

Beyond Poetic Perspectivism:
Applied Theopoetics in the Use of Language Arts as Christian Practice

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Almost always the books of scholars are somehow oppressive, oppressed: the "specialist" emerges somewhere – his zeal, his seriousness, his fury, his overestimation of the nook in which he sits and spins, his hunched back; every specialist has his hunched back. Every scholarly book also mirrors a soul that has become crooked; every craft makes crooked... Nothing can be done about that. Let nobody suppose that one could possibly avoid such crippling by some artifice of education. On this earth one pays dearly for every kind of mastery... For having a specialty one pays by also being the victim of this specialty.

–Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, § 366

I open with Nietzsche's cheery epigraph above as a sort of self-imposed gauntlet: to address the subject of theopoetics without hunching or becoming crooked. That is, I agree with Matt Guynn that “there is a risk that theopoetics will remain just a conversation corner in the academy,” even though it “deserves to also flow into the sanctuary and toward the streets” (Guynn 107). To this end, I've crafted this piece in the hopes that it manages to touch the pulse of contemporary theopoetic insight and to make it applicable without demanding any “crippling by artifice of education.” Thus, my intent for this essay is much closer to a prospectus detailing the contents of a possible “applied theopoetics” than it is to a groundbreaking theoretical work.-

What I hope to do is to rather straightforwardly demonstrate how it is that people of

faith might develop personal and communal practices that are intentionally theopoetic and then to suggest why and how it is – via Rebecca Chopp with a twist of Nietzsche – that these practices are liberative. I will accomplish this in four steps of increasing length: (1) a brief framing of my understanding of theopoetics, (2) an articulation of Rebecca Chopp's notion of “poetic testimony” and the need for non-discursive discourse to help engender liberative theological and practical action, (3) the description of some arts-based practices of spiritual formation described in recent books by Troy Bronsink, Dave Harrity, and Ruth Illman & Alan Smith, and (4) the argument that the practices described correlate well both to my understanding of applied theopoetics and to Chopp's poetics of testimony. In making this progression I suggest the beginnings of a platform from which congregational practices of applied theopoetics might be developed.-

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 and/or adaptation of concrete Christian 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.

A Sketch of Applied Theopoetics

Rather than trot out the history and argument behind the claim I am about to make I will simply state that a detailed account of the origins of what follows can be found in my text

Bridge to Water: A Theopoetics Primer. Having noted that, below is my working definition for theopoetics followed by a more straightforward breakdown of the five marks that I suggest are constitutive of the theopoetic genre and/or method.

...theopoetics is an acceptance of cognitive uncertainty regarding the Divine, an unwillingness to attempt to unduly banish that uncertainty, and an emphasis on transformative action and creative articulation regardless. It also suggests that when the dust has settled after things have been said and done in the name of God, the reflection and interpretation to be done ought to be grounded in dialogue and enacted with a hermeneutic of hospitality and humility, an acceptance of cognitive uncertainty regarding the Divine, an unwillingness...

Five Theopoetic Marks¹

1. An emphasis on mystery and a primal being via a style of language where theologies are not rigid, logical assertions, but extension of confessional spirituality; a theology that is “not theo-logic but theo-poesis.”
2. An attempt to bridge the fractured, chaotic, and fleshy experience of life with the oftentimes removed and “ossified” attempt to create “scientific texts” out of theological articulation: theological content is engaged within a deeply contextualized way.
3. An affirmation of the possible role of the body, emotion, and sexuality in theological discourse, encouraging dialogue between different actual bodies.
4. A destabilizing and/or decentering critique, seeking to point out how monolithic representations of orthodoxy often are actually composed of multiple voices hidden within – or suppressed underneath – an official articulation.

