

Only because the human person by his very nature pushes beyond every boundary and makes every end a new beginning can there be both art and theology. Both art and theology are rooted in man's transcendent nature.

THEOLOGY AND THE ARTS

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BEFORE ADDRESSING OUR SPECIFIC QUESTION ABOUT THEOLOGY AND THE ARTS, I should like to begin with some preliminary observations, first about the process of knowledge in general, and secondly about our knowledge of God.

Conceptual and Experiential Knowledge

In our knowledge there is always present both a unity and a difference between the original level of our cognitive self-possession and our reflection upon it. This is denied in different ways by theological rationalism on the one hand, and on the other by what is called classical "modernism." For essentially every rationalism is based on the conviction that a reality is present for a person in his free and personal self-possession only by means of a concept which objectifies it, and this process becomes fully and really complete in scientific knowledge. Conversely, what is called "modernism" in the classical sense is based on the conviction that concepts and reflection are *absolutely* secondary and subsequent to the original level of lived existence in self-awareness and freedom. Hence this reflection could be dispensed with.

But in knowledge there is not only the purely objective "thing in itself" of a reality on the one hand, and the "clear and distinct idea" of it on the other. There is also a more original unity, not indeed in everything and anything, but certainly in the living out of our human existence. It is the unity of reality and its own self-presence and self-awareness, a unity which is more and is more original than the unity of this reality and the concept which objectifies it. When I love, when I am tormented by questions, when I am sad, when I am faithful, when I feel longing, this human, existential reality is a unity, an original unity of reality and its own self-presence and self-awareness which is not *completely* mediated by the concept which objectifies it in scientific knowledge. This unity of reality and the original self-presence and self-awareness of this reality in a

human person is already present in the living out of human existence in freedom. That is one side of the question.

It must be said, nevertheless, that an element of reflection and hence of universality and the capacity for personal communication exists even at this original level of knowledge. This element of reflection, however, does not capture this unity and transpose it completely into objectifying concepts. That sought-after, original unity of reality and its own self-knowledge exists in a person only with and in and through what we can call language, and hence also reflection and the capacity of communication. At that moment when this element of reflection would be completely absent, the original self-presence and awareness would also cease to exist.

Both of these elements, our original knowledge and our concept of it, belong together but are not identical, and the tension between them is not a static thing. It has a history whose course runs in two directions. First, the original self-presence of a knowing and free subject in the actual living out of existence strives to transpose itself more and more into concepts, into objectifications, into language and into communication with others. Everyone tries to express what they are suffering to another, especially to someone they love. Hence in this tension between original knowledge and the concept which accompanies it there is a movement toward greater conceptualization, toward language, toward communication, and also toward a theoretical knowledge of itself.

Secondly, this tension also includes a movement in the opposite direction. Only very slowly, perhaps, does a person experience clearly what he or she has been talking about for a long time, and was able to because they were shaped by a common language and instructed and indoctrinated from without. It is precisely we theologians who are always in danger of talking about heaven and earth, about God and man with an arsenal of religious and theological concepts that is almost unlimited in its size and scope. We can acquire for ourselves in theology an extraordinarily great skill in this kind of talk, and perhaps not have really understood from the depths of our own existence what we are actually talking about. To this extent reflection, concepts and language must necessarily be oriented towards this original knowledge, this original experience, where what is meant and the experience of what is meant are still one.

Insofar as religious knowledge also manifests this tension between our original self-knowledge acquired from what we do and what we suffer, and our conceptualization of it, there is also within theology this double movement in its irreducible unity and difference, and the tension between them is not a static, but a fluid relationship. Although the movement toward conceptualization reaches its goal only asymptotically, we should always be striving for a better conceptual knowledge of what we have already experienced and lived through prior to such conceptualization, although not entirely without it. Conversely, we should show again and again that all of our theological concepts do not make the reality itself present to people from without, but rather they are the expression of what has already been experienced and lived through more originally in the depths of existence. We can and must do both: try to reach greater levels of conceptual

clarity, and try again and again to trace our theological concepts back to their original experience.¹

