

GOD'S PLACE IN A SPACE AGE

by Hans Schwarz

Abstract. The shift from a pre-Copernican to a Copernican world view has caused an ever increasing sense of homelessness for the idea of a theistically conceived God. This paper first traces the historical development of this problem and its implications for the Christian faith. Next it presents some historically evolved "rescue" attempts and examines them critically. Then follows an inquiry concerning the biblical understanding of God's relation to space and a critical presentation of some contemporary proposals to make God's presence intelligible. In conclusion we propose a dimensional model of relating God and the world, a model which allows for a reasonable discourse of God's immanence and transcendence.

In the Christian creeds God occupies first place. But when it comes to Christian theological reflection, God is usually presupposed and christology occupies center stage with the salvational aspect as its main focus. In the last two hundred years however, especially since Jean Paul's *Rede des toten Christus vom Weltgebäude, dass kein Gott sei* (1796-97; "Speech of the Dead Christ from the World Edifice, that There Is No God"), we have been reminded that God's place in the universe can no longer be taken for granted. Christ claims in this speech to the dead that he traversed the worlds, climbed to the suns and milky ways, but there was no God—just empty space and eternity (Zahrnt 1966, 157-59).

HISTORICAL REFLECTIONS

If God can no longer be asserted, any salvational consequences of God's existence can no longer be assumed either. But theology largely ignored these thunder clouds hovering over the first article of the creed. Even when Rudolf Bultmann finally admitted that the New Testament cosmology is basically a mythological world view which is no longer

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tenable, he did not draw the connection to the vanishing cosmological reference point for God. On the contrary, he claimed that this cosmology does not really want to be interpreted in cosmological terms but rather in anthropological or preferably existential terms. Small wonder that we felt relieved from the anxiety that with a change in cosmology the New Testament faith might tumble.

Theology as accomplice in the loss of a cosmological reference point. The mythological world view, Bultmann declared, accords with the description of the salvational event which forms the actual content of the New Testament proclamation. Thus the change from the pre-Copernican world view to the Copernican is of no consequence for our faith. That we escape so easily from the implications of a new world view should make us wonder unless our faith has no relevance to the physical world. Bultmann himself confesses how disjunctive the New Testament world view and our own have become (see Bultmann 1961, 3-8). He claims that we cannot use an electric light or radio, nor avail ourselves of modern medical and clinical health care and believe at the same time in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles. Although Bultmann can discard this mythology as literal mythology, he does not wish to discard its existential significance. The dualistic mythology, culminating in the battle between God and the devil, must be interpreted existentially, seeking its significance today. In that regard, this mythology asks whether we want to rely on our past or whether we are open to a new future. Yet being open to the future and having faith are not human possibilities, for it is through God's grace that we obtain a new self-understanding.

Once we refer to God, however, the question must be raised as to how God can actually do this (i.e., give us faith) and where God really is. But such questions are never raised by Bultmann. He rather rejects them, claiming that one simply has to believe in God and his action or discard them along with the rest of biblical mythology. According to Bultmann one cannot objectify grace.

Critical philosophers vehemently object to this preference of Bultmann and others for introducing here a *skandalon*, a paradox, or an antinomy as a means to explain God's action. These terms only show how shabbily reason is treated by theologians. For instance, Hans Albert, who advocates use of a critical reason, declared that faith in witches, angels, devils, and gods as these occur in a polytheistic world view has been abandoned, since its presuppositions are no longer tenable. Clearly "such consequences for the progress in knowledge are commonly admitted by Christian theologians. Yet when it comes to the issue of the Christian God, then they usually offer a special strategy

which has no use for them in their everyday thinking, because it is something called ‘special pleading’” (Albert [1968] 1980, 17). Thus theologians think they can say all kinds of things that make absolutely no sense in everyday language; they are even praised for it by their peers. We read, for instance, that “Christ has been resurrected into the kerygma” (Hans Conzelmann), “God is the origin of my being’s restlessness” (Herbert Braun), “God is the mythological expression for the ultimacy of personal responsibility” (Fritz Buri), and that “demythologization arrives at a God-established boundary behind which we are not allowed to go” (Helmut Thielicke).

