

## PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

### CREATIVE IMAGINATION: THE AESTHETIC HORIZON IN THEOLOGY

#### I

When we walk into a basilica of the fifth or sixth centuries (or into a church patterned after the basilica), or when we walk into a Gothic cathedral (whether it be Bourges or St. Patrick's in New York), we have a specific, intense experience of a church building and of a church community. It is possible to look into the being of the church precisely through the architecture of a specific period. Aisle and apse define an era culturally and historically. Our aesthetic vision—at the service of theology—grasps poignantly the history of the church in its forms, because ecclesial institutions as well as theological expression show forth parallels to the history of art.

Robert Nisbet has argued that sociology is an art form; like the arts, sociology has styles, landscapes, portraits.<sup>1</sup> Ecclesiology, too, can be treated aesthetically, for a style of enclosed space (and its accompanying architectural theory, always akin to some metaphysics) explains which forms the church assumed in a particular era and why. A building's control of space orders and conducts human movement through the lines made by stone, wood, glass and light. This affects liturgy, and ministry, for architecture unfolds and limits the space where human beings live: in the case of ecclesiology, the space where Christians meet, pray and worship; the space out of which they minister. Architectural space can be ministerial or sacral as it circumscribes and describes church. A basilica such as Santa Sabina arranges a place for community. There movement, fellowship, physical contact, preaching and hearing are formed. In the basilica, with its nave focused on the *cathedra*, with its ample aisles and translucent windows, ministerial diversity still had a limited role. The center of the community was not the Eucharist reserved but the ecclesial leader preaching.<sup>2</sup>

The medieval cathedral, however, exchanged specific tasks in the assembly for a space which is a mystical, liturgical and symbolic theater. The Gothic church is a universally open but localized

<sup>1</sup> *Sociology as an Art Form* (New York: Oxford, 1976).

<sup>2</sup> W. Norberg-Schulz, *Meaning in Western Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1972), pp. 40ff.; P. du Bourguet, *Early Christian Art* (New York: Reynal, 1971), pp. 30ff.

multi-media event for the presentation in dogma and liturgy of a neoplatonist light-theology.<sup>3</sup>

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My theme, however, is not the visual illustration of the major periods of ecclesiology through the arts but the suggestion that the aesthetic approach must be among the fundamental enterprises of theology's interpretation of revelation.<sup>4</sup> The aesthetic modality is a fundamental facet of human life. It seems to describe the mystery of revelation, faith and thinking-about-faith just as well as does the categorical style ("categorical" in both the Aristotelian and Kantian meaning of the word), and fundamental theology should ask seriously about its prominence. More and more it has been taken for granted that theology begins with logical or rational arrangements and exchanges of classes of concepts and words which are the important, even ultimate, structures of meaning. The aesthetic intuition of ineffable presence in reality, of subjectivity surrounding the object and penetrating to its depth which is both object and mystery, does not presume that theology or life is mainly word, syllogism, myth or symbol. Is that perspective which finds its hermeneutical cousins in physics and mathematics the only perspective, or may theology and faith flow out of an encounter with and grasp of that revealing mystery in a manner closely analogous to the production and appreciation of art?

The fundamental theologian observes the cultural scene. With only some oversimplification we can observe in theology, for some time, a dominance of words, a trend parallel to the rule in science and culture of software and programs in post-scientific technology. Much of transcendental hermeneutics (which, as we shall see, does not exhaust the heritage of idealism) goes no further than words and ultimately seems to consist in rendering linguistically attractive or non-threatening traditional or biblical words rather than uncovering new perspectives into the realities of salvation history expressed by words.<sup>5</sup> Just as this approach is withdrawing from the

<sup>3</sup>O. von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral* (New York: Pantheon, 1962), pp. 106ff.; "Die Kunst des hohen Mittelalters—Lichtvolle Geistigkeit." *Propylaeen Kunstgeschichte* 6 (Berlin: Propylaeen, 1972), pp. 11f. T. F. O'Meara, "Paris as a Cultural Milieu of Thomas Aquinas' Thought," *The Thomist* 39 (1974), 710ff.

