the Senses for God

22 *The Beauty of Holiness*

- 24 Sources
- 26 About



Detail of St. Joseph, sleeping.

Wall of the Nativity, Chapel of the Holy Family, Knights of Columbus Supreme Council, New Haven, Connecticut.

From Seeing to Contemplation to Adoration

Pope Benedict XVI has called attention to the relevance of sacred art for the new evangelization on numerous occasions. One such occasion was the presentation of the *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* to the universal Church. The *Compendium*, among the first publications of this pontificate, contains some fourteen works of sacred art. In introducing the *Compendium*, the Holy Father noted, “Works of art always ‘speak,’ at least implicitly, of the divine, of the infinite beauty of God.... Sacred images, with their beauty, are also a Gospel proclamation and express the splendor of the Catholic truth.... They urge one and all, believers and non-believers alike, to discover and contemplate the inexhaustible fascination of the mystery of Redemption, giving an ever new impulse to the lively process of its inculcation in time.”¹

As the Church reflects on the call and the challenges of the new evangelization, we are invited to reflect anew on the relationship of sacred art to evangelization and catechesis. What is the catechetical value of sacred images? How might sacred art serve to aid formation in the con-

tent of Christian faith? And might artistic masterpieces serve as powerful tools of the new evangelization in our own day and age?

From the Visible to the Invisible

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* notes that sacred art “is true and beautiful when its form corresponds to its particular vocation: evoking and glorifying, in faith and adoration, the transcendent mystery of God – the surpassing invisible beauty of truth and love visible in Christ, who ‘reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature,’ in whom ‘the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.... Genuine sacred art draws man to adoration, to prayer and to the love of God, Creator and Savior, the Holy One and Sanctifier.’”²

It follows that the role of sacred art in the new evangelization is to lead the faithful from *seeing* to *contemplation* to *adoration* of God. For as Pope Benedict XVI has noted, great works of art “are all a luminous sign of God and therefore truly a manifestation, an epiphany of God.”³ A sacred image of Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, or a Christian saint provides an earthly glimpse into eternal realities, a “head start to heaven,” so to speak.

The *Catechism* describes the goal of liturgical catechesis (*mystagogy*) as initiation into the mystery of Christ by proceeding from the visible to the invisible, from the sign to the thing signified, from the ‘sacraments’ to the ‘mysteries.’”⁴ Instituted by Christ, the sacraments are the privileged

means by which the faithful participate in his saving mystery through the ministry of the Church. Within this sacramental economy, sacred art that predisposes one to the sacramental presence of God may serve as a *pre-sacrament*, a phrase used by Blessed John Paul II to describe the sacred art and architecture of the Sistine Chapel.

To limit the function of sacred images to mere decorative or aesthetic representations of socio-cultural ideals, as is often the case, is to miss a high note in the liturgical symphony composed of sacred images, architecture, music and rites. Sacred images obviously express human, social, and cultural realities, and they add aesthetic value to the interior and exterior spaces of cathedrals, chapels and churches. But sacred images are also an indispensable means to instruct the faithful in the content of divine revelation, and reawaken and nourish their faith. With the help of sacred art, catechists, preachers and teachers of faith echo the divine pedagogy of salvation history wherein the witness of God's "words" and "deeds" are inextricably linked.

Blessed John Paul II drew attention to the pedagogical value of sacred images in his 1999 *Letter to Artists* when he wrote, "In a sense, art is a kind of visual Gospel, a *concrete mode of catechesis*."⁵ Which is to say that each Sunday, as the faithful hear the truth of the Gospel proclaimed and respond by professing their faith in the Creed, those same truths of faith are revealed in the sacred art that surround them. Church teachings and doctrines condensed onto a page of a *Catechism* find complementary forms of expression in sacred art and architecture. In this way, sacred art

- paintings, mosaics, stained glass, sculpture, sacred music
- become a “visual Gospel,” by which the faithful see, hear, and touch the mysteries of faith so as to incarnate its truths in holiness of life and Christian witness.