¹ Here it seems prudent to note that there is a *very* clear resonance between my five theopoetic marks and the “seven distinct thematic elements” which make up a “practical theology of the arts” for Illman and Smith (61-64). The most significant differences have to do with (1) my insistence that theopoetics explicitly address similar content to theological discourse but in a novel mode, (2) the association of theopoetics with confessional spirituality and (3) an affirmation that the process being described is librational, that is, it is a derivative of the hermeneutic circle, but its circular motion yields actual movement “forward” instead of covering the same ground again and again.

5. A repetitive, librational/oscillating motion which deconstructs systems that attempt to self-enclose or claim eternity, and – in the wake of that deconstruction – put forth a new thing, a new try, a new response to God.

While I won't go into great detail about the above, it seems worth noting that while there are two distinct approaches to theopoetics in general – Process Theology compared to Literary and Biblical studies – the five marks and the definition are applicable to both streams. What I am after is not an allegiance to one particular camp or another, but a broad call for more attention to be paid to the aesthetic poetic elements of theological discourse and an exploration of what greater aesthetic engagement with those discourses might look like in congregational settings. What I call “applied theopoetics” is the enactment of concrete practices² engaged in by people of faith that manifest the qualities addressed above. The person – or people – involved need not explicitly articulate that they are intentionally trying to practice theopoetics for it to be what I call applied theopoetics.

For the purposes of this essay I am explicitly interested in the practices of people of faith far more than I am in the normative enforcement of theory: I believe that the events detailed in the texts to be considered are *descriptively* theopoetic by their nature, not because they were crafted based on some article about theopoetics. And where does this put the function of the category of “theopoetics”? Or, put another way, if theopoetics is just being used descriptively in this context, what academic function does it serve since it cannot normatively

2 I work from Catherine Bell's fourfold understanding of practice as articulated in her 1984 book *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*: “Practice is (1) situational; (2) strategic; (3) embedded in a misrecognition of what it is in fact doing; and (4) able to reproduce or reconfigure a vision of the order of power in the world, or what I will call 'redemptive hegemony'.” (81).

critique situations? It works as do biological taxonomies: names are given for things we find so that we might better study and understand them, but it can never be the case that our name is somehow correct and the animal is wrong. I use the category of “theo-poetics” in regards to practices because I find it useful to know what I am looking at.

Chopp's Poetics of Testimony

Before beginning this section in full I should note that when I first conceived of this paper I did so thinking that beyond theo-poetics my primary theoretical conversation partner would be Nietzsche and what has come to be known as “perspectivism.” For the sake of remaining relatively concise, I'll just include one passage where he addressed this idea:

...let us be on guard against the dangerous old conceptual fiction that posited a "pure, will-less, painless, timeless knowing subject;" let us guard against the snares of such contradictory concepts as "pure reason," absolute spirituality, "knowledge in itself": these always demand that we should think of an eye that is completely unthinkable, an eye turned in no particular direction, in which the active and interpreting forces, through which alone seeing becomes seeing something, are supposed to be lacking; these always demand of the eye an absurdity and a nonsense. There is only a perspective seeing, only a perspective "knowing"; and the more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our "concept" of this thing, our "objectivity," be (*Genealogy of Morals*, Third Essay § 12).

At stake in perspectivism is the view that “any claim to knowledge is bound to the perspective formed by the contingent 'interests' of the knower”(Reginster 217). This framing is useful as it rapidly and clearly gets the roots of some of the key issues for theological epistemology: it

raises the issues about why it is hard to talk about God and knowing God. However, while discussions about contingency, subjectivity, and aesthetic expression are all useful tools to have access to, ultimately I found that Nietzsche's "philosophizing with a hammer" only got me so far and that I was looking for something that made those same points but in a different manner. Enter Rebecca Chopp.

