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# Theology — Philosophy — Poetry

## Toward a Synopsis

ERWIN L. LUEKER

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FROM HIS BACKGROUND AS PROFESSOR OF SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY, AS WELL AS THAT of his deep interest in philosophy and poetry and his writing in these fields over many years, the author sketches his impressions of the nature of the relationship between theology, philosophy, and poetry and indicates the current tendency toward a synopsis. The relationship between literature (especially poetry) and philosophy and theology is receiving increasing attention from scholars in all three areas. It is the author's conviction that the sensitivity of poets often makes them pioneers in recognizing new situations and impending changes and that some of the outstanding theologians and philosophers of our day have been strongly influenced by poetic insights.

Philosophers and theologians today are giving increased attention to poetry. Interest in poetry among philosophers reached a low point when idealism lost favor and was replaced by materialism, instrumentalism, logical positivism, and similar philosophies. When theologians became interested in practical issues and stressed scientific theology their interest in poetry also waned. An age congenial to the early language theory of Wittgenstein would find poetry nonsense. Even lay people tended to regard poets as outmoded remnants of primitivism. Expo 70 at Osaka, Japan, however, may be symbolic of a change in attitude. Whereas earlier world's fairs had glorified the machine, Expo 70 emphasized that machines are not enough, for there was a spiritual and humanistic strain running throughout the exhibition.

Varying attitudes are found in the same person:

Magicians believe that by words, spells, they can alter the world and so they belong to that noble category of people who place an over-emphasis on thought: children, women, poets, artists, lovers, mystics, criminals, dreamers and madmen!<sup>1</sup>

Later the same author refers to poets differently:

All this amounts to saying that we have to account for religious facts in terms of the totality of the culture and society in which they are found, to try to understand them in terms of what Gestalt psychologists called the *Kulturganze*. . . . They must be seen as a relation of parts to one another within a coherent system. . . . Perhaps, also, field research into this particular topic demands a poetic mind which moves easily in images and symbols.<sup>2</sup>

It is, of course, true that some versifiers

<sup>1</sup> E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> Evans-Pritchard, p. 112.



and their devotees have justified the negative attitude. Much published verse is far removed from serious poetry.

Studies of relationships among poetry, philosophy, and theology have barely passed their initial stages. Hence this article offers little more than an introduction to the problems involved in such studies and an indication of areas to be explored.

Dialog first of all taught poets, philosophers, and theologians that the chasm between them was wide indeed. Kierkegaard was among the few gifted artists who saw the end of Christendom behind the facade of surviving churches. Neo-Hegelians announced the death of God; Neo-Kantians reduced Jesus to ordinary manhood; Marxists and neo-Marxists made the material the real. God, priest, and preacher became superfluous even where the institution survived, as literature and philosophy passed them by.

Although poetry had originated in the religious atmosphere, its prominent representatives in the 19th and 20th centuries followed the secular with very few notable exceptions, for example, Gerald Manley Hopkins and several converts, including P. C. Claudel, R. A. Schröder, A. Döblin, and T. S. Eliot.<sup>3</sup>

The schism between poetry and theology followed trends of various countries.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Hans Jürgen Baden, *Literature und Bekehrung* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett, 1968).

<sup>4</sup> Martin E. Marty, *The Modern Schism: Three Paths to the Secular* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969); *Glaube und Unglaube in unserer Zeit*, ed. A. Rich et al. (Zürich: Atlantis Verlag, 1959); Horst Wernicke, "Dichterische Wirklichkeit und christliche Verkündigung: Versuch einer Verhältnisbestimmung," *Theologia Practica*, V (January 1970), pp. 13—32.

In Germany the schism was often marked by pointed debate on deep convictions.<sup>5</sup> The industrial wave in Denmark brought in materialism.<sup>6</sup> Poets were displaced by the vulgarity of the masses and sought refuge in nature or joined the Roman Catholic church. Logical positivism at the same time challenged the art of poetry itself. In Norway poetry followed a schism similar to that in the church. Some poets continued to be deeply religious, while others were defiantly secular and were even imprisoned for their poetry. The schism in Sweden, as in England,<sup>7</sup> seemed to result to a large extent from indifference. Religious poetry is at times dismissed as sincere but containing little that is new or significant. In America the schism was more like a fad or trend. As Christianity

<sup>5</sup> For contemporary German poetry see such anthologies as *Deutsche Lyrik seit 1945*, ed. Horst Bingel (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 4th ed. 1968) and such journals as *Akzente* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag).

