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Adventure and Transformation¹

ANTHONY GITTINS, CSSP

'As life is action and passion, it is required of a person that he/she should share the passion and action of his/her time, at peril of being judged not to have lived.'

CARL JUNG (1875-1961) said 'there can be no transforming darkness into light or apathy into movement without emotion', and added that 'emotion is the wellspring of personal maturity'. He also said that when two people meet, *both* will be transformed if there is any true relationship. Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926) said that 'the future enters into us in order to transform itself in us, long before it happens.'

So we begin this reflection with thoughts and images from two thinkers. From Jung, that as we move into the future we must transform our self and each other; and from Rilke, that the future will actually transform itself or will be transformed, through each of us (or perhaps not).

Here is a challenge that is particularly acute for those in religious life today, and let us be very clear about it: individually and collectively we have the ability and the duty, furthermore, to be transformed; and if we take this seriously we will be instrumental in changing the world! But there is a corollary that is no less important. Jesus says that whoever fails to encounter others and be mutually transformed, and whoever fails to transform the future due to laziness or lack of passionate faith, hope, and love, will have failed to be who they were

1. This article is an edited form of a talk originally given to the Presentation Sisters of Esopus, New York. The author of this opening quotation is Oliver Wendell Holmes (1841-1935) – inclusive language added.

created to be and to do what they were created for. Furthermore, God's plan (which by God's Providence includes and involves each of you who read this) would then in some measure be thwarted or even undermined.

So now we have three voices to listen to! Jung, the Swiss Christian, says that transformation requires an emotional investment. Rilke, the German Nature poet, says that our transformation can change the world. And Jesus, the Jewish preacher from Galilee, says that the transformation or conversion entailed in being a disciple of his actually allows God's Mission to be continually pursued and applied on earth as it is in heaven! But how is this to happen?

PURPOSE OF MY SPEAKING NOW

The Hebrew word for conversion (*teshuvah*) literally means 'to go back home', and is nowhere better illustrated than in the story of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15). But conversion implies first that a person remembers where home is, and then deliberately chooses to return. Jewish tradition is very clear: the will of God may change; we do not believe in blind, inexorable Fate but in a loving Providence, an attentive God; and each person has been empowered to begin, again and again, so that neither failure nor despair has the last word. Thus understood, conversion is the only hope for us and for religious life itself.

What follows is a reflection on religious life as God's dream for us and our communities. God's deepest desire is that we remember where our true home is and choose to return. My starting-point is transformation and mission, involving the harnessing of emotion, the fostering of hope, and a spirit of adventure. Without emotion (Jung says) there will be neither maturity nor movement; without hope, you have either false optimism or growing despair; and without a spirit of adventure you will become immobilised by being over-cautious or by the fear of taking appropriate risks. Your transformation implies continuous conversion, lest you first become predictable, then

inflexible, and finally paralysed or passive. Furthermore, continuous conversion entails commitment to God's Mission, without which you will become overwhelmed by your responsibilities or failures and by the demands or criticisms of others. Or, and let's admit this danger too, if you don't simply stop trying – you will finish up 'doing your own thing.'

Without a spirit of adventure you will become immobilised... Your transformation implies continuous conversion, lest you first become predictable, then inflexible, and finally paralysed or passive.

RELIGIOUS LIFE AS TRANSFORMATION

Heraclitus said that nothing endures except change; but *transformation* is not merely change. Given time, change occurs naturally in the form of a gradual slowing down, entropy, or decay. Transformation, on the other hand, is a totally different process, and we are called, not simply to change, much less to deteriorate or decline, but rather to become transformed. St Paul told the Romans not to be conformed to the world but to be transformed (Rom 12:2). He also promised the Corinthians that, if they stayed faithful, they would all be transformed at the sound of the last trumpet (1 Cor 15:52). So how can we recognise transformation and commit ourselves to it?

Transformation is the most radical kind of change possible. It does not happen by chance but is generated by immensely powerful processes that develop according to laws that are identifiable. An original reality is then converted into something quite new. But, critically, the new reality is always traceable to the original (which is why we speak of the transformation of one into the other). The outcome is quite dramatic, though the process may be gradual or cumulative. For example, at 211

degrees Fahrenheit (99.3 Celsius), water is very hot indeed; but at 212F (100C) it actually boils and is transformed into steam. Steam can power a heavy locomotive to very high speeds; hot water can do no such thing! That one extra degree marks a huge difference. Likewise, a fragile, baby boy was transformed into the towering genius who painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, Michelangelo. Again: a self-confessed lazy religious called Teresa *de Jesus* was transformed by grace and good works into the great Spanish mystic and reformer, St Teresa of Avila. And permit me a final example here: the element plutonium was, by nuclear fission, transformed into the atomic bomb that devastated Hiroshima. Transformation can change the world – literally.

