

Rosemary Haughton
The Transformation of Man
A Study of Conversion and Community
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Introduction

9 .. in England where the sophisticated puritanism of logical positivism has had terrific snob appeal but not much more -- appeal, that is to the half-formed intellectual hopefuls.

11 But in fact the whole well-meaning labour is misplaced because the thing about 'modern man' is that people are not satisfied with classifications of themselves, modern or not. The more sensitive the person, the more suspicious he is of categories and evades them, looking for truth in the immediacy of personal experience.

12 .. ensures that the discussion remains tied to the facts of experience and does not vaporize into a cloud of abstractions.

c. I. Conflict and Resolution

20 This situation is one of ignorance striving for knowledge, of separateness striving for communion, of fear longing for safety. (emotional explosion)

21 Therefore it is a state of desire that does not know what it desires, and of anger that does not know what to be angry with.

23 A lot of bitterness can be kept out of sight, from sheer necessity. But they may even come to disbelieve in the bitterness, and suppose that their kindly indifference to each other in later years is the norm of family affection. So the separateness and fear and distrust and frustrated longing lose their emotional character and can be disregarded. Only the results are left -- a settled and contented and taken-for-granted lack of communication, the kind of stalemate that modern drama explores with such sickening truth, as in The Caretaker.

26 Meanwhile, there is friendliness but no communication. There can't be, because of the antagonism and fear that still lies between the two, though they are no longer aware of it.

30 .. to enable these two people to see each other and recognize each other. This kind of recognition is not just 'knowing about', it is real knowing. There is, at this point, a true human encounter.

35 Here are the two related but contradictory facts about the relation between formation and transformation. Formation, according to a law which is holy and just and good, is necessary if man is to live. Yet, in practice, if its influence is unbroken, it leads not to life but to death of love by asphyxiation. Transformation therefore can only occur when formation breaks down, and this often happens because people break the law, because they sin. Yet nobody could say that love is the result of sin, for sin is disorder and separation and nonsense, and love shows itself as peace and unity and lucid sense.

c. II. Encounter

51 The very wholeness of the experience makes it impossible, for the time, to relate it to anything else. It is this that makes it so hard for those who are not in love to understand the lover's indifference to morality or public opinion or even personal safety. It is this that makes lovers so impatient of any attempts to judge their action by any other standard than that of service to their love, or to defend any course of action that seems to conflict with the needs of love.

51 The sense of freedom, of exaltation, of having almost discovered the secret of the universe, is so intense that ordinary concerns [52] and loyalties seem drained of colour, without definition or meaning, irritating interruptions to the one vital concern, which is to know, to discover, to enter into the new world to which each is the other's gateway.

52 Formerly his relations with women kept a fair balance between curiosity and fear, so that nothing much happened at all.
 .. the need for a certain recklessness in ~~xxx~~ giving which is characteristic of people in love.
 .. it is just this risking of oneself, with no safety clauses inserted, that is satisfying to people in the grip of passion.

59 So the modern (and often suspect) notion that sex is a means to salvation is not so odd after all. It is so because it is the most intimate possible human encounter, the one that demands, of its nature, the most complete self-giving, even though the actual giving in any one case may not amount to much. But marriage as a Christian institution is designed to ensure the maximum gift.

65 .. could break them down enough to release the power of true passion.

Passion in this sense is not simply unbridled sexuality or a sort of romantic cancer (though it can express itself as both of these) but primarily the power of the deepest springs of personality, which St. Paul calls the spirit, when it is released. It is the same power which was released in the two quarreling children, and was 'channelled' when they recognized each other, and momentarily forgot themselves.

66 Real passion is timeless, and deliberately so, thrusting away with reckless courage any consideration but that of the eternal now in which lies the transcendent experience of love.

67 .. sexual passion is a 'typical' experience and shows the nature of the breakthrough of the spirit in relation to many kinds of living.

.. by seeing what passion is life -- the uncovering of the personality, the definition through conflict, the need for decision--

All that they truly want of each other and for each other can only be truly developed in an unlimited relationship, and it is an obscure sense of this that makes the decisions that do occur, decisions of love.

Sex &
encounter

passion

passion

passion

68 Certain feelings and ideas that had no conscious existence before are brought into existence by the challenge of opposition.

.. the attack on the personality which is implicit in the conflict situation actually brings into being, forms, personal qualities that are needed in the making of the decision that transforms. But this in itself depends on previous formation, for it is only because they have the courage and 'sense of direction' to keep turned towards each other that the lovers can experience their conflict as both forming and transforming.

