The Aesthetics of Aidan Nichols

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The quest to understand beauty is an ancient one, dating back millennia, and yet it is still extraordinarily fascinating even to modern man. There is already a forest of men and women who have embarked on this quest, and I propose in this paper to present the results of yet another thinker's aesthetic adventure: Fr. Aidan Nichols, O.P., an English Dominican and prolific theologian. Before examining his aesthetics, the fruits of his quest, let us first examine the man himself. Nichols described his early religion as "a home-made one"; his parents' religion was "a very wishy-washy Anglicanism" with no attempt to give him a religious formation; whenever he saw religion in his parents, it was "a largely ethical reality" and a "hidden piety" with "no doctrinal or liturgical expression."[i] His first major religious experience was when he visited a Russian Orthodox church in the summer of 1959 while on a trip to Geneva, where he felt "transcendence, the holy, the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*."[ii] As there were no Orthodox in Lancashire, he began visiting Catholic churches, being won over to Catholicism rationally by a friend who later left the Faith; after the death of his father gave him a push, he entered the Church on Holy Thursday, 1966.[iii] After studying history at Christ Church, Oxford, he felt a call to the religious life. He was a postulant in a local Benedictine community, although he left before entering the novitiate. He stated about this time, "Subconsciously…, I had the sense I needed rather more (and rather happier) experience before I could say goodbye to the ways of ordinary life."[iv] Nichols had this needed time as he continued his study at Christ Church, until he entered the English Dominicans in 1970, following a "prophecy" (as he called it) that he would do so, received from a professor in Uppsala who assisted him in his dissertation.[v] He was ordained to the priesthood in 1976, and, since then, he has held numerous posts and received various degrees, including teaching in Scotland, Rome, and England and receiving his licentiate and masters in sacred theology.[vi] While more could be said of his life (and studying a man's life is a fascinating endeavor), our task here is to study Nichols' thought, and so we turn to his voluminous writings.

While he stated, in 1993, that his work lies mainly in historical theology, his production has spanned a number of fields: aesthetics, liturgiology, and spirituality, besides a heavy focus on history.[vii] While most of his work focuses on the twentieth century, he is not ignorant of the fullness of tradition.

His writings generally take three forms: either syntheses of theology as a whole, comments and studies of other thinkers, or explorations of a single topic. There are really only three works in the first class: *Epiphany*, *The Shape of Catholic Theology*, and *Chalice of God*. His works in the second category include books of essays (*Scribe of the Kingdom*, *Beyond the Blue Glass*, *Light from the East*) and general studies or book series (*The Poet as Believer*, his "diptych" on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, his five-book *Introduction to Hans Urs von Balthasar*). The third class would include works on liturgy (*Looking at the Liturgy*), art and image theology (*The Art of God Incarnate*), the Eastern Schism (*Rome and the Eastern Churches*), and Anglicanism (*The Panther and the Hind*). From his great cornucopia of writings, only a smattering of themes can be explored in one paper, and here we will study Nichols' theology of beauty and art. Before this, though, an introduction to his general theological outlook is necessary.

Nichols is a firm adherent to the view that "Theology has room for variety" and that there can and should be numerous theologies, with the result being "the orchestra of theological pluralism in the Church."[viii] Referring to himself as a "Catholic eclectic," his approach can be summarized as follows: "My wider aim is the creation of a plenary Catholicism, over and against versions which are either cribbed and cramped on the one hand, or smudged and attenuated on the other."[ix] This means a breadth both in terms of sources of inspiration and in terms of topics covered. Besides Anglicanism and the rich heritage of the British isles, Nichols draws on Eastern Orthodoxy ("which has been my accompaniment," he says, "since my earliest work"), as well as various Protestant traditions, to supplement his Catholic theology.[x] In one work, he uses the image of a forest of various types of trees, some of which are even located beyond the "waterways" that form borders of the forest; thus he exclaims, "May we rejoice in the great forest of the *Catholica* and take our bearings from its many glades."[xi] In addition to the diversity of sources and traditions, Nichols also emphasizes "qualitative catholicity," how the Church "has a holistic or all-round grasp of God's revelation in Jesus Christ."[xii] Thus he calls for theology to take into account the entirety of the Christian revelation and the entirety of the truth. This is similar to how the transcendental of unity is found in von Balthasar's thought: in both the "holism of reality" and in "the

holistic character of the reality that is Christian revelation."[xiii] Both of these aspects can be combined in the image of a symphony; Nichols obtained this frequently-used image from von Balthasar (particularly his work *Truth is Symphonic*), who in turn received it from St. Irenaeus.[xiv]