The Knowledge of God

We come now to the second of our preliminary considerations, the more specific question of the knowledge of God.² When we say that we know God or that we find in Him meaning in an absolute sense, we automatically tend to understand "meaning" as we usually understand it: to have gotten an insight into something, to have comprehended something and brought it under our control, to have made sense out of it in our own eyes and to have placed it in our hands and at our disposal, thereby putting an end to the agonizing frustration of an unsolved problem. This, indeed, is the modern ideal of knowledge: the process of knowledge does not reach its goal and become real knowledge until it grasps and masters the object; until it renders the object clear and self-evident; until it has arrived at clear and distinct ideas and has clarified every last condition of its own possibility; until as an autonomous power it has established the limits of what concerns it and what does not; until whatever cannot be spoken of in clear and distinct ideas will not be spoken of at all; until its valid concerns exclude anything beyond the functional relationships between the individual data within the world of experience. This is the ideal of knowledge that prevails in the modern world and is taken for granted without any need of further justification. If, on the other hand, God in Christian tradition is incomprehensible not only in Himself, but also in His free decisions and dealings with us, then obviously knowledge of God is ruled out a priori by this modern ideal of knowledge.

But if with our tradition we are to continue to speak of a knowledge of God, then we have to question this ideal. We have to ask, first, how are we to understand the essential nature of human knowledge so that a knowledge of God is not ruled out a priori? And secondly, how more exactly are we to understand the nature of the human act in which a person can accept the incomprehensibility of God without this latter sounding the death-knell to our search for meaning? These two questions are related, but not identical. For it is the second question which underscores the fact that knowledge as such must transcend itself, must be subsumed into the totality of human existence when it confronts the incomprehensibility of God.

How must we understand knowledge itself to begin with if we are to speak of knowing an incomprehensible God? If in the first instance reason were the capacity to know individual realities within our consciousness and their mutual functional relationships, then God's incomprehensibility could not even come up either as a question or as an assertion. At most it would have to be rejected

¹For a fuller treatment of these epistemological principles, see the author's *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Seabury, 1978), pp. 14ff.

²See also the author's "Die menschliche Sinnfrage vor dem absoluten Geheimnis Gottes" in *Geist und Leben* (June, 1977), pp. 437-450.

as a contradiction in terms like the notion of a square circle, and dismissed as a term which only apparently has any real meaning. The human spirit and its knowledge cannot be understood in such a way that it merely stumbles upon the reality we call God in the course of its activities, and then ascribes to this chance object the predicate "incomprehensible" as a property which belongs to this accidentally discovered and particular object of knowledge along with other properties. If human reason is understood in such a modern, a posteriori, positivistic and functional way, however one develops a theory of knowledge to account for the laws which govern the functioning of reason so understood, then human reason can never include the capacity to know an incomprehensible God. If for no other reason, this is true because God Himself cannot be understood as one of the particular, individual objects among the other data of our consciousness. It is also true because a human reason which has to do first and foremost with what can be defined by functional relationships cannot then afterwards have to do with something which absolutely contradicts what has been understood a priori as a possible datum of consciousness.

The human reason or intellect must be understood more fundamentally precisely as the capacity for the incomprehensible, as the capacity to be grasped by something which ever eludes our grasp. It must not be understood in the first instance as the capacity for the kind of comprehension which masters the object and subjects it to us. As Thomas Aquinas puts it, the human intellect must be understood as the faculty of the *excessus*, as a movement toward what is inaccessible. If the intellect is not understood right from the start as the capacity to encounter the incomprehensible, the unfathomable mystery, as that by which the ineffable becomes interior to us, then all subsequent talk about the incomprehensibility of God comes too late and falls on deaf ears. Such talk could only be understood as referring to a temporary remainder which has not yet been completely objectified, a remainder which all-consuming reason has not yet completely mastered, but sooner or later it will.

Now as a matter of fact, however, the nature of the intellect is as we have described it, even though it likes to stop with what it has clearly understood and comprehended and linger there, even though it constantly forgets where the clarity and brilliance of its individual pieces of knowledge comes from. For every time reason comprehends and understands an object, it has already transcended it into an infinity beyond. That infinity is always present as something immeasurable, precisely so and never otherwise. Whenever reason comprehends an individual object, it always silently knows that the object always is and remains more than what it has understood about it. It situates the individual object within a system of relationships which themselves are not exactly fixed and defined, and in which the individual object is indeed situated, but is not defined in any final or absolute sense. Reason always thinks with a bad conscience because it knows that it has never completely understood and grounded its own presuppositions, and the only way to a good conscience is to grant and accept this fact. But to be able to ground one's own presuppositions is the very presupposition for relying unconditionally on individual pieces of knowledge.