Two things worth noticing, I suggest. In the first place, if we only look at the initial reality – water, a baby boy, a baby girl, or a chemical element – it is not apparent exactly how it will be transformed or what it will in fact become. And, secondly, if we start with a transformed reality – Francis of Assisi or Adolf Hitler – it can always be tracked back to its original form and its 'transformation' traced. Thus we can understand how a particular baby grew up to become Osama bin Laden or Barak Obama. But we can also see clearly that no stone will ever be transformed into bread, no lie can ever give birth to truth, and, furthermore, no violence will ever produce peace. Similarly, no religious community without profound faith, abiding hope, and enduring love can ever be transformed into the abundant crop that becomes the harvest of the Realm of God. It is a challenge: if we hope to be transformed, we need to know our potential and our limitations, and identify what would be nothing more than dangerous daydreams. Looking carefully, we can get some general idea of what we might become, and also get some idea of what is utterly impossible. Then we can set ourselves to become the best possible people, the best possible community, the best possible instruments of God's mission for the world's transformation.

Transformation is not random, it is governed by rules. So, in order to understand not only our own personal and collective potential but also our utter limitations, we need to scrutinise the reality as it is at present: our institutional foundations, community wisdom, numerical strength, and current practices. No wishful thinking can transform institutions or individuals into zealous religious with a spirit of adventure and a hunger and thirst for God's justice. None of us can give what we do not first possess, and nobody can become what is not consistent with their nature. Yet transformation is mandatory if dry bones are to live and if God's will is to be done on earth. If there is to be authentic transformation, it will only come by the power of God's own Spirit, and only if we allow God to be in charge (Ezek 37), as we so willingly and wholeheartedly did on the day of our religious profession.

RELIGIOUS LIFE AS A SPIRIT OF ADVENTURE

Sociologist Georg Simmel (1858-1918) claimed that adventure was for the young. He was in his early fifties then, and apparently settled into a comfortable middle age from which he did not want to be disturbed! I think he was quite wrong: adventure is for those who *do* want, or are willing, to be disturbed, irrespective of age. Disciples of Jesus actually *seek* to be disturbed. J.G. Dunn said: 'There is a disturbing quality about the urgency of Jesus' call, a shaking of the foundations, that those who want a quiet life are bound to resent and resist.'

There can be no adventure without disturbance, but adventure is not limited to the young. As Betty Friedan was approaching her seventieth birthday, she wrote *The Fountain of Age*, truly a wonderful book.² Familiar with the mythic 'fountain of youth' (the obsessive cult of youth, and intolerance of grey hairs and advancing age) she wanted to celebrate the

2. Simon and Schuster, 1993.

wisdom that can come with age and the extraordinary contributions older people can make and share. Life expectancy in many countries has risen by 70% in the past century. Could this unprecedented social fact have an evolutionary significance? Might it contribute, not just to personal wellbeing but to the greatest good of the greatest number, to the furtherance of social justice, and to the ushering in of the Realm of God? Today's religious should seriously ponder these questions. But, as I say, the best answers will only come to those with a true spirit of adventure.

If we are not attracting new life, is it because we are simply not attractive, and precisely because we are not adventurous enough?

Has the bold energy vanished from religious life? Has the spirit of adventure — so characteristic of our founders, of our own youth, and of some (young and not so young) religious today — been sapped by a spirit of frustration or helplessness? If caution and prudence are more evident than risk and trust; if the art of the possible has become more practised than the virtue of hope; and if some of the most adventurous religious have long since left their communities (feeling stifled or sensing futility); what right do we have, to expect the Holy Spirit to renew the face of the earth? Many communities spend obscene amounts of money on projections for the future and maps for the journey, and some religious have been so seduced as to be compromised by their own trendy electronic gizmos or designer gadgets. Some are able to save so much time they are hardly mobile any more, and this has nothing to do with sickness or age. Meanwhile, what is happening to faith, trust and imagination? The very qualities that drew us to religious life and the features we so passionately sought, seem scarce commodities in some communities. If we are not attracting

new life, is it because we are simply not attractive, and precisely because we are not adventurous enough?

