



Where Are We Going? How Can We Get There? Imagination for Transformation

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WHEN MY TWO YOUNGEST DAUGHTERS WERE SMALL, I USED TO SING THEM THE song, "Where are you going, my little ones, little ones?" while they lay snuggled together in their big double bed under a soft, green chenille spread. As I sang it, a deep sadness filled my heart and permeated my tone, a sadness from thinking not just of the brevity of the time when they would be small, but of the inevitability of their future: "Turn around, you'll be young wives with babes of your own." My vision was limited, my imagination blocked. I could see for them only what I had seen for myself. And while I treasured my children and my role as a mother, still, as I sang, the words and the melody came out as a haunting lament.

Fortunately my daughters were not limited by my imagination. That was the early '70s, and the world was changing rapidly. Now, in the summer of '95, the year of the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the ordination of women in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, both those little ones are strong young women ready for ordination into ministry in that church—a tribute to the imaginations of many women and men who saw beyond the dictates of tradition. These people envisioned a church where gender was not one of the factors that determined who could be ordained. And they also imagined a process that successfully moved the stream of tradition into uncharted territory.

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But the problems of the world and of the church, as they prepare to roll into the twenty-first century, continue. In fact, we still struggle intensely with the tensions that result from gender inequity, and have brought forward other tensions: the polarities of views about the ways sexuality can be expressed, about religious pluralism, about the needs and rights of children born and unborn, about solutions for problems of domestic violence and street crime, racism, ageism, sexism, and all the other -isms that separate us—issues where people of good faith stand in opposite corners, unable to see beyond the walls they have erected, unable to imagine a new, creative vision. Bruno Bettelheim has noted that violence is the behavior of someone who cannot imagine any other solution to a besetting problem.¹ I contend that assorted other behaviors and attitudes are also the result of lack of imagination: polarization, name-calling, self-righteousness, prejudice, and discrimination, as well as spiritlessness, clinging to the past as reflected in our heritage, hopelessness, boredom, malaise, and so forth. One might also go on to talk about physical problems that have their root in our inability creatively to visualize solutions to what seem to be insurmountable problems.

The intent of this article is not to set out solutions for these many problems nor to speculate on ways to implement these solutions. Rather I will emphasize the crucial role imagination plays in helping us find new ways of approaching problems, how we can use our imaginations to work toward this end, and why it is so important for religious institutions to foster rather than fear the creative power of the imagination. I will first define what I mean by imagination, establishing its integral importance to the life of the spirit and to the church, and comment on what I see as a detrimental alienation between religions and the world of the imagination and the arts, with particular emphasis on creative writing. Then I will discuss why it is insufficient simply to imagine new goals; we also need to imagine new paths to reach those goals. In addition, I will discuss why women, especially, need to develop and use their imaginations both for the visioning of goals and for the creation of processes that will make it possible to reach those goals. And finally, after establishing the importance of imagination, I will suggest ways in which we can all develop and enhance our imaginative powers.

I. IMAGINATION

When we hear the word imagination, we often think of it as the special province of creative artists, writers, musicians. Or we might confuse it with fantasy and therefore dismiss it—“She is just imagining things again,” or “He has an overactive imagination.” But, according to Ann and Barry Ulanov, the imagination is “the central resource of the life of the psyche and of the life of the spirit.”² In fact, they would go so far as to say that “there is no life of the spirit without imagination.”³ That is not to say that all images that arise from our imaginations are the

¹Ann and Barry Ulanov, *The Healing Imagination* (New York: Paulist, 1991) 130.

²Ibid., 3.

³Ibid.

work of the Spirit of God. Spirits abound, and not all of them are holy. More will be discussed later in this article about the importance of always grounding the personal in the traditional, while at the same time always letting the personal inform, reform, and transform the traditional.