A second main theme of Nichols' theology is the idea of *epiphanies*. The theme so engrosses him that he named one of his comprehensive theological works *Epiphany: A Theological Introduction to Catholicism*. In short, the idea of an epiphany is the shining forth of the infinite through the finite, the showing forth of the transcendental in the concrete. This theme, too, is drawn from von Balthasar. As he summarizes von Balthasar's epistemology: "We come into intellectual contact with being, helped by the senses, in and through particular, concrete things."[xv] This is nothing else than an epiphany. Beauty, too, is a "disclosure of the depths of being…the epiphany of the Word," per von Balthasar and St. Bonaventure.[xvi] At one point, Nichols connects this theme to the "incarnational realism" that is the "constitutive principle of Catholicism": "the self-communication of God to humanity through embodiment in the human and visible."[xvii]   An extensive cataloguing of Nichols' use of the concept of epiphany would take up far too much of this paper, but suffice it to say that it is a key principle underlying his thought.

The third "theme," if one could use the term, has already appeared frequently: the influence of Hans Urs von Balthasar. The sheer amount of his work that is devoted to explicating and studying von Balthasar shows at least some level of fascination with the Swiss theologian. As mentioned above, he wrote a five-book series entitled *Introduction to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, and, in addition, he wrote a small book, *A Key to Balthasar*, to quickly summarize von Balthasar's thought (particularly in his great trilogy: *Theologik*, *Theodramatik*, and *Herrlichkeit*) through the viewpoint of the transcendentals. Besides these full-length explorations, various essays and articles explore von Balthasar's thought, and references to him are ubiquitous throughout Nichols' non-von-Balthasar-centric works. This is before mentioning the effect of von Balthasar's theology on Nichols. Above, I linked the other two major themes I highlighted in Nichol's thought—plenary Catholicism and the concept of epiphany—to von Balthasar's theology. A large investigation could be performed solely to show the heavy dependence of

the Englishman on the Swiss, and it is an openly embraced dependence: he states von Balthasar should be a model for theology, and, when asked in an interview about his thoughts on the importance of beauty, Nichols responded by summarizing his inspiration's theological aesthetics.[xviii] Needless to say, in examining Nichols' aesthetics, the Swiss theologian will be a constant presence.

Moving on from these three themes of plenary Catholicism, epiphanies, and von Balthasar, let us examine Nichols' aesthetics as a triad: beauty, art, and sacred art. Let us begin with a definition of beauty from Nichols' Swiss muse: beauty is "the inexplicable active irradiation from the mid point of being to the expressive surface of the image, irradiation reflected in the image itself and granting it a unity, depth and richness far beyond its own power to contain."[xix] Tied into von Balthasar's view of beauty are the twin concepts of *form* and *splendor*, that is, "the form of some object, and the splendor with which it strikes a beholder."[xx] Through the form, the interior content shines forth; understanding the form is necessary to perceiving the content within.[xxi] Nichols echoes the thought of his muse well; a compact definition of beauty found throughout Nichols' writings would be the simple phrase, "splendour of form." In other words, "the beautiful is the radiance which something gives off simply because it is something, because it exists"; in von Balthasar's term, it is *sich-zeigen*, "self-showing."[xxii] The form that is seen in this splendor does not keep us on earth: rather, beauty "provides an intimation of the transcendental order," it leads us to thirst for transcendence.[xxiii] The beauty of the world and of art lead us to the fullness of beauty: the glory of God. This separation of terms ("beauty" for that of the world, "glory" for that of God) is taken from von Balthasar, who speaks of God's *Herrlickheit*. Though these terms are distinct, there is still a union between their meanings, as the transcendent nature of beauty indicates: "for beauty is also increasing and indeed turning into its supernatural counterpart, glory."[xxiv] There is thus a sort of spectrum, with beauty on one end and glory at the other; a better image might be a rope: by grasping the beauty of the world, that knob at the end of the rope, we are drawn up to God's glory. This necessary directing of earthly beauty to Godly glory (particularly as seen in art, which will be discussed below) is summed up well in a quote from Paul Claudel: "*Beauty* is an idol which cannot be the goal of art. That goal is the glory of God and the teaching of the faithful *by relation to the latter*."[xxv] With too much self-

focus, beauty can be harmful: it is when it draws us "further up and further in"—to utilize C.S. Lewis' popular phrase from *The Last Battle*—that it fulfills its true purpose.[xxvi]