Seeing with the “Eyes of Faith”

One of the first to affirm this role of sacred images was Pope Saint Gregory the Great. In a letter to Serenus, Bishop of Marseilles in AD 599, he wrote, “Painting is employed in churches so that those who cannot read or write may at least read on the walls what they cannot decipher on the page.”⁶ The movement from *seeing* to *contemplation* to *adoration* of God is realized through written or spoken words *and* through sacred images.

For centuries sacred images were created with catechesis in mind. Of course, the appropriation of signs and symbols in sacred images relied on effective preaching and teaching in communion with the “seeing faith of the Church.” But the whole pedagogical point of a sacred image is not to engage viewers in an intellectual or didactic exercise alone. It is to lead them to awe and wonder, perhaps even to a ravishing of the soul by a glimpse of divine beauty, in the hope that they entrust their lives to this beauty and pursue a life of holiness. As the Preface for Christmas (I) reads, “In the mystery of the Word made flesh a new light of your glory has shone upon the eyes of our mind, so that, as we recognize in him God made visible, we may be caught up through him in love of things invisible.”

The whole point is to lead the faithful to perceive the Invisible in the visible, to learn a new way of seeing and hearing that leads to contemplation, worship and adoration of God. In this way, sacred art serves the new evangelization for the transmission of the Christian faith in our time.

Pope Gregory's assertion, cited above, would take distinct visible form in the outpouring of Christian art and architecture during the Middle Ages. A Gothic cathedral, such as Chartres cathedral, served, in effect, as a "catechism in stone," a homily in stained glass, expressing for the faithful in art and architecture the faith they professed in the Creed and heard proclaimed in the Scriptures. As medieval craftsmen set stone upon carved stone in a building visible from miles away and luminous through colored glass, they were, in fact, sculpting and painting the saving message of biblical history - explicit and beautiful as their faith. Thus a pilgrim entering Chartres cathedral was drawn into a "reading" of past biblical history made visible in its sacred art and architecture. At the same time, he was inserted through his seeing and hearing into a sacramental *present*, fully realized in the liturgy.

The Challenge of a "Sensory Dissonance"

Over the Christian centuries, sacred art served as a means of evangelization as it expressed, communicated and nourished the faith of Christians. In ages past, moments from the life of Christ, the Virgin Mary, the saints, and biblical events and figures were an unending source of inspiration

for art, architecture, music and literature. In the words of Blessed John Paul II, “Sacred Scripture thus became a sort of ‘immense vocabulary’ (Paul Claudel) and an ‘iconographic atlas’ (Marc Chagall) from which both Christian culture and art have drawn.”

Today the sacred artistic heritage of the West barely resonates in the common religious imagination. The visual deposit of faith in Christian art has only a negligible place in pastoral planning, liturgy, catechesis and evangelization. For younger generations the loss of familiarity and ready access to the Christian tradition of sacred art is particularly real. Born and educated in the so-called Information Age and immersed in internet and communications technologies, young people instantly recognize images and sounds from popular movies, music, commercials and advertizing. Unlike previous generations, they are saturated, consciously and unconsciously, with values conveyed through the visual and sensory culture that surrounds them. We have even begun to speak of “sensory overload” and “sensory addictions” in those immersed in today’s media culture.

As we respond to the call for a new evangelization, we are led to wonder – could not the vast heritage of Christian art and the beauty of holiness it expresses in sensory forms also shape and influence these generations?

We are also led to consider a striking paradox that remains a challenge for the new evangelization. This paradox takes the form of a *sensory dissonance* that marks the relationship of Christian art to contemporary culture. The *diminishing* role and place of Christian art in liturgy, catechesis and evange-

lization has occurred precisely at the moment when popular media culture, in content and medium, has become *increasingly* sensory and visual. Everyday life is infused with images, words and sounds aimed at engaging the mind, will, senses and emotions, while the daily or weekly experience of liturgy, catechesis and evangelization is often bereft of beauty. While the surrounding culture appeals constantly to visual and sensory experiences, the place and role of sensory expressions of faith within the Christian community have decreased significantly.

This *sensory dissonance* offers one among many challenges for the new evangelization. For clearly the sensory dissonance between the immersive experience of a visual culture on the one hand, and the Church's life of faith on the other, touches the very heart of the Church's mission to evangelize the culture.