What connects these assertions is not only the accurate insight that God cannot be objectified, but the implicit and unreflected admission that God has lost his cosmological reference point. Once theology and therewith the Christian faith become cosmologically neutral there are two immediate consequences. First, the world we see, live, and move in is implicitly or explicitly declared void of God, that is, simply atheistic. That many are oblivious to this issue was driven home to me in a recent conversation with a seminary president. When I told him about this symposium on the Theology of Outer Space, he declared that the pertinent issues were already solved in the sixteenth century when Martin Luther asserted the ubiquity of Christ. Yet common sense tells us that if something is everybody’s business, it is also nobody’s business. If someone is everywhere, he is basically nowhere. Arthur Schopenhauer was certainly right when he suggested that pantheism—ubiquity being a special form of pantheism—“is only an euphemism for atheism” (Schopenhauer 1913, 4:131). Perhaps the Soviet cosmonaut who quipped after one of the first Soviet space missions, “When I was up there I did not see God,” implying that consequently there is no God, was not as wrong as some pious Americans would want.

Second, once God has become detached from a cosmological reference point he becomes a strictly personal God. This personalization or interiorization leads to the feeling that the Christian faith is only private business. “Me and my God” become the sole constituents of the Christian faith. Actually, such faith is quite convenient. If God becomes bothersome one can simply pocket him, declaring that such demands as might be issued just do not *feel* right. Since God is deprived of his own sphere, he can no longer make any demands as a cosmological God could. Of course, one can still say that God challenges and comforts, that one can relate to this God, and that such a God answers one’s prayers. But when asked where the God who does such things is, then, as John Wisdom said, God dies of a thousand qualifications (Wisdom [1944] 1969, 154-56). This God who is reduced to invisibility, intangibility, and exclusiveness hardly differs from being no God.

Since we are however essentially religious beings, having need to relate to some absolute, whether imaginary or real, many cultivate this private religion. It provides the assurance that we are not alone, and it basically does not demand anything beyond the private sphere. With this mind set it is easy to assert the inerrancy of Scripture and to fight in the courts for scientific creationism, assuming that by taking such “stands for God” one has fulfilled the religious obligations towards him. Because God’s cosmological reference point is missing in this religion, however, the world in which we live with its social injustice and lust for power, will remain unchallenged and unchanged. Even where the Christian faith still takes seriously its socioeconomic dimension, it is often not out of the conviction that God has a cosmological referent but out of a politically activist mind set. Since it is an ideological God, often of a supposedly Old Testament prophetic model, who motivates such activism, this activism is frequently criticized as being nothing more than “politics in the name of God.”

With the abandonment of the cosmological referent for God other cherished concepts tumble too. The incarnation of God presupposes that he comes from somewhere. The same holds true for his resurrection to new life and his ascension. Small wonder that the death-of-God theologians claimed that such concepts no longer appeal to us, or if they still do it is only because we appropriate them thoughtlessly. This means the crisis of cosmology is a crisis of theology, a crisis of faith.

Emergence of a cosmic void. The loss of the cosmological referent was not theology’s own doing alone. It was primarily caused by the progression from the pre-Copernican world view to the Copernican. Yet initially it was not apparent that this change would endanger our understanding of God. In one of his “Table Talks” Luther could still remark: “Some new astronomer . . . wants the earth to move and not the heaven, the sun, and the moon. . . . But I believe sacred Scripture that Joshua commanded the sun to stand still and not the earth” (Luther 1883-, *Tischreden* 4:412-13). He did not even mention the name Copernicus and perhaps was merely acquainted with this new astronomy from hearsay.

Generally speaking, at Luther’s time humanity could still afford to make its troubled conscience the main object of its concern. The earth was a solid ground to stand on, and beyond the sky humanity thought of God as being in control of earthly affairs. When the Lutheran reformer Andreas Osiander wrote an anonymous preface to Copernicus’s potential bombshell, *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* (On the Movements of the Heavenly Bodies), he mentioned that this was only a more convenient way to compute the stellar movements. Whether he

attempted to diffuse the bomb or was just naive will perhaps never be known. Yet soon people discovered that Copernicus provided more than just a mathematical theory to compute the movements of the stellar bodies (see Bornkamm 1966, 178-80).