Most contemporary discussion of the imagination is dependent upon the work of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In chapter 13 of *Biographia Literaria* (1817) he differentiates between primary imagination and secondary imagination. Primary imagination is possessed by all people and is "the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM." Secondary imagination "differs only in degree and in the mode of its operation," and is the imaginative process of those involved in the arts. Those of us who teach in the field of the arts would argue that the line between the two is not as great as most people think, and that all people can and should use the gift of secondary imagination, which takes the images of the primary imagination and "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate...to idealize and to unify." When I think of people who say, "I have no imagination," or "I am not a creative type," or "I am not talented," I am reminded of Jesus' story of the ten talents (a large portion of money). The person given only one talent, who hid it rather than finding ways to make the most of it, was the one Jesus took to task.

Imagination (both primary and secondary) is present and active in us all to a greater or lesser extent, whether we are aware of the images or not, and whether we use these images for our own well-being or let the images use us.

They just happen. They arrive in consciousness from the unconscious, like a wisp of the spirit....They speak of another life running in us like an underground river-current, always present, never quite seen, exerting influence on us, lapping quietly on our dry ground, rich soil from which to grow things.⁴

This imagination is the place deep within that generates images with the power to heal, to synthesize, to affect our bodies and the bodies of others. "Things are constantly reborn in the imagination, made fresh, brought to us to renew themselves and to renew us."⁵ Much has been written in the medical world about the power of the imagination in physical healing.⁶ Inner emotional healing, documented by a number of Christian writers, is also the work of the Spirit through the imagination.⁷

⁴Ibid., 14.

⁵Ibid., 6.

⁶See, especially, Gerald Epstein, *Healing Visualizations* (New York: Bantam New Age, 1989); Ted Kaptchuk and M. Croucher, *The Healing Arts* (Fort Worth, TX: Summit, 1986); O. Carl Simonton, *Getting Well Again* (New York: Prentice Hall, Spectrum, 1979); Deepak Chopra, *Perfect Health* (New York: Harmony, 1991).

⁷See, especially, John Sanford, *Healing and Wholeness* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1977); Morton T. Kelsey, *Psychology, Medicine and Christian Healing* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988); or Francis MacNutt, *Healing* (New York: Bantam, 1974).

II. IMAGINATION AND OUR TRADITION

Within the mainline Christian traditions, more often than not, there seems to be a fear of the power of imagination. Where will it take us? What if the images that arise are not orthodox? What if our images collide? Or it frightens us because of the times we feel “haunted by images of our own insufficiencies.”⁸ In addition, we know, and therefore we fear, the power of our images to alter us physiologically—stimulate appetites, bring us to tears, produce rage or sexual desire, even orgasms, make our stomachs heave or our bowels loosen. Images, whether in our minds or outside of us, hold enormous power over our bodies, a power we fear because we lose control. But it is in this very loss of control that our imaginations can work to bring us to new synthesis, new healing.

Imagination is tough. It is naturally open. It wants to see everything. That is a large part of its healing power. It includes the daunting negative as well as the uplifting positive. It naturally renounces denial. It looks to include the wildly spiraling off-center event as well as the grounding, centering one. Imagination instructs us that seeing what is there means looking directly into the off-center events and the gaps.⁹

Yet we fear our own imaginations and, therefore, those of others. This fear is evident in institutional Christianity’s response to the private imaginations of those within the tradition (consider, for instance, the flurry surrounding the RE-imagining Conference held in the fall of 1993). But it is equally obvious in the attitude of religious traditions toward the arts, particularly toward writing, an attitude that has sent most artists fleeing from the church for hundreds of years.

This fear is centuries old and has caused what has been an estrangement, if not a divorce, between the worlds of organized religion and the arts. According to T. S. Eliot, “the secularization of the novel, that particular form of literature that affects the largest number of people, has been continuous for the last three hundred years.”¹⁰ Edward Robinson, in his book *The Language of Mystery*, concurs: “That, at least, is where I start: with a situation in which there is indeed an almost complete separation between the world of religion and the world of the contemporary arts.”¹¹

At its core, it seems to me, the problem that religious institutions have with the world of the arts in general and creative writing in particular hinges on the same issue from which our fear of our own imagination arises—the issue of control. The imagination cannot be controlled. Nor can the people who have learned to use and trust their imaginations. “The wind blows where it will.” And institutions have a deep-seated fear of what they cannot control. The reality is that there will always be a gap between the images that arise out of the subconscious of

⁸Ulanov, *The Healing Imagination*, 5.

