

## Proposal 6

### Poetic Perspectivism: Theopoetic Use of Language Arts in Christian Spiritual Formation

The vast majority of contemporary scholarship on theopoetics falls into one of two types: 1) theopoetics as an expression of Process Theology's love of multiplicity and the manifolded-ness of the Divine or 2) theopoetics in the vein of Stanley Hopper and Amos Wilder, as an understanding of scripture and theology as profound literary texts whose aesthetics ought to be considered along with their content. Interestingly -- perhaps ironically -- while both streams of thought proclaim an interest in theopoetics as a vehicle for greater theological embodiment, very little has been produced that reflects the utility and insight of using theopoetics as a lens for investigations of actual practices in congregational contexts.

This paper will explore three recent books that intend to serve as guides to spiritual practice: Dave Harrity's *Making Manifest*, Christine Valter Paintner's *The Artist's Rule*, and Troy Bronsink's *Drawn In*. Each is written at the intersection of theology and "the arts" and intends to provide the reader with means to deepen one's faith through engagement with various artistic practice(s). Using theopoetics as an interpretive lens through which these texts might be read, I suggest that the quality of Christian spiritual formation engendered by work with the arts —as exemplified in these three texts —can be understood as a kind of poetic Nietzschean Perspectivism. Then, working from a theoretical framework informed by Nietzsche and various theopoetics authors I advocate for the use of poetics in Christian spiritual formation, making claims that arts-based formation can be encouraged in such a way that it is coherent with experientially-grounded models as well as theological and scriptural Christian traditions.

More than just an exploration of three "arts-based" spiritual practice texts, I intend for this paper to serve as a potential model for the use of theopoetics as a theoretical framework to undergird the development of concrete church practices. As such, this paper is not oriented strictly in either Process Theology or Hopper's "Death of God" theopoetics, but will draw from both streams in an attempt to move forward in the exploration of what an applied theopoetics might look like in contemporary congregational settings.