Gradually most of humanity has realized that the earth it inhabited was but a tiny planet of a larger solar system. Even the uniqueness of humanity no longer went unchallenged. The revolutionary spirit of this time can be largely attributed to the Italian philosopher Giordano Bruno who radicalized Copernicus's heliocentric world view. In pantheistic fashion Bruno advocated infinity as the new deity and proposed the existence of countless other forms of human life on other earthlike planets.¹ Bruno's ideas proved so earthshaking that he got into trouble with Protestants and Roman Catholics alike, and finally in 1600 Roman authorities burned him at the stake. But the ideas he disseminated could not be easily extinguished. Western humanity felt that it had lost its unchallenged place in the universe and gradually it has become commonplace to believe that humanity and the earth it inhabits are part of a larger evolutionary process of cosmic dimensions.

It was not just the thought that there might be additional forms of human life on other planets in the universe that bothered the "earthlings." It was rather the awareness that the solid house of spheres which since antiquity provided one's base of operation without question, had suddenly collapsed and was replaced by an infinite universe without an actual center and place of orientation. Admittedly, the issue of other planetary populations was a favorite topic in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For instance, the British writer and clergyman Robert Burton postulated in 1621 an infinite number of forms of human life through the simple deduction: "If the earth moves, it is a planet, . . . and then *per consequens*, the rest of the planets are inhabited, as well as the moon" (Burton [1932] 1972, 2:53). Similarly the French writer and scientist Bernard LeBouyer de Fontenelle with his book bearing the characteristic title *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* (1686, Dialogues on the Plurality of the Worlds), was more influential than any other of his time in securing popular and fashionable acceptance of the Copernican system. Although the main idea of this book, the Copernican idea of vortices, was refuted the next year in Newton's *Principia*, Fontenelle's book was exceedingly successful. It was reprinted a dozen times, translated into several languages, and its author elected to the Académie Française in 1691. Even Immanuel Kant in his *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels* (General History of Nature and Theory of Heavens) of 1755 claimed that "most of the planets are certainly inhabited and if they are not they will be some day" (Kant [1755] 1968, 2:381). He even attempted to deduce the characteristics of such other sentient beings.

Standing on the shores of an infinite universe humanity felt forlorn as never before. For instance, concerning John Donne we hear that his soul is “compact of fear, egoism, poetry, and a kind of moral exhibitionism in which the sublime and the loathsome are inextricably confused, as they are also in the awfully symbolic portrait that shows him wearing a prematurely assumed shroud” (Brooke 1948, 613). Small wonder that in 1651 Thomas Hobbes described the human condition as a condition of war of everyone against everyone else (Hobbes [1651] 1930, 350-51), and that at the end of his life he wrote in a poem, that his mother “has born twins, me and fear.”² In the face of dreadful infinity, humanity was roving the earth without purpose and guidance, merely attempting to survive in the common struggle.

Attempts to establish a new foundation. This cosmic nihilism with its *Weltangst* and fear of death, which we encounter above all in mysticism of the baroque era, randomly welded humanity together in an attempt to fight its despair in a corporate manner. Thus we encounter the first mass society. Soldiers hid their individuality behind a common uniform, and the absolutistic temporal authorities served as superegos and earthly gods once God transcendent had vanished into space. Yet in a striking way the many absolutistic petty princes resembled the cosmic pluralism of humanity. In France as well as in many other countries and principalities the sun was pulled down to earth and became the symbol of the rulers, its rays shining through the crowns, the coats of arms, and the medals. When we consider baroque art and architecture, we notice that the straight line of the gothic and Renaissance eras is gone and the fluid, dissolving, and atmospheric element enters in. Things are in movement without an actual focus, although the baroque dome served as some kind of artificial heaven, under which one can take refuge from the chilling and threatening universe.

Although even in architecture infinity became the leading concept, a new kind of harmony of spheres replaced the lost stability of nature in the baroque churches. In the battle against deism and pantheism baroque theism defended its theological teleology and its moral principles with utmost rigor and tenacity. At the same time the Christian faith was narrowed down to a few principles, to ideas that still prevail today in the minds of many. The Cambridge Neo-Platonist Ralph Cudworth wrote his *True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678) to refute all atheism and materialism, and in 1711 Anthony Earl of Shaftesbury claimed that in order “to be a settled Christian, it is necessary to be first of all a good theist” (Shaftesbury [1711] 1963, 2:19). This type of philosophical theism which, to some extent is still an extremely popular creed in the United States, is not in need of revelation or of Christ.