With this focus on beauty's necessary goal, we can take a brief look at Nichols' aesthetics proper, that is, what *he* means by the term "aesthetics." His basic definition is that aesthetics is "the experience of the beautiful," though he more often discusses our *responses* to this experience.[xxvii] As he carefully distinguishes in an early work, the "aesthetic feeling," or "aesthetic enjoyment," is always *posterior* to the experience of the beautiful; they are only the result of a foundational *encounter* with beauty.[xxviii] There is an objective, ontological beauty in things, whether art or otherwise (though art is his focus in the context of these comments), and we truly experience an encounter with that beauty, not just an experience of our feelings toward it.[xxix] These assertions are meant to combat the opposite view, the view that when we speak about "beauty" or "sublimity," we only speak about our aesthetic feelings, not any object quality of the entity itself. (This notion is exemplified in the so-called *Green Book* of "Gaius and Titus" so expertly and satirically dissected and defeated in C.S. Lewis' famous essay "Men without Chests.")[xxx] To borrow from the philosophy of Dietrich von Hildebrand, Nichols' term "aesthetics" refers to the "value response" we have (or should have) to the objective value that is beauty.[xxxi] How does Nichols describe this aesthetic response to the beautiful? He does so by using corollaries with experiences of the divine glory. Thus he speaks of "lostness," that is, ecstasy, which is "a feature of all aesthetic experience."[xxxii] He also uses the triad of wonder, love, and praise, to describe the experience of glory: "*Wonder* testifies to the sheer facticity of the divine beauty; *love* to its capacity to draw to itself our desire; *praise* to our recognition of its supreme excellence."[xxxiii] It is that ecstasy, though, that transcendental tractor beam (to speak colloquially), that is the key component of aesthetics. An experience of beauty draws us out of ourselves (the Greek ἐκστασις comes from ἐκ, "out," and ἱστημι, "I stand," so ecstasy is when we "stand outside" of ourselves, or "stretch" (τάσις) out of ourselves) and towards what is above. Nichols says that this ecstasy breaks us "out of the limits of false finitude which denies that *finitum capax infiniti* [the finite is capable of the infinite]."[xxxiv] In short, for Nichols, the experience of beauty (aesthetics) is an ecstasy that pulls us out of ourselves, to the pre-existing beauty of an entity, to the "splendour of the form"; yet,

through the beauty of that individual entity, it draws us up to the divine glory by the power of beauty's transcendence.[xxxv]

   Before exploring Nichols' views on art and sacred art, a boundary theme appears: the theme of icons. Though Nichols writes about the sacred art form of iconography in particular, he also borrows the concepts of iconology and incorporates them into aesthetics as a whole. He defines icons as "painterly presentations of holy persons or holy mysteries key to the faith in some kind of cultic context."[xxxvi] Yet iconology goes beyond just this dry, basic definition: it defines them as "windows to heaven." This does not mean that what is invisible in Heaven is merely symbolized in images: instead, icons are intrinsically tied to the Incarnation. Because the Son took on human form, "circumscribing" Himself in flesh, He can be portrayed in an icon; because the Father and the Spirit did not become incarnate, they cannot be represented as such, although they are sometimes shown in symbols (the finger of God) or in the means by which They revealed Themselves (such as the burning bush or the dove at the Baptism).[xxxvii] The events of Christ's life, and the figures of saints and events of their lives, are also acceptable matters to be portrayed in icons, since these were all in the flesh. What icons do, though, is not merely represent these persons or events in their earthly forms: it transfigures them and portrays them in the light of Heaven. The—to many minds strange—heavily-stylized figures in icons are thus representations of the glorified bodies of the saints and of Christ. It is in this way that they are "windows to Heaven": revealing how the fleshly is rendered glorious in Heaven. To quote Leonid Ouspensky, whom Nichols exemplifies in his *A Spirituality for the Twenty-First Century*, "by material means, visible to carnal eyes [the icon] transmits the divine beauty and glory."[xxxviii] In the definition above, icons also necessarily tend towards worship or veneration, since they are "in some kind of cultic context."