<sup>4</sup>Much of the past discussion on art and theology was limited to the theory of aesthetics, particularly medieval aesthetics, and failed to grasp the synchronicity existing at times between artistic media and theology and philosophy. The Aristotelianism of Maritain and Gilson along with their rejection of cultural historicity and the legitimacy of the post-Kantian world made it inevitable that they would miss the mutual expression of a *Zeitgeist* in arts and humanities. By 1945, on the other hand, Regamey and Courturier saw the new mode of presence of the holy in modern art, and Tillich observed its similarities to Otto, Rilke and Heidegger.

<sup>5</sup>John Dillenberger criticizes the "total victory" of meaning, clarity and arrangement in language over other experiences and human processes in the role of

foyer of theology and accepting a more modest role in the pageant of biblical exegesis, the radical deconstruction of language is prominent in anthropology and literary criticism.

Still within the grove of words, a second lyceum of theological expression in the United States is religious journalism. Born of an American marriage of pragmatism and media, religious journalism easily seduces theologians but is almost never that serious meditation upon religion or revelation which qualifies as theology. It is, rather, usually a comparison of systems of buzz-words.

A third aspect of the contemporary theological scene is also to be found in the grove of language. After a century of Protestant liberalism where the philosophies of academics judged *sola Scriptura*, new, muscular, American fundamentalisms have arisen, and, like all fundamentalisms, they find salvation in words.

The Catholic personality and vision, however, are not found in grammar. Catholicism's glory and scandal are found in a commitment to, an insistence upon reality.<sup>6</sup> What Yves Congar sees in the "sacramental," what shocked Karl Barth in "*analogia entis*," is the Catholic determination to find and to hold—to see—the human and the divine together. The finite and the infinite, nature and tradition—what we call the revelation of mystery or the presence of grace acts in incarnation in the varied levels of a changing culture.

Looking into post-conciliar American Catholic theology, an observer of this Society might describe the Catholic Church as oscillating between two approaches: journalism and method. The media in America have an enormous influence as they gladly distill into two or three minutes complex moral issues or reproduce in a

religious analysis and expression. Cf. "The Diversity of Disciplines as a Theological Question: The Visual Arts as Paradigm," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 48 (1980), 235.

<sup>6</sup>"The act of faith ends not in a statement but in a reality. We form statements only to have knowledge of things by them; this is true of the sciences, and also of faith." *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 1, a. 2, ad 2. On the necessity of correcting the modern *Wendung zur Idee* with life and history and of achieving a balance of "subject" and "field," cf. B. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), p. 144.

Dillenberger argues against the trend to find "one central ingredient of humanity in terms of which other facets might be added, organized or oriented," and he questions whether there is one overarching code or language for expressing revelation, religion and theology ("The Diversity . . ." p. 247). The reduction of nature to number and force has, according to Langdon Gilkey, shunted aside the depth and variety of the religious vision's access to grace. Gilkey labels the scientific domination over nature as hostile to the mystical as well as the ecological. "In a strange paradoxical way, while objective religious studies grew out of a pluralistic world and provide the basis for the study of that world and its many encounters, they do not themselves reflect the radical pluralism of that world; nor do they themselves participate in its unsettling, yet creative encounters" ("AAR and the Anxiety of Non-Being," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 48 [1980], 10, 15).

repetitive cassette a pastoral program. The media by their nature cannot present nuances, analogies, paradoxes. Stripped of this, theology in the media becomes daring, trendy, shocking, outrageous. Journalism is easy, emotional, instant. Method, on the other hand, is slow, cerebral, observant, formal. Both are not so much the master as the heir of a world of words.

Without doubt, the single greatest task which faced Roman Catholic theology in this century—and which faced with a particular sharpness American Catholicism after Vatican II—was to pick up anew the pieces of the temporary synthesis of Roman Catholicism and Romantic Idealism accomplished in the early nineteenth century at Landshut, Tübingen, Munich and Vienna; to reclaim that the basic thought-forms of men and women today are not those of the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries, and so to develop theology from the point of view of the evolving self. Luther, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Freud, Marx, Klee, Schoenberg, Otto, Webern, Heidegger—the thought-forms of the modern person and culture are subject oriented. That remains. We cannot abandon in theology, however, the affirmation of an independent reality in revelation even as we devote considerable effort to exploring the individual and collective subject (the Church is a kind of collective person in time and culture) and their mobile and creative encounter with what we call revelation.

The intuitive mode of human engagement—typical of the world of art—may give us a mode of subjectivity which not only rejects the chimera of words and the presumed productivity of all reality but which unleashes, bestows and discloses the more of Presence.