When reason knows, all of its knowledge which gives expression to an individual reality is accompanied by a strange sense of just how tentative the knowledge is. It is only because we do not know that we can strive to know something; it is only because we inquire into what is unanswered and what is ultimately ineffable that we are able to hear answers, and the better the answers are, the more new questions they raise.

The rational subject with its constant demand for an accounting, its desire to understand and its all-encompassing question is itself thrown into question with every answer it discovers. Hence our experience of the unknown becomes an experience of the unknowable, and our endless questioning becomes the one place where the question itself becomes the answer, becomes the dwelling-place where the incomprehensible reality we call God dwells and offers us salvation. If one chooses to experience as darkness this transcendence beyond the individual objects of knowledge, the transcendence which is the condition which makes knowledge possible because it can never come to rest, then we can say by way of consolation that this darkness is the very condition of the light which illumines an individual object, then we can say that it is only by letting ourselves fall into this unfathomable abyss that we grasp the individual object on which we think we can stand firm. In brief: the simple fact which we inevitably reaffirm in every act of knowledge, namely, that every individual act of knowledge is possible only within an infinite process which will never be ended from our side, this simple fact tells us again and again that what we know lives by what lies beyond our knowledge, that our comprehension lives by the power of what is incomprehensible. (From a theological point of view, this process can only be ended by the goal towards which we strive but can never reach should it offer itself, but offer itself, of course, as the utterly incomprehensible One now fully revealed.)

This can all be dismissed, if one so chooses, as idle dialectic and cheap paradox, and one can demand that we speak only of what is clear and comprehensible. One can do so, however, only in his rationalistic theory. In real life with its bitter and shattering moments one confronts again and again this limit-experience whether one wants to or not. Hence at that point one can at most ask oneself whether beyond the realm of our clear knowledge and the things we can plan and execute by ourselves there lies a plunge into a meaningless abyss, or whether we are caught up by the saving arms of the incomprehensible One who is our deliverance from ourselves and our questioning.

This brings us to our second question which, of course, is immediately connected with the first. So far we have asked about the nature of reason and its knowledge and have defined them as the capacity for encountering the incomprehensible, and we said that this is prior to the function of conceptualizing and defining. Since this is the original definition of reason and knowledge, and not just the end-result encountered unexpectedly at the end of the knowledge process, this is not any kind of irrationalism. For this original encounter with mystery is understood precisely as the condition which makes possible the knowledge by which we conceptualize, distinguish and define. But if we de-

scribe reason this way we have already moved beyond it. In the very process of defining the essential nature of reason we have moved beyond it to something greater and more comprehensive because—anybody who believes in God can hardly doubt this—to grasp the essence of something is ultimately possible only by going beyond that essence. Hence we must now pose the second question that we asked earlier: How must we understand more exactly that human act in which a person can accept the incomprehensibility of God without being shattered by it or dismissing it as something of no interest?

Before we try to answer this question more precisely, let me make several preliminary remarks to avoid from the outset certain objections and misunderstandings.

I agree entirely with the position of Thomas Aquinas that knowledge on the one hand, and will (as freedom and love) on the other can be distinguished as faculties which emanate as different faculties from an ultimate substantial unity of the human person. They are maintained in this unity by a kind of perichoresis, to use in an analogous way a concept from the theology of the trinity, and it means that they mutually interpenetrate each other. But at the same time I am convinced that Thomas did not express his deepest insights about the difference of these two faculties where he distinguishes them from each other and then draws conclusions from this distinction, for example, that the beatific vision of God consists properly and essentially in an act of the intellect as such. These insights are found, I think, where he takes up the question of the unity of the transcendentals *verum* (the true) and *bonum* (the good) and the fact that they mutually condition each other (he does include an order between them, analogous to the order in the processions of the Trinity). If we consider the metaphysics of these transcendentals in their unity and in their difference as well as in the fact that they mutually condition each other, and if we take it seriously, then we can be good Thomists in answering our question by saying: The act in which a person can face and accept the mystery of God (and therein the comprehensive meaning of his own existence) without being shattered by it and without fleeing from it into all the banality of his clear and distinct ideas, the banality of looking for meaning that is based only on such knowledge and what it can master and control, this act, I say, is the act of love in which a person surrenders and entrusts himself to this very mystery. In this love knowledge, transcending itself to reach its own deepest nature, truly becomes knowledge only by becoming love.