Detail of the infant Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes, his arms outstretched as they will be on the cross.

Wall of the Nativity, Chapel of the Holy Family. Knights of Columbus Supreme Council, New Haven, Connecticut.

Four Reasons to Place Sacred Art at the Service of the New Evangelization

In order effectively to re-propose the Gospel message to those shaped by a sensory culture, can we afford to overlook sacred art as a tool of the new evangelization? Might artistic masterpieces serve to form the men and women of today, just as they did past generations of the faithful? We consider here four reasons for a recovery of the beauty of holiness in sacred art, at the service of the Church's task of evangelization.

Jesus Christ, the Icon of God

A first defense for the place of sacred art in the new evangelization is, of necessity, theological. Saint John Damascene, defender of sacred images against the iconoclasts of the eighth century, wrote, "In former times God, who is without form or body, could never be depicted. But now when God is seen in the flesh conversing with men, I make an image of the God whom I see. I do not worship matter; I worship the Creator of matter who became matter for my sake, who worked out my salvation through matter."⁸

Saint Paul sums up the Incarnational principle that inspires genuine sacred images in his hymn of praise as he affirms in faith, “Christ is the image (*eikon*) of the invisible God” (Colossians 1: 15). When God entered human history in the person of his Son, Christ filled our sensible world with his presence. The world, which already reflected God’s beauty, was rendered transparent to him. Images of beauty, through which the invisible mystery of God becomes visible, are now an essential part of Christian worship. Now matter *really* matters.

As Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI, notes in the *Spirit of the Liturgy*, “The complete absence of images is incompatible with faith in the Incarnation of God.”⁹ And as Blessed John Paul II observed, “In becoming man, the Son of God has introduced into human history all the evangelical wealth of the true and the good, and with this he has also unveiled a new dimension of beauty, of which the Gospel message is filled to the brim.”¹⁰ Masterpieces of Christian art that “speak the language of the Incarnation” become instruments of the new evangelization, at the heart of which stands the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ.

The Witness of Christian Art History

Secondly, there is the cumulative and undeniable witness of history. From the art of the early Christian catacombs to Romanesque basilicas and Byzantine iconogra-

phy, from soaring Gothic cathedrals to the creative torrent of the Renaissance and beyond, the history of Christianity is inextricably linked to its artistic heritage. To overlook or altogether ignore this accumulated treasury of Christian artistic and architectural history fails to resound with the most basic of human experiences – that of imagination rooted in memory.

In speaking of sacred icons, the Second Council of Nicea affirmed, “We preserve intact all the written and unwritten traditions of the Church which have been entrusted to us. One of these traditions consists in the production of representational art, which accords with the history of the preaching of the Gospel.”¹¹

Responding to the Beauty of Faith

Thirdly, there is a human or anthropological basis for the use of sacred images in faith formation. The *Catechism* speaks of faith as a response of the *whole* human person, engaging intellect, heart, senses, emotion, memory and will. A systematic formulation may lead one to *notional* assent (in Cardinal Newman’s terms) to the mystery of the Incarnation, but faith does not and should not stop there. Effective evangelization is directed to an all-encompassing *real* assent of intellect, heart and will. Sacred architecture and art engages the senses so that evangelization and catechetical formation involves the *whole* human being, moving him to lifelong conversion and discipleship.

Divine revelation shapes not only the content of evangelization and catechesis, but the methods by which that revelation is shared. Divine revelation, understood as the self-communication of God in human history transmitted in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, unfolds gradually in a “divine pedagogy” – that is, in the concrete means by which God communicates, teaches, and nurtures a covenant relationship with humanity.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes this divine pedagogy when it notes that “even before revealing himself to humanity in words of truth, God reveals himself through the language of creation, the work of his Word, of his wisdom.” Thus, “from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator; for the author of beauty created them.”¹²

In the Incarnation, the divine pedagogy unfolds in human history in the person of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. The Word of God, Jesus Christ, is the *icon*, the image of the unseen God. This “divine pedagogy” is disclosed in a symphony of “words” and “deeds” that engages the whole human person in the response and relationship of faith. This divine pedagogy will also shape the various means by which the Church bears witness to the Gospel in the new evangelization.

