

At Home in the Cosmos

Are we at home in the cosmos? There is urgency in the question. Whether by nuclear blast and radiation, the alteration of the earth's climate, or the poisoning, even the eradication, of our food supply, humanity has reached a critical point toward mass extinction. Environmental journalist Gary Strieker reports that "there is virtual unanimity among scientists that we have entered a period of mass extinction not seen since the age of the dinosaurs, an emerging global crisis that could have disastrous effects on our future food supplies, our search for new medicines, and on the water we drink and the air we breathe."¹ Indeed, scientists Bradley Cardinale, Marc Cadotte, and Todd Oakley reported at a 2008 meeting of the National Academy of Sciences that the Earth is in the midst of its sixth mass extinction of plants and animals, with nearly 50 percent of all species disappearing.²

Perhaps the greatest sign of the question's urgency is that it seems like a new question. Whether we are at home in the cosmos is an ancient question, one that has been asked ever since humans first began burying their dead with food and supplies for a long journey. In the short three or four hundred years of

that era we call modernity, however, the question gradually disappeared from our cultural consciousness. Raised again in the twentieth century in the midst of great scientific discoveries of great galactic spaces and a world apparently ruled by chance, the question was deemed irrelevant.³ The human's place in the cosmos was declared insignificant. This, in turn, led to a sense of lost intimacy with the cosmos. Virginia Stem Owens, the celebrated author of spiritual essays, put it this way:

Space as a mindless, lifeless void had no place in any of man's cosmologies before the scientific revolution. Before that, not only did the bushes burn, the serpent speak, and the trees clap their hands, but the ether, that vast, ineffable ocean in which we were all submerged, trembled with intelligence. Then came the drought, the four hundred years' temptation in the desert. We became accustomed to living in a wasteland where life receded steadily from being, and being receded from space. In our collective mind's eye, subject shrank from object. Our feet faltered, the music stopped, we fell out of the tree, the dance was over. The image of Bacon's individual bodies, reduced to external relationships, ruled our imagination.⁴

Owens makes clear how far our sense of loss of intimacy with the cosmos has progressed. Whether we are at home in the cosmos, however, is a question that asks more than our empirical significance in the universe. It is a question of ultimate significance for the human creature and, even, the cosmos. For asking the question suggests the search for an understanding of the value of human life, the tragic sense of that life, and the promise and hope of a transformed universe, a new creation. This bold claim comes not from the empirical sciences but from Christian belief. As such, it is also a question of ultimate significance for Christian theology. That the question had for a time disappeared simply points to the sad truth that Christian

theology has long lost its bearings under the onslaught of modern and post-modern teachings. We seem to have forgotten that the roots of Christian doctrine reach deep into the soil of cosmic awareness.

Indeed, our present cosmic awareness has taken a paradoxical turn under modernity's influence. A remarkable growth in understanding the forces of nature has led to human culture growing alienated from its natural matrix. A fount of knowledge about the natural world wildly successful in its practical application toward human aspirations and goals ironically has led to an urban culture that destroys its own habitat. In other words, nature and city have come to be at odds with one another. What sort of knowledge is it that enriches our understanding but leads us to self-destruction?

It is the sort of knowledge that enriches our understanding of the cosmos but not of the place of the human in the cosmos. Both the scientific knowledge and the cultural practices that flow from such explorations have shed little understanding on the question of how humans are meant to relate to the natural world. This is unsurprising, for such a question does not lend itself to scientific method or cultural analysis. Asking what is humanity's place in the cosmos is ultimately a theological question, one whose answer depends deeply (but not entirely) upon an accurate understanding of the natural world. Indeed, our very ability to see the natural world around us as a beautiful cosmos requires a bird's-eye view we simply do not possess. We cannot stand outside the cosmos and look at it from the outside to see that it truly is a cosmos. So our sense of the cosmos must come from inside, from deep within our human psyche. It is a deeply personal, profoundly interior sense that transcends our physical locality in time and space to look over at this world we live in and see it as cosmos, a home for us.