69 The appearing of Jesus, and the coming to faith of him... ⁱⁿ

What appears, and to which assent is given, is that towards which love already tended, but lacked the final, exterior challenge that is the occasion of actual decision.

70 .. both greater individuation and greater communication, not one after the other but as aspects of one movement of growth.

73 .. the nature of transformation. It is not an intellectual process, but in order to be effective in continued living it needs to express itself in terms of realized moral obligation.

.. the childhood insecurity that made adult relationships difficult is still there.

74 Marriage does not eliminate fears of each other and doubts about the feelings of the other, but it does, as any external self-committing act does, bring into play as many as possible of the motives and needs that lie below the surface, so that they are ~~disturbedly~~ involved in the decision and hence become fully personal.... If passion is the word for the breakthrough of power that makes true decision possible, marriage is the word for the 'language' in which, and only in which, the decision can be understood and worked out. And the definition stands: transformation affects the whole personality.

75 .. why marriage is after all not the running down of passion but its development.

76 For meaning is a personal act, it is both a summing up of experience in a total emotional-intellectual grasp, and in the same act an intention towards the future, onto which the meaning is projected.

In other words theology is formative, in the sense used here, and, as I hope is apparent by now, formation finds its meaning and definition in transformation.

77 This is liturgy [78] which protects man from the direct experience of the sacred but also keeps him in touch with it...

78 This double function of keeping in touch and yet protecting has already been touched on as part of the value of marriage as an institution.

Meaning

Theology
formation

Liturgy

78 This use of liturgy is an awareness that, for good or ~~evil~~ ill, our culture has lost. Not only non-Christians... but Christians too. There is no dangerous power, no sacred, in people's consciousness, therefore no liturgy that can bring about a meeting without an explosion. Religious liturgy is not now, on the whole, a contact with the sacred but an external expression of a highly idealistic secular concern. It is a matter of good formation, not transformation. That is a useful thing to have for forming religiously well-shaped people, but it doesn't deal with the problem of what is underneath, except by regarding it as alien and outlawing it.

79 It is something they can give each other, but only when each becomes aware of a demand 'outside' him or herself, and responds.

80 The transformation occurs in the moment of self-surrender to love. Each is responding to an invitation that comes to him or her through the other, and could not do so otherwise. The response of each is a total gift of the whole person as it then exists, it is unconditional and unreflective. It is of their own deeper self, yet it is not possessed but only exists in its givenness. This is faith, which is personal, yet cannot arise from the person without some intervention. For each one, alone is helpless, and only the knowledge of being loved has the power to set free into love.

80 Sin, it must be said again, means both the messy human condition -- an environment that we are soaked in -- and also the shabby and unloving behaviour that we indulge in, as indeed appropriate to this condition, therefore not seeming to matter much.

81 This giving of love is so hard precisely because of this background of sin. So love finally involves a sort of death.... It is a giving, then, to someone who is a sinner, a gift thrown into the void. So the lover dies in giving his love.... And this is a real dying, a real leaving behind without conditions, or it does not work.... And out of this death a new life is born, one which is shared. That which is shared is of both: it is not possessed by either but only exists in this sharing.

c. III. Self-discovery.

86 The use of perfectly good jargon to wrap up and then throw away perfectly good human experience is unfortunately quite usual...

87 Intervention in the normal structures of comfortable illusion is a possibility we doubt....

90 .. every time she opens her mouth she says something that makes him lash out with ill-aimed, panicky violence.

Liturgy
sacred

103 An area of personality has become aware, has come to existence in a crucial choice, and it cannot afterwards become non-existent. All that became known is still known. But there are still areas that have not reached definition as personal, are therefore still unconscious and exert their influence in unconscious but real ways.

104 .. no clear decision against the vision is made, there is only a gradual loss of clarity, as the adjustments to unconverted values become more far-reaching and leave less room for purposeful living.

The transformed personality is still there but it has become a sort of corpse.

But since nobody likes to carry a dead self around, the knowledge of its presence has to be blotted out by any means available. And since no means are infallible there is likely to be a strong reaction of defensive anger at anything that seems likely to uncover the knowledge of this horrible and inseparable companion. The intellectual dishonesty and moral recklessness characteristic of people who are (105) suffering from what we revealingly call a 'bad conscience' is so well known as to need no description.

105 So the repentant awareness becomes a remorseful awareness, and the unbearable knowledge of what one is like is faced not in love, but in hatred and despair and rejection of what cannot be rejected because it is oneself.