In her essay "Theology and the Poetics of Testimony" she unpacks the ways in which the social, psychological, and epistemological silences around trauma might be broken with a notion of "testimony." In short, Chopp notes that clear, discursive accounts of traumatic events are insufficient to communicate the – sometimes personhood shattering – effects of trauma. In its methodological adherence to a clear Subject and Object, rationalistic prose inherently suppresses the expression of experiences wherein one's very sense of self is violated, ruptured, or damaged. As a corrective she suggests that another form or style of discourse might need to be employed. Chopp feels that if we are to properly acknowledge the presence of trauma and its effects we must take more seriously the role that language plays in mediating – which includes affirming or denying – experience.

[Poetics] is an invention, for it must create language, forms, images to speak in what in some way has been ruled unspeakable or at least not valid or credible to modern reason. Compared to rhetoric poetics does not seek so much to argue as to prefigure, to reimagine and refashion the world. Poetics is a discourse that reshapes, fashions in new ways, enlarges and calls into question the ordering of discourse (Chopp 1998, 6).

As with Nietzsche, Chopp is skeptical of the capacity of language to capture the entirety of knowledge or experience. Where she differs is that she thinks that by employing poetic discourse we may be able to say something with our silences and creations: poetry emphasizes

the generative power of language to create new understandings by breaking language from its moorings as ordinary and immediately correlational. In the wake of this fracture, the world to which the old language referred is reconfigured as well, and new ways of seeing, doing, and being can emerge.

I believe that poetics is essential to the work of theology. The poetics of theological discourse is about the conversion of the imaginary, which works not only by stirring “up the sedimented universe of conventional ideas,” but also by shaking “up the order of persuasion,” thus generating convictions as much as settling or ruling over controversies... theology must refigure and reimagine the social imaginary (Chopp 1998, 9-10).

Chopp advocates for the use of the poetic and the literary precisely because it shakes us up and offers us – through our fusion with its horizons – a strange world. Or the “normal” world but seen with new eyes. A world where the voices of those living with the wounds of trauma are affirmed instead of denied and marginalized. It is not as if poetry creates the cry, it merely might allow voices which were *always* present to finally be heard. Indeed, Chopp even argues that one of the reasons that “poetic testimony” works as a form of powerful truth-telling is precisely *because* it does not use the normal register of argument and power. Employing non-propositional, aesthetic, and poetic dimensions of communication may help to bypass dominant cultural systems that might otherwise dismiss and/or filter out the content were it in another medium (Chopp 1999). What follows are all practices which I think may well engender this kind of liberative communication.

Arts-Based Practices of Faith

2013 marked the arrival of three books that are part of a rising tide of artistically-inspired texts written for use in religious education, spiritual formation, and congregational life. Each contains good examples of activities that might help a person of faith to cultivate what Andre Gide referred to as “a disposition to receive” what is around us, helping us to articulate what we perceive in new ways.

Dave Harrity's *Making Manifest* and Troy Bronsink's *Drawn In*, are similar in genre as neither necessitate a priori faith commitments or academic theological literacy, but instead are full of exercises that can be done individually – or with a congregation – that invite people to discover their own voice and how it reflects God, God's movement, and God's nature. W. Alan Smith & Ruth Illman's *Theology and the Arts* is a different kind of text, an academic appraisal which “brings the emerging fields of practical theology and theology of the arts into dialogue beyond the bias of modern systematic and constructive theology” (Illman & Smith, frontpage). In this section I want to provide a brief description of each text, highlighting its (1) context, (1) goals, and (3) method.³

Harrity's *Making Manifest*

Harrity writes that his book is a “28-day devotional book is grounded in the acts of writing, solitude, and community... meant to incline your heart and mind toward mystery, wandering, seeking, exploring, and contemplation” (1). It is composed of one month of

³ This is the obligatory and apologetic footnote that ensues from trying to summarize texts that include non-discursive prose. To the extent that I can redeem myself for trying to condense beautiful texts which are rich and varied into citation-length chunks, I'll assume it will be because you will be so intrigued you will want to get the full books for yourself.

meditations and writing prompts intended to help cultivate the creative and imaginative in those who work through it. While Harrity is a fine poet himself and the book does serve as a means to practice the crafting of writing, he notes that it is equally written to “give you and your faith community the tools you’ll need to create art, to live intentionally, and explore the mysteries of your faith through acts of writing...” (3). He envisions his book as a kind of catalytic compound meant to help us together come to an awareness of Spirit through creative practices.