Moreover, as Christian belief claims, we are at the same time at home in the cosmos and deeply alienated from it. We were

made for the cosmos but then found ourselves at odds with it. We are refugees from Eden. Indeed, we would not be asking the question of being at home in the cosmos if there were not a tragic sense to our existence. We sense ourselves as expatriates and refugees, even in our own home, a tragedy compounded by our simultaneous sense of love for the world around us. The beauty of the universe convinces us it is our home, yet we know ourselves to be far away from home.

To be at home in the cosmos leads us ultimately to ask, What is the meaning of redemption? If, as Paul says, we await a new creation, then our being at home in the cosmos is also a question of the transformation of the cosmos. And this is a question the natural and human sciences are poorly equipped to explore.

Yet theology, equipped as it is to explore it, has apparently avoided the question of the transformation of the cosmos. For instance, in recent years, theologians have concentrated on recovering Jesus' teaching that the reign of God is already here even if not entirely just yet. But it has applied its understanding of that reign almost exclusively to human systems of politics and culture and not to the very land of God's dominion, the creation. And even when it has dealt with the new creation, contemporary Christian theology too often shifts it to the future instead of the present, either by claiming that the future is somehow in the present or simply avoiding the present altogether.

Yet there are signs that theology is beginning to rise to the occasion. More theological voices are raising the need for a theological treatment of cosmology. More studies are being published that show the cosmological roots of Christian doctrine. A vibrant and healthy dialogue between science and theology has been well underway for many decades.⁵ This work is part of that chorus of voices now rising to meet the challenge. Are we at home in the cosmos? It is an urgently critical question only theology is well equipped to answer but which will

require theology to go back to its cosmic roots and provide us a theological cosmology.

What Is a Theological Cosmology?

First, a theological cosmology is not natural theology, nor is it a theology of nature. A theological cosmology resembles another ancient theological project, namely, Augustine's *City of God*. As in the time of Augustine, Christianity is being blamed for a crisis of tremendous proportions.⁶ In Augustine's time, it was the sack of Rome; in ours, it is the sack of the earth.⁷ To counter the attacks, Augustine undertook a project to explain God's providential work in history that someday would culminate in a city greater than Rome, the *city of God*. While the analogy between the sack of Rome and the sack of the earth may not be perfect, a theological cosmology promises to be a project very much like Augustine's *City of God*.

Though faced with mass extinction, with the eyes of faith one can see with clarity that we are heading toward a new creation that in some way we are asked to cocreate.⁸ Perhaps at this point the analogy breaks down for it is not so much a city we are asked to help build. In fact, it is the metaphor of the city that precisely is being challenged. The city that once mediated between our cultural and our natural existence is dissolving before our very eyes. We are now being placed face to face with the fragile facts of our natural existence. The city can no longer be the human habitat that isolates us from our origins in the dust of the earth. Indeed, the city must either be transformed or it will dissolve. What we will have left may be nothing but a dead, arid desert of cultural monuments to human pride and self-deception.

Let me suggest, then, that it is not a city but a garden that is the context of our redemption. Where Augustine saw

redemption culminating in the city of God, I see our redemption culminating in the garden of God. This garden is not so much a future as it is a place. It is not a question of When will we get there? but Where are we going? Putting it this way exposes what has been a classic modern obsession with time that has dominated contemporary theology far too long. As such, it has obscured our traditional connections to the cosmic nature of redemption and imposed a kind of enchantment with modern assumptions passed off as correctives to an older tradition. To see redemption as a matter of place rather than time may help us see with renewed and restored eyes the crucial role that cosmology plays in theology. Where are we going? A theological cosmology ultimately seeks to give an answer. We are going to the *garden of God*, our home in the cosmos.

The Rising Call for a Theological Cosmology

In 1996, theologian Elizabeth Johnson chastised the theological community for its “neglect of the ‘cosmos.’” Such neglect, she told us, has compromised the intellectual integrity of theology by failing to look at “the whole of reality in the light of faith.” Even worse, such neglect has compromised the moral integrity of theology by blocking what could be a powerful contribution in addressing the “unprecedented ecological crisis” of our “threatened earth.”⁹ As thrilled as I was then to hear her acknowledge the central role the cosmos has in theology, I do not believe her call has been heeded.