Essentially it does not even need a cosmic referent as long as it is accompanied by good manners and pious feeling.

A more churchly way to combat the feeling of fear, void, and helplessness arose in post-Reformation orthodoxy. Not only did one return to Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle to rescue the house of spheres, but one also painted God as a despotic tyrant expressing the prevalent features of fear and despair. Yet most importantly one attempted to construct an “objective faith” amid all confusion and fluidity. The Council of Trent, on the one hand, sought to safeguard Scripture by not only mentioning each book to be contained in the Bible but also by prescribing the right translation. Protestants, on the other hand, developed the idea of a verbal, literal inspiration of Scripture down to the vowels of the Hebrew text. Isolated biblical quotations and Aristotelian logic and conceptuality were employed to erect a foundation on which humanity could securely rest. In a scholastic style similar to that of the late Middle Ages one composed volume after volume of dogmatic treatises succinctly showing that not one possible argument had escaped the attention of the writer. To safeguard orthodoxy one rallied political forces on one’s side, forcibly converted thousands of “heretics,” and persecuted and executed crypto-Calvinists, crypto-Lutherans, and Philippists (i.e., followers of Philip Melanchthon).

But the signs of the new age would ultimately prevail. While René Descartes still needed a largely methodological doubt to gain a trustworthy foundation of reality barely 150 years later, Kant was much more optimistic. He advocated the shedding of all self-imposed chains and claimed: “*Sapere aude!* Have courage, to use your own reason!” (Kant [1783] 1959, 85). The initial optimism, that reason would provide for us a firm foundation, has long since vanished. Even Kant himself eventually set out to show the limits of reason to provide room for faith (Kant [1787] 1958, 2d ed., sec. 30). Neither the autonomous reason of the Enlightenment nor the repristinating reason of orthodoxy succeeded in bringing back to humanity a sense of security and confidence.

Seers, such as the nineteenth-century philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, have told us with prophetic clarity that the world has become cooler, that empty space breathes at us, that the bottom has been removed from beneath our feet, and that we are falling into infinite space (Nietzsche [1886] 1960, sec. 125, 95). While Nietzsche observed that this cosmological upheaval had profound theological implications, namely that God is dead, God remains dead, and that we have killed him in abandoning our earth-centered world view, it is still more the exception than the rule that such an issue is raised relative to a cos-

mological referent for God. Perhaps this is due to the immense privatization of faith. Perhaps it is also due to the implicit fear that adducing such a cosmological referent might prove impossible and faith in God might ultimately and entirely collapse.

Many people, pious and not, cheered when Genesis 1 was recited from outer space. Yet few realized that a lunar landing and Genesis 1 had nothing in common. It was by our doing and not God's that we finally reached the moon. Genesis 1 was not found there. We had to smuggle it there; otherwise it would have been refused as an illegitimate, nonscientific payload. Although billions of people heard the reading of Genesis, it was nevertheless an immensely private act. It had nothing whatsoever to do with what the astronauts had to do up there and how they got there in the first place. Nor did it inform them as to how they could return to earth. Unlike the Spanish conquerors who for better or for worse carried the cross with them to America, believing that without it they could neither win nor did they have any right to be in this New World, modern astronauts are emancipated from God. They may carry him in their pockets, but for them God has lost his external and cosmological reference point.

Nevertheless the astronauts were not totally wrong. When we want to look for a cosmological reference point for God, we cannot find it on the moon. We must bring this reference point with us to the moon. It is also useless and potentially self-destructive to look for it in our inner self. If we want to recover this at all, we must first search for it in the biblical documents which witness to such a reference point and then consider how the results of our search might be applied to our present self-understanding.

THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

There is no doubt that the biblical cosmology largely presupposes a three-tiered universe with earth in the middle, the waters below on which the earth floats, and the heavens above which block out the heavenly floods. While this view seems to be the oldest, another three-story world view is quite often presupposed with the earth in the middle, the nether world below, and the heavens above.

