

Tom Zanzig. *The Transformed Heart: Spirituality, Religion, and the Struggle for Integrity*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017. xxi, 228 pp. \$25.00. Paperback. ISBN: 9781626982161.

Reviewed by Mary Frohlich, RSCJ
Catholic Theological Union

Tom Zanzig has been doing youth ministry, writing popular catechetical programs, and giving workshops for more than five decades, and this book is in many ways both a memoir and a testimony to the fruit of this lifetime of practice. A great many Catholics who are now sixty or older will identify with his story of growing up in the pre-Vatican II church and then, after many ups and downs, discovering a completely different way to be “spiritual.” With much sincerity and humility, Zanzig recounts his personal conversion from a conformity-based, achievement-oriented, sin-focused spirituality to one that is profoundly open, vital, relational, and experiential. As he underwent this shift he discovered a pattern that he believes is universal in human spiritual growth: first hunger, then search, then an awakening, and finally a response. This is an ongoing spiral pattern, and it may take place at different paces in eight different aspects of our lives—physical, affective, relational, moral, intellectual, radical trusting/theistic, communal/religious, and Christian. Thus, the pattern itself is simple, but in our actual lives it may be quite complex—“like a wildly erratic Slinky,” as he puts it (95). Yet it always tends toward discovery of the integrity of our “true self” (a concept he borrows from Thomas Merton).

At the heart of Zanzig’s conversion is a shift from a high Christology, in which the divine Jesus comes from outside the world to offer us a chance at redemption, to a low Christology, in which Jesus lives a human life and offers us intimate accompaniment in our own human struggles. While affirming his own great love of Jesus, the author now believes that people can follow the spiritual path to integrity in any religion, or even in no religion. His shining example is his second wife, who is a fine human being who does not feel the need for religious practice. Zanzig continues to be a practicing Catholic, but he speaks for those for whom the walls of the church have dissolved, and who see God’s love flowing freely in all creation. He offers his testimony as a kind of bridge that may help those both inside and outside the church to recognize one another as fellow pilgrims on the path to becoming who they are most deeply meant to be.

Among the charms of this book are the many personal stories, as well as frequent experience-based suggestions for spiritual practices. Zanzig offers all this with both wisdom and humility, telling stories that demonstrate his own failures and struggles as well as the moments of great delight. Even while describing some “mystical” experiences, he stays fully grounded in everyday, ordinary life. The spirituality he presents is truly for everybody, no matter one’s age, state in life, spiritual experience, or religion (or “none”). The book seems particularly well suited for book clubs or discussion groups in parish or campus ministry settings. Even those who may quibble with the author’s low Christology and ecclesiology will find much benefit in reflecting on their own experiences of hunger, search, awakening, and response as he guides their journey with stories, practices, and reflection questions.