While many theological reflections have been written since Johnson’s remarks that address the cosmos, most have dealt either with ecological concerns or with the relationship of science and theology. None of these, however, has had the power to illumine faith and capture the imagination in such ways as

can be found in, for instance, the cosmological writings of the great Jesuit scientist and theologian Teilhard de Chardin (whom I will discuss at length below).

Perhaps the reason lies in Johnson's own understanding of the theological project of a turn to the cosmos. She tells us that "Whatever our subdisciplines, we need to develop theology with a tangible and comprehensive ecological dimension. I am not suggesting that we just think through a new theology of creation but that cosmology be a framework within which all theological topics be rethought and a substantive partner in theological interpretation."¹⁰ What is exciting in Johnson's proposal is that she calls for a cosmology that will be a framework for all subsequent theological topics. What is not clear is whether such a cosmology is to be built upon insights from the natural sciences or upon ecological concerns or, even, out of the theological tradition itself. It seems to me that a theological cosmology must include the first two possibilities but must grow out of the last possibility, the theological tradition. In any case, Johnson has done theology a great service. She has pointed out the crucial need for a theological cosmology. Nonetheless, she leaves us with an important question. How is such a cosmology to be conceived?

Elizabeth Johnson is not only who has called for a more comprehensive cosmology. The noted scientist and cosmologist, George Ellis, tells us that while "cosmology is the science that studies the physical structure of the universe," such an understanding of cosmology is much too narrow. He believes that "cosmology refers to an overall world-view that throws light not only on the structure and mechanisms of the Universe, but also on its meaning."¹¹

In his book *Before the Beginning*, Ellis outlines what elements such a cosmology ought to include. He lists five "big questions" that have "concerned humanity since the dawn of

consciousness.” These include (1) the nature of the physical universe; (2) the question of creation, that is, origins; (3) the issue of the final state, that is, ends; (4) the place of humanity in the universe; and (5) the meaning of existence.¹² One can detect in these five questions, however, the three main objects of metaphysics: the universe, the nature of the human, and ultimate meaning or God. It seems Ellis wishes to bring metaphysical questions into the study of the physical structure of the universe. If this is so, then Ellis ought to be commended for recognizing that cosmology asks ultimate questions both of the universe and of the human.

Yet Ellis’s project leaves us with questions as well. Does Ellis mean to add metaphysical synthesis to scientific analysis or is he saying that scientific analysis is capable of metaphysical synthesis? If it is the former, Ellis is charting a path similar to Teilhard. I suspect, however, that Ellis means the latter, in which case I fear his project is doomed. The five questions he is interested in asking call for a method of synthesis. To expect scientific analysis, the method of breaking things up into parts in order to understand them, to encompass synthesis, the method of accurately describing the whole of experience, seems overly confident of science’s capabilities, if not actually naïve.

While appreciating Ellis’s insight into a broader cosmology, I see a theological cosmology being built out of all the possibilities implicit in Johnson’s proposal. A theological cosmology can be discerned out of the theological tradition. The tradition, however, is to be informed (but not constrained) by insights from the natural sciences. It should also be oriented toward ecological concerns in such a way that profound insights into humanity’s relationship to the environment emerge out of the tradition itself. This calls for a new method that is able to keep in sight all these possibilities and integrate them into a new insight. This is the method mentioned in the preface that I have called aesthetic insight and uses the technique called

interlacing. I believe aesthetic insight can give rise to a new cosmological consciousness in theology. Such a consciousness has profound implications.

A true cosmological consciousness in theology would lead us to revisit our understanding of creation so that we may get beyond the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. It ought to revisit our understanding of providence and bring light into our hopes of an abundant life shed of misery and suffering. In other words, it ought to give a robust account of the connection between creation and redemption. This means revisiting the doctrine of the fall and the nature of evil, not just in human affairs but in the universe.

A theological cosmology also ought to give an account not only of the original creation but also of the new. Moreover, it should do so by reexamining what we mean by our belief in the resurrection of the body, wherein the body is not just used as a metaphor. Finally, a revised doctrine of creation must help us understand the way to that new creation, not only as a journey into the future but also as a journey to a place. Our modern obsession with time ought to be corrected with a more biblical concern with place. Our redemption is tied not so much to a time but to a place. Until we make that shift in redemptive orientation, cosmological consciousness in theology will languish.