The biblical view of God's habitation. The Bible does not distinguish between heaven and sky. God's habitation was thought of as above the firmament. In the New Testament the actual dwelling of God is the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:2). Often, in analogy to the oriental idea of a mountain of the Gods, Yahweh is understood as living on a mountain from which he comes, a mountain in the far north (Isa. 14:13), but it could also be Mount Sinai or Horeb. Since God's presence in his salvific

activities was certain, the actual habitation of God was of lesser interest. Similarly, in the New Testament Jesus talks without hesitation about his Father in heaven. One can easily assert that a world view which locates God somewhere above is neither decisive for our faith in God nor tenable in a Copernican world view. But there is an immense difference between locating God on Mount Sinai or in the third heaven, saying an exact location is unimportant, or having trouble assigning to God a cosmological reference point at all. Even calling him a history-making God, a God of promise or of the future does not avoid the cosmological question: Where can such a God be located? History is an intrinsic part of our space-time continuum.

One of the classical attributes of God is omnipresence, meaning that God is present everywhere. The latent pantheism in this statement already led Luther to the insight that God could not be circumscriptively present so that one would circumscribe him in space, but repletively present, meaning that God fills the same space together with the finite.³ Emil Brunner, who elaborated on the meaning of God's omnipresence, states that this means above all that God transcends all spatial distance and separation which would be essential for finite and created beings (Brunner [1946] 1972, 1:262-63). While the spatial and temporal distances are real for the created order since God inaugurated them, they are not real and binding for him. When we read in the Bible that God came down to earth and Christ ascended into heaven, we are not just confronted with a crude anthropomorphism because of which such assertions are often discarded. These assertions also seek to express the conviction that, although not confined to our space-time continuum, God is nevertheless active in it.

In this context it is significant that in the Judeo-Christian tradition there is a strict commandment against depicting God, a taboo which was continued in Islam. In contradistinction to most other religions Yahweh was not considered a local God who resided in a temple or on Mount Olympus. A God who can be depicted is confined to a space and can be localized. But "God does not live in a temple made with hands" (Acts 17:24). He fills heaven though "all the heavens' heaven cannot contain him" (1 Kings 8:27). The earth is his footstool and the heavens are his throne (Mt. 5:35; Ps. 123:1). God who is immanent in everything also transcends everything. Such elusiveness, of course, would give neither credence to God's presence nor to his existence unless we recognize that, similar to an electron in its orbit, God is not uniformly present in the world. Though present extensively everywhere, God is not present with the same intensity. Thus we speak of the distant God and the God close at hand.

When we say that God has left us or that he is coming to us, we do not just talk figuratively but mean to express a different quality of God's

presence. The same is true when Jesus promises to his disciples: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I will be in the midst of you" and "I will be with you until the close of the age" (Mt. 18:20 and 28:20). Though he is present always and everywhere, his comforting and sustaining presence is tied to certain promises. The same, of course, is true for his Eucharistic presence. God is present in bread and wine with all the benefits connected with Christ's salvific sacrifice on the cross. This qualified presence, of course, does not eliminate the eternal or general presence. There is still bread and wine. But the being present for us is expressed through the special presence.

God's presence and the interpretive word. Since the special presence is not self-evident, the interpretive word is always needed to point out such presence. In the case of the Eucharist there are the words of institution. Without them one would not know about God's special presence. Yet even these words are uttered by humans. Thus one can doubt them and explain them away as figments of human imagination. This is where faith is needed to trust that the words point to a reality and are not a fraud. But how can we distinguish this trust from mere credulity? The emphasis on the necessity to venture, to have faith, to believe, and so on, only seems to increase the suspicion that irrational criteria are substituted for facts. Classical theology, however, talked here about the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, meaning that for the believer the truthfulness of the believed word will become evident through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Presupposed here is that the word to be believed is true and that its truth will become evident once the word is believed. It is further assumed that the word to be believed is not a neutral and objective word but one which elicits a certain response. Since this word seems to have the power to convince the skeptic as well as to withhold its God-wrought nature from the seeker, the believer supposedly recognizes that God himself is involved in the decision-making process. Once the decision of accepting this word as God's word has been reached we are supposed to obtain an ever deeper understanding of God's (special) presence. But conversions to cults and other religious movements in particular show that such self-evidencing is not restricted to God's special presence as would ensue from the Christian understanding of the interpretive word. Even words that are contrary to the Christian message seem to evidence themselves. In this dilemma of evidence we could claim that "by their fruit you shall know them" and wait for the results of such conversions. The question, however, to be asked is whether such conversions are mere psychological phenomena without implication beyond the spheres of space and time. This means the reference to God's