<sup>6</sup> *20th Century Scandinavian Poetry: The Development of Poetry in Iceland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, 1900—1950*, ed. Martin S. Allwood (Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel-Nordisk Forlag, 1950); Denmark Number, *The Literary Review*, published by Fairleigh Dickinson University, Teaneck, N. J., vol. 8, no. 1 (Autumn, 1964); Norway Number, *The Literary Review*, vol. 11, no. 2 (Winter, 1968—69); Sweden Number, *The Literary Review*, vol. 9, no. 2 (Winter, 1965—66). There were notable exceptions to the secularist trend, for example, the Icelandic religious poet David Stefánsson (Stefan Einarsson, "David Stefánsson" *The American-Scandinavian Review*, LV [March, 1967], 37—39).

<sup>7</sup> For contemporary British poetry see such magazines as *Poetry Review*, published by The Poetry Society; anthologies of contemporary British and American poetry appear frequently. For English poetry in other countries see such publications as *New Coin Poetry*, published by the South African Poetry Society, English Department, Rhodes University, Grahamstown.



was often evaluated for its contribution to the civic religion, so religious poetry was at times evaluated in the light of American culture and democracy.

Although poetry separated from institutional Christianity, it did not free itself from religious concerns or religious concepts such as the numinous, the ground of being, human relationship, and meaning.

An analysis of a given trend among poets illustrates the schism. Coleridge and Wordsworth shared with Schleiermacher an emphasis on feeling. Under the influence of philosophers like Feuerbach the trend to supplant religion with poetry developed.<sup>8</sup> Ultimately some Western poetry had more in common with Zen than with Christianity.<sup>9</sup>

After the schism religious and secular poetry pursued separated ways. Popular secular poetry tended to stress feeling and became more and more emotive; such poetry appeared in abundance in popular publications. Serious poetry developed new forms and techniques and in some ways reached new heights. The serious poet, however, became less and less popular. In America his habitat tended to be on the campus, a tendency that evoked interesting comments from some European scholars.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> In the period following these authors, critics vacillated until recent times between coordination and replacement. For the movement see David Robbins, "Religion and Literature: An Overview," *Anglican Theological Review*, L (July 1968), 283—307.

<sup>9</sup> "Zen naturally finds its best expression in poetry rather than in philosophy because it has more affinity with feeling than with intellect; its poetic predilection is inevitable." — D. T. Suzuki, quoted in *The World of Zen: An East West Anthology*, ed. Nancy Wilson Ross (New York: Kingdom House, 1960), p. 112.

<sup>10</sup> For example, see *Akzente*, 3/70 (cover).

Christian poetry generally adhered to old forms and old content. Songs and hymns remained popular until the middle of the century in America and were often quoted in sermons. In The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod hymns were quoted in sermons frequently until around 1965 and thereafter the number of such quotations declined rapidly.<sup>11</sup> It seems that poetry was rarely quoted for the insights it provides, but rather to affect mood and will.

The situation seems to have been different in Germany, where the schism between *Lied* and *Dichtkunst* presented a major concern. In the 18th century the unity between the two was broken. In the 19th century the separation was completed.<sup>12</sup> In the 20th century attempts were made to establish contact, but the new forms developed by modern lyric poets make reunion very difficult and almost impossible.<sup>13</sup>

*Dichtung* (which includes poetry and

<sup>11</sup> This observation is based on a comparison of *The Concordia Pulpit* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House) for the years 1963, 1969, 1970.

<sup>12</sup> Johannes Pfeiffer, *Dichtkunst und Kirchenlied: Über das geistige Lied im Zeitalter der Säkularisation* (Hamburg: Wittig, 1961).

<sup>13</sup> Efforts to achieve dialog between theology and poetry include Hans-Eckehard Bahr, *Theologische Untersuchung der Kunst: Poiesis* (Munich and Hamburg: Siebenstern Taschenbuch Verlag, 1965); Horst Wernicke (see note 4); studies by Johannes Pfeiffer; D. Sölle, W. Fietkau, A. Juhre, K. Marti, *Almanach I für Literatur und Theologie* (Wuppertal Barmen: Peter Hammer Verlag, 1967); W. Kohlschmidt, "Theologische und dichterische Aussage der Wahrheit," *Reformatio*, VI (January 1957), 11—23; K. Marti, "Die Sprache in der modernen Literatur und die Verkündigung," *Reformatio*, XIII (September 1964), 546—61; K. Marti, K. Lüthi, K. von Fischer, *Moderne Literatur, Malerei, und Musik: Drei Entwürfe zu einer Begegnung zwischen Glaube und Kunst* (Zürich: Flamberg, 1963).



artistic prose) receives more consideration in Germany (and probably France) today than in the United States and some other European states.<sup>14</sup> The youth of Germany read contemporary poetry as avidly as youth in America listen to current music. Older people read poets of the past. In a proposed reorganization of German schools, poetry was to have a role in overcoming cultural differences.<sup>15</sup> After World War II, some people in Germany looked to a *Dichter* to heal German spiritual ills. Walter von Malo sent Thomas Mann an open letter inviting him to come to Germany, diagnose the spiritual ills, and heal them. Poets are credited with early awareness of the evils of Nazism and resistance to it.<sup>16</sup> Modern poetry is read by pupils of *gymnasium* age for cultural development and enculturation. Students preparing for a vocation (for example, teacher or pastor) emphasize the reading of lyric poetry for the purpose of understanding the youth of their age. Some theological faculties require their students to gain a knowledge of

contemporary poetry. In universities, modern poetry is studied critically, analytically, and historically.