We have yet to explain this, but at first glance it might strike one as paradoxical. It is simply expressing, however, the paradox rooted in the ultimate unity of all our faculties, a unity in which each faculty ultimately becomes itself only when it is subsumed into the other. It is a unity in which the whole is justifiably named after the final moment in this ordered series of moments. The situation is exactly the same as when we say: God is Spirit, and then call Him after the name of this third mode of His subsistence.

We can clarify our answer to the second question by coming at the question from the opposite direction and asking: How must that act be constituted in which a person precisely as a rational being can accept and live with God's

incomprehensibility? How can this incomprehensibility not be experienced as an infinite barrier which hems in the narrow confines of our happiness on all sides, so that we are able to be happy within these narrow confines only by anxiously lowering our eyes in order to have nothing to do with this barrier which towers over everything? If there should be such an act at all, what must we call the act in which this encounter with incomprehensible mystery in all its inexorable clarity and finality means eternal happiness rather than being the very boundary which puts an end to all our happiness? We can only answer: If such an act exists at all, if there is such an act since we certainly cannot do without it, and if we look for a name for it within the realm of our ultimate experiences, then we can only say: love. Of course we must then define precisely what we are calling love not just from any kind of experience, but from *that* experience which we have in the presence of incomprehensible mystery. Ultimately love is precisely the acceptance of the mystery we call God both in His own being and in His freedom, accepting this mystery as what accepts and saves us, and affirming it as mystery forever.

But the essential nature of this act of loving God, which discloses itself to be ultimately the acceptance of His incomprehensibility as something which constitutes our happiness and not our annihilation, this is really familiar to us from the lesser experiences we have elsewhere in the realm of interpersonal love. When a person encounters another in really personal love, does there not occur an acceptance of something we have not “seen through,” an acceptance of that in the person of the beloved which one has not made subject to oneself by a knowledge which comprehends and thereby masters? Is not interpersonal love a trusting surrender to the other person without guarantees, and this precisely insofar as love always is and remains free and uncalculating? I do not mean to say that the absolutely unique act of loving God in its proper and univocal sense can be subsumed under the notion of interpersonal love as we experience it elsewhere. The two realities are only analogously related, hence in such a way that in the midst of the similarity between them there appears an even greater dissimilarity. This is simply a variation on a statement of the Fourth Lateran Council about the relationship between God and creatures.

But interpersonal love really does give us some idea of our relationship to God. It justifies us in saying that the act in which a person lets go of himself and his self-centered claims and surrenders to the incomprehensible mystery which remains forever incomprehensible can best be called love. This is so because in the realm of our everyday experience knowledge purely as such has the characteristic of appropriating the known to ourselves and gaining mastery over it, although this is not the essential and ultimate nature of knowledge. This is not the case, however, in genuine interpersonal love even in the empirical realm of life. It remains true, nevertheless, that the essential and deepest nature of love first becomes really manifest in the act by which a person lets go of himself and surrenders to God’s incomprehensibility, which then is no longer the limit, but the very content of our relationship to God. Interpersonal love is only a created reflection of the former.

To be sure this does not yet really and adequately define the relationship

between knowledge and knowledge-transcending, free love in that basic act of a person vis-à-vis God's incomprehensibility. But as I have already pointed out, the ultimate definition of their relationship is to be found not in the context of Thomas' teaching about the various faculties, but through a study of the transcendentals "true" and "good" and their mutual relationship. For only then can it become clear that love (and maybe today we would also say freedom and praxis) can also be and must also be the condition which makes possible our knowledge of the true (of theory). Hence this very relationship of perichoresis between the two transcendentals reaches its most essential and most radical actualization in our relationship to God's incomprehensibility.

Theology and the Arts

With these presuppositions about the nature of human knowledge and especially the knowledge of God, we come now to the question of theology and the arts. I shall begin by asking just what art really is, for it is a difficult question whether the individual arts—sculpture, painting, music, poetry and so on—can really be subsumed under a single concept of "art." Let us leave aside for the moment the literary arts like poetry or drama whose medium is the human word. For by the very nature of the case these "verbal arts" are very closely related to theology, which also comes to expression in word. Focusing for the moment just on those arts which do not employ words, like architecture, sculpture, painting and music, we can say that all of these arts too are meant to be expressions, human self-expressions which embody in one way or another the process of human self-discovery. Looking at it this way, our question then is whether these human self-expressions in the various non-verbal arts have the same value and significance as the verbal arts.

