

# GROUNDING SPACE

## TAPESTRY, TEXTS, TUNES

### Workshop for Modern Spirituality

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*Grounding Space is an experimental art theologian project that is organized during Lent 2015, in Kampen parish church in Oslo. One priest, a singer and a visual artist collaborate in creating a space that offers the visitors a new way of being present and grounded within the framework of a church room. The event is interactive, free and open to all.*

#### Introduction

Christianity was shaped nearly 2000 years ago and is foundational in Western culture. The Biblical narratives and images are strong and poetic. However, dogmas and ways of understanding based on pre-Copernican reality, hardly fits a contemporary worldview.<sup>1</sup> In a Norwegian context, the Church no longer is the obvious meeting place on Sunday morning, where the congregation meets and confirms a shared Christian belief. Still, the majority of the population is members of The Norwegian Lutheran Evangelical Church and takes part in the rites of passage during life: Baptism, Confirmation, marriage and burials. Simplified, one can say that today there is a mismatch between the membership of the Church and religious practice. If we suggest that people are no less religious today than in earlier times, the Church faces a huge challenge. This challenge is addressed in Kampen church in several ways, during Lent, by an experimental art liturgical project called *Grounding Space*.

#### Workshop for modern spirituality

*Grounding Space* is inspired by the British author and teacher of meditation William Bloom. Throughout the last 30 years, Bloom has been involved in teaching and research within what may be designated an expanded religious field, in which religion, psychology and the human body are combined. On spirituality he says:

*Spirituality is everyone's natural connection with the wonder and energy of life – and the instinct to explore that experience and its meaning.*

*Spirituality affirms that personal development is about the growth of compassion and consciousness, heart and mind.<sup>2</sup>*

In his book, *The Power of Modern Spirituality* (2011), Bloom presents a model that may help us understand religion as such. He suggests that all religious systems have three shared principal elements: *connection*, *reflection*, and *service*. Taken further, one may say that connection relates to wonder, reflection to self development, and service to how we act and what we do. Based on these fundamental principles, Bloom elaborates on developing a modern spirituality suited for people of our time.

*Grounding Space* is planned as a workshop for modern spirituality in the Bloomian sense, within the framework of the Church. Inside a church room, it offers new paths to experience the concept *connection*, or connectedness to that which is experienced as holy, mysterious or just wonder. As women, we wish to create a physical and mental space that is friendly to feminine

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<sup>1</sup> See the American, former Episcopal bishop, John Shelby Spong, especially his book (1999): *Why Christianity Must Change or Die*.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.williambloom.com/biography/>

experience and thus spirituality.<sup>3</sup> We believe that through connection follows reflection and motivation to serve and give back to those relations that the individual may be part of.

## Grounding Space

The project *Grounding Space* is the result of conversations between priest Anne Cathrine Owe (50), visual artist Grete Refsum (61) and singer Hege Høisæter (50). As initiators we have a shared wish of contributing to the development of a renewed ecclesial spirituality that may resonate with contemporary needs. We ask: What do we need now to be nurtured spiritually in our lives?

In a shared understanding that most people constantly have too much to do – there are too many offers and we are haunted by too many obligations – it struck us that what we primarily need is something that offers mental rest and relaxation.

Rest is a central element in the Gospels, nicely expressed by the evangelist Matthew:

*Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light* (Matthew 11, 28-30).<sup>4</sup>

If the Church should be a place where we can be restored and balanced, we must be offered the possibility to rest and ground ourselves – thereof the title *Grounding Space*.<sup>5</sup> We wish to create a space within the church room that allows the visitors to be interactive and present with all their senses, emotions and intellectual abilities – to sink into themselves and become grounded. As experts in various fields, each of us takes responsibility for the separate parts that are included in *Grounding Space*: tapestry, texts and tunes.

### Tapestry

Ecclesial art has traditionally been illustrating. When theology and liturgy change, however, so do iconography and the visual images.<sup>6</sup> Contemporary art includes more formats and expressions than earlier times standard art works, placed on walls or consoles. The visual artist of *Grounding Space* is responsible for the visual and tactile aspects of the event. She has chosen to initiate the production of a carpet, or rather rug, on the floor – as a ground sheet for being together. The artist has artistic responsibility, but the visitors are invited to bring material and bind the structure. People are the condition for a living Church. If nobody turns up, nothing is going to happen.<sup>7</sup>

### Texts

All world religions are text based, Christianity in particular. The Gospel of John begins: *In the beginning was the Word: the Word was with God and the Word was God*.<sup>8</sup> The holy texts of the world are extensive, comprising endless expressions and poetics that may enrich our own understanding of that we consider holy. The priest has responsibility for the texts and the choice of texts to be read. A premise in *Grounding Space* is that visitors can bring texts – their own or others – that they want to read or be read. Everyone shall be met with respect, without

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<sup>3</sup> The inspiration comes from several authors and ideas, there among: Crossan, Dolto, Fiorenza og Johnson, see the reference list.

<sup>4</sup> *Jerusalem Bible* version, available: <[http://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=47&bible\\_chapter=11](http://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=47&bible_chapter=11)> [downloaded 2 March 2015].

<sup>5</sup> In Norwegian *Hvilerom*, directly translated it means restroom, which could not work in English!

<sup>6</sup> The Norwegian Professor Sigurd Bergmann treats this field, see the reference list.

<sup>7</sup> Follow the development of the rug here: <[www.refsum.no](http://www.refsum.no)>. Documentation will only be done after each event. No images of identifiable persons will be published.

<sup>8</sup> John 1. 1-2 (see: <http://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=50>) [downloaded 2 March 2015]).

ensorship. We presuppose that those who call on the church do it in sincerity and we certainly will not ask for a Credo.

### *Tunes*

The singer is responsible for the sound. Mostly, the ears shall rest in a room of relative stillness, with everyday sounds and muffled talk. But there will also be times for concentrated listening. The visitors – if they wish – are welcome to research the sound of the voice in concert – unpretentiously. Perhaps somebody wishes to bring and share a song, or just listen relaxed to the professional singer at work in the background. She will research voice, sound and text in a newly written composition by Kjell Mørk Karlsen that has not yet been played publicly, to texts by Jon Fosse: *A Silent Wind*.<sup>9</sup>

## **Welcome to participation!**

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<sup>9</sup> Norwegian: *Ein stille vind*.