110 Now he knows that his marriage was a refuge from love, not a giving of it, his work an escape from commitment, his responsibility a blanker to protect himself from other people's needs and his own nature.

111 This (isolation) means that he may lack the renewed conflict and resolution pattern, the dialectic of a community of common aims but differing temperament and interpretation. He will lack the power of some kind of liturgy to express the meaning and purpose of his life and so extend it towards the future -- a liturgy which is not purely self-devised and therefore capable of providing the stimulus of conflict as an aid to continued self-discovery. He is in some danger of becoming narrow, perhaps smug, and attached to his own ideas.

114 .. we never know anything in itself....

114 .. the heroic predicament of the one who knows himself in need of love, and able to give it, but cannot see that there can be any one to love him, or to whom he can give love, and therefore can only regard the surrender to love as a surrender to unreality and death. (about existentialism)

114 .. the most important part of a human formation that can make way for the transformation of love is in ~~the~~ fact the experience of being loved. And real love is, by definition, something that only occurs in transformation.

c. IV. The Release of Power

118 All conversion involves repentance, a turning away from all that prevented the self-giving of love, a realization that, as preventing love, much in the past was incongruous and evil. But the prophetic ~~x~~ calling involves repudiation of much more than unworthy and unloving behaviour. It sees that everything in the life of the flesh -- the world as we know it -- is futile and useless as a means of accomplishing the will of God.

119 .. an equal degree of transformation can come about by slow successive changes, a number of 'conversions', by which, each time more and more of the whole man becomes real, defined, and available as personal.

.. man as a person, that is, as a conscious being capable of love....

120 .. the area of transformation is chiefly concerned with intellectual and emotional awareness, not first of all with the moral sphere.

120 .. not his own words but God's, and bringing to the people not his own care and advice and support but only God's. This is what gives a prophet a kind of wild tactlessness, and an often infuriatingly placed acceptance of the fact that what he says doesn't persuade, doesn't get through.

123 So a prophet is one wholly taken over by a power which he is convinced is not his own, and it is a power with a purpose, a message which must be conveyed to others.

124 They don't belong, nor are they part of an organized opposition, not even an individual one. They seem to erupt through the cracks of a society, or even create cracks to erupt through.

124 So the chaotic and unformed life of the flesh must submit to the governance of the Law, and it produces what we call a civilization, whose self-knowledge is its culture.

128 .. there have to be always more prophets, to tell people that there is a power that is greater than ~~the~~ the Law.

129 They do not require the vindication of being heard or of visible results.

It does not necessarily convert, but it is capable of converting those whose formation has been such as will enable them to listen.

The false prophet is extremely impressive, too, he also moves men's hearts, he takes them out of themselves and transports them. But their emotion is one of self-affirmation, not self-surrender. The German crowds who listened to Hitler and were raised to near-ecstasy by the vision he offered them were not converted, they did not repent.

132 The power that the prophet wields -- or that wields him -- is the transforming, self-discovering power of love.

135 Once there, they hear the prophetic word, and must choose. But the way in which the word is understood depends on the formation

which has preceded the invitation to be transformed. Quite literally, it depends on the language in which the invitation is presented. If the language is not a familiar one it will not be understood at all. But even when it is in a language which is fully understood, the conversion which follows can only take up in its self-giving that part of life which the language expresses and affects.

~~148~~

149 Obviously, then, the kind of setting in which a Christian conversion takes place conditions the kind of Christianity that results, and it immediately becomes apparent that a large part of the function of what we call the Church must be concerned with creating a language community -- in the world, of-the-flesh, under the Law -- which can provide the right kind of setting for the explosions of the power that transforms. It isn't so easy. If you do organize and do it well it can get to seem as if there were no need for transformation after all. The language works very well, it does all the proper Christian things, why allow anything so untidy as a transformation? But then the power does explode, in unexpected places, and usually with an inadequate language, so that people cry 'heresy' and try to screw down the lid even tighter.

150 In that case it seems that any kind of community aiming to be Christian must be an educational structure, teaching a rich and flexible language, but must also deliberately leave room for explosions which can never be entirely predictable. It sounds positively Anglican.

c. V. Creating Community

175 This common and not very drastic family problem is one of a series of events that make up the history of this family. Yet this event, and the others, are not part of an unfolding process happening to the family but actually are the family. They bring it into being as a community and determine its quality and character as a community.

But this community-creating event could not take place without the continuous history, with recognizably belonging events and traditions, rules, language, customary gestures, of this community as it happens to be.