self-evidencing word does not relieve us of the necessity to give account of where God is and just how God evidences himself. But this issue is hardly ever addressed.

God as energy-event? A notable exception in recent theology is John B Cobb, Jr. In his small book *God and the World* he discusses how God is related to space (Cobb 1969, 71-72). Before Cobb can establish the relation of God to space he first defines his understanding of God. He does not want to understand God as a physical entity but as a special kind of energy-event, meaning that God is neither visible nor can he be apprehended in general by our senses. Yet such an understanding would allow inclusion of mental and spiritual phenomena in the God-event.

When Cobb asks where such an energy-event could be, he soon realizes that neither conventional nor modern typographies suffice. God is neither "up there" nor "down there." Since space is the kind of function which bodies have and since God is not extended, we must first of all understand that God cannot be related to us spatially (Cobb 1969, 77-79). When we confess that God is everywhere we can talk about his extensive relation with us in terms of contemporaneity or successiveness without indulging in a visual understanding of space. Cobb however does not want to say that God is everything and we are simply parts and pieces, nor that God is simply another name for the sum total of all the parts. God as supreme energy-event is related to us in such a way that he is all-inclusive of the space-time continuum which we occupy, and thus we are in this way parts of God. Yet we are not parts of God if we understand this to mean that God is the sum total of the parts. Nor should we infer that the parts are lacking in independence and self-determination. "God and the creatures interact as separate entities, while God includes the standpoints of all of them in his omnipatial standpoint. In this sense God is everywhere, but he is not everything. The world does not exist outside God or apart from God, but the world is not God or simply part of God. The character of the world is influenced by God, but it is not determined by him, and the world in its turn contributes novelty and richness to the divine experience" (Cobb 1969, 79-80).

This process model of a feedback relationship between God and the world Cobb rightly labels panentheism. It neither advocates a theism in which God occupies another, supernatural sphere nor a pantheism in which God and world are ultimately identical. Cobb claims that it preserves the central concerns of both theism and pantheism. God and world have their own integrity. At the same time God provides the world and is manifest in all its parts without being outside of the world

and juxtaposed to it. Cobb presents an intelligible model of God's interaction with the world and is also able to assign to God a credible "space."

However, two decisive moments of God's relation to us seem to be lost. First, Cobb's energy-event conceptuality makes it unlikely that God is related to us in a personal way. This is mainly due to the conceptuality borrowed from physics which depersonalizes God. And an impersonal God is hardly different from an impersonal fate. Second, Cobb's concession to pantheism, that God is not "an external center outside of or over against the world," significantly reduces the possibility of true novelty. Basically, there is nothing new under the sun, just ever-new arrangements of the same. Such an evolutionistic model significantly differs from the Judeo-Christian tenet of salvation as a new beginning.

If we want to respond effectively to the challenge posed by a Copernican world model, neither analogies to physics nor to biology suffice. One must meet the challenge on its own turf. One possibility would be to argue in analogy to matter-antimatter or universe-antiuniverse that in Hegelian fashion God dissipates himself into the world, being present in it through his own annihilation. While such a notion might satisfy death-of-God theologians, such as Thomas J. J. Altizer, it would again show serious deficiencies regarding the Christian concern for personal interaction and actual novelty.

God's dimensional relationship to our space-time continuum. More promising would be to pursue the Copernican world view in terms of its concepts of space and time. Within the space-time continuum God can certainly not be present as an additional object. This would mitigate against the basic conviction that God is not one object among others.