We have the chance, as believers, to grow together in unwavering awareness of the reality of our belief by way of our imaginations. Wisdom, faith, and peace are all acts that reach their fullest potential in community, and as Christians, we’ll need those ingredients to rouse and realize the Kingdom of God within and around us (6).

By open ourselves up to quiet reflection and God's Spirit, and then *creating* from that space Harrity believes that we participate and manifest the movement of God in the world. By inviting others to engage in these practices with us, we engender the possibility that by hearing from one another about how God is manifesting we all come to a greater sense of how we being called out into the world. He encourages his readers to enter into the process with what Quaker minister Sandra Cronk called an “expectation of the experience of the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God” (Cronk 1).

Move through these pieces – poems, reflections, scriptures, and exercises – day by day, and expect something to change in you. Not because of anything that’s been written in the pages by me, but because you’re taking time to allow for quiet and creativity in a way that you hadn’t before. Writing – much like the Kingdom of God – is a place where nothing is ever wasted, where all time spent is good time (Harrity 7).

Harrity asks us to trust in God's presence and our capacity to create language that helps us and

others come more fully – though perhaps never fully – into an understanding of God's work in our midst. In creating a space for reflection and the presence of God without trying to press God into a particular agenda, Harrity hopes to invite us into an environment that is both critically engaging and spiritually insightful. Consider the first pairing of reflective poem and writing exercise from the book:

Your Days Are Waiting

There's a sound like certainty a river makes,
the steady way leaves float the surface like paper boats.
Or the noise of hooves throbbing in the light.
There is a waking in the wilderness.

What is inside your mind
that waits to slip away?

Will you remember what it was like to stare
into the constant face of the moon?
To watch the jet stream's hand push the clouds through night?
And stars like ships on the ocean?

Your days are waiting to be left behind.
So tonight, before sleep helps you to forget,
etch in yourself
this moon,
this leaf,
this star.

[Having read the above poem], take some time to think about the way you see the world—what's it like to live with your uniqueness? It's something we don't often think about. Your hairs are numbered and your being known. So, tell about it. Give some serious thought to what it's like being you.

Are you a glass-half-full or half-empty person? A black-and-white or gray person? Are there times when you only see what you want? Or do you consider yourself a diplomat—seeing the world from many angles? Why?

What do you want to see in the world? What do you hope for? Who has given you your vision? What informs it most? Dig deep.

What is it that you want to say to the world? What do you want your voice to be for?
(17).

Note how Harrity's prompt readily lends itself for reflections on a number of traditional, doctrinal themes. Is our hope eschatological? Do we fear the materiality world? What do we understand our vocation to be? Who has God called *you* the reader to be? Harrity asks us each to consider these questions as a pastor's sermon might, but then he asks us to *actually answer* his questions. In so doing we may articulate a vision of the world or an articulation of hope we didn't even know we had. And some of those will not mesh well with traditional understandings, but that isn't the point at this stage of things: our task is to enter into the process trusting that our prayerful intentionality and God's grace will meet. Later we may want to talk to a pastor, priest, or theologian about what has come up for us, but if that happens it will be separate from this space which is cleared and open for new sight and language.

Bronsink's *Drawn In*

Bronsink identifies the purpose of his text as an attempt to “sketch out the correlations between the creative life and the life of faith... tracing how God creatively draws all things into one vision of a new creation” (2). He is interested in the ways in which there is an operant (if not explicit) “philosophical difference between the artist’s prophetic craft and the craft of developing and maintaining church” (ibid.) More so than Harrity, Bronsink emphasizes the

(apparent) cultural tension between art and faith, a social dynamic he feels need to be dismantled. From his vantage point as a musician and as a Presbyterian Minister he has much to say and is clear in his position.