A “Culture of Images” and the New Evangelization

A fourth and final reason for placing art and architecture at the service of evangelization is cultural. Few will argue that we live in the midst of a global culture in which multiple images dominate, shape and define people's values and identity. Television commercials, billboard advertising, the Internet, blogs, video games – these visual media communicate the content and values of culture, for good or ill. This sensory culture daily presents fragmented images that subtly and not so subtly trivialize and denigrate the dignity of the human person, create superficial and consumerist needs and estrange us from spiritual realities.

How is the Church to “make belief believable,” in the words of the American writer Flannery O'Connor, to the YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook generations? In order effectively to engage the faithful who are shaped by this sensory culture, can the Church afford to dispense with sacred art and architecture as tools of catechesis and the new evangelization? Might sacred images serve to heal, transform and elevate the very sensory experiences that inundate our visual culture?

Pope Benedict XVI speaks of the challenge posed by a “culture of images” when he notes:

The centuries old conciliar tradition teaches us that images are also a preaching of the Gospel. Artists in every age have offered the principal facts of the mystery of salvation to the contemplation and wonder of believers by presenting them in the splendor of color and in the perfection of beauty. Today, more than ever, in a culture of images, a sacred image can express much more than what can be said in words, and can be an extremely effec-



*Wall of the Nativity, Chapel of the Holy Family.
Knights of Columbus Supreme Council, New
Haven, Connecticut.*

Toward another Way of Seeing

Awakening the Spiritual Senses

Human beings are created for beauty. The human person, created in the image and likeness of God, is a being at once corporeal and spiritual, an embodied spirit. As a unity of body and spirit, human beings express and perceive spiritual realities through tangible signs, most especially through sacramental signs and symbols. The embodiment of the human person is not an accident of nature or a byproduct of random molecular combinations. Rather, our embodiment, as creatures willed by God, is a necessary pre-condition for receiving God's revelation and for the human response of faith.

The human person, created by God out of love, is a gift of love to be given to others in love. And the way God communicates with humanity corresponds to the way he created us. This Christian anthropology shapes the methods and means of the new evangelization.

From a Christian anthropology that views the human person as an embodied spirit flows an understanding of the act of faith itself. Christian faith is the free response of the whole human person – intellect, will, memory, emo-

tions and senses – to the God who reveals himself. In other words, the human person, created by God as a unity of body, soul, and spirit, responds in faith to divine Revelation from that same embodied unity.

The patristic doctrine of the “spiritual senses,” or “five senses of the soul,” highlights the fact that the human person possesses faculties or powers by which we experience the invisible reality of God. Masterpieces of sacred art engage these “spiritual senses” as we contemplate, hear, touch, taste and see the beauty of his holiness. As a person encounters a masterwork of Christian art, his “spiritual senses” are engaged in a way that leads him from the visible to the invisible, from the sign to the reality signified, from sensory perceptions to the mysteries of faith.

In the words of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, “Listening to God’s Word, beholding God’s Word and touching God’s Word are all spiritual ways of perceiving the unique divine mystery.” Furthermore, the Patriarch noted,

Icons are a visible reminder of our heavenly vocation; they are invitations to rise beyond our trivial concerns and menial reductions of the world. They encourage us to seek the extraordinary in the very ordinary, to be filled with the same wonder that characterized the divine marvel in Genesis: “God saw everything that he made, and, indeed, it was very good” (Genesis 1: 30-31). Icons underline the Church’s fundamental mission to recognize that all people and all things are created and called to be “good” and “beautiful....” Indeed, icons remind us of another way of seeing

things, another way of experiencing realities, another way of resolving conflicts.¹⁴

Among the primary goals of the new evangelization is to lead people to this “other way of seeing things,” as well as to reawaken and nourish the faith of those who have lost the practice of faith in a secularized society. A recovery of the patristic doctrine of the “spiritual senses” will be vital in efforts to renew and nurture faith in our times.

