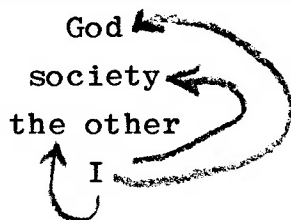


At a N.Y.Theol.Seminary conference on religion & aging,[†] 12f Mar 87, some faculty asked me to do this Thinksheet on the depth dimension of language. The occasion was my observation that while some have special gifts of communication, all can learn the skills of improving one's own half of the hearing-speaking loop, toward authentic & profound soul-to-soul communion, healing, hope, & human-divine usefulness. I'd just told the familiar story of young Dr. Freud's playing chess with a nervous expectant father who was, with the physician, listening to the sounds from the bedroom. The cultured Viennese expectant mother cried out in French. "Now?" said the husband. "Not yet," said Freud. A little later she cried out in German. "Now?" said the husband. "Not yet," said Freud. A little later still she cried out in Yiddish, her Muttersprache. "NOW?" cried the husband. "Now," said Dr. Freud. I had said that ten minutes is enough to reach this soul-level of conversation, even with a stranger. Though I didn't allude to Tillich's response when I asked him "What is evangelism?"--here it is: "Evangelism is talking with another till you hear the other's depth words, the soul words that mean most to that other; and then naming 'Jesus Christ' as most meaningful to you." I countered, "But what if that depth in you is some-one/-thing other than Jesus Christ?" Tillich replied, "Then you cannot be an evangelist."...More broadly, this Thinksheet is for those who yearn to speak soul to grief toward joy beyond grief--especially all who have to do with Hospice.

1. I've a camera mind, so visualizers find me easier to read than do nonvisualizers. I hope you "get the picture" of this Thinksheet from these two pictures:

WHO is experiencing?



WHAT is being experienced?

polite talk & negotiation	grief 3	joy 3
community, fellowship	G2 --->	J2
intimacy, communion	G1 -->	J1

2. Note the narrowing, for purposes of this Thinksheet, in both diagrams. On the left, "I"--the "I" who wants to improve in depth relating--is doing the experiencing, though of course so also (and primarily!) is God; and "the other," with whom I'm in aural-oral relationship; and, with ramifications beyond my active or even cognitive reach, "society." Yes, to represent the objective situation, "God" should be, as the Ground, at the bottom (Tillich's "dimension of depth"); but I've here represented the servant situation: I serve the other directly, as I do (so the arrows to them) society and God; unrepresented here are my services to society through the other & to God both through the other through society and through society beyond the particular other I'm at the moment relating to. ...On the right, the diagram narrows "what is being experienced" to the subject of this Thinksheet, which is talking about talking about grief & joy. I've called the deepest level G1/J1 because this Thinksheet is primarily concerned about this level, the level where intimacy or communion becomes reality, soul-satisfying & world-forming reality. The solid arrow represents my conviction that when grief is faced & lived at this level, the movement toward joy, at first imperceptible, is inevitable (by both nature & grace, according to my theology).* The intermediate level has a broken arrow: I'm less sure that the fellowship-community ways of dealing with grief lead inevitably on to joy. And at the comparatively superficial level of polite talk & negotiation (from Latin for "business, commerce"),

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*Of course for me as a Christian, the crucifixion-grief/resurrection-joy is history's central f/act here.
[†]Grief increases as aging diminishes one's physical powers, but joy too may, should, increase.

G3 & J3 are episodic, unconnected.

3. How we speak of grief & joy can be usefully presented also under the aspects of TIME & SPACE:

....TIME: Grievs & joys now being experienced are also being invaded by griefs & joys remembered & by griefs & joys anticipated.

....SPACE in three dimensions, LWH: As you are now feeling-thinking about grief & joy, what is their length? width? height?

4. Now back to the lefthand diagram in sec.1. Narrowly, there I pointed to "I" as experiencer of grief & joy. Now shift the focus, as does the true lover-listener-counselor, to "the other": What is the other experiencing, of grief & joy, in this moment of relating to me? Broadly, in wider context, what of grief & joy is being experienced by the "society" this person lives in & is a part of (including the worlds the other & I share)? And what, here & now, are God's griefs & joys?

5. Our biblical monotheism is radically theocentric, the primary question forever being what God is feeling/thinking/wanting here & now. This is so foreign to the dailiness of America '87 that it's worth the rest of this Thinksheet to expound it. Which I do by reference to two books, both "prophetic" in this biblical sense:

....Henri Nouwen's MAKING ALL THINGS NEW: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SPIRITUAL LIFE (H&R/81) aims to get persons to God-center. Using the space metaphor, he says we're always making space for ourselves; and some of us attend to making space for others & helping others make space for themselves; but (and this is the point of his last paragraph) how about making space for God--inner space, with the prophetic implication that then we'll make outer space for God? Since writing this book, Henri's attached himself to l'Arche, in France a community for the retarded, a Christian space for those whom the world crowds out. A fortiori: If one can minister to & with the retarded, how much more with the spiritually retarded & to our retarded world?

....Walter Bruggemann's THE PROPHETIC IMAGINATION (Fortress/78/83) aims (1) to show how, in the Bible, leaders used their imagination to feel/think/present the divine will, to point the people toward God-centering; and (2) to suggest how, consequently, Christian leaders today should feel/think/live/lead (especially in chapter 7, "A Note on the Practice of Ministry"): Says he: (1) "The monarchy of Israel" betrayed "the Moses movement," which undermined the death-regime of Pharaoh & energized the life-community of doxology, worshiping God in the wilderness & the promised land. "The prophets of Israel continue the radical movement of Moses in the face of royal reality." JEREMIAH, radically criticizing "the royal consciousness," "conjures a funeral and brings the grief of dying Israel to public expression," thus trying to penetrate "the royal community" in its "numb denial" of oncoming death. SECOND ISAIAH "practices radical energizing against the royal consciousness," "conjuring an enthronement and bringing the amazement of rebirthed Israel to public expression" in joy. The convergence of grief & joy, as in my G1/J1. (2) "Jesus...practiced in most radical form the main elements of prophetic ministry and imagination," which "consists of offering an alternative perception of reality and in letting people see their own history in the light of God's freedom and his will for justice," toward "evoking an alternative community." (3) Our experiences of death-grief-lament can open us to perceive & attack the deadliness of our culture, its values, its means & ends. "Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh" (L.6.21; cf.Mt.5.4). Aiming at the joy God intends for the world, Jesus knew that this "future required a grieving about the present order."