⁹Ibid., 26.

¹⁰T. S. Eliot, “Religion and Literature,” in *Religion and Modern Literature: Essays in Theory and Criticism*, ed. G. B. Tennyson and Edward E. Ericson, Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975) 24.

¹¹Edward Robinson, *The Language of Mystery* (London: SCM, 1987) 1.

a contemporary person and the images that arose hundreds of years ago in the imaginations of others and have since been formed into dogma.

For example, there has been in the past twenty years or so a resurgence of the god-image in feminine form, springing from the imaginations of both men and women within the Christian tradition. Rather than seeing these images as a corrective for thousands of years of emphasis on the masculine image of God and an indication of "the collective hunger for the missing feminine in ourselves, in our dealings with each other, in our treatment of the earth we live in,"¹² many people within mainline Christianity have screamed "heresy" and worked to marginalize or silence the honest, integrative work of the human imagination.

There will always be a gap between the images preserved by the institutional church and the personal images brought to consciousness by the imaginations of contemporary Christians. And it is in this gap that the creative work of God can happen. "And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See I make all things new'" (Rev 21:5). There seems to be today a belief that a tradition can survive and be kept alive without continuous exposure to the creative energy and vision of the imagination. But a religious tradition that is closed to the imaginations of living people will quickly grow stagnant and die. In fact, many outside of the church would say this has already happened.

However, it is also possible to err on the side of universalizing one's personal images and using those images to manipulate others, or of isolating oneself from a community of accountability. "Experience can also tell us of the shipwreck that the individual, or even whole societies, can come to if the imagination tries to break wholly free from the influence of tradition."¹³ One might think of our own images as being like a slip taken from the tangled plant that is our unconscious. Put into the water of our conscious mind, it might continue to grow and develop roots, or it might dry up and blow away, but by transplanting it into the ground of the tradition (in those places and among those people where one can find fertile, life-giving ground) it can be nourished with other images, other ideas, pruned, cared for, allowed to grow to whatever size it is meant to be, but not allowed to take over the whole garden like a noxious weed. David Koresh, deceased leader of the Branch Davidians, is a good, current example of one whose imagination lost its moorings, as he let his personal images grow unchecked, resulting in a clash with the government and the horrifying destruction of the whole group.

But this tendency to worship one's own images can be much more subtle.

Without access to tradition, preachers concoct sermons however moving and interesting, which do not reach beyond their own experiences in prayer, in marriage, or divorce, in the war, in training in seminary or hospital or prison. We do not hear the gospel. Worse still, without acknowledging tradition, we all tend to identify with our god-images and want everyone else to identify with them too.¹⁴

¹²Ulanov, *The Healing Imagination*, 63.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., 32.

It is in the gaps between our personal god-images and the images for God perpetuated by our traditions that new life can be found. “[This gap] makes us ask how the old official pictures of God touch, inform, confront our personal god-images, and how our own images touch, confront, inform those of the tradition.”¹⁵

There are many more gaps, however, than the gap between the god-image of tradition and the personal god-images of our sub-conscious. For example, in a recent article, John Alexander, a life-long rights advocate, has begun to recognize how a championing of rights has created a society of “moral two-year-olds.”¹⁶ He calls us to look imaginatively beyond the polarizing effects of domination language versus rights language (both of which, in his view, have proved to be bankrupt) and toward a creative vision where polemics on power mature into language of the common good and where notions of individualism and personal rights blossom into awareness of interdependence.