   Nichols, then, uses this idea of an icon as something that makes the heavenly present or visible on earth to expand beyond just the painted images. He wrote an entire work on "image theology" in Christian history and thought (*The Art of God Incarnate*); at one point in this work, he describes man as "a disclosure of God in the cosmos, the 'icon of God in the temple of the world.'"[xxxix] When using the word analogously, man is an "icon": he is something fleshly, something material and visible, through

which God Himself is "represented." After all, man was made "according to the icon of God."[xl] Another writer Nichols studies, Sergius Bulgakov, speaks of "man's iconic quality."[xli] It is in his introductory work *Epiphany* that Nichols most mentions this view. Besides once again describing man as God's "'icon' in the temple of the world," he also writes that all of creation has an "iconic power—a capacity to image, or echo, its Creator."[xlii] The Church building "is quintessentially an icon" (a theme which we will return to in discussing his views on sacred architecture), and even religious life is "an incomparable icon of the mystery of the Church."[xliii]

To sum up, then, Nichols views beauty as an epiphany of what is at the core of an entity, but, beyond just focusing on what the entity is in itself, it also has a transcendent effect on us, leading us beyond the mere beauty of this entity up to the divine glory. The proper response to such an experience of the beautiful (aesthetics) is ecstasy, going beyond ourselves and towards what is above. We could characterize beauty's "self-showing" nature as its *epiphanic* nature and its transcendent nature as its *iconic* nature.

Next, let us see how Nichols' views on beauty inform his concept of art. Before delving into this topic, distinctions should be made between *art*, *Christian art*, and *sacred art*. *Art* means any kind of art; though all art is, in some sense, religious (as will be mentioned below), this does not mean it has to be created with a specifically religious aim or subject matter. *Christian art* refers to art which "transmits Christianity," "a 'form'…in which divine revelation is presented"; thus it has Christian subject matter and the aims of promoting Christianity.[xliv] *Sacred art* refers to art that is meant for liturgical or cultic use; the issue of sacred art in particular is a key one for Nichols, which is why it will be discussed separately.

Art is what humans create to manifest the invisible; as Paul Klee said, its purpose "is not to reflect the visible but to make visible."[xlv] There is a level at which art is intrinsic and basic to humanity: "Every person is an artist, revealingly translating interior novelty into manifest exteriority," a "pontifex" who builds bridges (the etymological meaning of the word) between the human and the divine.[xlvi] This "pontifical" nature of man (similar to his "iconic" nature, mentioned above) means that art itself is "pontifical" and "iconic," no matter whether it is made for a specifically religious purpose. The *raison*

d'être of the mystery celebrated in all art "can only be called religious," "no matter how unbelieving" the artist himself is.[xlvii] All art lifts us up, inspires us, and educates us, since "the arts are or should be an education in the use of moral imagination" which "[move] us to live up to our intended nobility as human beings."[xlviii] Since such an elevation and education is a necessity for man to be as he is meant to be, then the arts too are necessary, though they are too often restricted only to the elite.[xlix] In short, art, like beauty, is *transcendent*, and it elevates man when he encounters it. This is not due solely to man's response to the art, but it is due to the transcendent nature of the art itself, its intrinsic, objective beauty.

This transcendent aspect of art is key for Nichols, as is its religious aspect. Not only is all art, in some sense, religious, but art specifically needs religion and religious art, unlike in Calvin's view.[l] Art reflects the transcendental character of the world and leads us to God.[li] Yet, beyond this mere reflection, art is also continual new creation. Each work of art increases the value of the world by the fact of its being; art is "an ongoing extension of the original creation."[lii] Though Nichols does not say much more about art in general, instead focusing more on Christian art and sacred art, it is obvious from these comments that art reveals the world to man, but it reveals it particularly in its invisible qualities. Art has a "splendour of form," as beauty does, which shows the viewer the invisible through the visible, and it leads men up to what is above. The one other interesting point Nichols makes on the attributes of art, drawing from von Balthasar, is the interplay in it between "disciplined necessity (no detail can be other) and sovereign freedom (the whole need not have been at all)."[liii]

As mentioned above, Nichols highlights religion's need for art, and this need is all the more powerful in Christianity due to the Incarnation. There is a key connection between Christianity and the arts, particularly the visual arts.[liv] The roots of this are in "image theology," which Nichols extensively discusses.[lv] His *The Art of God Incarnate* is a treatise on image theology, beginning with the philosophy of image, progressing through images in the thought of Israel (particularly the idea of man's creation in the image of God and of the Mosaic prohibition of images), to the Christian view of image, culminating in an application of this theology to art, particularly Christian art. Many of the themes seen above appear, particularly the ideas of form and radiance of being and the necessity of a person's response to the

objective, ontological values of art. The fact that the world is God's artwork is important as well (although Christ is the supreme "artwork").[lvi] The world thus reveals the truth of God, and Christian art also picks up this revelatory aspect of art: "Christian art is essentially a 'form'…in which divine revelation is presented."[lvii] In another turn of phrase, "Apostolically, art points to the honour of God which doxologically it conveys," and Christian art does this in particular.[lviii]