While the arts are frequently antagonistically positioned against religion in general, and this often happens specifically within Christianity, most creatives are compelled by the very love that Christian churches testify to. A loving partnership with the Creator need not blind us aesthetically, neither does artistic passion blind a person to faith (4).

While the book is designed specifically to offer integrative language to engender collaboration between artist and faith leaders, he makes clear that he wants the book to serve “every person who wants to follow Jesus and do it through their creativity” (10). The text is more full of his own prose than is Harrity’s book, which is primarily a series of meditations and writing prompts, but at various points throughout *Drawn In* Bronsink does invite reflection, writing, and meditation practices like the one below.

Exercise 13

Before we go on, look at the stuff around you. What is it made of? Is the counter or sofa near you made of wood? If so, do you know what kind of wood? Ash, oak, mahogany? Can you imagine the mountain that held the granite under your feet. Or the great tree from which the beams and rafters around you were hewn? What colors are used on the walls around you? How many different textures can you identify around you? Are there coarse as well as supple things nearby? Look around you for something that you regard as holy. Why is it holy? What marks something as holy to you? (52).

Beginning with small noticings of particular sensations and closing with a reflection upon that which is holy, Bronsink is encouraging us to consider how our sense of the divine is inherently bound up in “the stuff around” us. Bound up in, but not equivalent to. Here we do

well to remember Catherine Keller's reflection that what is announced by things is not that they are God, but that "God is somehow somewhere in this all, every ripple and all, every bite, flight, scramble, or stillness of it" (Keller 2006, 97). Bronsink affirms that our task is not to become consumed in the materiality of the world, but to understand that it calls us forth like an icon, asking for our full attention and then thrusting that attention out beyond our recall, granting us a moment of disorientation and a chance to recalibrate so that we might more faithfully live with knowledge of the possibility of the in-breaking Kingdom of God.

Art draws on our vision – that intangible place of calling, imagination, intuition, and taste. Vision and work meet "where the rubber hits the road," transforming certain material things into something else... In life as in art, our selection of materials, and the choice to use one ingredient over another, can make all the difference (Bronsink 12).

Illman & Smith's Theology and Art

Whereas Harrity and Bronsink both conceive of their books as a form of first order discourse, that is, their books are themselves to be directly catalytic for arts-based practices of faith, Ruth Illman and W. Alan Smith's text is *about* arts-based practices. Methodologically, this is done in two sections. Part I, titled as "A Practical Theology of the Arts," contains three chapters which serve as the undergirding theoretical basis upon which Part II rests. Part II is titled "Études," and consists of seven, international case-studies of arts-based communal reflection from a variety of religious traditions. While I find the theoretical perspectives contained in Part I to be useful – I highly recommend the book as a great resource – the book is relevant to my current argument because of the second section. While there are seven case studies that Illman and Smith provide, in what follows I will only summarize one, hoping that

it will be sufficient to give a sense of their work.

The chapter “Film as an Embodiment of Interpersonal Relations,” focuses on “the work and artistic ambition of the Swedish visual artist and filmmaker Cecilia Parsberg,” and her documentary film “A Heart from Jenin.” A promotional summary of the film as produced by the director is below:

A Heart from Jenin is the story of Ahmed Chatib, a Palestinian boy shot by Israelis whose father decided, within twelve hours, to donate his son’s organs to six Israeli children so as to save their lives.

One and a half years have passed since then. What has Ismail al-Chatib, of the Jenin refugee camp, achieved with his peace gesture? To find out how Ismail’s deed changed the life of the recipients’ families, it is necessary to travel throughout Israel, from its northern hills on the Lebanese border, past the contended Holy City of Jerusalem, up to the edge of the Negev Desert in the south of the land.