A theological cosmology, moreover, ought to involve more than borrowing insights from the natural sciences and applying them to theological issues. I do not believe Ellis's view of cosmology as a matter of adding metaphysical synthesis to scientific analysis is viable. Nonetheless, a theological cosmology ought to provide insights into the very nature of the universe itself. This was, after all, the very conviction of those patristic and medieval theologians to whom Johnson so eloquently refers in her appeal for a turn to the cosmos.¹³ Most important, however, a theological cosmology must address the question of being at home in the cosmos. This means, I believe, taking

another look at our original home in the cosmos so that we may look with fresh eyes at the promised new home. In other words, we must address the nature and role of the garden.

Outline for a Theological Cosmology

So what does this *garden* look like? What are the elements of a theological cosmology? The question of the nature of the universe certainly belongs to cosmology. In theological cosmology, however, the question does not take shape as merely asking about the physical structure of the universe. Theology recognizes that there is something beyond physical structure in the universe. For this reason, theologians have, for the most part, preferred to speak of a *cosmos* rather than a *universe*. This preference refers to the recognition that the whole that is the universe is not a merely physical whole. The “uni” in universe would not, in a theological cosmology, refer to a physical unity. The unity of the cosmos is different. What is the difference? It is beauty.¹⁴

Cosmos or Universe?

A cosmos is a beautifully ordered unity.¹⁵ As such, a beautiful unity is quite different from a mere physical unity. Bonaventure used the image of a stained-glass window, whose beauty manifests itself when light from the sun shines through it. Though the window is beautiful in itself, its beauty would not be manifest to us without the sun shining through. Such is the beauty of the cosmos. God’s glory shining through the window of the universe reveals its beauty, reveals it as cosmos.

If we carry the analogy of the stained-glass window further, one could describe the cosmos also as a window into sacred place, a place that engenders praise and worship. The sense that the cosmos calls for praise of its creator is part of a revised

doctrine of creation. The noted biblical scholar Claus Westermann, for example, tells us that “Praise of God, the Creator, does not presuppose the creation story, but quite the reverse: praise of God is the source and presupposition of the creation story.”¹⁶

As such, the unity of creation is shown to have a marvelous dynamism. It unites our hearts to God. Moreover, it has the double aspect of a liturgical dynamism. The cosmos receives glory and returns praise.¹⁷ Herein is the difference between the two unities. The unity that belongs to the cosmos is more than the unity of a whole. It is a unity made beautiful through its dynamism, which unites the cosmos and ourselves to the very One who made us. The dynamism so eloquently expressed in the big bang theory of the universe does not yet capture the fuller dynamism revealed in the Christian doctrine of creation. The big bang theory can make us gasp at the tremendous power at work in the universe, but it cannot help us see the true source of that power, a marvelous love.

Beyond ex Nihilo, the Ordaining Power of God

A cosmology, says Ellis, ought to give a theory of creation. I am not sure whether Ellis means that a cosmology ought to have a theory of origins or something about a creator. A theological cosmology, for example, has a theory of creation in the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, creation out of nothing. It is not, however, a theory of origins. It is a doctrine about the power of God. Indeed, a theological cosmology would point out that in order to understand the source of the power revealed in the physical cosmology that is the big bang theory of the universe, one must consider the nature of divine power.

Theologians in the Middle Ages made a useful distinction in the nature of God’s power: they recognized the difference between God’s *absolute* power and God’s *ordaining* power.¹⁸ God’s absolute power answered a particularly vexing question about the cosmos: Why something and not nothing? It is

the power that is behind the *ex nihilo* doctrine of creation. It emphasizes the absolute dependence of all created things on God's will. It is a powerful doctrine that makes clear that the universe, as a whole, is not self-made. It answers the question scientists hesitate to address in the big bang theory: What happened at what scientists call $t = 0$, that is, at the very instant the big bang went off?