The use of poetry in sermons and theological essays is one phase of the relationship between poetry and theology that may be examined in a few brief sketches.

Rudolf Bultmann quotes poetry frequently in his sermons. Non-German poets cited include Horace, Vergil, Tibullus, Pindar, Dante, Dostoevski, and Proust. Most of the poets quoted are German, including Paul Fleming, Hoffmann von Hoffmannswaldau, Joh. Chr. Günther, Klopstock, Matthias Claudius, Jung-Stilling, Goethe, Schiller, Hölderlin (who influenced Heidegger), Novalis, L. Tieck, Achim von Arnim, Eichendorff, K. Immermann, F. Rückert, Stifter, E. Mörike, E. Geibel, F. Heibel, C. F. Meyer, W. Raabe, W. Busch, Nietzsche, G. Schüler, Hofmannsthal, Rilke, Dwinger, R. A. Schröder, E. Wiechert, F. Werfel.<sup>17</sup>

The quotations that Bultmann introduces in his sermons are in harmony with the total thought of the poet quoted. Furthermore, he reveals an understanding of the analogy between poetry and religion. He points out, for example, that profound awareness of transitoriness is found in ancient literature as well as the Old Testament.

Bultmann does not cite poetry to escape beyond the world into mysticism or to enhance his literary style, but to reveal man's insight into himself. Nietzsche is quoted to

<sup>14</sup> The author was granted the John W. Behnken Fellowship by the Aid Association for Lutherans to study the topic *The Role of Poetry in the Contemporary Religious Life and Thought of German People with Some Comparative Studies of American Parallels*. The project included a month's stay at Heidelberg for interviews and study. This portion of the study reflects some of this work.

<sup>15</sup> Gottfried Preissler, "Thesen zur Strategie der westdeutschen Bildungsplanung," in *Die Deutsche Schule: Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft und Gestaltung der Schulwirklichkeit*. Herausgegeben von der Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft in DGB (Hannover: Hermann Schroedel Verlag KG), 62 (Juni 1970), 372.

<sup>16</sup> Hans Jürgen Baden, "Wort und Widerstand: Protestantische Dichtung im Dritten Reich," *Lutherische Monatshefte*, VIII (January 1969), 405—411.

<sup>17</sup> Franz Peerlinck, *Rudolf Bultmann als Prediger: Verkündigung als Vollzug Seiner Theologie: Kerygma und Mythos als Problem der Predigt*. In *Theologische Forschung: Wissenschaftliche Beiträge zur Kirchlich-Evangelischen Lehre* (Hamburg-Bergstedt: Evangelischer Verlag, 1970), pp. 118—26.



show man's awareness of God. For example,

Ich will dich kennen, Unbekannter,  
Du tief in meine Seele Greifender  
Mein Leben wie ein Sturm  
Durchschweifender,  
Du Unfassbarer, mir Verwandter!  
Ich will dich kennen, selbst dir dienen!

Klopstock, Goethe, Schiller, and others are quoted to show man's knowledge of God's presence in nature. Bultmann is aware that Goethe's nature piety is not sentimentality but earnest and serious:

Und alle deine hohen Werke  
Sind herrlich wie am ersten Tag.

Bultmann usually quotes Klopstock when he wants to present a correct understanding of nature:

Wenige nur, ach wenige sind  
Deren Aug' in der Schöpfung  
Den Schöpfer sieht! Wenige deren Ohr  
Ihn in dem mächtigen Rauschen des  
Sturmwinds hört, . . .

Poetry shows man's insight into himself. In his sermons Bultmann urges people to think. Poetry at the end of his sermons recapitulates his thought and invites the hearer to meditate.

