The French theologian, Jacques Pohier (*1926), occupies a distinctive place in the recent history of theology. His theological trajectory is marked by a number of fundamental themes, including death, guilt and sexuality. Pohier's theological training took place at the Dominican Le Saulchoir and was informed by the so-called nouvelle théologie. His thought has its roots in the work of Thomas Aquinas and is nourished by psychoanalysis.

The theme of death is central to Pohier's thought, and recurs in a wide range of contexts. An examination of the many notions which he associates with this theme provides us with a thorough grounding in his theology and the fundamental options which inform it. This dissertation provides such an examination. Despite his prominence, Pohier has not been the object of sustained study.

Pohier's attitude towards death is remarkable in that he regards death as an ally of life. This approach can be seen as providing a theological framework for a widespread contemporary perception, one which is supported by empirical research regarding the reception of biblical-theological themes, namely, that death represents the natural and peaceful conclusion of a completed life. In line with this theme, the dissertation also aims to examine Pohier's thought with a view to the broader discussion concerning a contemporary and critical inculturation of Christianity.

This study is structured in a very straightforward fashion: three chapters, each of which represents a distinctive perspective. Chapter I offers a reading of relevant texts, chapter II investigates the psychoanalytical background, and chapter III concentrates on specifically theological reflection. These three chapters are preceded by a Portrait of Pohier, which introduces the reader to his life and work and to the authors and contexts which influenced him.

Chapter I, Death as sister in human existence, offers a panorama of 'texts' (1960-1998) and a survey of the basic options in Pohier's thought on death: the organic-biological, the unconscious, human autonomy and freedom for self-determination, the Western perception of death, and contemporary questions concerning euthanasia and the right to death with dignity. The Conclusion of this chapter seeks to interpret and to situate Pohier's thought within a broader reflection on the meaning of human existence. What is most fundamental here is the option for a way of thinking informed by finitude,
which summons one to a positive relationship with mortality and to a life freed from exaggerated expectations.

**Chapter II, Death, the Imaginary and the Symbolic: The Influence of Psychoanalysis and Its Theological Implications**, provides a systematic examination of Pohier's views on death in terms of the influence exercised by psychoanalysis. Pohier has been significantly influenced by two psychoanalysts who have developed distinctive systems of thought, namely, Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) and Conrad Stein (1924). Part I of chapter I considers Lacan, with particular attention to elements of his thought and the theme of death, and then proceeds to examine those texts in Pohier which reveal the influence of the former. Part II has an analogous structure. An extensive discussion of the work and thought of Stein is followed by an analysis of texts which reveal his influence on Pohier. This chapter concludes with an extensive Epilogue reflecting on Pohier's debt to Freud. Freud is also discussed in the reflections on Lacan and Stein. Both authors advocate a retour à Freud and both were prominent mediators of the interpretation of Freud's oeuvre. Two of the most fundamental elements in the continuing influence of psychoanalysis on Pohier's thought are as follows: the purification of imaginary notions of faith and the accentuation of Christian faith as a religion in which the human person, as contingent 'son', unfolds his or her personal longings in a fashion which does not conflict with the orientation towards God. What is striking is Pohier's insistence on the transcendence of the imaginary and the entrance into the realm of the symbolic.

**Chapter III, Death in Speech about God and Christ: Pohier's Theological Reflection** investigates the implications of Pohier's thought for specifically theological domains such as the doctrine of God and christology. There is neither a developed 'doctrine of God' nor a separate 'christology' in Pohier's work. Nevertheless, theological reflection on God-talk and on the relationship between God and humanity is so manifest that it demands treatment (Part I). In the course of reflecting on God, Pohier returns often to the figure of Christ. Part II examines this element and concentrates on a number of important christological issues. Two of Pohier's key notions are that the image of the Almighty must die in order to make room for God who, as Creator, creates a space for humanity's own existence, and, analogously, that the image of the sacrificial Christ must die in order to make room for the figure of Jesus who is able to inspire contemporary men and women to a liberating idea of God.

The General Conclusion brings together the findings of the three chapters in view of a central question: 'what is Pohier's contribution to the contemporary theological understanding of death, including speech about the relationship between God and humanity?' In general, it can be asserted that Pohier's theological reflection is fundamentally shaped by a willingness to
recognize the reality of death. For him, death and finitude are inherent to our status as creatures of God. They belong to our creaturely nature and are not deficiencies to be overcome. Pohier's work represents a contribution to that theology which seeks to take seriously the creaturely character of death and finitude, and which refuses to negate the radicality of this fact by means of imaginary speculative constructions.

(Translation: Terrence Merrigan)