The film is a trip through occupied territory and hearts occupied by prejudice. It leads us to the people who have learnt to overcome their prejudices and to others who still speak of the misfortune of having to live with the organ of an Arab. It is the story of a humanitarian peace gesture that seemed, for a short instant, to prevail over the insoluble conflict between Israel and Palestine.

Illman and Smith point to the film, which combines documentary material with music, fiction, animation, poetry, to suggest part of the way art can transform is because it takes the things of everyday life and lifts them up for closer inspection (Illman & Smith 127). In particular, they are drawn to what the filmmaker refers to as “relational aesthetics,” which she says is present throughout the film.

In *A Heart from Jenin*, one can see her shadow in the corner of the screen and hear her voice asking questions and taking part in discussions. At times, Parsberg also lets the participants in the film take the camera in order for them to be a part of the making of their own story. Parsberg calls this attached approach relational art or relational aesthetics. Relational aesthetics is interested in the shortcomings of everyday life, she states: no well-directed shows, no facades but horizontal encounters where the other is

allowed to influence the aesthetic expression. Relational aesthetics is not about bringing art to people, she states; it is about creating art together with them (Illman & Smith 128).

In the dialogical nature of the film, Illman and Smith see “a visual confirmation of the claim that art as practical theology gives physical, visceral, or sensual form to abstract concepts and ideas... [which] opens up new possibilities for experiencing and understanding other human beings, but it also offers a forum for addressing questions of ultimate, existential importance” (Illman & Smith 132). This is crucial to their vision of a practical theology of the arts as it affirms the fact that any articulation of a theological aesthetic must function to “protest against the ills, the meaninglessness, and the blind hypocrisies of society, rather than support for them”(136). In making *A Heart from Jenin*, Illman and Smith suggest that Parsberg has catalyzed a complex conversation about people's experience of things rather than glossing over the “everyday-ness” of events by employing some filtering category like “The Isreal-Palestine Conflict.” While Illman and Smith refer to the film as a piece of “practical theology,” I would suggest that what it is instead is applied theopoetics.

My Second-Order Plea

I believe that each of the approaches addressed above are reflective of an applied theopoetics and that as such they may well play a role in helping, as Chopp thinks poetic discourse can, to “refigure and reimagine the social imaginary.” Why do I think these practices are each a form of applied theopoetics? Because they each affirm that the imagination is to be

cultivated both for its own sake and for its capacity to allow us to envision a world that has not yet come. There is a resonance and oscillation: neither wholly focused on the particulars of expression and experience nor upon rational externalities and utility.

In professing the importance of the imagination and generative, poetic, and creative reflection, they each show support for a kind of non-discursive theological discourse that cannot help be contextualized and affirm the legitimacy of individual bodies, experiences, and perspectives. While there would likely be some measure of pleasure and growth by individually engaging Harrity or Bronsink, I think both authors would prefer that their texts be also engaged by congregations as well. With the case-study considered in Illman and Smith, the situation is already communal. By engendering environments in which space is made for voices to be heard speaking in registers that might not be normative, these practices help to support the discovery of how varied and polyphonic our faith(s) may be: even within a given congregation! Finally, none of the practices addressed suggest that the task of theological reflection is ever complete or fixed. To paraphrase Scott Holland, they are practices that invite more practice, conversations which invite more conversation.

Ultimately what I am after in this paper is the recognition that in theo-poetics there exists a framework for guiding the development of practices that more fully engage the breadth of human experience in regards to theological discourse, religious education, and spiritual formation. Theo-poetics has the potential to be of great service to the Church, but if that is to be the case it *must* overcome its own, painfully ironic and “long addiction to the discursive, the rationalistic, and the prosaic” (Wilder 2). The intent for the establishment of the theological

and academic category called “theopoetics” has – for the entirety of its brief usage – been about embodiment and liberation. It is well past time that those of us interested in theopoetics make sure we use our time and energy to contribute in ways that honors that intent.