Adolf Köberle quotes hymn writers and poets for insights into the heart, for as C. F. Richter said,

Das Vernunftlicht kann das Leben mir  
nicht geben  
Jesus muss das Herz anblicken und  
erquicken.<sup>18</sup>

Paul Gerhardt also expressed the truth of the Christmas story in his emotive poetry.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Adolf Köberle, *Die Einladung Gottes: Predigten Gehalten in der Tübingen Stiftskirche* (Hamburg: Furche Verlag, 1958), p. 45.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

Matthias Claudius expressed the longing of the heart for reality:

O du Land des Wesens und der Wahrheit,  
Unvergänglich für und für,  
Mich verlangt nach dir und deiner  
Klarheit  
Mich verlangt nach dir.<sup>20</sup>

Angelus Silesius complained that human hearts are so small when God's heart is so large.<sup>21</sup> E. Mörike expressed the relation between Christmas and Good Friday poetically:

In grüner Landschaft Sommerflor  
Bei kühlem Wasser, Schilf und Rohr  
Schau, wie das Knäblein sundelos  
Frei spielet auf der Jungfrau Schoss  
Und dort im Walde wonnesam,  
Ach grünet schon des Kreuzes Stamm!<sup>22</sup>

At Christmas the heart sings with children:

O Jesulein süß, o Jesulein zart<sup>23</sup>

Köberle quotes poets repeatedly against *hubris* of the intellect and stresses the importance of the heart. For example, he cites these lines from Angelus Silesius:

Der nächste Weg zu Gott führt durch  
der Liebe Tür  
Der Weg der Wissenschaft bringt dich  
nur langsam für.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, he quotes Matthias Claudius:

Zerbrich den Kopf dir nicht zu sehr  
Zerbrich den Willen, das ist mehr.

One could easily multiply other examples (including quotes from Kierkegaard)

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.



in Köberle's sermons, which also frequently contain poetic prose. For example, he asks, "Who today, does not feel the earthquakes which shake both earth and humanity with ever new tremors? Who does not shiver in the cold morning cosmic hour in which we stand?"<sup>25</sup>

Heinrich Bornkamm in *Einkehr* quotes Andreas Gryphius as an example of the expression of Christian truth in concise poetry.<sup>26</sup> F. Rückert wrote a hymn to comfort men in the night hours ("Um Mitternacht").<sup>27</sup> R. A. Schröder is also quoted to still anxious hearts.<sup>28</sup> Bornkamm shows his awareness of contemporary philosophic and poetic theory: "Both are equally real: the world and the lap, the distance and the inner nearness, eternity and a fragment of history, the earthly life through which God speaks to us."<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, he says, "Man is always a unity before God. That is Luther's basic contribution to the concept of man. I cannot divide myself into higher and lower, spiritual and unspiritual, godly and devilish."<sup>30</sup> These concepts substantiate poetic symbol and analogy.

These examples must suffice to illustrate the use of poetry in communication of the Gospel. Other works studied, including those of Niemöller, Gerstenmaier, F. von Bodelschwingh, Martin Fischer, and Peter Brunner, showed skillful yet varying use of hymns and poetry.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>26</sup> Heinrich Bornkamm, *Einkehr: Rundfunk-Betrachtungen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1958), p. 28.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 12, 13.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

This writer made a special effort to study samples of sermons by members of the theological faculty of Heidelberg.<sup>31</sup> The sermons that were read did not quote poets as frequently as those by some of the theologians mentioned above, but they did reveal insights into myth, symbol, analogy, and other elements of poetry. It became evident, as one professor in literature said, that the theologians were contemporary and scholarly. When poetry is quoted it is incisive (for example, H. Krimm's quote from Goethe: "Doch Ordnung lehrt euch Zeit gewinnen.")<sup>32</sup> Günther Bornkamm's words illustrate the point of this paragraph:

But is the Gospel necessary for such understanding? Death is the boundary before which human existence and life first attains its truth and reality. Our heart undoubtedly reminds us of this enough and the voices of poets have given the thought rich expression. If we knew nothing else we should, nevertheless, be still and not chime in with the great melancholy chant that rises secretly or openly out of the depth of the world and human existence.<sup>33</sup>

Rudolf Bohren emphasizes the need for the pastor to keep abreast of literary activity:

The proper relationship between the divine service and culture is disturbed by the fact that the service has been desecularized. The contemporary culture is not used to sing the new song. The human world is removed from the liturgy and the latter becomes a law unto itself and

<sup>31</sup> These are found in such collections as *Heidelberger Predigten, Neue Folge*, ed. H. Krimm (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1963).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 187.



speechless because it renounces the law of the spirit which is also active in art.<sup>34</sup>

Helmut Thielicke freely uses thoughts of poets to structure his ethics. In his *Ethik des Politischen* he makes references to Berdyaev, Bernanos, Heine, Hölderlin, Goethe, Lessing, Schiller, Shakespeare, and many others. He does not often quote, but refers to their thought, thereby showing the close relationship between poetry and life. In his book *The Freedom of the Christian Man*<sup>35</sup> he shows his comprehension of the thought of freedom in Goethe, Schiller, Herder, and others. Goethe, for example, is used to show how freedom is merged with necessity in order that man might become what he is.