The spirit of adventure is surely not the exclusive property of the young, but many young people are still as idealistic, generous and committed as any of us have every been. But if the adventure has left religious life, why would the young seek to enter there? Unless religious life continues to be an adventure, we are not being led by the Spirit of God but have become tame, domesticated and predictable, and no longer marked with the risk-taking wildness and unpredictability of our founders.

A spirit of adventure and a sense of mystery are not mutually exclusive! People of faith and recipients of God's revelation should have a double portion of both. But a selfish spirit and the Holy Spirit are indeed mutually exclusive; and the Holy Spirit is indeed the Spirit of adventure. We dare not forget that the initiative belongs to God's Spirit, and we must not muzzle the Spirit who is responsible for renewing the face of the earth and transforming each of us. But sometimes – in the heat of the moment, the grip of fear, or the shadow of death (or perhaps when personal or administrative mandates are to be renewed and evaluations loom, when the pressure of other people's expectations builds or when we hunger for people's approval or the quiet life) – we can effectively muzzle the Spirit. And then we worry about what has happened to our *joie de vivre* and spontaneity, and we anxiously wonder why death seems to be getting ever closer!

RELIGIOUS LIFE AS MISSIONARY SPIRITUALITY

The word 'spirituality' has had a chequered history. The Latin root is *spirare*, to breathe, suggesting perhaps that spirituality is as much part of life as breathing. But 'spirituality' has frequently been defined in opposition to something else, and Christianity has not been much help. Yet humanity is both/and rather than either/or: we are both spirit and body, both mind and matter, both elevated and debased, both graced and sinful.

Spirituality has often been opposed to the body, or sought at the body's expense. But we are all embodied, and it is impossible to separate what God joined: body and spirit. In fact Christianity is, *par excellence*, the religion of the body, of embodiment, of incarnation – of the Word made flesh. Tragically, this has often been overlooked.

SPIRITUALITY: INCARNATION WITH THE SPIRIT

For people of the Abrahamic faiths, the word 'spirituality' should immediately evoke the Spirit: the Spirit that is Holy, God's Spirit. But ask around, or consult a dictionary, and you are unlikely to corroborate that. At the Baptism of Jesus, the crowd witnessed the heavens torn apart, the Spirit of God hovering like a dove, and God's word: 'You are my beloved son' (Mk 1:9). This Spirit was manifest, and known by Jesus and the early community as the one who inspired [the 'in-spir(it)er'] or animated [the 'one who gives spirit to'] him. In other words, the 'spirituality' of Jesus was, precisely, the Holy Spirit. At the very beginning of his public life, Jesus himself had said it clearly: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; and he has sent me' (Lk 4:18). Clearly, the Spirit is the initiator, the legitimator and enabler; and each one of us has been baptised by, and into, that very same Spirit. This fact should be foundational to our own understanding and experience of spirituality.

Only when we realise that 'spirituality' and 'Holy Spirit' have everything in common will we begin to glimpse a God's-eye view of ourselves and our lives. Regrettably it seems doubtful that many of us truly believe in the promise of our own Baptism, supposedly 'firmed-up' or 'confirmed' in the sacrament of Confirmation.

Authentic Christian spirituality then, is nothing less than our participation in God's new creation, expressed in a renewed and transformed life, and made possible by Christ's initiative,

through his call to us, and by his cross and resurrection³. For believers, this is stupendous; for unbelievers, sheer fantasy. But Jesus promised that, by sending the Spirit, his *abba* would forge an intimate relationship with all who love God and remain faithful (Jn 14:23-26). The Spirit activates God's transforming love in all who respond to the call to discipleship. This same Spirit gathers you in to community, dedicated, as Jesus was, to the reconciliation of humanity. And you – individually and corporately – are charged, by your call as religious, to be transformed in order to transform; your lives are not simply for your own perfection but – critically – to be generative and life-bearing for others.

It seems doubtful that many of us truly believe in the promise of our own Baptism, supposedly 'firmed-up' ... in the Sacrament of Confirmation.

You are the seed destined to be grounded and earthed, softened and opened up, in order to germinate and bring forth new life (Jn 12:24-25). You are the modest mustard seed, designed to be transformed into a tree that becomes a nesting place for the birds of the air (Lk 13:18-19). And the agent of this transformation is God's own Spirit. So the authenticity of your spirituality and your apostolic life is measured both by your intimacy with God's Spirit and by your willingness to lay down your life for others (Jn 15:13). Whoever does not remain in Christ and with the Spirit of Christ, is like a branch that grows, not as a nesting place for others, but as an ugly shoot to be cut off, discarded, and left to wither (Jn 15:6). These are hard words indeed, and a shocking image.