The creative imagination in fact is the open imagination, the imagination that prompts us to think the unthinkable, to conceive the inconceivable, to imagine the imaginable. It is thus our natural, inborn faculty for transcendence, for rising above the limits of what previously seemed possible.¹⁷

What is important to remember is that the artists or the literary giants of this world are not alone in having this faculty for transcendence, in being able to use their imaginations for the well-being of the whole. “We are all able, being endowed with this faculty of imagination, to some extent to create, and continually to recreate, the world in which we live.”¹⁸ Our vision need not be limited to the horizon. Rather our imaginations give us the power to see beyond the horizon to new possibilities never thought of before. And it is this imaginative vision that institutions must learn not to fear, but to nurture, trusting that the God who set the tradition in motion will work to keep it fresh and growing, by continually letting the Spirit blow through as it will, bringing all to wholeness.

III. HOW WILL WE GET THERE?

It is important to be able to see beyond the horizon, to imagine new ways of being and relating and living, to set goals that keep both ourselves and our tradition moving forward. It is equally as important to marshall imaginative power in visioning the process for getting there. New goals require new paths, and the mistake made most often has been to take an old path to try to reach a new goal. Most revolutions have failed in the long run because the revolutionaries were able to imagine a new society, but failed to imagine a way to get there that did not rely on old methods. Therefore they undercut the vision before it had a chance to come to fruition. The communist revolutions have been a classic example of this.

¹⁵Ibid., 31.

¹⁶John Alexander, “Beyond Domination and Liberation,” *The Other Side* 30 (September/October 1994) 32.

¹⁷Robinson, *The Language of Mystery*, 12.

¹⁸Ibid., 21.

A recent collection of stories titled *Sandino's Daughters Revisited* tells of the struggles of the women within the Sandinista Party because the males within the Sandinista Party, in their attempt to overthrow oppressive forces, had failed to notice that they were using those same oppressive forces against the women in their own party. It is these women who now are struggling for a new image by which to live. "Gioconda Belli says, 'We can't give up dreaming, even if it sounds romantic and obsolete. What we need is not simply a formula for improving the economy; it's something much more profound, which we're not going to come to quickly.'"¹⁹ Closer to home, the women's movement has stumbled along the way, often because the path chosen, the methods used, were the familiar methods established by the patriarchal structures. Old methods are incapable of moving us toward new goals. Imaginative vision must be brought to bear on both the goal and the process. As Audre Lorde says, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."²⁰

A relatively recent historical event in which imagination was used both in process and in goal was the Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott of 1955. The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., a man caught by the love of God in Christ, imagined a world as Christ had imagined it nearly two thousand years earlier, a world where the meek inherit the earth and the peacemakers are blessed, where the weeping are comforted and the merciful given mercy.

But it was not enough to have an imaginative vision of a goal. King also had to have a vision of the process, the way to move toward the goal that would not undercut or sidetrack it. For this, he looked to Gandhi's imaginative vision of non-violent resistance: "People who had never heard of the little brown saint of India were now saying his name with an air of familiarity....Gandhi furnished the method."²¹ But King had to go beyond Gandhi and use his own imagination to translate Gandhi's method into Montgomery society and politics. King's vision, based on the goals of Jesus and the process of Gandhi, could never have been realized if he had not, in addition, been able imaginatively to create new ways of responding, new ways of organizing, new ways of claiming dignity, ways that did not use the familiar methods of the oppressor, but forged new paths that would lead to and not undercut the goal. One can only speculate what might have happened had this visionary not been struck down and replaced by angrier voices, both black and white, who see hate as stronger than love, non-violence as weakness, and passive resistance as unworkable idealism.

But his legacy remains, and we who see the world as still in need of healing can learn from his imaginative vision of both a goal and a process containing all of the basic elements of the goal. By doing this, we can open ourselves to the power of

¹⁹Taken from a review of *Sandino's Daughters Revisited* (Rutgers University, 1994) by Renny Golden: "Sandino's Daughters Break Rank," *The Other Side* 30 (September-October 1994) 52.

²⁰Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing, 1984) 110-23.

²¹Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1958) 44.

the Spirit that will give us the images by which we can envision both the goal beyond the horizon and the path that will move us in that direction.