Some German theologians not only used poetry but also wrote poetry. Among the most interesting poems of this nature are those written by Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his last days. Though Bonhoeffer was embarrassed and hardly knew "what to make of these new children of mine," Susan Wiltshire is right in saying that

to understand fully the directions of Bonhoeffer's thinking during this final period so influential in contemporary theology, and also to appreciate the character and quality of the man himself it is important to read with care the poems from prison.<sup>36</sup>

Hermann Diem calls Kierkegaard "the

poet of Christianity."<sup>37</sup> Kierkegaard had no authority as a pastor, and hence he resolved to address his contemporaries as a poet. Thereby he indicated that he considered himself a peculiar kind of poet who wanted to read for himself the original text of human existence and seek poetic distance to escape confusion.<sup>38</sup>

As in philosophy and theology, so also in poetry, Kierkegaard made observations that are basic, even though controversial.<sup>39</sup> His most controversial statement appears in his *Diapsalmata ad se ipsum in Entweder/Oder*:

What is a poet? An unhappy man whose lips are so formed that his sobbing and screaming change to beautiful music while his soul writhes in hidden agony. Yet people crowd around the poet and shout: Sing us another: In other words, let new suffering torment your soul, sing new pangs. He shouldn't scream, though, because that would cause people anguish. But people are eager to hear the beautiful song.<sup>40</sup>

The poet, according to Kierkegaard, is in conflict with total existence. This conflict is submerged in creativity, whereby the poet removes the problem from himself into a work of art. He criticizes Goethe for thus avoiding the realities of life. The poet, more than others, feels the anguish and despair of existence, but instead of ex-

<sup>34</sup> Rudolf Bohren, *Mission und Gemeinde: Mit einer Anmerkung zur seelsorgerlichen Predigt*. In *Theologische Existenz heute* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1962), p. 26.

<sup>35</sup> Helmut Thielicke, *The Freedom of the Christian Man*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).

<sup>36</sup> Susan Ford Wiltshire, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Prison Poetry," *Religion in Life*, XXXVIII (Winter 1969), 522—34.

<sup>37</sup> Hermann Diem, *Kierkegaard: An Introduction* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1966), pp. 29—38.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 96, 98.

<sup>39</sup> For fuller treatment see Johannes Pfeiffer, "Kierkegaard's Kampf gegen den Dichter," *Zwischen Dichtung und Philosophie: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Bremen: Joh. Storm Verlag, 1947), pp. 186—97.

<sup>40</sup> Translated from *Gesammelte Werke*, pt. 1, p. 19.



ploring and overcoming them, he diverts the energies into works of art.

Yet Kierkegaard considered himself a kind of poet and wanted to speak to his fellowmen as a poet. His criticism is a self-criticism. He had transformed the anguish of his own life into productivity.

Several theologians in Germany are also outstanding critics. Paul Althaus is recognized as a Goethe scholar who gave an outstanding analysis of Goethe's attitudes toward Christianity. Goethe was an avid reader of the Bible all his life, but read it "weltlich" (humanistically). In his *Faust*, striving takes the place of contrition and repentance. Goethe learned the Gospel well but in later life secularized it. He opposed the exclusiveness of Christianity but continued to value Christ as symbol of an ideal approached when the ego, striving for truth, is freed from its sordid, lower nature.<sup>41</sup>

Johannes Pfeiffer helped his countrymen understand poetry. With masterful insight he shows how Matthias Claudius raised his simple little world to the eternally relevant by using its things as symbols pointing to the ultimately real.<sup>42</sup> In a synopsis of literary criticism and his own concept of poetry he lists five basic tensions: (1) between free transcendence of art and its roots in perceptible realities; (2) between

<sup>41</sup> Paul Althaus, *Goethe und das Evangelium* (Munich: Claudius Verlag, 1951). Althaus makes extensive use of hymns and poetry in his sermons.

<sup>42</sup> Johannes Pfeiffer, *Matthias Claudius, der Wandsbecker Bote: Eine Einführung in den Sinn seines Schaffens* (Bremen: Storm, 1947). Other works include: *Über das Dichterische und den Dichter: Beiträge zum Verständnis deutscher Dichtung* (Hamburg: Richard Meiner Verlag, 1956); *Über den Umgang mit dichterischer Prosa* (Hamburg: Friedrich Wittig Verlag, 1953, 5th ed. 1960).

esthetic independence in the sense of visionary exclusiveness and overarching truth in spiritual-ethical world encounter; (3) between reflective thought and imagination; (4) between cosmic, natural bases and historical, existential bases; (5) between art as penultimate with awareness of the absolute and revelation.<sup>43</sup>

