

Ring Out Reflection

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I want to tell you a story that I think expresses why it is worth while to offer the gift of this tower, its light and its bells to our city at this point in its history.

On the 9th of November of an eventful and even terrifying year a tall blond gothic figure stood on the floor of the senate of a great empire. Facing him were the powerful politicians who could still not believe that this man had penetrated into the heart of the imperial system. They waited fearfully to learn what he intended now that he had obtained power.

The empire was that of Rome, the year was 409 of the Common Era, the name of the tall figure on whom all eyes rested, was Alaric the Goth. His subsequent attack and siege would damage and cripple the city. In the following weeks thousands of refugees would stream down the Amalfi coast fleeing south. Some would take passage to Sicily. Those who had money would take passage to the glittering cities of the North African Mediterranean coast.

On the quayside in one of these cities there was the new young governor of the province. His name was Volusianus. He was shaken and appalled at what had happened to his country. In his desperation he wrote a letter to an older friend living along the coast, basically asking for meaning and reassurance. The older friend replied and later elaborated his reply into one of the great books of the Christian tradition.

The older friend said something like this. Volusianus, there is a way to remain sane and grounded if you are living in a turbulent moment of history. You must remember that there are always two cities, the city of Humanity and the city of God. The city of

humanity, being a construct of time, is always both being built and being dismantled. The city of God is eternal. And so Volusianus, if you wish to find meaning and assurance at such a time as this, then, as you walk in the changing streets of the city of humanity you must believe that at the same time you are participating in building the city of God.

The older friend who wrote that letter was Augustine of Hippo. The book he later wrote is THE CITY OF GOD.

This evening, by building this tower, by its rainbow of colour and by the harmony of its bells, this Cathedral is addressing a modern glittering city by another ocean. And once again, as in the twilight of an ancient empire a voice spoke of there being always two cities, this tower speaks the same unchanging truth. And when we know this truth we are able to live in the city of humanity, even in a turbulent time of history, with meaning and hope, and joy and celebration.