Often this problem has been addressed by claiming that God is both immanent and transcendent with relationship to his creation. Here God is both present in every point and time of our world and yet remains the one who made the world out of nothing and whose existence is underived. Although a Christian can agree with such a description, the question of God's whereabouts remains unsolved. Similarly, when one introduces for God's presence the metaphor "Logos" (word), once again the Logos is either spoken by someone or the Logos is an entity of its own requiring specification in space and time. Similar questions emerge with the metaphor "Spirit." It is conceived either as a ghost or as a "spiritual" entity which appears so elusive as to become nonsensical as John Wisdom has rightly reminded us.

More intelligible is the classical metaphor of panentheism which expresses that God is like an envelope for the world. "The world is

regarded as being, as it were, ‘within’ God, but the being of God is regarded as not exhausted by, or subsumed within, the world” (Peacocke 1979, 207). This option is to be preferred over the pantheistic model, in which God becomes largely synonymous with the world, or the deistic model, in which God is deemed largely distanced from the world (and residing at an unknown location). The panentheistic model also seems to be preferred by many process thinkers who occasionally talk about the world as God’s body. While such “body talk” again raises questions as to the precise nature of the interaction between God and world, the enveloping nature of God as suggested in classical panentheism helps to clarify questions of spatial contiguity and spatial interaction.

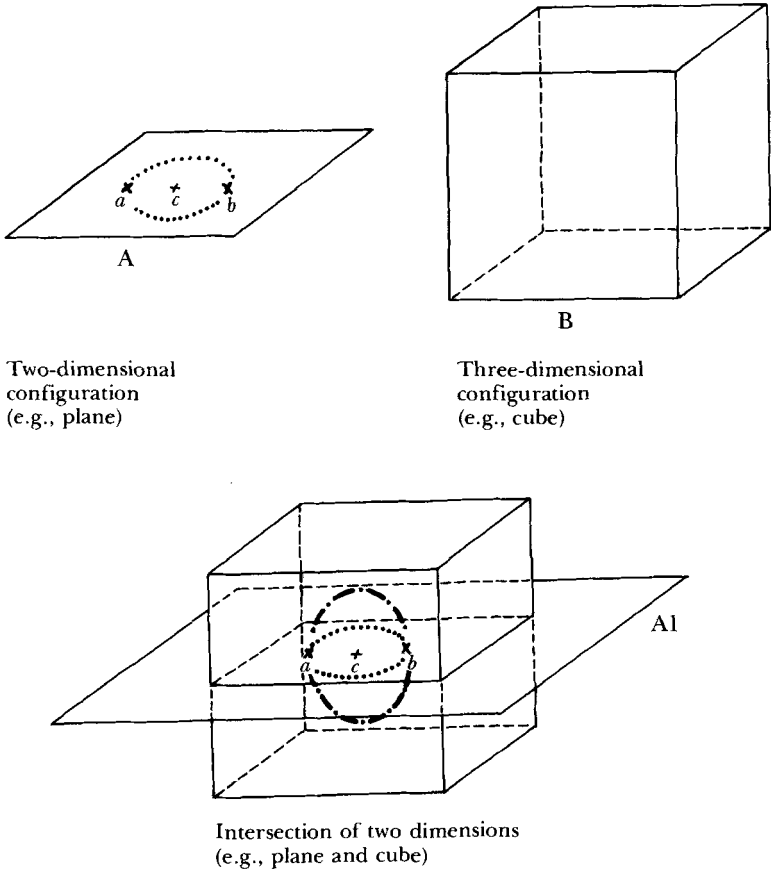
Especially the metaphor of a dimensional relationship between God and the world seems worthy of renewed attention.⁴ It allows us to perceive the issue of contiguity in space and time in a new light. Thomas F. Torrance seems to allude to this when he states:

In our investigation of nature we frequently come across a set of circumstances or events which do not seem to make sense for we are unable to bring them into any coherent relations with one another, but then our understanding of them is radically altered when we consider them from a different level, for from that point of view they are discerned to form a distinct, intelligible pattern. This can happen when an additional factor is included at the original level which helps us to solve the puzzle, but often the all-important additional factor must be introduced from a higher level, which means that the coherent pattern of the circumstances or events we are studying is reached only through a dimension of depth involving cross-level reference (Torrance 1976, 188).