## II

First let us visit again the parent of the modern world, both artistic and theological: the beginning of the nineteenth century.

A single ship or an iceberg against a vast sky of white and blue; a solitary person sitting on the edge of the Hudson or on the North Sea; two companions on a path in the German forest or American wilderness. The nineteenth century Romantic painters used blue, white and gold light to bring together the self with the mysterious world of nature.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Cf. J. Wilmerding, *American Light. The Luminist Movement, 1850-1875* (Washington: The National Gallery, 1980); W. Vaughn, *German Romantic Painters* (New Haven: Yale, 1981); B. Novak, *Nature and Culture* (Oxford: University Press, 1980).

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At nineteen, just finishing his unsatisfactory studies at the Tübingen seminary, an enthusiast of Kant and a disciple of Fichte—but capable in two years of surpassing both—Friedrich Schelling observed in one of his first publications in 1794 that the full implication of Kant's thought had been drawn by Fichte. If the self was active enough to create space and time, did not the *ich* produce all that was the non-self? This full mastery of each personality over reality corresponded to the personal and political freedom offered by the French Revolution. In the new presentation of consciousness, the most profound theory joined the most radical praxis to liberate the infinite and the finite and all their modalities.

But Schelling did not remain long with Fichte's consistent if radical position. Exposure to the new natural sciences of chemistry and electricity as well as to the new Romantic movement in the arts led him, in his first system of 1800, to posit a dialectic between the highly productive self and the pulsing, mysterious network of structures as rich as the world of the self, nature. Schelling intended to show that nature and spirit, parallel processes were united ultimately in an aesthetic act of consciousness, imagination. Imagination pervades both matter and spirit and joins them to each other. Spirit struggles to be concrete and specific while nature struggles to release (much as Michaelangelo said stone released the sculptured body) its own *Geist*. In art, Schelling saw the unity of human self-consciousness and free intelligence with objective matter. Through an imagination which is not simply inventive but ontologically creative the mind in its existence and life joins the impulses and perceptions of consciousness with the particulars of the material universe. The resulting work of art is real and ideal, presenting and symbolizing the union of spirit and nature.

Art is passion moderated by beauty, matter grasped by intellectual sight. An art work is a union and reciprocal interpenetration of form and material, spirit and nature, subject and object, freedom and necessity.<sup>8</sup>

The Enlightenment created this new, powerful role for the imagination. The Enlightenment brought forth words like genius, feeling, self, production, sympathy, unconscious. Kant's *Critique of Judgement* shifted art to subjectivity, spiritual power, quasi-infinite consciousness. Schelling's was "a dream of unity,"<sup>9</sup> and Coleridge said that Schelling's work ended the gaps in the "history

<sup>8</sup> Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art* (London: Chapman, 1845), pp. 2, 9, 18. This is the only work of Schelling fully translated into English during his lifetime.

<sup>9</sup> J. Engell, *The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Cambridge: Harvard), p. 3.

of the collective human mind."<sup>10</sup> Certainly Schelling sought the core, the quintessence, and wanted both the ideal and the real, both the absolute and the finite. In German, imagination is *ein-bilden*, "to form into one." The transcendental and the material are one in the arts' presentation of both structures of the absolute: *Geist* and *Natur*. Aesthetic perception sees their interplay; the work of art presents it; the artist patterns her work after the activity of the Absolute . . . whose work is, also, cosmic art.<sup>11</sup>

Up until Schelling's first system, when philosophy treated art, it was a treatment of art-works as objects for a section of philosophy or a treatment of the aesthetic function as an aspect of epistemology. With Schelling, however, art had become life, the paradigm of being and producing.

Now since it was the free tendency to self-intuition in that original identity which divided intelligence from itself, the feeling accompanying [in us] this intuition [of dialectical unity between subject and object] will be that of an infinite tranquility. With the completion of the product, all urge to produce is halted; contradictions are eliminated; puzzles solved.<sup>12</sup>

Art is a reflection of the primal unity in the absolute out of which, in freedom and necessity, the variety and development of objectivity has flowed forth. Art does justice to both sides of dialectic; it begins in turmoil, it ends in peace.