C. S. Lewis' influence on religion is largely due to use of myth and poetry.<sup>44</sup>

Hans-Eckehard Bahr surveys theological theories of art and concludes: "Only through an insight into the response-character of art is it possible to establish theologically the function of art. . . . That he [the artist] sees God's togetherness with His creation means nothing else than that he conceives also today's world as touched and affected by God's presence."<sup>45</sup>

Paul Tillich, a theologian who worked in both Germany and the United States, included poetry in his discussion of art and there applied his method of correlation. Art at its depth deals with something of ultimate concern, the ultimate question to which religion gives the ultimate answer. For Tillich, the depth dimension is available only in symbol.<sup>46</sup>

Walter J. Ong, a prominent American

<sup>43</sup> Johannes Pfeiffer, *Die Dichterische Wirklichkeit: Versuche über Wesen und Wahrheit der Dichtung* (Hamburg: Richard Meiner Verlag, 1962).

<sup>44</sup> William Luther White, *The Image of Man in C. S. Lewis* (Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1969), pp. 36—74.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

<sup>46</sup> *Phenomenology of Religion: Eight Modern Descriptions of the Essence of Religion*, ed. Joseph D. Bettis. In *Harper Forum Books*, ed. Martin E. Marty (New York & Evanston: Harper & Row, 1969), pp. 169—178; Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, I (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 238—247, *passim*.



critic and an expert in theories of communication, states one of his major concerns this way: "The displacement of the sense of recurrence as the dominant human awareness is, I believe, a major crisis, and probably *the* major crisis, in the arts today."<sup>47</sup> He suggests that poets must rethink both the thought and the structure of poetry to conform to the anticyclic cosmic view. This would include rhyme, rhythm, and other cyclic and repetitive elements.

In America there are also some prominent poets who have participated in dialogs between poets and theologians, including Robert Duncan, Denise Levertov, and Hollis Summers.<sup>48</sup>

What factors have caused renewed interest in the dialog between poets, philosophers, and theologians? The first is undoubtedly linguistic analysis. The theories of the "early Wittgenstein" and the logical positivists made both poetry and theology nonsense. Linguistic analysis later tended to make poetic and theological discourse valid and also pointed out that the so-called strict sciences depended heavily on symbolic languages. Gustav Aulén holds that in the future one of the chief tasks of theology may well be to elucidate symbols.<sup>49</sup> Hence more attention is also given

<sup>47</sup> Walther J. Ong, "Evolution, Myth, and Poetic Vision," *New Theology*, No. 5, ed. Martin E. Marty and D. G. Peerman (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p. 230.

<sup>48</sup> Denise Levertov, "A Personal Approach," *Anglican Theological Review*, L (July 1968), 229—53; *Parable, Myth, and Language*, ed. Tony Stoneburner (Cambridge, Mass.: The Church Society for College Work, 1968).

<sup>49</sup> Gustav Aulén, *The Drama and the Symbols* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), cf. Thomas Fawcett, *The Symbolic Language of Religion* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1971).

to the poetry of the Bible.<sup>50</sup> Anders Nygren pointed out that since the Bible presents its message in poetic form, logical argument, systematization, and rational classification tend to suppress truth.<sup>51</sup>

Linguistic analysts have frequently compared religious language to poetry. Thus Frederick Ferré says: "For it is without doubt the imagery of the models in theology which evoke the communal adoration, obeisance, awe, devotion, ecstasy, courage — the emotive and conative dimensions of faith that constitute it religious faith rather than philosophical speculation or metaphysical system-building."<sup>52</sup> Erich Heller says of Wittgenstein's *Unphilosophical Notes*: "It is an ending a little like that of Goethe's *Tasso* where a man with all his certainties shattered holds fast to his last possession: language."<sup>53</sup>

Hans-Rudolf Müller-Schwefe summarizes the problematic of language in three statements: 1. Language is the actually real in reality. 2. Language is the actually human in man. 3. Language appears as ac-

<sup>50</sup> See Arlis John Ehlen, *The Poetic Structure of a Hodayah from Qumran: An Analysis of Grammatica, Semantics and Auditory Correspondence in 1QH3:19-36* (Thesis, Harvard Divinity School, Harvard U., Cambridge, 1970).

<sup>51</sup> Anders Nygren, "Emil Brunner's Theology of God," *The Theology of Emil Brunner*, ed. Charles W. Kegley (New York: Macmillan, 1962), p. 177; cf. Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson (London: SPCK, 1953), pp. 220—226, 440—446.

<sup>52</sup> *New Essays in Religious Language*, ed. Dallas M. High (New York: Oxford U. Press, 1969), p. 85; cf. Martin Foss, *Symbol and Metaphor in Human Experience* (Lincoln: U. of Nebraska Press, 1949).