The formation in fact conditions or even prevents the transformation, as in the case of the individual. But in this family setting it is easier to see the interdependence of the structures of formation and the occurrence of transformation.

176 And when people do something together, on purpose, and mean something by it, which is not fully expressed by what they actually do, this is ritual.

176 The creating of a community, then, means the point at which the accidental (in the flesh) community becomes the on-purpose community (in the spirit) community, by conversion, mutual self-surrender and faith.

177 But when the area of conversion concerns community life, and the community is aiming at creating itself -- coming into being as itself -- then the process of encounter/conflict, repentance/self-discovery, surrender/faith has to be ritually expressed.

c. VI. The Community of the Transformed.

182 .. for the structures of authority in a community are inventions that express a human understanding of the natural, human unconverted man and his needs. They are the formation structures and have no place in the immediate transformation event.

190 The two lovers in the second chapter were not converted to each other because either of them was kind or unselfish or forbearing or compassionate. These qualities formed their approach to each other, and the learning of them made their encounter a fruitful one, but the occurrence of transformation brought them into a relationship to which all these admirable things were quite alien and meaningless. So to call God 'Father' is not to acclaim his qualities but to bear witness to an experience of relationship. It is to cry 'Abba, Father,' because of an awareness that is of the Spirit. But the ability to do so, to witness to the fact of a community being created in the spirit, depends on the existence of a pre-conversion community which is of a kind that can be converted. And such a community must have some sort of symbol which means the community to its members. It need not be a human being. It can be a statue or a picture or an ideal of a golden age or just a memory. But it must be something at least vaguely imaginable. And most often it is a human being, because a human being is a person, and the symbolic centre must be personal.

191 .. why leaders like Lenin or Juarez or Mao Tse Tung have so much influence. They are the converted community's own self-awareness.

191 There remains the link-up, the power that breaks out in the breakdown of the Law, the power that transforms, that draws and defines the personality in the movement towards the decision that transforms, and in the light of which the material of formation becomes new, converted, recreated. This power is the self of the community in its creation, it is the creator of community, and its life as community, shared life. It is the sharing in the community of the life whose source makes the community be itself, by its [192] self-awareness which is Christ -- which is as near as I can get to explaining how a community in the Spirit comes about, and what makes it come about.

192 .. to say that he (Christ) is the symbolic centre is to use the word 'symbol' in a rather special sense, to mean something that gathers together into one word or phrase or act a whole complex of felt feelings and hopes and ideas and intentions and gives them unity and a reality that can somehow be 'turned on' by using that word or gesture. This part of the function of converted language, whose words and gestures are symbols in this sense.

But since the converted community is still in process of becoming ~~human~~ what it is -- still consists to some extent of 'babes in Christ' -- there is a great part of communal awareness which is still unconverted, and it therefore uses the converted language hesitantly, and with varying assurance and meaning.

205 .. 'evil' is the only word to describe the results of trying to treat an ordinary secular community as if it were, or ought to be,

a group of the totally converted.

205 The doctrinal and ritual quarrels, the splits and feuds, the back-biting and accusations of heresy, are almost too involved to be unwound, and all of them show the basic assumption that correctness of doctrine and behaviour are the essential proof, to oneself and others, of being saved. 'Deviationism' and moral failings of any kind, were proof not of being unconverted but of having fallen from one's conversion, and being therefore in a state of [206] reprobation. This was such a terrible thought, especially in connection with one's own children, that any amount of harsh discipline and punishment was used to terrify the young and wayward into that outward conformity....

209 .. the specifically religious is concerned with the formation of human life towards transformation, and secular influences can do this too, and increasingly do so, as understanding of psychology increases. The distinction in that case will not be between secular and religious, which can happily fade into each other, if they are allowed to, but between the secular and the sacred, which is not the same as the religious. The sacred is purely that area of consciousness which is concerned directly with transformation, either in creating the immediate occasion for it, or in expressing [209 210] its immediate results.

c. VII. The Formation Community

213 He (Benedict) wanted something more, and to call it 'God' is to give a name to the source of those queer, restless feelings, those unexplained discontents, those longings and nostalgias that have no clear object but that come to most people.

220 .. the language of Christianity as he (Benedict) knew it did not include concepts that could have made it possible for him to see his transformed awareness of life as in fact identical with the eternal life towards which, he hoped, he was travelling.

