

## **In Praise of Space**

### **I. Space**

Good afternoon. I come to you speaking from my two disciplines—depth psychology, including my clinical work as psychoanalyst, and theology, in my teaching as professor of Psychiatry and Religion at Union Theological Seminary. I come also as a person in the pew of your church, representing one of the few who come to the eight o'clock Sunday service.

As a professor, I study and teach about patterns of psyche in relation to religious questions, for example, of suffering, evil, dread of the good. I am very interested in the interplay of our God-images, by which I mean our personal ones, our pet gods, our group gods, and the official God-images given in Scripture, worship, theological doctrine. I am wont to say to students, you must make room in your preaching for your people's pet gods or they will not be able to hear about the official God-images in Scripture, and the best way of doing that is to speak from a space that includes your own pet God-images. Yet I emphasize to speak from that space not about those personal images, except rarely. I am wont to say there is no future to the church without acknowledgement of psyche, that underground river of images in us that presses us to find and create our own path, despite our sinkholes where we disappear to nothingness. That river of images insists all parts

of us be given a seat at the table, not just the ones we call good. Jung says, "It is only through the psyche that we can establish that God acts upon us." This insistence on psychic reality gets me in trouble with my theological colleagues (Jung 1952/1958, para 757).

Yet, also, in my clinical work, my insistence that psyche is another medium through which what is beyond psyche reaches us, that God speaks through the psyche just as God reaches us through Scripture, worship, symbols, political and historical events, even lectures (!), gets me in trouble with my psychoanalytical colleagues. Although they might invoke religious language, using words like 'sacred' and even 'prayer,' 'resurrection,' they deny the referent. The only referent, where, the buck stops (so to speak), is psyche. My space lodges on a frontier between intersecting realities and the disciplines that represent them. I titled this talk *In Praise of Space*, and I mean that, for we need space between psyche and soul to breathe, reach out, touch, receive, stand, assert. When space collapses, as in many instances in this present time, we lose our breath and our footing.

I see your space as priests as a frontier between the here and now and the beyond, the mortal and eternal, the included and developed and the left out, the marginalized, both in ourselves and in our communities and our ethics. We who sit in the pew depend on you depending on God. We come for bread. We come to church to be with the God we love, the God we lost, to say thanks, to cry help, and always with a long list of requests-- to ask God to do this, do that --for our sister, our child, our neighbor, our nation, our troubled world. And sometimes we are just

“tempted into the marvelous” (Hederman 2001, p. 184) and fill the space of worship with praise and gladness.

## **II. Space Collapsed**

I see us then as near neighbors (frontier dwellers) and am going to make analogies between the clinical situation in analytical work and your situation in the present-day state of our church and diocese. For the church is in trouble. All Episcopalians live in the midst of declining institution which is riven by in-house fighting and whose future is not clear. Membership is haemorrhaging; the economic recession of 2008, even though improved, leaves the church with less financial resources. Those signals direct us to look into the deep structures of the church-- economic, ethical, and spiritual. What are we to be being and doing?

You as clergy hear yourselves addressed and say yes to this call; you bear the brunt of this state of church. In preparing for the Hobart Lecture I consulted with different priests here and from other dioceses and came away with the impression that great loneliness afflicts the clergy, and perhaps a muddle, not a clear sense of who I am and what am I trying to do as a priest. You are not social workers nor therapists, nor managers of a business, nor chief financial officers of the budget, nor the development officer to raise money, let alone the one who fixes the boiler and deals with broken water pipes, though you are asked to fill all these roles. What is your work and calling as a priest?

In clinical work these kinds of uncertainties and lonely struggles, and lack of sufficient resources would be the presenting problem, the complex of the group, of the church. That we do not have enough

resources is often the feeling of people who seek out therapy; things need fixing and we do not know how to fix them. Not knowing leaves us on shaky ground and reaching out for validation from others, or from the large organization and that can result in giving away our power to others. In clinical work the major complex emerges that has a person in its grip, unconsciously driving them to reenact failing solutions to the problem making them suffer.

By complex I mean a cluster of imagery and emotional and behavioral patterns that tell the story of one's personal situation, through the details of this person's life narrative. In addition, the personal problem interpenetrates with the cultural situation and even embodies in individual terms the common problem that presently afflicts the culture. Further, driving the complex is an archetypal image of terrific energy, both animal and spiritual, that bedevils and persists in order to get acknowledged and housed in the ordinary here and now of living. Until that happens all the energies of these personal, cultural and archetypal levels vie with one another and the person feels brought to her knees, torn apart in conflicts, and deeply alone. And frightened, for solutions that worked in the past no longer do so; it feels as if the bottom is dropping out, and whatever map we had no longer indicates the direction toward healing.