To create Christian art, the artist must have both "natural inspiration," including skill in artistic technique, and "supernatural inspiration" from God.[lix] (Thus Christian-themed "kitsch," with its lack of true artistic technique and beauty, is a lesser form of Christian art.)[lx] Yet here we are finding the sometimes-blurred line between "Christian art" and "sacred art" in Nichols' writing, for a similar line appears when he says that sacred art must combine artistic beauty and religious truth.[lxi] Technically speaking, "sacred art" would refer to only art which is used for a liturgical or cultic role, as stated above, but Nichols does not frequently distinguish his views on Christian art from those on sacred art, as his writing is more often concerned with the latter.

In addition to what has been said regarding Christian art, sacred art has additional aspects, and one of the keys distinctive to sacred art is its ecclesial aspect.[lxii] Christian cult and liturgy are under the purview of the Church, so art directed to them must fall under her domain. Not only that, but sacred art must fit within the Church's tradition. In addition, the artist who makes this art must be a believer, himself steeped within this tradition.[lxiii] The key example Nichols uses for sacred art is what he describes as the criterion of all Christian art: the icon of the Byzantine tradition.[lxiv]

The Byzantine icon is painted (or "written," as is sometimes said) by an artist who is not only a faithful believer, but who also follows a pattern of "ascetic and spiritual effort" in the process of painting, with a traditional set of rules regarding the fasting he performs during the process.[lxv] In other words, drawing from Sergius Bulgakov, "Painting an icon is a theurgic act, requiring prayer and askesis."[lxvi] When painting the icon, he does not create new symbols or images on his own: rather, he draws from the vast symbolic alphabet prepared by the Church's tradition. This alphabet, based on the Church's dogma, doctrine, and tradition, makes the icon into a language: all icons, in general, no matter who wrote them,

can be understood by someone who has learned this shared alphabet.[lxvii] One does not have to learn a new individual symbolic alphabet for each artist: there is just one shared by all, rooted in a common tradition. In addition, the usage of icons has its own traditions, both in veneration shown to them and in their order of placement within a church.[lxviii]

  In Nichols' eyes, all sacred artists in the Church can learn lessons from the Byzantine icon; he goes so far as to say, "A Church that lacks iconic beauty cannot sustain us on our pilgrimage."[lxix] First is the need for "ascetic and spiritual effort" in creating artwork: this assists artists in gaining that needed "supernatural inspiration" mentioned above. Second, the sacred artist must think ecclesially and share in a common symbolic alphabet with the Church in order to make his work understood by all. Third, sacred art must be used within a greater contextual scheme, not just as scattered artwork on a church wall. The need for an "overall iconographic scheme" within churches is a point Nichols focuses on sharply in some of his works when he discusses ecclesial architecture. Thus, he writes, "A church must be not only a rationally designed liturgical space but a unified work of art."[lxx] Without these unified schemes, a church merely becomes an incoherent conglomeration of art pieces, similar to a gallery or a museum, rather than "the icon of the Church mystery."[lxxi] In Nichols' view, this has become one of the key issues with modern church design: the lack of unity, order, and sense in the artwork. In addition to all of this, the traditional devotions to icons also highlight the necessity of sacred art to draw viewers to contemplation, as is its role in cult and liturgy.[lxxii]

  To summarize Nichols' views on sacred art, it is an art directed to Christian worship and liturgy.[lxxiii] As a type of Christian art, it must proclaim the Christian message; since it is liturgical, it must be under the purview of the Church (since the liturgy is ecclesial) and in line with her tradition. It should use a shared "alphabet" or "language" of symbols and images (though this applies to all art, it is especially important in sacred art), and each piece should be part of a unified scheme of sacred art. Finally, a good piece of sacred art must combine both religious truth and artistic skill; at best, it must be "theurgic," a work of both God and man, divine and natural inspiration; in this way, it radiates both God's glory and the world's beauty.