223 .. many influences that nobody would describe as religious can create the conditions in which transformation occurs.... On the other hand it is clear that a religious structure of life can provide a language for conversion which ensures that the self-discovery leading to conversion and ~~monks' lives~~ its working out, are more far-reaching in their effects on the personality.

224 The more clearly we recognize the sacred as a matter of not uncommon experience, and recognize how it occurs, and what are the optimum conditions for its occurrence, the better we shall be able to provide a secular formation which serves the purposes of religion. In that case religion needs to do two things; to provide a language in which the transformation-promoting qualities of the secular structure may be expressed, and to provide a ritual occasions which will express the transformation-orientated character of secular living, and so bring about that encounter with the underlying reality of human life which constitutes the sacred.

224 But in a secular culture that is manifestly not directed towards transformation in any ~~may~~ useful way religion has a much bigger part to play. It has actually to provide alternative secular structures. It doesn't call them that, but that is what they are, and the importance of the Church as a political (in the wide sense) institution, and of religious orders and communities within it, has been due to this fact.

224 .. people dedicated to bring about transformation must either find and use an existing secular formation which is suited to its (their) purpose or -- if none exists -- make one.

225 The 'religious life' Benedict created was an excellent secular structure, orientated toward transformation.

225 So when it is regarded as axiomatic that language exhausts meaning it is perhaps necessary to suggest that this can only be true of what I have called the 'total language', which is the whole range of experiences and feelings and hopes and desires common to a particular community, expressed in word [226] and rite and gesture, even when the fullness of that which is symbolized by each unit of communication could not possibly be expressed in a fully satisfactory verbal formulation by anyone engaged in using that total language.

228 For to be 'in the wilderness' means to be out of touch, unrelated to the structures of normal living, and this is the reason both for its efficacy, as sacred, and for its danger, as destructive.

229 .. a life which is totally unrelated, out of touch with the secular structures [230] (whether expressed in a religious language or not) is in danger of this kind of misdirection because it has cut itself off from all values and standards but its home-grown ones.

233 .. the founder laid down ^{as} norms for their behaviour the kind of behaviour that seemed proper to him as converted. These worked all right in the beginning, but proved impossibly hard later on, when what was needed was a secular structure (expressed religiously) to underpin and frame the experience of conversion.

235 But if there is no way to express the presence of a particular quality of life there is likewise no way to express its absence, nor will that absence be realized as a matter for concern.

235 So the observance of the Rule was no longer felt as the framework within which the encounter with God, the salvation occurrence could take place but as itself the only kind of occurrence that had any necessary connection with salvation. The rest -- gifts of prayer, special missions or callings -- were extras.

236 .. the excellence of the ~~Rule~~ formation the Rule provides makes people realize a need which cannot always find satisfaction within the framework of the Rule in its normal interpretation.

237 But a Rule, strict or easy, is the secular structure of daily living, and its value lies solely in the way it helps to form people's minds, so that the challenge of decision shall prove a converting occurrence. The religious language in which it explains itself helps to make clear what the structure is for, and to provide special opportunities for the saving encounter. That is all that a formation structure, however excellent, can do, and when it tries to do more it distorts its own purpose and begins to die on its feet, though it may be a long time about it.

All this is not simply a simile for what happened to Catholic Christianity as a whole; what happened to the Benedictines is the same thing that happened to Catholicism, but the Benedictine developments show it on a small scale. The Church developed a formation structure, a secular organization, and this it had to do in the historical circumstances of its expansion. It was a secular structure explicitly dedicated to the transformation of man, and it carried out its task through its official structure, expressing what was happening in the form of sacramental rites. But the nature of what was happening was not expressed in terms of real occurrence, to human beings as wholes, in the present. It was seen as something to look forward to, whose coming was ensured by obedience to God -- conceived as outside -- and by his grace, also injected from outside.... this is how most people felt about their lives as Christians (and still do feel).

238 .. no formation structure, secular or religious, is relevant to the transformation occurrence except as promoting it, framing it, and providing the setting for its working out.

And when you have a system of law and custom and religious ritual which is regarded as in itself effective of salvation then you have a secular structure which is claiming to be sacred. And once that happens, then the way is clear to every kind of legalism and casuistry and engrusted, arthritic ritual, all regarded as sacred, and therefore not to be touched by the hand of mortal man.