The thought in coming to an analyst is that this person can fix it, do something, change it, get me back on track, which, alas, is not true. What the analyst can do is enter into the fray, dwell in the archetypal space, hear the details of cultural setting and personal strife, and listen

for the new, perceive the drift toward life, because what afflicts also announces what wants to come in (Ulanov 2013, Introduction).

But in the meantime, on the way to the new, symptoms run riot. I imagine the symptoms affecting the church problem as dwindling members and paucity of money resources, and fear for the future of your particular church and for the whole Anglican communion. Such symptoms throw us into strategies—methods to increase numbers, of bodies, of coins coming into church. Such strategies often amount to a false route because at the wrong level; hence leading nowhere. The strategy shifts our concentration to numbers, away from poverty of spirit in need of blessing: “Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Can we ask what does it mean in this situation to live in the kingdom of heaven?

If we attack problems on the wrong level in analysis, we go up into ego and end up flailing about. I imagine the wealthier churches with big memberships will want to be liberated from what they see as excessive taxation, so to speak, to support small churches with few members and little money, saying economize, focus on what works, jettison this enabling tendency, this co-dependency! I imagine the smaller churches in need will strike back at such arrogant labeling of their realities and seek to make the bigger churches feel guiltier. Truth resides in both viewpoints but their opposition yells at everyone. Holding on to one’s own point of view is not just yelling. We hold on so hard because we have experienced this route as connecting us to truth, to archetypal verities, to the living presence of Christ. We want to

protect the route we have found, not let it be vitiated. But we have lost the emotional field in which all of us feel self-restraint based on awareness that we can harm each other (Ulanov 2001/2004, p. 314).

There never is a fix, a magic word or policy that heals these divisions, these oppositions. We must hear each other out, which is very difficult to do, to find a depth beneath our oppositions to see the other's vision. Instead of a communion, sharp splittings leave our group in shards, rationalizing and arguing, and underneath lurks worry and despair. It is as if we have lost the blood of kinship and just shed blood instead. This happens in individual psyches where warring parts of us seek to kill off each other, for example, get rid of this neediness! Strike down this grandiosity! This plight is socially dangerous because we can project the reviled part on another group or person and seek to kill them--literally, or financially, or wreck their confidence. Whether within ourselves or in our church, we lose our capacity to imagine the whole and our vital role in it and that leaves us at the mercy of what happens, outside the decisions, prey to feeling impotent, resentful, alone.

Two options usually appear in this strife. We fall into narcissistic disorder, flagrant presentation of our grandeur and superior importance, displayed in our better "successful" church with the right "numbers" (but based on empty holes in us that make us use others as if gas stations to fill up on). Or we fall into depression that inexorably knocks us flat-out (but concealing strength of energy of rage not yet put to use). Either way, self-medication often follows, thru alcohol or drugs or obsessions with work or breakouts of crazy behavior.

If we fall into the grip of narcissism, we can use the success of our parish to shore us up, stroke our sense of self. We get exiled to our persona role, that is, how we see ourselves appearing to others, in the world of the church, the committees, the pulpit. Overly invested in our image to the world, we fall into a weird reversal, like a parent feeding on his children, the parish serving our self-esteem. Underneath is the desperation of how can I get more funds for this parish that is doing it right, and keep the barbarians from the door! But underneath the spangles of success, is exile from what feeds the feeder. Who feeds the feeder is a perpetual issue for the working clergy, to guard against burnout, or, I believe, also burn-up (Ulanov and Ulanov 1991/1999, chapter 9).

If caught in narcissism gone awry, we exile ourselves to the periphery of the circle circling around Christ, isolated at the edge, caught in our inflated self-image, no longer fed through participating in, indeed even identifying with the One at the center. We lose the nourishment of being attached to the vine as one of its branches. As together we circle round this vine, this axis, this core, this heart, we describe its centerness, creating its circumference. With all of us uniting with this center, we unite with each other, a tribe that includes every person as well as their priests. (Jung 1956/1958, paras 418-419). Recognising this One we all revolve around, we come into the unity of the many. We are fed by our common understanding of the One we adore. But if we estrange ourselves to the rim and forget our participation in the center, we lose our root, wither, no longer

nourished. Jung sums it up “Only subjective consciousness is isolated; when it relates to its centre it is integrated into wholeness. Whoever joins in (the dance,)...sees himself in the reflecting centre, and his suffering is the suffering which the One who stands in the centre “wills to suffer”” (ibid. para 427). A shift occurs in our experience of suffering the symptoms bedeviling the church. I will return to this point.