Lectio Divina Adapted to Art at the Service of the New Evangelization

The practice of *lectio divina* has received renewed attention in our day. Pope Benedict XVI has spoken on several occasions of the need to recover this ancient spiritual practice. In the Holy Father’s words, “The diligent reading of Sacred Scripture accompanied by prayer makes that intimate dialogue possible in which the person reading hears God who is speaking, and in praying, responds to him with trusting openness of heart.... If it is effectively promoted, this practice will bring to the Church – I am convinced of it – a new spiritual springtime.”¹⁵

Might the practice of *lectio divina* adapted to the appreciation of works of Christian art serve as a concrete means of engaging the faithful in the new evangelization?

A hurried, even frantic pace of reading, hearing and seeing has become a given in a sensory culture. With ever new

and improved information and communications technologies, the way most people experience the world today has changed dramatically. At best, we now have instantaneous access to large amounts of news, opinion and information about the world, together with sophisticated and efficient means of communication unthinkable in previous times. At worst, the innate human capacity for reflection, receptivity, interior silence and the docility of contemplation has steadily eroded. In the attempt to keep pace with the incessant traffic of information, images and sounds, the ability to listen attentively, to see meditatively and to read prayerfully diminishes. As our physical senses, through which we experience the world, are overloaded with multiple images and relentless sound, our “spiritual senses,” through which we experience God, are increasingly deprived of exercise, nourishment and light.

In contrast to a high-speed sensory culture, the Christian spiritual tradition of *lectio divina* offers a distinctly different way of reading and hearing. This ancient approach to Sacred Scripture also is distinct from biblical exegesis, hermeneutics and the theological study of God’s Word. *Lectio divina* is a spiritual reading of Sacred Scripture that attunes the “spiritual senses” to listening to God silently, to reading God’s word meditatively and to resting in his presence. The Christian advances, with the Holy Spirit, in union with Jesus Christ, the living Word made flesh, through the Paschal mystery of his life, death and Resurrection.

When applied to works of Christian art, the practice of *lectio divina* can foster a prayerful *seeing* that integrates prayer,

faith and daily life. While upholding the unique and privileged place of Sacred Scripture as the inspired Word of God, the practice of *lectio divina* can transform the way we see the world as God's handiwork, as well as how we come to recognize and uphold the dignity of each human person, made in God's image, as the crown of creation.

The practice of *lectio divina* adapted to works of Christian art might also serve as a practical aid in the new evangelization as it leads the faithful to acquire the capacity for childlike wonder, to see with the "eyes of faith" and to hear with the "ears of the heart." Following the pattern of *lectio divina*, the faithful are invited to integrate intellect, emotions, will and senses in a response of faith to the God who reveals himself. Finally, a way of seeing and hearing informed by *lectio divina* provides a Christian alternative to the dehumanizing and multiple distractions of a fast-paced, sensory culture.

In the new evangelization, the Church offers Christian traditions of prayer as an antidote to the excesses of a visual culture. The goal of *lectio divina* is prayerful contemplation of the mysteries of faith. Simply *being* in God's presence, rather than *doing*, is the aim of contemplation, the final stage of *lectio divina*. The one who is immersed in God's Word is challenged to overcome the temptation to spiritual activism that tends to equate growth in the spiritual life with multiplication of prayers or spiritual activities. Receptivity to God's grace and openness to the healing power of God's Word replaces anxious, self-sustained effort in the spiritual life. In contemplation, one's spiritual gaze is simply fixed

on the face of Jesus Christ. Growth in holiness and ongoing conversion of life is experienced as a pure gift that flows from contemplating the One who reveals God's eternal love.

For contemplation, as the *Catechism* teaches, is "a gaze of faith, fixed on Jesus ... this focus on Jesus is a renunciation of self. His gaze purifies our heart; the light of the countenance of Jesus illumines the eyes of the heart and teaches us to see everything in the light of his truth and his compassion for all.... Words in this prayer are not speeches; they are like kindling that feeds the fire of love."¹⁶

Through the stages of *lectio divina* that includes *lectio* (prayerful reading), *meditatio* (meditation), *oratio* (prayer), and *contemplatio* (contemplation), the faithful enter into the mysteries of faith conveyed in masterpieces of Christian art. Through *lectio divina*, they may even be led to an encounter with the divine beauty of Trinitarian love revealed in the human face of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh.