239 So their odd behaviour is explained as part of the system, not as the power of the spirit manifested in the breakdown of the system, and this naturally makes the system itself seem extremely demanding and not really designed for ordinary ~~living~~ people. So you get two systems, one for the advanced, who can manage these difficult skills and therefore qualify for heaven, and another for ordinary people, who may, all the same, qualify -- [240] partly by sticking to the system (at 'O' level) but also by ~~maintaining~~ the assistance and intervention of the successful 'A' level candidate. In this way, when prophets and saints are not -- as they sometimes are -- driven out altogether or personally suppressed, their sanction as signs, as re-assertion of the communities real nature and purpose, is suppressed. They should remind the system that it is only a system, and that it is in its death that it finds its true meaning. By being made part of the system, their power is neutralized.

241 .. these very different ways of interpreting the Christian idea (Puritan and Benedictine)... They both confuse the sacred and the secular. One way imposes behaviour proper to contact with the sacred ~~which~~ as the norm of secular life, the other treats secular life as it it were sacred.

c. VIII. The Meaning of the Church

243 St. John's Gospel, for instance, uses the terminology of gnostic mythology, but the author was talking about real experiences, and his readers (some at any rate) knew this.

243 We have lost the sense of the myth and also of the real human experience which the myth could express. What is left is not, as people hoped, an utterly purified residuum of timeless and absolute truth, but precisely nothing at all.

243 We seem to have lost the ability to recognize our most common experiences as having anything to do with the mythological vocabulary of our faith.

244 Community is not the common existence of a large group of people, it refers to the creation of a relationship, whose nature is not affected by the number of people involved.

244 .. how community springs from encounter -- a confrontation of the individual by something else, one involving a certain degree of conflict, which is the challenge of an 'otherness' recognized as dangerous and to be feared. It is this that creates the decision situation. The decision demanded is one involving self-surrender, a blind handing over of oneself in the face of a future which is blank. There is no conscious content to the conversion event. Transformation is a timeless occurrence to which all previous and succeeding circumstances are totally irrelevant.

Yet it is these preceding and following circumstances that make possible the event, and determine its results. This is the area of what I called formation. Formation is all-important, but only in relation to that to which it gives way. Transformation is in the in between, it is unrelated, unstructured, eternal, self-sufficient, having no hierarchies, no morality, no past, no future, and no possibility of control or even of the observation of what is happening.

The occurrence of conversion in a sexual context also helped to show the nature of the act of surrender as one made in relationship, a relationship of love whose development creates the community we call marriage.

The importance for conversion ~~forms~~ of a confrontation which induces an extreme form of self-knowledge became clear in discussing the symbolic function of nakedness, and the need for a ~~it~~ 'liturgy' to frame and express conversion became apparent also. A sexual and non-religious type of conversion was intended to provide the essential de-mythologized vocabulary for a discussion of salvation, but it was necessary to show next how transformation happens when no single human relationship provides the occasion for conversion, but rather the encounter is with a whole situation, though it is necessarily encountered 'in' one or more individuals.

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245 One of the most important ideas that emerged from both these chapters was that the language of conversion is of crucial importance, because it determines the way in which conversion is worked out, and the area of living which it affects. Conversion affects the whole person; but a human being is a person only in the degree of this self-awareness, developed in the saving (or damning) encounter. And the effect of conversion is to convert the language of self-understanding, so that a whole area of ordinary living has a new type of awareness. This became even more apparent in the chapter on prophecy, when the nature of the power that is released in encounter was seen in its most typical form. The language of a prophet's conversion determines the action to which his conversion impels him, and delimits ~~his~~ his effectiveness as a creator of community.

247 And I suggested that the concept of the religious... is (sic) really to do with the need for a particular kind of formation, which will make transformation more likely. In that case the religious is really part of the secular, and is distinct not in the area of life which it affects or discusses but in the fact that it directs life explicitly towards transformation, whereas the idea of the secular implies an approach which does so only accidentally. So religion is the organization of secular life for sacred purposes, and from one point of view it is co-extensive with secular life, just another way of describing (and therefore modifying) secular life.

summary

247 [modify secular structures vs replacing them with others that have an explicitly religious shape; latter necessary in some cases eg militant materialism; often happens that the religious replacement suffers the same defects as the secular that is duplicated]

248 .. there is one area of living which is certainly formative but which is directly and solely concerned with the occurrence of transformation. This is the sphere of ritual, or religious observance, which frames the sacred. It is formative, it is structured, it is deliberate, but its sole purpose is to provide an occasion for contact with the sacred which is transformative, unstructured, and spontaneous.