If we fall into depression, our aggressive energy splits away from our conscious use, to turn against ourselves. We live in pain that is so great we do not acknowledge it as pain, but feel there is nothing there, nothing worthwhile. We lose our dynamic vigor that would support our imagination and capacity to see the new. Instead, we feel beaten down, and even mindless in a dull stillness where nothing seems to go right, and everything no longer matters. We are caught in smouldering feelings of defeat sucking up all the oxygen. The narcissistic solution exports the problem outwards and feeds off events to nourish the soul’s paucity. The depressive solution imports the problem inwards to a depth of Tartarus within, where life meets death. We are exiled from the center and need something from the outside to break into our isolation.

### **III. Space Clearing**

What then happens in this awful place? Analogous to individual work is the task facing us as groups, for you the church, for me too the church as a member of the eight o’clock gang. In my life as part of analytic communities, we face same challenge (Ulanov 2007). We suffer seemingly unbridgeable splittings that do not engender vigorous

discussion of different treatment techniques and their ontological bases. We too have food fights and resource problems and not speaking to one another. It is as embarrassing and shocking as our church disputes. In sum, we do not practice what we preach. We need to ask how come? Where do we get upended?

This question confronts individual life too when old solutions do not work anymore because they do not fit the situation. We need to dig down to find new tendrils that lead to new experiences of depth of psyche, dig down to new experiences of God. We need to dig down to new ways to speak the unnamable theological fact that grows in us from the same substance of what thrummed in Jesus, his root in God, his manifestation in human terms of the source of the Source (to quote Marguerite Porete) who comes so we may have life more abundantly. Have we forgotten that on this we can stake our claim?

To put the new question in your language, what is your common understanding of your call and profession as priests of this unfathomable God? Is not your communion together supported there? All in the same soup, all in the same perceiving of God's glory? This source comes in person, not in a position paper, not in budget or numbers but always through the poor place. Our poverty dwells in the space where we do not know, do not have a name for this strange One who brings the end of all our religions, who gives each of us a secret name known only to God and ourselves (Revelation 2:17), just as we find and create images for this One who comes, like Rysbroeck's "Sparkling Stone."

Let us not minimize the gravity of digging down under our old solutions, our old God-images that now must make room for the new addressing us. In my work as analyst I find Jung's statement, so frightening to me, of great help. At the bottom of the barrel when we feel bereft of hope, utterly helpless, mirrored in the One hanging helpless on the cross (if we follow for the moment Mark over John), I hear this statement said to individuals and to all of us as a group: "we are threatened with universal genocide if we cannot work out the way of salvation by symbolic death" (Jung 1956-57/1976, para 1661). I am bolstered by the fact that Jung sees in the course of analysis its destruction and destruction of the analyst, to be replaced by a person's own style of relating to the unconscious, not the analyst's, not the theory's. If the work goes well enough, analysands come through with a living relationship to psyche, idiosyncratic, real, speaking to them, for, as Jung says, "the unconscious is not this thing or that; it is the Unknown as it immediately affects us" (Jung 1916/1960, p. 68).

We live on this earth in actual body; if too divorced from it, we must dig down again to our earthly reality. Similarly, digging down to a new experience of God and your common understanding of your role and mission as priest and church, you too fashion incarnation of the unnamable, the beyond, in the daily here and now. If the spirit is not enfleshed in the body, the eternal in the material, we lose the living God. If we have gotten too far away from the fire, the water, our earthly hut, our church habitation for the divine is dessicated. To return to earthly

reality forces a symbolic death, destroying the old ways. A symbolic death, not literal one.

Even further, and I find a source of support, Jung writes of destruction of his own theory of the Self. Jung names as Self, in contrast to ego as the center of consciousness, the greater center of the whole psyche, conscious and unconscious. But, "the Self wants its destruction as a symbolic reality;" we must come back to our earth, what called us into this community in the beginning (Jung 1997 vol. 2, p. 1314). We cannot, for example, capture and tame the ox of the Oxherding pictures of Zen Buddhism, corral and chain it, because reification, though an inevitable human tendency, finally ends in reductionism. If we take that route, we try to avoid the symbolic death of knowing that finally all our God-images crumble, because they are finite, too small to house the infinite God.