Purifying the Senses for God

"Blessed are the pure in heart," says Jesus, "for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). To "see God" is both a supernatural gift of grace and the vocation of every Christian.¹⁷ But what does it mean to purify one's heart in order to "see God?" How might masterpieces of Christian art serve the new evangelization as they call forth a purifying of the senses for God?

To "see God" is a desire placed by God in every human heart. This common human desire for transcendence draws

each person to the One who alone can fulfill it. As the *Catechism* teaches, “The Beatitudes teach us the final end to which God calls us: the Kingdom, the vision of God, participation in the divine nature, eternal life, filiation and rest in God.”¹⁸

However, “seeing God” is not simply a promise to be fulfilled in the future, in eternal life and final rest in God. Growing in purity of heart transforms us in the present as well. In the here and now, the one who purifies the heart through a cleansing of the senses – seeing, hearing, touching – is given an earthly and partial glimpse of God.

This is the promise of the beatitude and this is where Christian art comes in. For contemplation of divine beauty and the beauty of faith expressed in masterpieces of Christian art provide a concrete way to purify our senses in anticipation of the promised eternal vision of God. Genuine masterpieces of art offer privileged means by which we may purify our vision and our heart so as to “see God,” now and in the life to come.

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger affirmed this capacity of Christian art to purify the senses when he observed:

To admire icons and the great masterpieces of art leads us on an inner way, a way of overcoming ourselves; thus in this purification of vision that is a purification of the heart, it reveals the beautiful to us, or at least a ray of it. In this way we are brought into contact with the power of truth.... The true apology of Christian faith, the most convincing demonstration of its truth against every denial, are the saints, and the beauty that the faith has generated. Today, for faith to grow, we must lead ourselves and

the persons we meet to encounter the saints and to enter into contact with the Beautiful.¹⁹

The Beauty of Holiness

The lives of the saints Cardinal Ratzinger mentions exemplify the beauty of holiness. The saints hold up for us a living image of beauty in a harmonious life, graced by the Holy Spirit and perfected in divine love. It is in this sense that it is often said that the saints are like masterpieces of art – human beings whose openness to the Holy Spirit allowed them to be purified and molded into unique icons of Christ Jesus in the world. Perhaps that is why so many people, even those shaped by a secularized and rationalistic worldview, are attracted to, even compelled by the lives of the saints. No wonder, too, that artists through the centuries have chosen the lives of the saints for inspiration and content. Their holiness and virtue are apprehended as beautiful.

So just as one delights in the cadence of a sonnet by Shakespeare, or is drawn into the intense visual drama of light and shadow in a Caravaggio painting, or is moved by a treasured piece of sacred music by Bach, the Christian stands in awe of the beauty of a saintly life purified and lived completely for God.

In admiring the virtues of a saint's life, expressed in artistic forms, the Church invites the faithful to imitation in

a life of Christian discipleship and the pursuit of holiness. Blessed John Paul II observed, “As Genesis has it, all men and women are entrusted with the task of crafting their own life; in a certain sense, they are to make of it a work of art, a masterpiece.”²⁰

The lives of the saints and the art that depicts the beauty of their holiness can attract those who have fallen away from the practice of the faith and reinvigorate the faith of those who believe. It can guide all of us in the spiritual life, in imitation of the saints. The beauty of holiness that radiates from the lives of the saints thus becomes a pre-eminent path for the new evangelization.