249 But the use of a language which is Christian is the way to create a ritual which expresses a Christian notion of the relation between formation and transformation. Christian language is both formative and transformative, it describes secular concerns and focuses all of them on the sacred as their meaning and justification. And the point at which it explicitly changes the one into the other is a ritual one. When a whole community is in question this is necessarily so. Transformation can and usually does occur accidentally in all sorts of odd ways. But if a whole community is dedicated to transformation it can't leave the occurrence to chance. The whole community is, in principle, involved, and therefore it must create deliberately the encounter which is at least potentially transforming.

This is what the Church is for, and what ritual in the Church is for, and the rest of this chapter will ~~be~~ be an attempt to see how this can happen.

251 But to belong to the Church in this sense implies without room for evasion that belonging to it means fellowship or community with all the converted, and a responsibility for creating community for all those who are not yet converted.

.. to accept that one is a member of the Church is to accept community with all mankind, and the demands of this relationship are limitless.

252 The Church cannot, even if it wants to, be a body that transforms, just like that. Transformation is something that happens, and nobody can lay it on ~~an~~ to order. We can only create opportunities for it. Those people who act under the name, Church, have this task of creating both the opportunities and the kind of more remote formation which make it likely or possible that the opportunities will be taken. And it does seem, increasingly, that at the remoter level this is not best done by creating duplicate formative structures which, of their nature, limit the reach of the formation provided, and therefore the effectiveness of that self-awareness as the Church, and as people-who-know-what-salvation-is.

253 This means that the Church is the world's prophet. Prophets, it is true, are separate and odd, but they are separated ~~in~~ by their prophecy. They don't belong anywhere, and ~~that~~ yet they belong more deeply than anyone else to that community which it is their task to create -- a converted, real community, in the spirit. If they came in from outside, from above, they would be no use. Instead they ~~in~~ come out from inside, they erupt and disrupt and interrupt. And the inside that they must come out from is the inside of the community to which they are sent, which is their community, in whose guilt they are involved. 'I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.'

254 As soon as he begins to think he hasn't got unclean lips he'd better shut up, because he can no longer say 'thus says the Lord' but only ~~in~~ 'I think'.

255 Morality is concerned with discovering the kind of person who is able to hear and repent and be converted and live. It is also concerned with the behaviour by which the converted work out their conversion, and so prepare the way for each new conversion -- both their own and other people's. This kind of behaviour, both preceding and following conversion, springs from an interior response to love -- drawing towards conversion and conditioning its working out. It cannot, therefore, conceivably be expressed as rules, except the one rule which isn't really a rule at all: (whole heart etc). ~~More~~

256 Morality has no content, because its point of reference is the occurrence of salvation, the self-giving of faith, which is the act of loving the Lord our God. But morality cannot be simply a matter of interior attitudes, it only discovers its nature in its expression, and its expression is the command 'thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' The moral formation towards conversion, and the moral behaviour that expresses the conversion, are both a matter of outward acts and words, religious ones, in the sense that they are related to the sacred, which is known only in the surrender of faith.

256 Morality is an awareness of man's orientation towards a transformed existence, and this is not only a permanent part of human life, it is what human life as human really is.

256 Ethics is concerned with outward behaviour only. It is a language about morality, by which people can communicate about and agree on the kinds of behaviour which are morally good. Therefore ethics not only can be codified but obviously has to be, because you can't use a language whose words change their meaning according to the wishes of the speakers....

257 .. ethical norms must change in order to mean something to people using them in all sorts of different cultural conditions, otherwise they won't make sense to people, and so cease to be a language at all... In different social conditions the units of ethical language cease to relate to the kinds of behaviour to which they originally referred. They are not meaningful, then, to the people who use them, and communication breaks down.

.. they must still express the unchanging moral direction, otherwise they won't make sense of their subject, and the language will cease to be about anything....

258 .. the ethical responsibility of the Church is ~~pr~~ perhaps primarily political and social, since we have to build structures which subserve the creation of community, and do not prevent or restrict it.

258 But if we can see that education is part of the Church's ethical concern, (remembering that ethics is language about morality in the same ways that aesthetics is a language about art) we shall be even more deeply concerned over education, although less inclined to see Christian education as a matter of imparting facts about Christianity. That is part of it, but it loses its way if it loses sight of its end, which is transformation.

260 .. problem of communicating ~~it~~ it to other people. He has to translate his [261] language, which is religious (in the sense used here, of language relating to transformation) into non-religious language. But in order to do that he has to have a very clear understanding of the meaning of his own language. It is for lack of this understanding that many Christians, when they want to explain what they mean, can only go on using religious words. Their grasp of the meaning of these words is not sufficiently clear for translation to be feasible. Translation of converted language is not of course possible... but the words that become the converted language have a meaning that can be used to communicate quite effectively, in the strictly religious (in my sense) context, and it is in this communication that they can become the language of conversion. Then, possibly, they can be translated (just as language, not conversion language) into concepts that can convey something in terms of another culture.