IV. WOMEN AND IMAGINATION

Because imaginations draw on what we have learned and experienced, all imaginations are, in a sense, time and culture bound. Our language is given to us, our syntax, our system of thinking, our metaphors, our literary allusions. White women, as well as people of color, trying to thrive within the dominant culture, often find themselves silent, knowing they have within them a truth that needs speaking, but finding they have no words, no easy reference points, to explain what they are sensing or feeling as truth. So, we often feel inarticulate, muddling about for words, overwhelmed by the rational arguments around us, and yet, deep within, knowing that something about this world, this culture, this religion, is askew: my truth or the truths of others who are not a part of the dominant culture are not being spoken with clarity.²²

This poses a triple task. We need to use our imaginations to see the goal beyond the horizon, to chart a new path to get there, and also to create new materials, new metaphors, new allusions. "We have no ready-made system, no vocabulary in place, no easy syntax, no context of allusion, no given subject matter to embrace us and call us forth."²³ We have always known instinctively that the solitary hero on a quest for the holy grail was not an image that spoke to women. Though we may have been seduced by its power, deep within we have known that the mighty hero slaying the dragon was not our way of doing things. But neither were we the sleeping princess waiting to be kissed by a prince, or Mary, the virgin, perfect in every way. The vast legacy of western culture is a legacy in which women find few metaphors that fit, few allusions that ring true, few images grounded in the experience of our lives. The gift of the women artists of the last decades is that more and more they have rejected what our culture has handed them and have let their own imaginations forage about, searching for and finding new ways of thinking and speaking.

Women have gone within themselves to find their own sources of spiritual truth. We didn't have much of an alternative, really. Where were we to go for meaning, for identity? To books written with the assumption that the male perspective is also the human perspective? To the arts, where woman is pictured as madonna, virgin, or whore? To the mass media, where she is seen as an object for consumption?²⁴

What has come out when women have gone within themselves is art (literature and visual arts) that draws its power and metaphor from the essential unity of

²²Much work on this subject has been done. See particularly the writings of Sallie McFague, *Speaking in Parables* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), and *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Fortress, 1988).

²³Marilyn Sewell, ed., *Cries of the Spirit: A Celebration of Women's Spirituality* (Boston: Beacon, 1991) 1.

²⁴Ibid., 6.

all things, from the pleasures and pains of relationships of every sort. Separation is seen as an illusion—a concept being presented as a new theory by modern physicists, but long known instinctively by women and mystics of all traditions.²⁵ Women's art is beginning to create a legacy of images and language grounded in the earth, in birth and death, in tears and blood, in seeds and growth, cords and connections, cycles and spirals, food and all that is natural. Women are looking beyond sentimentality—that inability to look reality in the face and see into the depth of things. And women are also rejecting cynicism (the flip side of sentimentality), which is a vision that refuses to see good in the world. In this century, Christian writing, by and large, has been dominated by sentimentality, and secular writing by cynicism. Imaginative vision is necessary to bridge the gap between these two and bring them into a truthful whole.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza describes this process in relationship to biblical interpretation as a "hermeneutics of imagination,"²⁶ where we can seek to "articulate alternative liberating interpretations that do not build on the androcentric dualisms and patriarchal functions of the text. [This process] allows women to enter the biblical text with the help of historical imagination, narrative amplifications, artistic recreations, and liturgical celebrations."²⁷

It is clear that for women, whether we are trying to illuminate a biblical text, pastor a congregation, live with a spouse, parent children, work toward social or political change, or live authentically wherever our lives take us, it is necessary to tap the power of the imagination. The purpose is not just to grasp a vision and a path that will lead to that vision, but to imagine new metaphors, create new syntax, find or develop new allusions that will communicate that vision in a way that captivates and empowers us and those around us.