<sup>53</sup> High, p. 24. See also such works as James A. Martin Jr., *The New Dialogue Between Philosophy and Theology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1966).



complishment.<sup>54</sup> He attempts to achieve four goals in the study of language: (1) to analyze the possibilities of language from its structure; (2) to determine how and why the transcendental is associated with language; (3) to describe how we talk today and why we so talk; and (4) to conceive of Scripture as language event.<sup>55</sup> His basic question, "Does language express reality or is language itself reality?" is also a basic question of poetry. (Compare Wallace Stevens' "supreme fiction.")

Ronald W. Hepburn discusses whether words of poetry are used in their "normal" sense or whether they are "stretched." Though he concludes that there is no stretching and that statements branded as meaningless by philosophy do not regain meaning in poetry, he still finds a depth indicated in poetic language.<sup>56</sup>

Some people endeavor to find the "more" of poetic and religious language in coexpressionism:

When an image and words can coalesce to form a fresh kind of language — demanding an interplay between words and image, and between the word-image combination and the reader or viewer — then coexpression has happened.<sup>57</sup>

The bipolar approach of process philosophy created a renewed interest in poetic

<sup>54</sup> Hans-Rudolf Müller-Schwefe, *Die Sprache und das Wort. Homiletik, erster Band* (Hamburg: Furche Verlag, 1961), p. 13.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>56</sup> Stephen Toulmin, Ronald W. Hepburn, Alasdair MacIntyre, *Metaphysical Beliefs* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), pp. 152 and 155.

<sup>57</sup> William Kuhns and Robert Stanley, "Co-expression and Religious Language," *The Religious Situation 1969*, ed. Donald R. Cutler (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 871.

expression of religious thought. As Norman Pittinger claims:

We have come to see . . . that religious assertion by its very nature is inevitably couched in such metaphorical, symbolical, if you will, poetical language; and that all deep faith must express itself in this way if it is to express itself at all.<sup>58</sup>

The German philosopher Consalv Mainberger pointed theology in the direction of symbol and poetry for new breakthroughs: "When the problem of God, neglected since Schelling, is again placed in the context of the philosophy of mythology, then philosophy will make progress in the God question."<sup>59</sup> Is this new? No, it is the victory of the philosophy of Johann Hamann over that of his friend, Immanuel Kant.<sup>60</sup>

In more recent years, studies of religion have become more and more phenomenological. Such an approach presupposes poetic qualities.<sup>61</sup> Mircea Eliade holds that

<sup>58</sup> Norman Pittinger, *Process Thought and Christian Faith* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p. 95. For a recent discussion of process philosophy see Charles Hartshorne, *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method* (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1970). It is interesting to compare Luther's *Larvae Dei* and related concepts (Hellmut Bandt, *Luthers Lehre vom verborgenen Gott: Eine Untersuchung zu dem offenbarungsgeschichtlichen Ansatz seiner Theologie* [Berlin: Evangelischer Verlagsanstalt, 1958]; from the literary point of view: Cleanth Brooks, *The Hidden God: Studies in Hemingway, Faulkner, Yeats, Eliot, Warren* [New Haven: Yale U. Press, 1963]).

<sup>59</sup> Consalv Mainberger, "Wie Weit Bringt Es die Philosophie in die Gottesfrage?" *Philosophisches Jahrbuch*, I (Freiburg-Munich: Karl Alber Verlag, 1970), 64.

<sup>60</sup> Ronald G. Smith, *J. G. Hamann: A Study in Christian Existentialism* (New York: Harper, 1960).

<sup>61</sup> See select essays in *Phenomenology of Religion* (see note 45 above).



religious myth makes the world apprehensible.<sup>62</sup> Gerardus van der Leeuw shows the relevance of persons and things for religious thought. He quotes Rilke to show "that only a poet could vindicate things" and also quotes Wilde for the religious love-hate theme: "Each man kills the thing he loves."<sup>63</sup> His work draws heavily on other poetic insights. Feuerbach insisted that religion is poetic feeling.<sup>64</sup> Maritain saw primitive religion as the primordial intuition of being.<sup>65</sup> Schleiermacher observed that what is greatest in art had a religious character and approached the poets Coleridge and Wordsworth in the conviction that the universal existence of things is in the eternal.<sup>66</sup>

Poetry has served many uses, including protest. Poets are constantly creating new language and new meaning and are often the first to sense change and its direction. Hence, Martin Marty compares them to the Aeschylean chorus which knows and sings events before they are enacted.<sup>67</sup>