262 But the words that relate to the sacred -- redemption, conversion, salvation, God, Christ, resurrection, glory -- are no use whatever for this purpose.... The only way they can be used then is as the words of a mythology, and this is fine for Christians among themselves, because they know -- or should know -- that mythology is a language that indicates a reality beyond the reach of any language.

263. The way ahead lies in the realization that the language of the cultic community is about things that happen to people, and that certain kinds of behaviour are appropriate to such happenings. What the prophetic Church cannot convey by words it can convey in the total language which is the language of Christianity as life in Christ. It doesn't mean that words don't matter, but that the words can only be translated and heard by the world as the total language of sanctity.

The implications of this are appalling. It means that the Church is only obeying her prophetic calling in so far as she is clearly and unequivocally expressing the fact of Christ in her whole life. Christ poor, Christ serving, Christ healing, Christ suffering, Christ dying, and -- but only through death -- Christ risen and glorified. A language that does not mean what it says [264] is a nonsense language. If the liturgy of the Church says things that the Church does not clearly and visibly mean in her total language of living -- then the Church is talking nonsense, loud and emphatic and quite lunatic nonsense. It is nonsense to express repentance liturgically, and maintain in practice in the secular sphere that the Church has nothing of which to repent. If the Church * goes through a ritual that expresses the 'fellowship' of love, and does not show fellowship and love in its ~~many~~ secular actions -- not just the actions of individuals but the corporate activity that expresses in secular terms the transforming purpose -- then this is nonsense. If we urge people to Mass, and don't emphasize that the language of sacrifice and self-giving is the secular word of this action, then this summons has the feverish urgency of the lunatic, and the whole affair has the character of self-absorbed and self-validating obsessiveness that characterizes lunatic behaviour, which is typically ritualistic.

268 Ritual is a deliberately arranged confrontation with the sacred.

269 Formation is for the unconverted. It is designed to create conditions for the converting encounter. A ritual which wants to provide a good formation, then, needs to take into account the fact of unconversion. It should be intelligible in unconverted terms. It should create a sense of belonging. It should not put up any unnecessary barriers, either intellectual or emotional. It must make everyone feel at home, safe, cared for, valued.

269 .. many people, at any given time, will be at a stage where these are the only ways in which the liturgy can help them at all.

269 The more immediate formation for conversion, a little nearer the centre, is concerned with discovering a sense of what the Church is for, of the relationship of its people to the sacred, and their responsibility in that relationship. The readings and prayers of a liturgical assembly are about this... the language is one that can carry the power of converted consciousness.

270 You can't have prophecy without tradition, otherwise the prophet speaks for himself alone and has no point of contact with his hearers.

.. even the tradition is not purely formative, but suffers that retroactive effect of transformation, which defines it in relation to the salvation event. The very framing of the sacral suffers a sacral alteration, and becomes capable of mediating the presence of the sacred. It becomes in fact sacramental.

271 The lead-in to conversion is repentance, and this is provided for ritually. But it is not just a preparation for an encounter that has not yet taken place, a ritual purification before entering the holy place. That is a formative idea, and the formula of penitence is formative, certainly. But in this ambiguous setting it is also the result of the encounter with the sacred, working backwards to define the person as singular and in need of salvation. The person who discovers himself in this encounter is already saved, but in his expression of repentance the penitent refers to himself as in need of salvation. And both are true at the same time.

The fundamental ambiguity at the heart of Christian experience is what makes this ritual action really a wilderness. Metaphors help to make one feel its wildness and remoteness, but the fact is not dependent on the feeling. The fact is a basic human experience that shows how conversion, love, faith, salvation, or whatever you like to call it occur in ambiguous, 'in between' situations, and not otherwise.

275 The conversion occurred in the gap, when he surrendered himself to a vocation that had no obviously sensible content of any kind.

This is the pattern of all conversions, it is in this sense that conversion occurs in the wilderness where the certainties of the Law, the structures of formation, have broken down, and only the choice remains. The wilderness is framed by the ritual reminder of the vocation of the Church, and the need for grace and repentance. But at the point of encounter the framework breaks down. It provides the ideas which constitute the challenge, and thereby shows the yawning gap between.

277 On Christ. Just mystery apparently.