Yet such a doctrine of God's absolute power leaves another important cosmic question unanswered: Why is the world ordered this way and not some other way? This question also belongs to a doctrine of creation. It refers to another aspect of God's power, the power to ordain or, rather, to shape the world. This power can be understood in both a static and a dynamic sense. The Middle Ages saw it very much in a static sense. The shape of the world is a done deal. God created a cosmic order that would last until the end time. Perhaps one of the greatest contributions of the natural sciences to theology has been the discovery that the world is very dynamic indeed. But what sort of cosmic dynamism has science discovered?

The Heart of Cosmic Dynamism: Cosmic Love

Perhaps the great astrophysicist Stephen Hawking can help us ask this question more eloquently. At the end of his book *A Brief History of Time* he muses: "What is it that breathes fire into the equations and makes a universe for them to describe?"¹⁹ I have given a hint of an answer above. It is a great love that orders as it unites. Such a love, however, cannot be understood without the tragic note that gives it context. As Paul Santmire put it, there is "travail to nature."²⁰ There is a struggle in nature herself that includes pain and extinction, suffering and agony. Such travail has been expressed in many religious myths. It is the struggle of order versus chaos. In Christian understanding, such a struggle cannot be described in terms of opposite warring principles. What God created is good. Precisely because it

was created good, struggle in nature must be seen in a special light. It is not the struggle of the strong against the weak but the struggle of a new universe being built. This new universe is meant not to replace, but to fulfill and complete, the original. It is the struggle inherent in reconciliation, that is, of a universe becoming reconciled to the loving order of God's cosmic plan. It is the universe struggling to become a cosmos.

There are signs of this struggle everywhere. Scientists, for example, are only beginning to expose the role that chaos and order play in nature. Order is nature's response to chaos and chaos is the creative source of order. Even more significant, this order out of chaos is strikingly beautiful. It is as if at every moment the universe chooses to order itself rather than become a chaotic mass of undifferentiated, static bits of inert matter. This apparent choice manifests itself in a great dynamism of endlessly beautiful forms that come and go with the centuries. It expresses a dynamism akin to spirit. It is the dynamism of a powerful love where chaos and order find reconciliation by forming ensouled bits of matter manifest as dynamic forms of striking beauty.²¹

As such, a theological cosmology goes beyond the *ex nihilo* doctrine. This doctrine has been used to express the absolute contingency of the universe. But another kind of contingency is part of the doctrine of creation. Contingency is also to be found in the reconciling power of God's ordaining love made manifest in the dynamic fragility and beauty of the universe's forms.

The contingency associated with divine power, however, has another dimension not captured in the *ex nihilo* doctrine. Such power created the Garden of Eden. God did not create a generic garden but a particular, contingent, that is, dynamically beautiful garden. In other words, God's creative power wrought not simply beings into existence but a particular place of striking beauty. Creation is not simply about existence but also about a place of existence.

Getting Back to Place

Elie Wiesel spoke of the twentieth century as “the age of the expatriate, the refugee, the stateless—and the wanderer.”²² For one such as me, a Cuban refugee, Wiesel exposes a painful wound. The experience of being placeless is particularly painful and frightening. Wiesel’s remarks reveal the pathos inherent in the question: Are we at home in the cosmos? It exposes as well the implicit cosmic pathos one finds in the letter to the Hebrews, a letter written with the exodus in mind.²³ The universe is also a refugee with us. As such, it points out that a theological cosmology is, in part, a theology of suffering and not simply a theology of nature. A theological cosmology must address suffering in a cosmic way. It must help us understand what Paul meant in Romans 8 when he tells us that creation groans to be fulfilled. Suffering, in other words, is the context in which a discussion of the universe’s final state must take place.

This context, according to the theological tradition, begins with an expulsion from Eden, a mandated displacement that, throughout the centuries of tradition, finds expression in a longing for a heavenly Jerusalem. Thus, it seems odd that the question of place has disappeared from our inquiries about the nature of our redemption in the cosmos. To be at home in the cosmos is ultimately a question of the meaning of redemption. Yet twentieth-century theology found it easier to speak of eschatology, the end times, than of cosmology, our final place. Such theology posited that the end of our suffering will occur not when we reach a place, our home, but when we end up at a point in time, the future. The future, however, has clouded contemporary theology’s understanding of redemption. It needs to get back to place.