In conclusion, we have seen the results of Nichols' expedition on the quest for beauty, and these results have been summarized in three areas: beauty, art, and sacred art. These thoughts have shown connections with the three themes of Nichols' theology previously outlined: plenary Catholicism, epiphanies, and von Balthasar. In his views of beauty and art, he draws on many facets of Catholicism and many types of Christianity (in particular, he holds up the Byzantine icon as a model for sacred art), his entire concept of beauty is wrapped up in the notion of epiphany, and the thought of von Balthasar provides him with his point of embarkation on the quest for beauty. From Aidan Nichols' aesthetics, we can find some key points to add to on-going discussions of beauty and sacred art. First, the concept of "epiphany" and beauty being the "splendour of form," the invisible shining through the visible, is a paradigm of beauty that can add much to current reflections and investigations. Beauty is not merely visible: it is linked to the underlying, invisible form of an entity, and, further back, it has an intrinsic connection to God's own glory. Thus the transcendent nature of beauty can fuel much thought, especially when thinkers parse out the meaning of Dostoyevsky's famous dictum, "Beauty will save the world." Second, the necessary connection between religion and art (and particularly between Christianity and art) can also assist in exploring that dictum.[lxxiv] Third, the "theurgic" nature of true sacred art is a grand ideal to strive for as artists determine how to best create new sacred art. It must not be merely kitsch with a pious intention yet no artistic skill; nor can it be a virtuosic marvel lacking the breath of God's Spirit (for the Church's use of art "baptizes" it and makes it "pneumatophoric," Spirit-bearing).[lxxv] Finally, a point that also relates to the creation of new sacred art is the necessity for common symbolic languages in art, particularly sacred art, and also the need for these languages to be ecclesially connected. While sacred art can have some innovations and can use a variety of smaller traditions ("the great forest of the *Catholica*"), it must always be tied to the Church's shared tradition, and it must share a common language so it can be easily understood by many; the language must also be consistent within various connected pieces of sacred art, such as all the artwork within a church. Drawing these ideas from Nichols' work, we can continue the never-ending quest for an understanding of beauty and art, and, in this way, we can ever draw closer to the all-Beautiful One, the Artist Whose masterpiece is the world:

What is the moral stance appropriate to living in so beautiful a world as ours? Surely it is a response of self-oblation – the self-disciplining, self-sacrificial attitude which is required of us before all great works of art if we are genuinely to appreciate them. The arts are or should be an education in the use of the moral imagination. The beauty of the world which the arts focus touches us, and, if we are well disposed by a profound wonder and not merely dilettantism, moves us to live up to our intended nobility as human beings. By their splendour of form the arts can do us this service more efficaciously than does moral didacticism.[lxxvi]

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[i] Aidan Nichols, *Scribe of the Kingdom: Essays on Theology and Culture*, 2 vols. (London: Sheed & Ward, 1994), I:2; Aidan Nichols, "Presenting the Chalice of God: A Theological Manifesto for the Contemporary Church, where I ask, what is theology, what form should it take, what content should it have?" *Nova Et Vetera (English Edition)* 11, no. 3 (Summer 2013), 602.

[ii] Nichols, *Scribe of the Kingdom*, I:1. The phrase *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* appears to be taken from Rudolf Otto: see Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1969).

[iii] Nichols, *Scribe of the Kingdom*, I:2-4.

[iv] Nichols, *Scribe of the Kingdom*, I:5.

[v] Nichols, *Scribe of the Kingdom*, I:6.

[vi] Nichols, *Scribe of the Kingdom*, I:9,14.

[vii] Nichols, *Scribe of the Kingdom*, I:17.

[viii] Nichols, "Presenting the Chalice of God," 601; Aidan Nichols, *Beyond the Blue Glass: Catholic Essays on Faith and Culture*, 2 vols. (London: The Saint Austin Press, 2002), I:107.

ix Nichols, *Beyond the Blue Glass*,I:107; Aidan Nichols, *The Poet As Believer: A Theological Study of Paul Claudel* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), x.

x Aidan Nichols, *Lost in Wonder: Essays on Liturgy and the Arts* (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2011), viii.

xi Aidan Nichols, *A Spirituality for the Twenty-First Century* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2003), 12.

xii Aidan Nichols, *The Splendour of Doctrine: The* Catechism of the Catholic Church *on Christian Believing* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd, 1995), ix.

xiii Aidan Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar: Hans Urs von Balthasar on Beauty, Goodness, and Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 4.

xiv Aidan Nichols, *The Service of Glory: The* Catechism of the Catholic Church *on Worship, Ethics, Spirituality* (Steubenville, OH: Franciscan University Press, 1997), 286, n. 5.