A musician will certainly say that his music is not just a lesser form of human self-expression, but is a unique and irreplaceable mode of expression which cannot be substituted for by words or by some form of verbal art. We could say the same for painting and sculpture. When one stands before a painting of Rembrandt's, one can try to say in words what the painting is expressing. But however much one art can be translated into another art, ultimately, sculpture, painting and music (prescinding here from architecture, since it is far more functional than the others) have their own independent validity as forms of human self-expression which cannot be completely translated into verbal statements.

Presupposing that all the arts cannot ultimately be reduced to verbal art, then our question is: How is theology related more precisely to these non-verbal arts? Insofar as man expresses himself in all of these arts as well as in theology, each in its own unique way, all these different arts and theology are mutually interconnected and related. But the situation is more difficult than we tend to imagine. If and insofar as theology is man's reflexive self-expression about himself in the light of divine revelation, we could propose the thesis that theology cannot be complete until it appropriates these arts as an integral moment of itself and its own life, until the arts become an intrinsic moment of theology itself. One could

take the position that what comes to expression in a Rembrandt painting or a Bruckner symphony is so inspired and borne by divine revelation, by grace and by God's self-communication, that they communicate something about what the human really is in the eyes of God which cannot be completely translated into verbal theology. If theology is not identified a priori with verbal theology, but is understood as man's total self-expression insofar as this is borne by God's self-communication, then religious phenomena in the arts are themselves a moment within theology taken in its totality.

In practice, theology is rarely understood in this total way. But why should a person not think that when he hears a Bach oratorio, he comes into contact in a very unique way with God's revelation about the human not only by the words it employs, but by the music itself? Why should he not think that what is going on there is theology? If theology is simply and arbitrarily defined as being identical with verbal theology, then of course we cannot say that. But then we would have to ask whether such a reduction of theology to verbal theology does justice to the value and uniqueness of these arts, and whether it does not unjustifiably limit the capacity of the arts to be used by God in his revelation.

Theology, Art and Experience

Presupposing this distinction between the verbal and non-verbal arts, and focusing now on the verbal or literary arts like poetry, drama and the novel which share with theology the medium of the human word, we could perhaps characterize these arts from a theological point of view by saying that they succeed, each in its own unique way, in putting a person in touch with those depths of human existence wherein religious experience takes place. When I say, for example, that a person should love God, I have said something very deep in this simple statement. But uttered amidst all the superficial routine of daily life, it does not generate much understanding or appreciation of what the statement really means. But if I read some of the lyric lines of a John of the Cross or perhaps a novel by someone like Graham Greene, which, to be sure, cannot simply "contain" an immediate and genuine religious experience, for that is quite impossible, but which perhaps evokes in me my own experience of the religious, then this literature has accomplished something which reflexive, purely conceptual and rational theology is not able to accomplish.

There are, of course, theologians in the narrower, stricter sense like Augustine or Thomas Aquinas in some of his Eucharistic poems where religious experience and reflexive, conceptual theology are closely joined. But these are exceptions, and they represent something which is rarely found in the theology of modern times. Maybe something like this can be found in some of Newman's sermons. But in general it is a rare occurrence any more. Hans Urs von Balthasar once said that what we lack in modern times is a "theology on its knees." We could perhaps add to that that we also lack a "poetic theology," and I see that as a defect in our theology.

But, of course, we have to be reasonable and balanced about this. There is

also a kind of theology which is perfectly justified in taking a deep breath and proceeding patiently through the long and arduous reflections of conceptual theology which cannot be expected to lead immediately to some kind of religious or mystical experience. It is, nevertheless, perfectly justified. But however much it must be left to the individual theologian to what extent he evokes or does not evoke religious experience in his theology, nevertheless it is perhaps fair to admit that one of the consequences and deficiencies of a rationalistic theology working exclusively with "scientific" methods is that theology has lost so much of its poetry.

Moreover, theology faces a task especially today which is not new, but has been greatly neglected in recent centuries, namely, that it be in some way a "mystagogical" theology. By this I mean that it must not speak only in abstract concepts about theological questions, but must also introduce people to a real and original experience of the reality being talked about in these concepts. To this extent what I have called "poetic theology" could be understood as one of the ways, although not the only way, of doing this kind of mystagogical theology.