In a theological cosmology, place means more than a location or a geography. Place has an interior dimension as well as

an exterior dimension. I live at 232 Cherrywood Avenue but it is home to me—it is both exterior and interior in my understanding. In a theological cosmology place takes on a very profound meaning. If the cosmos is seen to include an interior dimension, then place in cosmology includes what the tradition refers to as heaven and earth.

Heaven, in a theological cosmology, does not refer to some spiritual place outside of the creation but is part of the creation itself. It is the invisible referred to in the Nicene Creed.²⁴ It is the interior dimension of cosmos as place. A theological cosmology gives an account of the relation of heaven and earth and their role in our redemption. This relation is, essentially, the reconciliation of heaven and earth. In this, time is involved, but only as it relates to place. In this perspective, the future is inadequate to explain or even to point to the cosmic interlacing of heaven and earth into the home that is to be our salvation. The time of heaven and earth, of the invisible becoming visible, is not simply the future but also the present and the past. All of time must be invoked to understand the interpenetration of heaven and earth.

The Question of Evil

But heaven and earth as components of a theological cosmology raise questions regarding the interaction between heaven and earth. This was the place where premodern theology dealt with angels and demons. If we can get past the caricatures our modern age has made of angels and demons, we can perhaps recognize the importance of revisiting certain doctrines concerning angels in a theological cosmology.

One of these is the doctrine of the fall of the angels. Found in Daniel and in Revelation, the fall of the angels has been used in theology to qualify and deepen the meaning of the other fall, the fall of the human. The fall of the angels brings evil into the

creation right at its beginning. Somehow the mystery of evil is tied in with the very mystery of creation. If Christian belief in the fall of the angels ought to tell us anything, it is that it is insufficient to place evil entirely upon human shoulders. While humans introduced death into the world through their sin, they did not invent evil. Evil was offered to humans by the serpent, and humans accepted it.

The fall of the angels, as Louis Bouyer writes, helps us see the human “by virtue of his creation and its conditions, a first potential redeemer of the world. If he had been faithful to the call of God, who intended him to fill the place left by the prevaricator, his faithfulness would have erased the initial transgression. This is the meaning of paradise, the restoration of the world around man.”²⁵ This view has solid basis in the patristic literature yet has been neglected in contemporary thought, either due to a lack of belief in demons or angels or aversion to the doctrine itself. Nevertheless, the doctrine still has something to teach Christians in the twenty-first century. Evil has cosmic dimensions. We misunderstand its nature if we see it simply as a result of human moral failing. There is something profoundly spiritual in human evil acts that neither law nor reason can curb. The malignant spiritual dimension of evil is ultimately to be found in the human alienation from the cosmos.

Perhaps this lack of awareness about the cosmic dimension of evil explains why theological treatment of human evil and suffering borders on the irresponsible. Much of the contemporary discussion has focused on a dichotomy between “good guys” and “bad guys.” In this construction, there is not so much evil as there are bad guys that oppress and harm us. Good guys struggle against these bad guys and eventually overcome them. This dubious characterization of the nature of evil seems naïve and reductive. By contrast, studies concerning trauma victims provide us with a more expansive window into the nature of evil. Why trauma studies? First, they permit us to look at the

contemporary Job, innocent people devastated by an evil that is hard to name. Second, they provide a serious look at the nature of evil from an empirical, clinical perspective. As such, it is a fresh view somewhat free of metaphysical assumptions and very helpful in grasping the nature of evil as it appears to us today.

Trauma as a word has its roots in Greek and means “wound.” Trauma refers to more than physical wounds. Trauma also refers to wounds that are relational, emotional, psychological, and spiritual. A common way to define trauma is as a state of being overwhelmed physically and psychologically.²⁶ Understood this way, trauma can be seen as part of normal life. After all, life confronts us regularly by overwhelming us. Being born, for example, is our first traumatic experience. Trauma, then, can be seen as an ordinary element in human experience. If we were to leave the discussion on trauma at this point, however, it would be dangerous. While it is true that in life one is bound to get hurt, it is also true that once hurt one can expect care for one’s wounds. A key ingredient basic to life’s traumatic experiences is the response of others to an individual’s trauma; the nature of their response will determine if such trauma will be healing or destructive. As such, it isn’t trauma *per se* that is undesirable but how it is handled.²⁷ Therapists see in their practices trauma that has not been handled, trauma to which there has been no adequate response. In such cases, victims face lingering trauma, trauma that seems to feed on itself, as we see in those suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. Such trauma is intrinsically psychological and spiritual.