Let us illustrate the usefulness of this metaphor by focussing on the transition from one dimension to another (see fig. 1). When a plane A (two-dimensional configuration) and a cube B (three-dimensional configuration) intersect, the resulting plane A1 bounded by the extensions of the cube B is part of the three-dimensional configuration and part of a two-dimensional configuration. If we consider it part of the higher dimension (cube), then all the possibilities of the plane A are available to it. For instance, if we connect on the plane two points *a* and *b* without touching a point *c* between them, we can circumvent *c* on the left or the right. Yet there are also possibilities available which do not occur if we consider the plane A1 as just belonging to the original plane A. We can circumvent *c* from above and from below, assuming A1 belongs to the cube B.

If we now assume that God is related to us in a dimensional way, being present in a way in which he is dimensionally higher than we are, God would embrace all our available possibilities in space and time plus possibilities which are not available to us in our present dimension. Thus both elements, God’s presence in our space-time continuum and

God's superiority to it, could be maintained. But it would be futile for us, being confined to our space-time continuum, to look in it for traces of divine transcendence. Everything we perceive in our world is perceived as being exclusively a part of this world. The higher dimension is in principle inaccessible to us. It can be disclosed to us only by someone from that dimension telling or showing us that what we perceive as belonging exclusively to our dimension is at the same time part of another and totally different dimension.



Two-dimensional configuration (e.g., plane)

Three-dimensional configuration (e.g., cube)

Intersection of two dimensions (e.g., plane and cube)

FIG. 1.—Intersection of plane and cube.

The twofold nature of reality is contained, for instance, in the conviction that a "purely natural event" (e.g., the instantaneous healing of a sick person) is at the same time a totally God-wrought process. Similarly, the assertion that Jesus is fully human and divine could be understood by assuming such a multilayered structure of reality. Even the real

presence of Christ in the Eucharistic elements could be made plausible by such a dimensional model without resorting to the notion of transubstantiation or diminishing his presence to mere symbolism. Since a higher dimension does not simply add a vertical or horizontal story, that is, another space, the issue of a "heavenly topography" becomes obsolete and the transition from a pre-Copernican world view to a Copernican or Einsteinian one would no longer pose a threat to God's "habitat." God would be present in our dimension (i.e., four-dimensional space-time continuum) without being contained by it and he would transcend it without being absent.

Yet the most important issue concerning God is not his "thatness," that God is or is not, but the quality of his presence. If God is simply present as another name for nature (*deus sive natura*), he is not only indistinguishable from no God at all but also utterly meaningless. Ludwig Wittgenstein correctly sensed this when he wrote: "We feel that even when *all possible* scientific questions have been answered, the problems of life remain completely untouched" (Wittgenstein [1922] 1961, sec. 6:52, 149). A dimensional relational model for the relationship between God and the world does not just make God's presence intelligible; it also allows us to perceive that God offers us a view of life which was inaccessible before.

At this point the issue of value and meaning emerges. As long as our perception is confined to our space-time continuum alone, we encounter an ever-increasing competition of values and meanings, often cut short by ideological reductionism or resulting in a relativism marked by ever-increasing confusion. Here the notion of God as the ultimate sanction of value and meaning provides our perception with a transcendent aspect beyond polarization and relativity. The notion of God as, for instance, experienced for the Christian in God's self-disclosure in Jesus Christ, or for both Jew and Gentile in his covenant with Israel, provides guidance and elicits trust with which we can bridge all conflicting polarities and face the future confidently and openly. A new dimension with unforeseen possibilities is opened to us indicating that there is more to the world as a whole than is accessible to our eyes. While a dimensional relational schema may not be a panacea in relating God and the world, it does suggest one model in which God's place in relation to the world can be reconceptualized in a new and intelligible way.

NOTES

1. Cf. Giordano Bruno ([1684] 1904, 3:40), where he asserts that the infinity of the worlds and of human forms of life results *a priori* from common principles.

2. Thomas Hobbes, ([1681] 1961, 1:86): *Atque metum tantum concepit tunc mea mater/ut pareret geminos, meque metumque simul.*

3. Cf. Hans Grass (1954, 63-64, 67-68), where he also touches on the issue of pantheism in connection with the real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper.

4. For the following cf. Karl Heim (1953, esp. 144-46), who also develops a dimensional approach to this issue.

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