3. The ideas, and many of the actual words, in this section and the next, come from Inagrace Dietterich, writing in *The Center Letter, Center for Parish Development, Chicago*, and extracted from *The Gospel and Our Culture, Vol 8/3, September 1996: 1-8.*

Your transformation by God's Spirit will move you out of your inner, private world(s) and into the marketplace, the public square, to witness to (indeed, to embody, to incarnate and articulate in your own lives) the redeeming and healing love of God. Therefore your spirituality must incorporate a centrifugal or missionary dimension, without which it is not yet fully Christian, not fully Christ-like.

SPIRITUALITY: EMPOWERMENT FOR MISSION

Like Jesus, the early disciples understood themselves to be inspired by and subject to the Holy Spirit: this was their 'spirituality.' Inagrace Dietterich pursues this theme with remarkable insight: 'Spirituality shaped by the [biblical] Spirit is radically different [from contemporary or New Age spirituality]' she says. 'Its purpose is empowerment for mission: for witness to God's mighty acts.' This is direct, wonderfully – even startlingly – so, challenging, and deeply encouraging: we are called and sent by God; our lives have a much greater and more noble purpose than either self-interest or even survival; our call is to be witnesses (the Greek for witness is *martur*, c.f. our *martyr*) to God's great and compassionate works; and the way we respond to the call to collaborate with God's purposes is as disciples of Jesus, committed to continuous conversion – by transformation.

Mission is, first and foremost, God's initiative, God's activity. It is the very life of the Trinity. The subject of mission is neither ourselves nor our own communities, and not even the Church; the subject of mission is God: Mission is God's (work). Thus we speak of the *missio Dei*. And we ought not to say that the Church, or your community, has a mission, but that God's Mission *has* the Church, *has* the community, which are the servants of God's mission, and derivative of it. The responsibility of the Church, and of your community, is essentially this: to serve God's Mission faithfully day by day. It differs only in scope and focus, not in levels of dedication or integrity.

Mission then, is God's own eternal work. And Christian spirituality should be shaping the lives of all who are charged with participation in this mission by virtue of God's own call. The call comes through Jesus, who transforms disciples' lives through love, and sends them in his name as he himself was sent in God's name. The divine mission, eternal and cosmic, was brought to earth by Jesus, and is continued in his name by faithful, hopeful, and loving disciples who carry out his mandate. Mission is neither our own initiative nor the Church's; nor is it a programme or task we undertake on God's behalf. Mission is a way of naming the work of God's own Spirit who is renewing the face of the earth. But, by God's grace and foolishness, you are called and commissioned to participate in God's own design. God's mission *has* you, individually and collectively, and you must not look back or falter.

Fortunately, you are not required to live forever, to remain youthful, or even to grow numerous: but you are asked, each and all, to remain faithful until you die, and thereby to glorify God. The God who chose you will surely call others, for God's work does not depend entirely on you: it started long before you were called, and will continue long after you pass on.

You were not created to be turned inward (inverted) but rather outward (everted). Authentic conversion or transformation is accomplished through processes that effectively turn your lives inside out! Jesus poured out his life for the life of the world, and called his disciples to emulate his dedication to his *abba* and to all his sisters and brothers: 'The love, freedom and joy of Christian spirituality is overflowing, contagious, and intrinsically seeks to embrace the whole of created reality.'⁴ *Everted* (or exocentric!) living should describe our basic disposition and/or current state of being: it can never be a thing of the past.

4. Inagrace Dietterich, *loc. cit.*

Too many Christians, for far too many reasons, have failed to ensure continuity between what Jesus planted and what he intended should grow. This is partly due to a catastrophic failure of the collective imagination of Christians: we have failed to link in with the divine dream, to imagine what Jesus imagined, and therefore to be sufficiently committed for it to become a reality.⁵ After two thousand years, we still have so much to learn and then to practise and teach, about authentic, Spirit-led spirituality and discipleship.

And we ought not say that the Church, or your community, has a mission, but that God's Mission has the Church and indeed your community, which are servants of God's mission, and derivative of it.