These studies of trauma victims suggest ways to characterize evil that is more concrete than the metaphysical description of evil as *privatio boni*, the privation of the good. These studies tell us that the attempt to define evil is an attempt to register something solitary and unknowable. In other words, whenever evil occurs, systemic ambiguity, denial, and obscurity attend it.

Evil, as Sue Grand so insightfully put it, “tends to be brazen in its presence and yet radical in its concealment.”²⁸ In other words, evil is “illusory and mysterious and at the same time blatantly obvious and concrete.”²⁹ This means that one must distinguish between trauma and evil. As Means and Nelson put it, “trauma is an event, evil is a process.”³⁰ It is evil, not the trauma, that is destroying the person!

Means and Nelson offer us the following definition of evil:

Evil creates and builds upon brokenness in the world by threatening, attacking, destroying, and desecrating the integrity of the relational nature of life. Furthering and exploiting the naturally occurring divisions within and between persons, evil leads to increased fragmentation, alienation, and polarization as it turns people against themselves, others, their natural environments, and their God. Evil works against reconciliation and healing and is the chief obstacle and threat to the wholeness and interconnectedness of God’s creation.³¹

Evil, then, operates in multiple levels at once: individuals, friends, families, social institutions, cultures, even the natural world itself. Evil destroys more than individuals. This picture of evil is not very different from the image Ignatius gives us in one of the spiritual exercises. Imagine a rock dropping into a pond. The ripples extend throughout the pond. In the same way, a traumatic event ripples through all society, including the natural world itself. If no response is given to this event, the trauma gives rise to a self-feeding process of disintegration and broken relationships.

This understanding of evil, then, helps us understand how important the doctrine of the fall of the angels is to our understanding of the fall of the human. For if we apply the understanding of evil we have learned from trauma studies, then perhaps we might see that the fall of the angels and the fall of humans

both revolve around the human place in the cosmos. Original sin is original challenge to find our home in the cosmos, a home made elusive to humanity through the temptations of malignant evil addressing human failing. This challenge is made present to every human generation. The challenge to finding our home in the cosmos subsequently means not simply the restoration of Eden but finding out what makes us truly human. It means loosening the grips of evil on this world by growing ever more human. The restoration of Eden, then, is not a mere return to Eden but a growing ability to respond to the brazenness of evil in the world and to reveal its insidious concealment. The key to our home in the cosmos, of course, is Christ, who came to show us what it means to be fully human and on the cross revealed evil so that it may never fully hide again. But Christ is the word become flesh. And in this doctrine, too, a theological cosmology is necessary to understand its full implications.

The Resurrection of the Flesh

To ask if we are at home in the cosmos is also to ask if we are at home in the flesh. It is flesh that ties the human to the cosmos. Flesh underscores the human as phenomenon. The human as phenomenon emphasizes our foundation in the processes and materiality of the cosmos. We are dirt, we are Adam, but we are dirt given form through the power of God's breath. In other words, we make God's spirit a visible phenomenon through the wondrous dynamic materiality that marks us as human. This is the human phenomenon. Matter matters to God. Matter makes spirit possible. Matter makes spirit visible. Nowhere is this clearer than in the creature called human. Indeed, the human reveals the spiritual orientation of matter in a way no other natural phenomenon can.

On the other hand, it is also flesh that makes it difficult to live in the cosmos. Flesh brings us pain, disease, hunger, thirst, and tears. The frailty of flesh questions our very ties to the

cosmos. Indeed, it is flesh that alerts us to a tragic sense to our life in the cosmos. For flesh offers us a paradoxical experience. There is no doubt that we experience flesh as mortal. Yet in that experience of mortality also lies an experience of immortality.³² That is, we know ourselves not only as mortal but also as immortal. Death is not the final answer for us, nor is it natural for the human creature.