If we cling to our formulations for the ultimate, we detour into a false problem and there is no food there. Symbolic death means clearing a space, or rather accepting that a space is being cleared, for all of us, priest and parishioner, to dwell those few hours on Sunday morning, in the words of poet Seamus Heaney in a "space utterly empty, utterly a source" (Haw Lantern 1987 from "Clearances" cited by Hederman 2001, p. 185). That space calls forth our praise. In it we are neither crushed by impersonal fate, nor seduced by our own constructs of free will (Hederman 2001, p. 39).

The All comes toward us in the person Jesus who, contra Arianism, is God, and who, contra Sabellianism, Monarchaism,

Modalism, is human (Hederman 2001, p. 131). He is the marvelous sitting in the back pew. Without that clearing, still holding on to our old route to truth, thinking that will keep out the barbarian, the chaos, the destruction, we will kill each other in genocides, masked as fighting against "invading terrorists" as in Syria, where its ruler believes he is saving his country, or against what the Taliban believe is "idolatrous blasphemy" in their blowing up of the Buddhas in Afghanistan. But chaos and destructiveness are here and part of the whole. Jewish scholar Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg cites the Kafka tale where "Leopards break into the temple and drink to the dregs what is in the sacrificial pitchers." Endlessly repeated, the leopards can be counted on and prepared for in advance: they become part of the ritual (Kafka 1961, p. 93 cited in Zornberg 2009, p 232). The animal, the barbarian, is part of the whole, just as is the spiritual.

#### **IV. In Praise of Space**

The analyst Bion has the idea truth exists and we come upon it and think it. We add to its sum our unique experience of its habitation, mark it with our particular response for others to think the truth. We do not compete among ourselves for the truth. It is. We need not worry over guarding the truth: it will do it. We are not the subject nor the verb. The truth is, the God is. The Russian theologian S. L. Frank sees the opening of the Gospel of John saying that light and dark on the surface level, the world's level, what I call the ego level both individual and collective, endlessly vie with one another in conflict; neither ever defeats the other. But at the depth level, God has already come and light

is established. We have a home, we hear the call. We re-turn to the starting place; we re-collect, re-source the ways the gift endures despite wounds, despite forgetting; we find again the vine of which we are the branches and re-root. With the poet Heaney we hear, "Sing yourself to where the singing comes from" (Heaney "Wellhead" 1996, cited by Hederman 2001, p. 76).

To reflect now on the shift in suffering I mentioned earlier (p. 7) and on the role of the priest. In analysis the person who discovers that their individual problem is also an instance of the suffering point in their culture shifts personal suffering from humiliation and wild ideas how to get rid of it, to humble doing their particular part, their contribution to working on a human problem. Our subjectivity becomes intersubjectivity. We are indebted to each other.

It is my suffering but I am not the sole or even the main subject of this drama. Something in me is, Jung would call it Self. Bion calls it 0, St. Paul calls it Christ in me. Whatever we call it, It is the subject and the verb. It is Christ's suffering today. People cannot find the vine, this root of which they are a branch, to gain access to it; they feel the church is not offering the "door into the dark," as Heaney puts it. The crisis of the church is the Christ suffering abandonment in the world.

We are affected by this spiritual action, participate in it. You as priest and the church itself are emblems of God in the world not finding welcome but finding instead nowhere to lay his head. We are afflicted by it, changed by it, but It is doing it and having it done. We are the

supporting cast, taking part in the sacred drama of suffering, dying, rising to incarnate in the livingness of the body of the holy in the world.

The church is part of this change, lives in it. Hence your suffering as clergy, of diminishment of old forms of being Christ's body and wrestling to become alert to new forms of incarnation. Your suffering this contributes to the rest of us; you are working on this problem. Others have different problems they suffer and through which they contribute to the whole of us. Hence suffering of diminishment in old forms to find and create new embodiment of God in the world is what is happening, I believe. We watch, wait, listen, respond, as part of a larger drama starring the main player; we are the bit players, essential to witness the transition, neither crushed nor inundated. The pivotal question for clergy, your "door into the dark" is what is your shared understanding of the role and call of the priest? From there the new generates.

Your job, I believe, remains fundamentally, at depth, the same: as Samuel says, to speak the things of God to the people, and to speak the things of the people to God. As a parishioner, I hope as priest you go the rounds of the year giving one day to each of us under your priestly care; to speak to God of the particular things of each one's soul and body and sufferings, so that our fear lessens that we could become the lost sheep. And space is cleared, depths re dug for the growing vine.

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**Hobart Lecture Delivered to the  
Clergy of the Episcopal Diocese of New York  
October 9, 2012 by Dr. Ann Ulanov**

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Woodbury Ct July 2012

The Hobart lecture to Clergy of Diocese of New York 10/9/12