RELIGIOUS LIFE AS COMMITMENT TO CHANGE

To live is to change; to be perfect is to change often, said John Henry Newman, at a time when such a statement was highly contentious. Indeed many of us grew up in a Church solidly opposed to change, and were taught to persevere with dogged and undeviating determination. That Church produced some rather inflexible people, whose imagination and sensitivity to changing circumstances were severely impaired. Newman was exploring his theme on the development of doctrine, and suggesting that, far from being inflexible, we must always read and respond to the signs of the times and people's needs. A spirituality that concentrates on personal performance, competence, and control, is not only limited but can often be quite joyless and is certainly not fully Christian. We can identify three trajectories that should mark the progress of our lives (as Spirit-led, hope-filled people) from our current situation to

5. Imagination and its potential is addressed in my *A Presence That Disturbs* (2002), Ch 3.

where God is calling us. We must move, becoming transformed from perfectionists into prophets, from managers to martyrs, and from a 'maintenance mode' to a commitment to (God's) mission.

FROM PERFECTIONISTS TO PROPHETS

'Be perfect as your *abba* in heaven is perfect,' said Jesus (Mt 5:48). This has caused confusion and enormous frustration for those Christians whose focus is on themselves and their own efforts: perfectionism is a kind of sickness found in those who aspire to what is utterly impossible. Jesus asks that we aspire to what is possible, with God, and not through our efforts alone: holiness, wholeness, wholesomeness and full development. In this way we reach our potential as human beings. We are not God; but we are called to marked by a sense of integrity, as God is. This means not looking to ourselves, but looking outward and beyond, and for God's sake, for God's glory, not our own. The prophets exhibited this attitude. They were not focused on themselves or their own truth, much less on foretelling the future! Rather their focus was on God and God's truth, and their lives were dedicated to articulating God's message which was always calling for (our) change and always promising (God's) faithfulness.

Unlike the priest, a sacred figure who enjoyed the protection of the religious establishment and operated within the sanctuary, purified and dressed in special robes, the prophet had no such protection and was not a sacred but a 'profane' figure. 'Profane' means literally 'standing outside or in front of the temple' (*pro-fanum*). Prophets, clothed not in brocaded robes but very ordinary garb, or rags, even, stand in the public square, speak God's truth. They are not protected but, rather, often vilified, pilloried, or even killed for their pains. You are called to know God, to speak God's truth in public, and to be willing to pay the price.

FROM MANAGERS TO MARTYRS

What do managers do? They manage! They strategise, decide, and execute. But martyrs *witness*: they discern, trust and remain faithful. They put their understanding and insight on the line, accepting the possibility these may need to change, they run great risks of personal safety, and constantly witness to God's mighty deeds, God's justice and will. The heart of Christian living is *martyria*/martyrdom, implying the radical witness of a lifetime. It is not wanton risk, but it will always require a willingness to gamble with our current and provisional (or limited) understanding of the faith, of God, and of others.

Whoever is ready to gamble – not with God, but with their understanding of God, God's creation and all God's people – is willing to allow God to shake and modify that understanding: to change and deepen it.

Martyrs must submit their current understanding – of faith, of God, and of people – submit it all to the test of life. This is necessary for a maturing of faith and a developing relationship with God and neighbour. Not to risk in this way would be to cling too tightly to our partial understanding and thus to resist our very own conversion. *Whoever is ready to gamble – not with God, but with their understanding of God, of God's creation and of all God's people – is willing to allow God to shake and modify that understanding: to permit God to change and deepen it.* Such personal transformation by ongoing conversion always involves God, other people, and the martyr's risk-taking and trusting spirituality.

FROM MAINTENANCE TO MISSION

Maintenance is care for *current* concerns and projects; mission focuses not only on what is but *what is yet to be*. Maintenance is rational stewardship; mission is faith-filled

service, not defined independently by the rational but rather by trust in God's grace and faithfulness. Whoever answers the call is led by faith, hope, and love: these are not limited by reason or logic, by budget or personnel. From the birth of the Church, maintenance and mission have lived in tension. The disciples locked in the Upper Room would never have emerged into the light of day until they were literally *inspired*: the Spirit breathed new life into them and drove them out, into encounter with God's people. The crowds were amazed to see them gambling with their understanding of the God of universal mission, and palpably inspired.

You believe in the same Spirit, and you have already dedicated your lives to God's mission. And all religious today should be asking to be restored, inspired, and sent out ('commissioned') once again. There is no turning back, and this is no time to retreat. This is the time to risk everything in faith. How can we possibly be faithful unless we are missionary? Only renewal of mission can renew the Church and the face of the earth; because mission is another name for the very Spirit of God, and we, like Jesus, were baptised with that very Spirit and sent to embody good news.