In this sense and understanding the following statement correctly, we can say that all Christian theology has to be "subjective." It cannot speak about objects which lie outside the realm of the personal, spiritual and free reality of human existence itself. There is no such thing as a theological statement about a beetle. Hence all the objects of the natural sciences considered just in themselves lie outside the realm of theology. We could say, then, that theology does not begin until it really begins to be subjective. But subjective in this sense does not mean arbitrary or maintaining that black is white. Christian theology must be subjective insofar as it has to speak of faith, hope and love and about our personal relationship with God. It must be subjective insofar as ultimately, whether directly or indirectly, it must describe, evoke and introduce one mystagogically to this personal and spiritual relationship between man and God. In other words, theology as revelation theology is the mediation of God's call precisely to human subjectivity. When theology can no longer accomplish this, when it becomes "objective" in a false sense, this is not good theology, but bad theology.

The Unity of Sensibility

If indeed, as we have said, the arts play a role in this mediation, what do we mean when we speak of "seeing" or "hearing" God in a work of art? The difficulty, of course, is that the eye as an optical organ and the ear as an acoustical organ as such cannot perceive God. It would be nonsense to maintain that. In the Middle Ages, for example, the question was raised whether human sense faculties play a role in the beatific vision in heaven, and the answer was negative. But it is a very different question to ask whether in a situation where something is seen or heard with special intensity the whole person in and through all his faculties cannot have a very radical religious experience. To put it another way, is it not possible that when the whole person is involved in the process of seeing or hearing, a religious experience can very well take place?

There is, for example, a German song called, "Good Moon, You Glide So Silently," a very trivial song that has absolutely nothing to do with religion. But it has the same melody, I hear, as the melody we use in singing the religious hymn we call the "*Tantum Ergo*." It follows from this that an acoustical phenomenon can be religious or non-religious depending on the total human context in which it is heard. If it is not the ears alone which hear, but the whole person, then something is religious or not religious depending on what kind of a person the hearer is and on the total concrete situation in which he is doing the hearing. Whether this melody is religious or not depends quite simply on whether you base your judgment on the melody taken exclusively in a purely acoustical context, or whether you situate it in a total human context. For then the acoustical phenomenon becomes something different, not in view of itself, but in view of the situation.

But the relationship between the artistic realm and the religious realm is not easy to define. God is, indeed, everywhere with His grace, as we would want to maintain in theology, but this does not mean that every reality has the same relationship to me or to God. God is not present in a chemical change in my stomach in the same way that He is when I act with trust or love or responsibility towards my neighbor. Hence the question about the possible religious significance of non-religious art is a difficult question. For example, can I say that impressionistic painting has no religious significance because in principle it intends to represent nothing but the visual impressions and colors of our immediate environment? If and insofar as that is all it intends and that is all it accomplishes, presumably we have to say that it has no religious significance. And, of course, there is no problem in granting that there can be real art which is not religious. It need not for that reason be anti-religious, but it is involved with dimensions of human life where our relationship to God is not yet present.

It is a very different question to ask whether I can situate an impressionistic painting from the beginning of the twentieth century into a larger context, into a larger *human* context so that the religious question does arise. That is quite possible, and to that extent we could speak of the "anonymous reverence" of an impressionistic painting. This is especially true, of course, because religious painting is not simply identical with painting which represents some explicitly religious content. If someone paints a Nativity scene with Jesus, Mary and Joseph and explains by means of halos and the like what the painting is supposed to mean, then this is a religious painting in the objective sense. Maybe it is not an especially religious painting at all because it cannot evoke a genuine and radical religious response in the viewer. There is, after all, religious "kitsch," as we say in German. Some "religious art" is well intended and painted by pious people, but it is not genuine religious art because it does not touch those depths of existence where genuine religious experience takes place. Conversely, it could be that a painting of Rembrandt's, even if it is not religious in its thematic, objective content, nevertheless confronts a person in his total self in such a way as to awaken in him the whole question of existence. Then it is a religious painting in the strict sense. It can be religious in this sense even if it does not have an explicit, thematic religious content.

Being Holy and Being Human

This touches on another difficult question. One could conceivably maintain that the truly holy person is identical with the person who has developed fully all the dimensions of his human existence. To put it another way, I could say that when a person's sensibility, his capacity to see and hear are fully developed, his experiences are identical with his religious sense. In other words, I could take the viewpoint that the fully developed human being and the real saint are identical, and only when a person is fully developed in all the dimensions of his human existence can he be a saint in the fullest sense. One could hold this because apparently in heaven one is not only going to be very pious, but also fully human in the complete development of all human capacities. That is one side of the question.