xv Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar*, 1.

xvi Aidan Nichols, *The Word Has Been Abroad: A Guide Through Balthasar's Aesthetics* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 91.

xvii Aidan Nichols, *Epiphany: A Theological Introduction to Catholicism* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 272.

xviii See Nichols, *Scribe of the Kingdom* I:17; James M. Kushiner and David Mills, "Dialogue with a Dominican: An Interview with Aidan Nichols, O.P.," *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity* 13, no. 9 (November 2000), http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=13-09-028-i.

xix Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theologik* I:156, qtd. in Aidan Nichols, *Say It Is Pentecost: A Guide Through Balthasar's Logic* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 38.

xx Nichols, *The Word Has Been Abroad*, 23.

xxi See ibid., 32.

xxii Nichols, *Scribe of the Kingdom*, II:23; cf. Nichols, *Say It is Pentecost*, 202, 204.

xxiii Aidan Nichols, *Redeeming Beauty: Soundings in Sacral Aesthetics* (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, 2007), vii; cf. Nichols, *Lost in Wonder*, 179.

xxiv Nichols, *Lost in Wonder*, 141.

xxv Paul Claudel, qtd. in D. Millet-Gérard, "Paul Claudel lu par Hans Urs von Balthasar. Continuité de la

Tradition culturelle européenne," in *Claudel et l'Europe. Acts du Colloque de la Sorbonne* (Lausanne, 1997), 29, qtd. in Aidan Nichols, *Divine Fruitfulness: A Guide through Balthasar's Theology beyond the Trilogy* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 334.

xxvi C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 198.

xxvii Nichols, *Lost in Wonder*, vii.

xxviii See Aidan Nichols, *The Art of God Incarnate: Theology and Image in Christian Tradition* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 90-91.

xxix See ibid., Chapter 6, "The Shaper of the Artwork," 89-104.

xxx C.S. Lewis, "Men without Chests," in *The Abolition of Man, or, Reflections on Education with Special Reference to the Teaching of English in the Upper Forms of Schools* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1955), 13-35.

xxxi See Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Ethics* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1953), in particular Chapter 17, "Value Response," 191-243. von Hildebrand classifies beauty as an aesthetic value, as opposed to, for example, moral or intellectual values (see ibid., 130); he praises beauty, saying that it "speaks of a world above; it is a ray of the Father of all Lights; it elevates our spirit and fills our heart with a longing for this higher world," even saying that "the sublime beauty of nature surpasses the ontological value of those beings in which we grasp the beauty: in its quality it reflects God in a more intimate way" (164). Further of his views on beauty can be found in his two-volume *Aesthetics*, the first English translation of which is forthcoming from Hildebrand Press.

xxxii Nichols, *Lost in Wonder*, vii.

xxxiii Ibid., vii.

xxxiv Ibid., vii.

xxxv This transcendental concept of beauty is reminiscent of Diotima's speech in Plato's *Symposium*, 210A-212C, where Diotima explains how, by contemplating the beauty of one individual body, one can eventually be lead to the contemplation of pure Beauty itself. See *Great Dialogues of Plato*, trans. W.H.D. Rouse, ed. Eric H. Warmington and Philip G. Rouse (New York: Mentor Books, 1956), 104-106.

xxxvi Nichols, *A Spirituality for the Twenty-First Century*, 114.

xxxvii This is the traditional Eastern Orthodox view of icons: the Father and the Spirit cannot be portrayed in

human form in icons, and the Father is rarely portrayed at all, though the Spirit is frequently shown as a dove. However, some Eastern Christians have portrayed the Trinity in human forms in icons, and the legitimacy of such a representation is debated. (The use of the three angels who visited Abraham as a symbol of the Trinity, as in Rublev's famous icon, is generally accepted, though.)

xxxviii Leonid Ouspensky, *La théologie de l'Icône dans l'Eglise Orthodoxe* (Paris: Cerf, 1980), 144, qtd. in Nichols, *Lost in Wonder*, 102.

xxxix Nichols, *The Art of God Incarnate*, 17.

xl A literal translation of Gen 1:27 in the Septuagint: "κατ' εἰκόνα Θεου."

xli Nichols, *Redeeming Beauty*, 84.

xlii Nichols, *Epiphany*, 372, 30.

xliii Ibid., 333, 270.

xliv Nichols, *Redeeming Beauty*, 49, 55.