Schelling uses many pairs to clarify the nature of the two poles connected by the imagination. On the one side are finite form, matter in its particular and concrete manifestation, the individual, nature, and works of art. This pole includes a beautiful tropical fish, Saturn's shadow cast on its own rings, and the Apollo Belvedere. On the other side are infinite being, spirit in a universal or abstract mode, the race or type, the mind of God, and the mind of man. This is where God broods over the face of the waters, where the Logos of St. John speaks, and where souls feel what Buddha calls Nirvana. The "productive power," apparently nothing in itself, is the power that creates all things. More dramatically, it is the power to make galaxies out of a seeming vacuum, worlds out of stellar dust, and the *Last Supper* from dyes and wet plaster. Only by exercising this pervading creative spirit in both man and nature, only by re-attaining a pre-established harmony, can perception and reality, the ideal and the real, work through each other and become one.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 6f.

<sup>11</sup>*System of Transcendental Philosophy in Sämtliche Werke (SW)* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1856-1861), 3, pp. 610, 601. "History as a whole is a progressive, gradual self-disclosing revelation of the absolute. So one can never indicate in history particular places where the mark of providence of God himself is visible. For God never *exists*, if the existent is that which presents itself in the objective world; if he existed in such a way, then we would not be. Rather, he continually reveals himself" (p. 603). On Schelling's philosophy and art, two works stand out: X. Tillet, *Schelling. Philosophie en devenir* (Paris: Vrin, 1970), 1; D. Jaehnig, *Schelling, Die Kunst in der Philosophie* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1969).

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 614.

<sup>13</sup>Engell, pp. 302ff.

Science, on the other hand, is not capable, Schelling maintains, of producing the universal theory. Science remains particular, intent upon a group of elements or powers while art is intuition of genius into the whole. In the play's dramatic movement or in the sculpture's eye or muscle are found not just the part but in the part the totality, both real and ideal. Schelling compares the absolute and its revelation to a playwright involved in the play with the players. This revelation must be immanent, subtle and on-going; otherwise divine life and human freedom would end.<sup>14</sup>

Art, Schelling wrote in 1800, is the only true and full expression of the new philosophy which was both idealist and developmental, an "objective idealism."

The real world develops entirely from the same primal composition which gives rise to the world of art. It is to be viewed as one great whole, and is, in all its individual products, depicting the one Infinite. . . . Aesthetic intuition is simply transcendental intuition become objective, and so it is obvious that art is the only true and eternal organon and document of philosophy, ever speaking to us of what philosophy cannot depict in external form, namely the unconscious elements in acting and producing, and their original identity with consciousness.

Art is paramount to the philosopher, precisely because it opens to him, as it were, the holy of holies, where burns in eternal and original unity, as in a single flame, that which in nature and history is rent asunder, that which in life and action, no less than in thought, must forever fly apart.<sup>15</sup>

For modern artists like Kandinsky, art after 1900 became more and more abstract. Kandinsky's *Compositions* and *Improvisations* were not a surrender to decoration or solipsism but a serious attempt to let absolute spirit appear in forms, to let the holy disclose itself in precise arrangement of tone, color and line. For in our century, objects particularly explicitly religious or super-

<sup>14</sup>*System*, pp. 623, 601.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 627. For various reasons the idea of art as the point of union of the subjective and objective fades from Schelling's thought after 1804 as his philosophy undergoes modifications from Hegel and Jakob Boehme. Still it perdures and appears with new vigor as the core of the late philosophy in "myth" and "revelation." These two are the results of the same human dialectic, the works not of a single genius in stone and color but of a group of people within the history of religion. For Schelling, mythology as the revelation of the absolute and as the collective consciousness of a people becomes the ultimate expression of the ideal in the real (*SW* 11, pp. 241f). Engell describes the change in Schelling, as religion becomes more explicit after the move to Munich in 1804, as one from imagination to love. "Increasingly he identifies the two principles of God no longer as reason and creative imagination but as reason and love. The oneness of God, working through love, brings about creation itself. Imagination is a form of love because it involves escaping from self and becoming involved in the world. To this end the whole of creation is God's act of love. Christ is a promise and symbol of that love" (p. 327). We should recall, too, that the Church in the last pages of Schelling's final system, *Die Philosophie der Offenbarung*, is a work of art.

natural, objects presented by artists (or theologians) in the style of David or Runge, block vision into grace. Kandinsky sought the "inner necessity" of "*das Geistige*." The world, he believed, precisely in this triumph in art of the subject was moving towards "an epoch of great spirituality."<sup>16</sup> Echoing Schelling's last pages of his final system, *Die Philosophie der Offenbarung*, Kandinsky wrote:

I realize that this view of art is Christian and at the same time it shelters within itself the necessary elements for the reception of the "third" revelation, the revelation of the Holy Spirit.<sup>17</sup>

The similarity of Kandinsky, Marc and Klee to Rudolf Otto and Martin Heidegger is inescapable. Abstract art is not a flight from all objectivity but a process of piercing through objectivity.