My plea for a theopoetic means doing more justice to the symbolic and the pre-rational in the way we deal with experience. We should recognize that human nature and human societies are more deeply motivated by images and fabulations than by ideas... This plea therefore means according a greater role to the imagination in all aspects of the religious life... When imagination fails doctrines become ossified, witness and proclamation wooden, doxologies and litanies empty, consolations hollow, and ethics legalistic (Wilder 3).

I think that Wilder's plea still has power, calling out to us from 1976 and asking that we encourage the development of the Christian Imagination, but *my* plea is that we recall that his supplication was for that development to occur in *all* aspects of religious life, not just in texts we read to one another.

That is not to say that those of us who are theologians must become pastors or church consultants working directly with congregations. However, I do believe that some move must be made such that the insights and affirmations of theopoetics are made available to those who *are* in a position to help concrete practices get developed. This might entail an increase in emphasis on collaborative work with those are not yet aware of theopoetics as a framing vision. For example, Practical Theologians Heather Walton and Pam Couture co-chair the Practical Theology and Poetics Working Group of the International Academy of Practical Theology, and they have – as of 2012 – explicitly voiced interest in “the way in which writing style interacts with research methodology enabling insights to be drawn from reflexivity, self examination

and autoethnography,” as well as the “impact of affective, mystical and imaginative approaches” on theology. Similarly, John Schluep, UCC pastor and co-director of Warrior's Journey Home, a veteran's healing group, believes that we need the aesthetic to fully connect to the fullness of human experience.

There are wounds that need to be cleansed that normal types of talking cannot get into. Sometimes the pains that war inflicts on people who were soldiers need a language of poetry to clean them out... Every Wednesday night we have faculty from the Wick Poetry Center [at Kent State] who come to help the [veterans] at Warrior's Journey Home... Poets and artists are needed for their power to allow Spirit to do Spirit's work and leave us with words that heal (Schluep 2013).

The utility and transformative power of the aesthetic can serve to help heal, comfort, and critique, and theologians interested in theopoetics may well want to consider how they might generatively serve with filmmakers, poets, and musicians in addition to pastors. And lest it seem that I think it is just *us* who have something to offer *them* let me affirm the contrary as well. In 1991, Thomas Hoyt Jr., New Testament Scholar and former President of the National Council of Churches, urged the following:

...we must begin to train scholars and interpreters of the text to have an aesthetic formation that prepares them for a controlled application of the creative imagination. Artists and poets have been ahead of us in this matter, and we may need to study more about how these persons have used their imaginations in disciplined ways. That study could help us to express the truths of the biblical texts in ways that would improve and vivify our own formation... (Hoyt 38)

What these three examples point toward – and I imagine there are numerous others – is exactly what I am advocating:

1. The increased and intentional use of aesthetic, poetic, and creative reflection in

Christian education, service, and spiritual formation

2. An affirmation that this increased and intentional use is not merely for the aggrandizement of individual perspectives for the sake of individualism and perspectivism, but because transformation is desired and the Gospel is not well-preached in a monophonic tone.

Whether or not “theopoetics” as a term is used or not is irrelevant if what theopoetics represents isn't finding its way into our streets and sanctuaries. Harrity, Bronsink, Illman, and Smith have gestured in the direction of what I hope we will see more of, and I hope that as more comes those of us academically interested in theoreticians will find ways to be part of it. Not just for the sake of the Church, but for ourselves as well! After all, “imagination is a necessary component of all profound knowing and celebration; all remembering, realizing, and anticipating; all faith, hope, and love” (Wilder 3). We ought want to celebrate, remember, and love!

Beyond a mere affirmation of the legitimacy of the poetic and aesthetic dimensions of theological discourse, beyond merely making room for individual perspectives, beyond a recognition that contextualization and particularity is vital, there is a way in which these insights can be concretized and made accessible. There are *ways* this can happen. And I for one am excited to find out what they will be.

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