V. KEEPING OUR CREATIVE IMAGINATIONS IN GOOD PRACTICE

At a lecture on religious pluralism, Anglican theologian John Hick talked about how the Christian symbol system fits us because we were born into it and formed by it, but that it needs to give way to a symbol system free of absolutist claims. When asked how a theologian could come up with such a system, he quickly responded, "That is not the task of the theologian, it is the task of the artist." The assumption of the statement was that one could not be both, that theologians are not gifted with creative imaginations. I would argue that this dichotomy is one that the imagination must bridge in order for our theologies to be infused with the creative, imaginative wind of the Spirit. And it begins with a recognition that we all have imaginations that can be developed. There is much we can do to stimulate our imaginations so they will be ready to catch the wind of the Spirit as it blows where it will.

1. The first step is the most enjoyable. It is a pledge to ourselves that we will

²⁵Ibid., 11.

²⁶Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said* (Boston: Beacon, 1992) 73.

²⁷Ibid., 12.

spend some time each day reading or looking at the artistic works of women or of other disenfranchised groups. *Cries of the Spirit* is a particularly powerful collection of poetry and prose by contemporary American women. But there are hundreds of other books recently published—novels, short stories, poetry, literary non-fiction—in which new voices are being heard, new images developed, new visions articulated.

When reading, it is important to remember that just because the author is a woman or a member of some other disenfranchised group it does not necessarily mean that her or his writing is free of the powerful images and biases of the dominant culture. We are all products of that culture and moving beyond it is a slow and arduous process. Reading must be done intelligently and self-reflectively. What is this work of art doing to me? Does it strengthen or confuse me? Does it draw me toward wholeness or fracture me even more? Does it plant seeds of hope or seeds of despair? Does it integrate or disintegrate? Does it break me out of old ways of thinking or dig those ruts deeper?

There is a generosity about true works of art. They give to us all that we wish to take, all that we feel we can use, free and for nothing....Both the giving and the taking are costly in terms of effort....We know a poet, said Coleridge, because he makes us poets. What the poet does, that is, is to activate us in our own capacity for what the Greeks called *poiesis*, making....So there is this interdependence between the artist and the rest of us.²⁸

When you find what is for you a work of art, you will know it because it will empower you to continue along the imaginative path it has begun. You will become part of the poem, the story, the painting, extending it, expanding on it, letting it live through you. What art does, in fact, is to draw you into its truth-telling, tapping your own imagination to deepen the truth, leading you to places you never thought possible.

I hope I have said enough about works of art for it to be clear that the work done upon them, the work they do, the work they enable us to do, is not subject to any of those physical laws of change and decay. On the contrary, the real creation they achieve is the creation of energy.²⁹

There is a decision required here, a decision to pledge to ourselves that every day we will avail ourselves of some work of art, enter into its energy flow, let it carry us along to some new vision for our own life. Then that decision must be undergirded by discipline—turning a vision into a daily routine that lifts us above the routine.

2. The second step is to absorb the personal implications of the following statements:

Because I am a part of the human race, I have an active imagination given me by my creator for my own healing and the making whole of the creation.

²⁸Robinson, *The Language of Mystery*, 38-39.

²⁹Ibid., 75.

Whether I have been given five or two or one “talent,” my well-being depends on my using what I have been given (see Matt 25:14-30).

The Spirit depends in large part on our imaginations to bring us life-giving, healing images. “There is no life in the spirit without imagination.”³⁰

By daring to receive what happens spontaneously (primary imagination), and consciously working with it (secondary imagination), I can enter into the creative stream that brings fresh-flowing water into stagnant pools.

“Imagination brings an eternity of literary graces to the practice of religion. It changes preaching, makes over praying, enables to teach.”³¹

Through imagination, we begin a process with no idea of where it will end, and we need to allow ourselves to live in that suspension for as long as it takes.

Imagination allows us every once in a while, through the process of writing or meditating, to write or see more than we know, and by so doing, to discover something new. This something new is for us God’s grace.

3. If we take these statements seriously, we cannot help but want to do what we can to activate our own imaginations, to make them ready to receive the healing grace that God wants to give us.