It is this double experience, moreover, that poses flesh as the greatest challenge to Christian faith. Gnostics and a score of ancient and modern heresies challenge Christian faith by attempting to dismiss the paradox. Claims continually are made that either immortality of the human makes flesh an illusion or the mortality of the flesh makes immortality of the human improbable. This paradox cannot be easily dismissed. The sense that there is some sort of existence after death has been held since the first humans began to appear on the earth.³³ For Christians, the challenge can be put in form of a question: What do Christians mean by the resurrection of the flesh?

It is not an easy question for the theologian. It turns on how one understands flesh. Scripture is not very helpful here. The Hebrew Bible speaks of *bāśār*. The great scholar Hans Walter Wolff translated the term as “Man in his infirmity.”³⁴ It refers to the person as a whole but also to what we would call “flesh.” Yet if *bāśār* stands for flesh in its physical and material dimensions, it also stands for flesh in the sense of what binds people together, such as the connectedness of a family. Finally, *bāśār* also means the human who in him- or herself is weak and frail, even ethically frail.³⁵ For this reason, *bāśār* needs God’s help. Thus, in the Hebrew Bible, flesh has a variety of meanings around a single consensus: flesh is frail.

The New Testament does not clarify matters. Jesus heals deformities of the body but always associates it with the faith of the one healed. In other words, it is not clear what was the real object of healing, the body or the spirit. Paul continues

and even compounds this ambivalence. Capitalizing on the fact that the Greek language has two different words for body, *sarx* and *sōma*, he makes a distinction between the two. *Sōma*, like *bāšār*, denotes the person as a whole and also the physical and material elements that make up a human being. *Sarx*, on the other hand, refers to human frailty and mortality. In Paul's usage *sōma* is the basis of a life with God, *sarx* is a life that separates us from God. In the resurrection, it is the *sōma*, not the *sarx*, which is risen.³⁶ Ambivalence becomes confusion when, in ordinary translation, the nuances in the Greek language are lost. *Sōma* and *sarx* are often translated as "body" and "flesh." Yet this is not the whole story.

The New Testament retains the Hebrew Bible's characterization that flesh is frail but adds a new component. The need of flesh for God's help finds answer in the word become flesh. Frailty finds God's favor, not God's condemnation. Our understanding of flesh as frail must find answer in the incarnation, God finding favor with the frail. A theological understanding of flesh must begin with Christ. The ambivalence and confusion between body and flesh find their rest here. For if we trace the meaning of flesh through the Christ, we find more clarity on its meaning in the crucifixion, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and return of the Christ. The frailty of the flesh is the strength of God. These two are inseparable and define our place in the cosmos.

A Theological Cosmology

So, again, what is a theological cosmology? Let me suggest that a theological cosmology attempts to "see" God in all things. It makes visible the inner meaning of phenomena by allowing them to move the human heart. In other words, a theological cosmology is an aesthetics of creation. Like science, it pays

attention to the phenomena of the universe, but it also attempts to “see” the inner meaning of all things. A theological cosmology, however, recognizes that for the human there can be no detached observation. Phenomena proper to a cosmos move the human heart. We do not simply observe; we participate.

This understanding of a theological cosmology reflects Teilhard’s profound insight that the human is a phenomenon. It also adds, however, the theological insight that the human is not a mere first among phenomena, we are meant to know and love the phenomena in the world, including the phenomenon that we are. Moreover, the cosmos’ fate is tied to our own. What ought to give us pause, however, is that we, among all creatures, are meant to see the world as a cosmos. This is not merely a property of our biology. It defines our place in the cosmos. We were meant to restore goodness and justice to the world. Now, because of the fall, it is our own goodness and justice that are also at stake; but the essential mission has not changed. Evil is not to have its way in the world.

Christ came that our mission be finally accomplished. He sent us the Holy Spirit to renew the gift of our humanity that we may heal the trauma ever present in the universe. Together with Christ through the Holy Spirit, we are to restore Eden in the reconciliation of heaven and earth. We are to be reunited with God in Eden because God did not mean to stand outside of God’s own creation but to dwell in and inhabit it. God means to live with us in a cosmos that reflects and allows all creatures to participate in God’s own goodness and life. Our ability to see a cosmos is our ability to experience God’s presence in all things. This is not pantheism. It is not even panentheism. It is the garden of God.