But if we proceed empirically, we could easily reach the opposite conclusion. Are there not persons who are really and genuinely holy, who selflessly love God and their neighbor in a radical way, but, nevertheless, their artistic sensibility is hardly developed at all? They would be considered boors in the realm of art because they can respond to artistic things only in a very rudimentary way. And vice-versa, there are people whose artistic sensibility is developed to an extraordinary degree, but are, nevertheless, not holy. I suppose we have to make a distinction here between the offer of an opportunity for a religious response and one freely accepted. Then one could take the position that a Goethe has developed his human capacities to such a height and depth and breadth that *if* he should begin to love God and does so with all the fullness and intensity of his human capacities, perhaps he loves in a greater, broader, more nuanced and freer way than an ordinary pious and holy person loves God. But it would also be possible, of course, that in spite of his fully developed humanity Goethe did not in fact do it at all, that is, that he did not make adequate use of the possibilities he had to actualize and direct his human existence towards God. Conversely, it is possible that the more limited and modest capacities of an ordinary holy person were put to better use.

This question is closely related to the old problem about the extent to which holiness also means psychological health, and this is a difficult problem. Did not Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque also have a very neurotic personality, as many a Catholic therapist today would say? Was not Saint Alphonsus Liguori in his later years a saint, to be sure, but also a neurotic saint? To what extent is this possible or not? All these questions can be transposed into our question about the relationship between artistic sensibility and sanctity, but we cannot pursue it any further here.

The Eternal in Historical Particularity

Instead I would like to conclude with some final remarks on our central topic. A poet, as we say, speaks in images and likenesses. The possibility of this kind of poetic language is rooted ultimately in the analogy of being, insofar as all realities are intrinsically interrelated, are somehow interconnected and related to one another, and therefore can ultimately be conceived only by moving be-

yond them as individual realities to the whole of reality. This analogy of being makes it possible for the poet to speak in images and likenesses, and enables him to understand particular human experiences as mysteriously pointing beyond themselves to God. For example, he can represent love between human beings in its hidden depths as pointing analogously to the love of God. Even when such human realities as fidelity, responsibility and acceptance of the mystery of life are not expressed in any explicitly religious way, they point ultimately to the reality about which theology does speak explicitly.

It seems questionable to me whether today there really is so much less Christian and religious literature in poetic and artistic form. It would be quite possible that the analogous symbols in which a real poet expresses himself today have changed so much that they are no longer intelligible to people brought up in the traditional piety. But it is nevertheless possible that the poet is basically giving expression to religious statements in this different set of analogous symbols. Such a situation calls for careful scrutiny of the language of the poet.

In any case, analogy makes possible the understanding of one reality as the mysterious disclosure of another, higher and more comprehensive reality. Everything which comes to expression in art is a particular actualization of that human transcendence through which a person, as a spiritual and free being, is oriented to the fullness of all reality. Only because the human person is a being who by his very nature pushes beyond every given boundary, a being for whom every end is a new beginning, a being who encounters the unfathomable mystery of things, only because and insofar as the human person is a transcendent being can there be both art and theology in their real senses. Both art and theology are rooted in man's transcendent nature.

But it is important to see why and how this human transcendence is always represented in art in a quite definite, particular and historical way. True art always embodies a very definite, particular and historical instance of human transcendence. To this extent, art can and must be thoroughly historical. There is a real history of art, artists do not always say the same thing. The artist by his very nature is necessarily the discoverer of a concrete situation in which man concretely actualizes his transcendent being in a new and different way. But what follows from this is not that there is an opposition between man's historical and transcendent nature, but rather that there is a mutual and necessary interrelationship of dependence between the two. The true artist, to be sure, proclaims what is eternal in truth, in love, in man's endless quest and boundless desire. But he is an artist and not just a conceptualist and rationalist only when he creates this proclamation of the eternal in a new and unique way. In real art the absolutely historical particularity of the artist and the eternal in his proclamation are one. It is precisely this which constitutes the essence of a work of art. I can understand Dürer's "The Hare" as a *concretissimum*, as an utterly concrete and definite given in an innocuous human experience. But if I really look at it with the eyes of an artist, there looks out at me, if I can put it this way, the very infinity and incomprehensibility of God.