xlv Qtd. in Nichols, *The Art of God Incarnate*, 12.

xlvi Nichols, *Epiphany* 20; cf. 22.

xlvii Nichols, *Lost in Wonder*, 175. Cf. Nichols, *Redeeming Beauty*, 147: "Even art which is not at all overtly religious in its subject matter, is a shining through of divine presence."

xlviii Ibid., 178.

xlix See Nichols, *Redeeming Beauty*, 143-4.

l See ibid., 48.

li See ibid., 146: "Art is, arguably, a disclosure of the overall character of the world."

lii Ibid., 144. This idea bears some resemblance to the idea of "co-creation" or "sub-creation" in art and literature, as, for example, expressed by J.R.R. Tolkien in his "On Fairy-Stories." See J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Tolkien Reader* (New York: Del Rey, 1986), 60.

liii Nichols, *The Word Has Been Abroad*, 67. Cf. Nichols, *Beyond the Blue Glass*, I:97.

liv See Nichols, *Lost in Wonder*, 106.

lv See "The Origin and Crisis of Christian Art," in Nichols, *Redeeming Beauty*, 19-49, and Nichols, *The Art of God Incarnate*.

lvi See Nichols, *Redeeming Beauty*, 148, and Nichols, *The Art of God Incarnate*, Chapters 8-9, "Sketch for

a Christology of the Image" and "The Eyes of Faith," 119-157.

lvii Nichols, *Redeeming Beauty*, 55.

lviii Ibid., 69.

lix See ibid., 65.

lx See the discussion of Paul Claudel's view of kitsch in Nichols, *Lost in Wonder*, 109-111. In sharper language, Nichols says that one particular brand of kitsch, "the art of Saint-Sulpice," "took the sacred Liturgy a prisoner": ibid., 115. This is still tamer than Hermann Broch's critique of kitsch, where he emphatically declares, "The producer of *Kitsch* cannot be assessed according to aesthetic criteria but, more simply, must be judged as a contemptible being, as a criminal who wishes evil from the roots": Hermann Broch, *Kitsch*, qtd. in Umberto Eco, *On Ugliness*, trans. Alastair McEwen (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 2007), 406.

lxi See ibid., 178.

lxii See Nichols, *Redeeming Beauty*, 65, 68.

lxiii See Nichols, *Epiphany*, 442.

lxiv See Nichols, *A Spirituality for the Twenty-First Century*, 128.

lxv See Nichols, *Epiphany*, 442.

lxvi Qtd. in Nichols, *Redeeming Beauty*, 86.

lxvii On the importance of these structures of images in iconography, see Nichols, *Scribe of the Kingdom*, II:191-195. On the dogmatic basis of iconography, particularly as seen in the Second Council of Nicaea, see "The Dogma of the Image at Nicaea II," in Nichols, *Scribe of the Kingdom*, I:180-191.

lxviii On devotion to icons, particularly in pre-Revolutionary Russia, see "The Icon Revisited," in Nichols, *Lost in Wonder*, 71-104. On the traditional placement of icons, see Nichols' critique of the writers of *L'Art sacré*: "They never seemed to have realised the importance for the church interior of an overall iconographic scheme" (*Redeeming Beauty*, 122).

lxix Nichols, *A Spirituality for the Twenty-First Century*, 149.

lxx Nichols, *Lost in Wonder*, 68. The entire essay is worth reading in this context: "Architecture in the Church," in Nichols, *Lost in Wonder*, 49-69.

lxxi Nichols, *Service of Glory*, 39; cf. Nichols, *Redeeming Beauty*, 122.

[lxxii] See Nichols, *Service of Glory*, 30-34.

[lxxiii] Technically, he states that sacred art is just art directed towards cult or liturgy in general; however, I do not recall his discussing non-Christian sacred art—except for some discussion of Jewish sacred art, particularly the art of the Dura-Europos Synagogue in Syria, in the opening chapters of *The Art of God Incarnate*—so I am using sacred art to refer solely to *Christian* sacred art, as that is what Nichols discusses almost exclusively.

[lxxiv] Nichols makes a great point in describing this when he calls for "a sacred art that simultaneously feeds the hunger of *homo religiosus* for meaning *and* renders in imagistic form the content of the salvation history which the Liturgy expresses" (Nichols, *Service of Glory*, 31-32).

[lxxv] See Nichols, *Redeeming Beauty*, 148-149.

[lxxvi] Nichols, *Lost in Wonder*, 178.