This is a three part process: First of all, we need to let the images happen. This means giving our minds uncluttered time and space for the imagination to work. By setting aside twenty minutes a day for quiet reflection and meditation, we can let images roll through our minds as they will, unedited, making space in our minds for the Spirit to work. Or, we can simply spend time each day freely writing anything that comes to mind, with two or three pages each morning or night as our goal. Again, it is important not to edit ourselves, or worry about spelling or grammar or proprieties. Just write. There is a generative power in writing that flows from deep within and allows us to say more than we thought we knew, see more than we had ever imagined before.

Second, by being reflective, by looking long and hard at what has happened during our times of free flow, we take ourselves, our images, and our own creative ability seriously. By doing so, we give our imagination the trust and freedom to work for us, for our wholeness and the wholeness of all creation.

And finally, we can learn how to mold our images, shape them, rub them up against the images of the tradition, critique them for their life-giving ability, move them into the public domain through published writing, exhibited art, and so forth. By doing this, we let them become a part of the flow of energy in this world that works toward wholeness. This sounds simple enough, but it is actually a life-long process, the process of becoming good at putting into words or on a canvas or in clay or music the fruits of our imaginations.

VI. CONCLUSION

And so we ask, “Where are we going?” and “How can we get there?” Both in

³⁰Ulanov, *The Healing Imagination*, 3.

³¹Ibid., 19.

the church and in society at large, problems beset us from every side. We often feel caught in irreconcilable polarities, pulled into dichotomous thinking. Or we lose hope. It is my contention that the answer to both questions lies in the healing, reconciling work of the imagination that enables us to see beyond the horizon to new goals and to envision new paths that will reach those goals.

If that is true, then we need to ask those same questions again in terms of imagination: "Where are we going?" and "How can we get there?" In answer to the first question, I have stressed the need for a renewed intimacy between the worlds of religious institutions and the worlds of the imagination and the arts. "The faith must be made to speak, and not in the hectoring voice of the reactionary or in the attenuated and embarrassed tones of the liberal,"³² but in the open, creative, challenging voice of the artist in each of us.

I hope that we will all see ourselves as a part of the needed process of drawing the worlds of religion and the arts together again so that art can flow from the hope and life-force that is religion at its best, and religion can be continually reformed and transformed by the artists among us. "Transformation is what faith and imagination have in common: they take the stuff of ordinary life and place it in the light of the ultimate questions."³³

There are, in the world of writing, a few, isolated voices crying for a renewal of the moral dimensions of art, an art that will "rediscover, generation by generation, what is necessary to humanness,"³⁴ an art whose spiritual dimension "gives it a depth, a meaning, against which everything else reverberates, so that every other activity, from making love to painting, seems not to be an isolated exercise, but is enriched by being part of the greater scheme of things."³⁵ And there are some voices within our religious traditions calling for a treasuring of the creative imagination.

I also hope, in those places and among those people for whom religion is a passion and/or a profession, that fear of the unknown, the unusual, the unorthodox, the uncontrollable will be transformed; that the creative imagination will be embraced; that artists of all kinds and the artist within each of us will be nurtured and supported; and that the creative energy of the Spirit will be let loose, moving the tradition as it will, in ways beyond our control.

And I hope that if my daughters are ever singing to their own children, "Where are you going, my little ones," their voices will be filled with a joyful trust in the creative power of God working through the imaginations of the faithful all over the globe. Such hope-filled actions would, in fact, demonstrate the greatest possible faith in a God we believe to be continually at work bringing creation to completion, a God willing and eager to use our imaginations to give us both a transformative, healing vision for where we can go, and also a vision of the path we will need to get there. 

³²Gregory Wolfe, "The Christian Writer in a Fragmented Culture," *Image: A Journal of the Arts and Religion*, no. 7 (Fall 1994) 97.

³³Ibid.

³⁴McFague, *Speaking in Parables*, 63.

³⁵Dan Wakefield, "A Journey of Return," *Theology Today* 47/2 (1990) 125.