Soon theologians strove to get beyond the landscape of a simplistic salvation history where, like big boulders, supernatural objects were strewn about. Tillich's "ground" and "symbol," Bultmann's "myth" have their cultural sources not in the technology of the post-modern world but in the aesthetics and philosophy of the end of the nineteenth century. The generation of theologians after Tillich and Heidegger, however, particularly those in England and America, have been too equivocal and technical, too distracted by what are ultimately linguistic structures. Lesser thinkers have turned the disclosure of mystery not into a canvas or quartet but into a glass which is either opaque or mirror-like. Modern theological method, smiling upon secularity and technology (linguistics is a form of technology) lost its originally aesthetic context of participative awe and awareness before the holy disclosed in finite life. As with pop art, secular theology spun down the corridors of the 1960's into the confines of epistemology or into a journalism of self-parody. Certainly the original pastoral presuppositions and programs of this exegesis and dogmatics—the disappearance of faith in the supernatural—proved to be neither successful nor accurate.

### III

We ponder Raphael and Rembrandt. Through their use of light, two different theologies emerge on canvas: two different views of grace (for in art, light signifies grace), two different views of human nature, of the world and its sin. Almost impressionistic, the details of Raphael's background are luminous and rich; there is light in the air and air in the towns and landscapes. In the Renais-

<sup>16</sup> V. Kandinsky, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (Munich: Piper, 1912), p. 104.

<sup>17</sup> In *Modern Artists on Art* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1964), p. 41.



sance, the sadness of pain or humanity does not overwhelm but separates and then unites the colors of light exuding from both nature and grace. The vibrant emotions and the linear corporality of the High Renaissance are present in Raphael but serenely, without Michaelangelo's *Terribilita*. Optically spacious, Raphael's *Stanze* are balanced, thoughtful contemplations—in European saints and Greek geniuses—of the harmonic and salutary springs of antiquity and Christianity.

But in Rembrandt's Calvinism, succeeding levels of darkness give another theology as they frame and so proclaim the single place of light, Christ. Even the light surrounding Jesus, preacher and crucified, is ultimately outside the canvas with God, the totally transcendent. Shadows of browns and blacks intrude upon John and Joseph of Arimathea at the Cross (Mary has fainted). Nothing escapes sin except the divine Word.

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The forms of the New Testament writings are rarely those of logic and law. They, and the Jesus they record, teach through imagination's forms: parables, stories, paradoxes, confrontations, dramas, hymns, gospels and letters. In the Gospel according to Luke, Jesus explains that his *doxa* could come only through both Passion and Resurrection (24:26). In Philippians, Jesus, though in the *morphe* of God, has lived in the schema of the human person (2:6ff). Romans proclaims Jesus to be the *ikon* of God (8:30). The explanation for the diverse views of Jesus in the writings of the New Testament has been given by John and Paul. For them Jesus is an individual person who is at the same time a depth barely plumbed by his followers (Jn 21:25; Eph 3:18f). The Word incarnate, from the infinity of the *Logos*, reveals in the man through the very limitations and characteristics of Jesus ben Joseph. They are the channels not of finite failure but of revelation. Sign of Jonah, suffering servant, savior of the people, fountain, son of God, son of man, vine, *Logos*, bread—Jesus is viewed from different perspectives by a variety of people. Varied, even contradictory, interpretations are possible . . . as with a work of art.<sup>18</sup>

Revelation in the New Testament, secondly, is not only one personality transparent and revelatory but also drama: life as art.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Herrlichkeit* 1 (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1961), pp. 25ff.