Serious poetry and Christian thought both seek to integrate and make whole man's lives and free them from meaninglessness.<sup>68</sup> The imagination of the poet offers one or more visions of human life

and value. Religious poetry integrates in two ways: As symbol it patterns life; as art it is patterned symbol in closely unified poem. Wallace Stevens' "jar in Tennessee" gave meaning to environment. In the poetry of Albert Joseph Hebert, the Virgin Mary is often described as giving meaning to man and nature.<sup>69</sup> This approaches the "blik" concept of R. M. Hare. Slightly different is the view of H. E. Root that in poetry we gain insight into the inwardness of the lives we lead.<sup>70</sup> Cleanth Brooks has developed well the unity concept: "A poem . . . is to be judged by its coherence, sensitivity, depth, richness and tough-mindedness."<sup>71</sup>

Poetry is the opposite of the computer. A poem, among other things, is like a crystal ball in which each sees reality and dream as they form in the tension between that which is and that which should be.<sup>72</sup>

*poet's invocation*<sup>73</sup>

breath at first dawn  
calling the tremendous  
out of the dark  
drawing man from clay  
by design  
color  
sound  
to create the world in grateful words

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., pp. 205, 211.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., pp. 70, 82.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>67</sup> *The Modern Schism*, pp. 37, 83, 94, 95, 125, 137, 139. Though at times classed with dreamers, serious writers have regarded poets as nearest reality: "Berkeley in some passages, especially in the *Commonplace Book*, also Croce, Bosanquet, Bradley, Whitehead, in some passages Peirce, have been aware that it is aesthetic categories that are most relevant to the concrete as actually given." Hartshorne, p. 76.

<sup>68</sup> Toulmin, p. 78.

<sup>69</sup> Albert J. Hebert, *Mary Our Blessed Lady* (New York: Exposition Press, 1970).

<sup>70</sup> H. E. Root, "Beginning All Over Again," *Soundings: Essays concerning Christian Understanding*, ed. A. R. Vidler, (Cambridge: University Press, 1963), pp. 3—19.

<sup>71</sup> Cleanth Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (London: Dodson, 1949), 228.

<sup>72</sup> Hilde Domin, *Wozu Lyrik heute: Dichtung und Leser in der gesteuerten Gesellschaft* (Munich: R. Piper & Co. Verlag, 1968).

<sup>73</sup> The poems that follow are copyrighted and are included by permission of the author.



caress our flowering wheat with  
 fruitful breeze  
 infuse our fellowship with harmony  
 fan face of man with  
 wing of dove but  
 storm the poet's heart with every wind  
 to sense each thing  
 to feel each life until  
 tossed from mood to mood it  
 brings forth form  
 caught in beam of  
 endless light

*babakkuk*

no vergilian prodigy  
 waves wand to calm war  
 no sandalled maid  
 carries fetus on census trek to  
 Messianic birth  
 not even beast slouches to Bethlehem  
 heat stalks parched hollow with  
 Pestilence and Fever until  
 deep lashes back in  
 flashing black storm over  
 steaming hills as  
 prophetic eye discerns  
 Spirit of sirocco  
 still Center of cyclonic wind  
 Remnant from threshed nation  
 though streaking bolt lightens  
 bare vine  
 rotting olive  
 empty stall  
 Faith dances with Life in  
 tumbling clouds

*Existential Dialog*

Give me my life  
 before I'm neatly  
 robed  
 by other hands  
 carried  
 by other feet  
 filed  
 by other minds  
 in pigeonholes  
 not of my choosing

granting me my hours to  
 rebel against principles  
 flaunt formalities  
 assert myself  
 and gather fruit  
 Give me my death  
 after I'm neatly  
 caught  
 in your conventions  
 shoved  
 into your shambles  
 forced  
 to mutter your language  
 conceding me my end to  
 experience what is not yours  
 stand alone on line of  
 being and void  
 taste past and future  
 uniquely my own

*without question*

ask not about  
 daggers that dig  
 into vitals, if  
 song grows in harrowed heart  
 sing it with gusto  
 going your way

*vale of ricochet*

not where mountains are gutted  
 by hot steel and lead  
 finding out troopers  
 in coiling smoke,  
 but far below among bullets  
 foiled by aim gone astray  
 he staggers the jagged road  
 while hatred whines itself away and  
 love contorts in pangs of birth  
 yet pain lives on, and on, and on  
 in eerie vale of ricochet

*poetic faith*

in early light  
 word matched thing like  
 paired horses



now verities fade with  
gulls winging seaward and  
leave me  
clutching myth  
at twilight  
hoping sea gulls return  
before dark

*Civilization*

He came out of the forest,  
his shaggy hair  
tangled and uncombed,  
his ruddy face

covered by a straggly beard  
red as coral.  
He came out of the forest  
with odor of pine  
carelessly mingling in his rustic garb  
with fragrant forget-me-not  
and pungent sheep sorrel.  
He came out of the forest,  
ate voraciously,  
danced at the tavern,  
stared at the skyscrapers,  
roared with the factories,  
returned . . .  
munching sheep laurel.