RELIGIOUS LIFE AS GENERATOR OF *COMMUNITAS*

The missionary commitment required of religious communities is demanding; it costs (in T.S. Eliot's words) 'not less than everything'. Without our creative – and sustained – energy, the Spirit of mission will be unable to animate our communities. Examining this 'energy', we note that it is not a necessary by-product of religious life; rather, it needs to be generated, deliberately. Institutions, including religious ones, are inherently conservative: maintenance – of resources, projects and personnel – tends to absorb virtually all their energy. But before our religious congregations were 'institutionalised' – before Rules and Constitutions were approved, before vocations, buildings, and commitments

multiplied, before the community became stable and also numerous, something extraordinary happened. Like the explosion that produces new planets and galaxies, there was raw, concentrated, creative power, called *communitas-energy*.

Communitas exists when the founding inspiration of a fragile few, who are united in passion, imagination and hope, generates a creative burst of energy. Like a bolt of lightning whose incandescent light briefly turns night into day, so *communitas-energy* cuts through the dark, flashes against the horizon, and illuminates a vision of what God is asking. Numbers are invariably few and money scarce, and the vision itself appears totally unrealistic, even wildly extravagant. But common commitment and utter dedication can generate *communitas-energy* that defies all rational understanding. Such is the founding moment of religious communities and congregations.

But *communitas-energy* is also short lived. As incandescent light fades and white heat abates, so *communitas* almost imperceptibly but quite certainly turns into the natural daylight or room-temperature ambience of community. 'Community' (the domestication of *communitas*) can handle large numbers of people and manage a range of rational programmes; it can execute long-term plans and general maintenance.

Community is the institutionalisation of *communitas*. Where *communitas* is pathbreaking, risk-taking, and flexible, community becomes predictable, prudent and routine. If *communitas* is combustion, community is a steady burn, and both are necessary if religious life is to retain its missionary dimension. But unless the spark of *communitas* still burns within, a community will gradually lose momentum, run out of ideas, become creatively bankrupt, and ultimately betray its initial promise.

Communitas is to community as flame is to coal, as a spark is to the flint, or fuel is to a rocket: both elements are necessary, but the active agent is *communitas*. When the flame flickers, the spark

fails, the fuel is depleted, no coal can ever produce heat, no flint flame, and no rocket lift-off.

Communitas is a measure of your capacity for refounding and for mission. Not every religious is animated by *communitas* and not every congregation has sufficient. It is marked by radical generosity and utter commitment to the 'dangerous memory' of Jesus, to the spirit of our founders, and to the adventure of our lives. *Communitas* is not dependent on youth or strength but on commitment and the sustaining of a vision. Religious communities do not lose *communitas* because they decline and die; they decline and die because they lose *communitas*.⁶ The future of religious life is *communitas-energy*. It may only need a few to generate this energy, but it must be endorsed and fostered by many more, lest it flicker and die.

'HOLD FAST TO THE HOPE WE PROFESS' (Heb 10:23)

Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971) said: 'Nothing worth doing is completed in our lifetime; so we must be saved by hope'. God is the Initiator, the Caller, and the one who saves those who live in hope. Our hope is, after all, in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth.

*Religious communities do not lose communitas
because they decline and die; they decline and die
because they lose communitas.*

If we remember where our true home is, and if we constantly direct our steps towards our loving God, we will be converted and transformed. If we cultivate a generous spirit of *communitas*, our communities will be refounded and God will

6. This is a paraphrase of the motto of the Senior Concert Orchestra of New York, cited by Betty Friedan (1993:614), 'We do not stop playing because we grow old ... We grow old because we stop playing.'

be praised and glorified. If we live faithfully in hope, God will surely continue to be our strength. If our hope-filled lives inspire other people to hope as well, we will remain instruments of God's mission and will enable God – through our ministry – to offer others an alternative to frustration and meaninglessness. And if, with faithful courage and courageous faithfulness, we remain focused on our God, God will surely and certainly hold us in the palm of God's hand. This is enough.

Pincher Martin is sometimes taken to be a novel about hell, but it is really a story about purgatory. Purgatory is not an ante-room in which morally mediocre types sit around performing various degrading penances until their number is called and they shuffle shamefacedly forward into paradise. For Christian theology, it is the moment of death itself, when you discover whether you have enough love inside you to be able to give yourself away with only a tolerable amount of struggle. This is why martyrs – those who actively embrace their deaths in the service of others – traditionally go straight to heaven.

Terry Eagleton

On Evil

Yale University Press, 2010, p 24.