<sup>19</sup>Von Balthasar intends to compose three theological systems, each based upon one of the transcendentals: the beautiful, the good and the true. While the third (as yet unwritten) would be a logic, the first two arrange Christian revelation around aesthetics (*Herrlichkeit*) and a second art form, drama (*Theodramatik*). "Dramatics is agogics, teaching as action, and in the relationship between life and

The reaction of women and men to God's word is a drama. This drama of the dialectic of sin and grace may occur with past prophets or present charismatics, among true or false religious leaders. As freedom meets intuition in the atmosphere of the kingdom, men and women accept or reject the historical Jesus. Rejection, betrayal, search, following, recognition, love and hate, are the components of drama and theater. Jesus is not only the catalyst of this primal and universal drama, but he is revelation precisely as this drama in an intense form.

Human life is not only a plan of God (Eph 1:2ff) but God's drama. What is revelation *au fond* except personal action? From presence and action spring communication and words. Because revelation is revelation of a personal presence in the midst of our personality, revelation and faith are about freedom, evil and grace in each of us. Conversion, experience, insight and recognition, knowledge, dark vision, gift, communion and encounter—all these typically aesthetic modalities of life are given in both revelation and faith.

Both human experience and scripturally recorded experience suggest an intersection of faith and revelation which is an emotional and intuitive meeting. Not always reason but imagination too is that meeting-point, imagination which is both receptive and productive. Is not the style of both faith and revelation similar to the aesthetic? This pattern of the arts is: *intuitive* (seeing is its exemplary function): *immediate*; borne forward in emotional experience. Analogous to artist or viewer, composer and hearer, the believer seeks through the words and ideas and symbols and powers of what we call revelation for access, openness through objectivity towards a further reality glimpsed darkly but richly. The interplay of subject and mysterious presence (which as grace exists on both sides of the subject-object encounter) happens in the style of an encounter. As with the arts, faith too is a seeing; a perceiving of likeness and then a perceiving of distance and difference. All of this is mediated through emotions and images filled with ecstasy and identification.

The faith-revelation experience, like the artistic one, gives not a single but a double access: one into the self, the other forward to "the ideal," "the holy," "the absolute." When I attend theater, opera or dance, a double movement is at work. My psyche is

stage the border between both fades. So in the action of God with humanity the border between the agent and the spectators is lifted. The human person is not a spectator but a co-player in God's drama. . . . Naturally, in this theodrama the stage is God's. What he does remains the decisive content of the play . . . , and so viewing revelation as a drama remains image and simile" ("Zwischen Aesthetik und Logik," *Theodramatik 1 Prologomena* [Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1973], p. 18).

stimulated by the music or the image, and lets the bottom drop out; then the experience regroups vision and emotion and leads me to something "more" mediated by art.

Enduring art is precisely not merely self-productive or self-interpretive. Nor is full aesthetic experience only subjective and existential. The demythologizing-existential model of theology has proven to be ultimately not an aesthetic one. Art, like revelation, is a liturgy of the "More." As the ideal-presence increases through the intensity of the aesthetic-mystical experience, the intervening object declines in perceived centrality and the two powers intermingle: self and further presence. Paul Ricoeur writes of this:

To summarize, poetic language is no less *about* reality than any other use of language but refers to it by the means of a complex strategy which implies, as an essential component, a suspension and seemingly an abolition of the ordinary reference attached to descriptive language. This suspension, however, is only the negative condition of a second-order reference, of an indirect reference built on the ruins of the direct reference. This reference is called second-order reference only with respect to the primacy of the reference of ordinary language. For, in another respect, it constitutes and primordial reference to the extent that it suggests, reveals, unconceals—or whatever you say—the deep structures of reality to which we are related as mortals who are born into this world and who  *dwell* in it for a while.<sup>20</sup>

#### IV

There are several consequences for fundamental theology when it takes seriously the quality of access found in the aesthetic experience.

1. Fundamental theology sees in art a sustenance of both domains of subjectivity and objectivity. The aesthetic act is productive, both as it produces the woodwind quintet and as it hears its coda. The format and forms, the material of art, whether it be fashioned space or simile, are not the object of perception but the medium. Similarly, in faith and theology, the text or the law, the liturgy or the church building is not the object but the medium. Because of its particular relationship to cognition and emotion, art lays claim to some immediacy. We cannot pursue the issue of immediacy here; it is both a traditional and newly contemporary problem. Religious immediacy, however, seems to be an aspect not of analysis but of consciousness permitting an objectless pondering of grace. The realm of immediacy is found traditionally in mysticism understood as the ordinary development of faith, grace and life.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup>Paul Ricoeur, "The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination and Feeling," *Critical Inquiry* 5 (1978), 153; cf. B. Lonergan, *Insight* (New York: Longmans, 1958), p. 185.