In the *Ratzinger Report* interview given decades ago, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger drew us to the place of Christian art in the new evangelization when he observed, “The only really effective apologia for Christianity comes down to two arguments, namely the *saints* the Church has produced and the *art* which has grown in her womb. Better witness is borne to the Lord by the splendor of holiness and art which have arisen in communities of believers.... If the Church is to continue to transform and humanize the world, how can she dispense with beauty in her liturgies, that beauty which is so closely linked with love and with the radiance of the Resurrection?”²¹

Sources

- 1 Benedict XVI, Presentation of the *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, June 28, 2005, 7.
- 2 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (=CCC), 2502.
- 3 Meeting of the Holy Father Benedict XVI with the Clergy of the Diocese of Bolzano-Bressanone, August 6, 2008.
- 4 CCC, 1075.
- 5 John Paul II, *Letter to Artists*, 5.
- 6 Gregory the Great, *Epistulae IX*, 209.
- 7 *Letter to Artists*, 5.
- 8 St. John Damascene, *On the Divine Images*, 17.
- 9 Joseph Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2000), 131.
- 10 *Letter to Artists*, 5.
- 11 CCC, 1160.
- 12 CCC, 2500.
- 13 Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Introduction to the *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, March 20, 2005.
- 14 Patriarch Bartholomew I, Intervention at the Synod on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church, October 2008.
- 15 Benedict XVI, Address to the International Congress Commemorating the Fortieth Anniversary of *Dei Verbum*, September 16, 2005.

- 16 CCC, 2715-2717.
- 17 Cf. CCC, 1716-1728.
- 18 CCC, 1726.
- 19 Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty*, Message of His Eminence Card. Joseph Ratzinger to the Communion and Liberation Meeting at Rimini, August 2002.
- 20 *Letter to Artists*, 2.
- 21 Joseph Ratzinger with Vittorio Messori, *The Ratzinger Report: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985), 129-130.

About the Author

Jem Sullivan, Ph.D. is the author of *The Beauty of Faith: Christian Art and the New Evangelization* from Our Sunday Visitor. She serves various new evangelization initiatives at the Blessed John Paul II Shrine, Washington, DC.

About the Catholic Information Service

Since its founding, the Knights of Columbus has been involved in evangelization. In 1948, the Knights started the Catholic Information Service (CIS) to provide low-cost Catholic publications for the general public as well as for parishes, schools, retreat houses, military installations, correctional facilities, legislatures, the medical community, and for individuals who request them. For over 70 years, CIS has printed and distributed millions of booklets, and thousands of people have enrolled in its catechetical courses.

“Catholic Information Service” is a registered trademark of the Knights of Columbus.

The New Evangelization Series

1 What Is the New Evangelization?

PART I “FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD”

2 “I Believe in You”: The Question of God in the Modern World

3 The Mysteries of the Life of Jesus

4 A God Who Is Threefold Love

5 “We Have Come to Adore Him”: An Introduction to Prayer at the School of Benedict XVI

PART II “CALLED TO LOVE...”

6 Called to Love: John Paul II’s Theology of Human Love

7 In the Image of Love: Marriage and the Family

8 Following Love Poor, Chaste and Obedient: The Consecrated Life

PART III ...IN THE CHURCH, THE BRIDE OF THE LAMB

9 “Let It Be Done to Me”: Mary, the Origin of the Church

10 With the Heart of the Bridegroom: The Ministerial Priesthood

11 The Transfiguration of the World: The Sacraments

12 Light and Silence: A Eucharistic Diary

PART IV “LOVING IN DEED AND IN TRUTH”

13 What is Freedom For?

14 Justice: On the Dignity of Labor

15 Justice: The Gospel of Life

PART V “HE LOVED US TO THE END”

16 The Dignity of the Suffering Person

17 “Behold, I Died, and Now I Live...”: Death and Eternal Life.

APPENDICES: TOOLS FOR THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

A The Beauty of Holiness: Sacred Art and the New Evangelization

B Technology and the New Evangelization: Criteria for Discernment

“Works of art always ‘speak,’ at least implicitly ... of the infinite beauty of God.”

— Pope Benedict XVI

CATHOLIC INFORMATION SERVICE

Masterpieces of sacred art reflect the new dimension of beauty that entered the world in Jesus Christ, the “image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15). As works of art lead us from *seeing* to *contemplation* to *adoration*, they allow us to encounter the divine beauty of Trinitarian love revealed in the human face of Christ.



Catholic Information Service®

Knights of Columbus Supreme Council

PO Box 1971

New Haven, CT 06521

cis@kofc.org

203 752 4267

800 735 4605 (fax)

www.kofc.org/cis