<sup>21</sup>For Thomas Aquinas the highest human activity was not metaphysics or

Both revelation and belief/theology follow aesthetic patterns. The goal of theology is not model-substitution but contemplation as openness to disclosure and unending exploration through media of life and presence. The history of Christian doctrine and institutions is not, as professors of the nineteenth century presumed, a devastating dissection of an all too finite frog but the disclosure of different perspectives capable of truth and beauty yet tenacious in their finitude.

2. Fundamental theology explains how all the areas of Christian faith and life can be enterprises of imagination. As productive consciousness structures knowledge, theology arranges and draws out new, creative correlations of revelation with culture. This happens not only through legal, logical and verbal forms but in intuitive modes. Theological creativity is neither an emptying of language nor an arbitrary projection of models and meanings. Rarely does life escape the search for the presence of the "More" amid sin and grace. The drama of life in people's experience joins to the prophet's vision and the community's liturgy. Community comes not from obedience and fear, nor from common texts, but from shared images and experiences. The source of church is conversion and nourished experience where images calm fear. Last year at our convention, Edward Schillebeeckx pointed out that no matter what a man or woman might believe about Jesus Christ, they believe it because they have *experienced* it as true. To a theology which is mainly verbal, intent upon logic, either drawn from scholasticism or the individualism of the Enlightenment or existentialism, the Church inevitably appears as an anachronism or embarrassment. The community is, however, with all of its scandals a place of life and reality. It too exists in the aesthetic mode, for the Church survives in people not because of salvation assured but because of deep images and past and future experiences nourished. The stages of psychological life should determine every mode of religious expression, for they describe the structure of human experience. They resemble the enterprise Schelling set for himself in his first system of 1800 as he wished to describe the structure of consciousness, its development in personality and nature, its finale in art.

3. Only in the arts do we find some presentation of the strange fundamental pattern of our existence which is joy mixed with

theology but psychic life touched by the Spirit's charism of wisdom. Wisdom is intuitive, experiential, surpassing knowledge and understanding in its emotionally driven, immediate communion with that which faith accepts and reason ponders analytically. Interestingly, for an illustrative analogy to wisdom, Aquinas chose art (*Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 45, aa. 1,3; q. 45, a. 2; I, q. 14, a. 8; T. Gilby, *Poetic Experience* [London: Sheed and Ward, 1934]).

tragedy. There is a negative aesthetic: one of pain, of limitation. The scriptural theme of life out of dying is also an artistic leitmotif. The ultimate critique of everything is suffering and that for whom suffering is messenger, death. Yet, contradiction, negativity are, too, presence and glory. Every life, like every art work, is *chiaroscuro*; there is the beautiful, the symbol, the disclosed reality glimpsed, the *doxa*. There is also the sharp line of finitude, the limits of negation, the shadows, the *apophasis*.

4. Art as educator is best when it produces not a critic nor an aesthete but a seer whose surrounding lives are richer through art. Fundamental theology, too, is ministerial, educating believers and particularly ministers to perceive revelation under the modality of grace. Adult Christians, all of whom are called to some ministry, are destined to be observers, analysts of grace, to be contemplatives of the interpenetration of grace and individual life, to be a spellbound witness of sin. The great theological task prior to the analysis of God's existence or Christ's hypostasis is not the knowledge of past theologies or present psychologies but the believing pondering and perception of grace amid freedom and evil, a standing before the particularity of lives, ugly and beautiful.

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These remarks seem to me to have their own dialectic—one, unfortunately, whose poles appear, like peaks in a blizzard, to be alternately the obvious and the opaque. Perhaps these observations do retain the partially expressed dynamic of their ideas and have spoken of a presence within consciousness but beyond words.

Nevertheless, the above ideas, in their union of the aesthetic-mystical and the real-divine, stand in a long tradition reaching from Origen to Dionysius to Eckhart to Schelling to Heidegger.

For them, theology is life as well as thought: the *Pneuma's* wisdom teaching all is the ultimate charism completing the *daimon* of genius.

For them, human finitude and change are not hopeless and punishing shipwrecks but clearings for revelation. Even nothingness—which in our century seems to be the lord of the world—has its own dignity, reality and dark glory.

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