

# Is God Everywhere? An Anthropological Theology of God and the Cosmos



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## ABSTRACT

This article addresses the “where” question for understanding who God is for Christians. It explores the divine presence through the lenses of theological cosmology, Christology, and pneumatology. Limiting the investigation to (and even connecting) creation and redemption, and engaging contemporary theologians such as Adolphe Gesché, Alejandro García-Rivera, Ian McFarland, Kathryn Tanner, and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, it discusses God’s immanence and transcendence, culminating in spiritual panentheism. Ultimately, places where God is encountered are sacred with two characteristics of God’s glory descending as “rain,” while worship ascends as “vapor” (upward and forward). As human, we are in this world first, a world to cultivate as cosmos (i.e., beautiful and shared world), although our destiny is elsewhere: where our world corresponds to God’s fullness. This means being at home in the cosmos, being at home in the flesh, and seeing God in all things. God is everywhere; we just need to experience divine presence by seeing all things in God. This implies lived faith in everyday life: now in the present, here and there, everywhere.

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## Introduction

In catechism during childhood, we were discouraged to ask difficult questions about where God was before creating heaven and earth. We were told that God was preparing hell for those who ask such kind of questions. We were supposed to assume that God is in heaven, while having an eye, mind, and heart on our daily concerns and endeavors. God is here and elsewhere at the same time; **God is everywhere.**

Now that I am a grown-up believer and a theologian, I am inclined to ask if God is really everywhere and address other related questions. Where is Jesus now? What does Jesus’ answer “Come and see” entail to the quest of Andrew and the second unknown disciple to be (John?), who asked: “*Rabbi, where are you staying*” (Jn 1:35-39)? Does the symbol of wind as related to the Holy Spirit, with its unknown origin and destination (Jn 3:8-21), convey the idea of a location where to find God and “the heavenly things?” I mean, does this place, *hic et nunc*, matter if the above *pericope* implies a request of paying greater attention to it as to not miss the Spirit while

She is here?<sup>1</sup> Ultimately, what all these different questions attempt to express is a single quest, a single aspiration: by seriously considering “where” the Trinitarian God is (or has been), can places (whether physical or ontological) and spaces (physical, mental or social)<sup>2</sup> tell us who God really is? Adolphe Gesché (1928-2003) alluded to the fact that “it is very important for a human to know—that is perhaps the very reason of theology—who God is.”<sup>3</sup> For this, he listed the question of “*ubi*: where do we find God?” among the important steps in that quest.<sup>4</sup> Gesché will be one of the main interlocutors in this conversation as he leads us to search for God in creation, in others, or as he warns us that “God’s presence is indefinable, gushing from an encounter even when one is unaware of it,” or as he defines Jesus as the “*ubi*” par excellence for encountering God.<sup>5</sup>

As it may already appear, this paper concerns Christian talk about God and focuses on places. But, contrary to what it was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a purely historical portrait of Jesus was developed by refusing the basic presupposition of the dogma of the Incarnation,<sup>6</sup> this reflection accepts from the outset the dogma of the Trinity, but strives to provide a theological interpretation of known, supposed or imagined places and spaces. It underlines the characteristics of God. Besides, instead of considering all the possible spaces and places spanning from heaven to hell and vice versa (which would surely be beyond the scope of this paper), it limits this investigation to creation and redemption.

My approach is inspired by Balthasar’s reflection on Jesus going to the Cross, to the Dead, and to the Father, in *Mysterium Paschale*, and by that of Kärkkäinen when he deals with the Spirit in creation. I am also inspired by Kathryn Tanner in *God and Creation in Christian Theology*. But since all God-talk connected to places and spaces necessarily leads to cosmology, I start by examining some aspects of theological cosmology according to Adolphe Gesché and Alejandro García-Rivera. In any case, what ultimately transpires in this discussion is the dialectic of God being in heaven and in the cosmos, and what it entails.

The discussion will evolve according to four main moments: (i) Adolphe Gesché’s mode of God’s presence in the world; (ii) Ian McFarland’s understanding of the Incarnation; (iii) Alejandro García-Rivera’s approach to God’s ordaining love in the cosmos; and (iv) Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen’s divine panentheism. Gesché suggests four modes of God’s presence in the world, but seems to minimize God’s immanence. McFarland (along with Kathryn Tanner) beautifully integrates God’s immanence and transcendence vis-à-vis creation, but seems to dilute the physical and, like Gesché, focuses on time still. García-Rivera takes very seriously the physical world and calls for focusing on place, instead of time. He creatively brings the notion of place and beauty in Christology, and accounts for the relevance of the ascension today. But, like Pierre

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<sup>1</sup> The use of “She” or “He” for the Holy Spirit is often a matter of discussion. I am using “She” in this paper in English, while I would be inclined to use “He” if I were writing in French. I agree with Anthony C. Thiselton that “when we call the Holy Spirit personal, we do not need to ascribe personal gender.” After showing that the words for “Spirit” in Hebrew and in Greek are *grammatically* feminine and neuter, while John uses the masculine “*paraklētos*,” not only does Thiselton discourage the demeaning use of “it” for the Holy Spirit, but also encourages the reference to the analogical *fatherly* and *motherly* qualities for the Holy Spirit. See *The Holy Spirit in Biblical Teaching, Through Centuries and Today*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 469-470.

<sup>2</sup> In 1974, Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991) published a book which has been since reedited many times and translated in several other languages. In *La Production de l’Espace*, Lefebvre asserts that writings on spaces, landscapes, suburbs and towns are not really knowledge of spaces, rather point to the theoretical unity of the physical, mental, and social spaces. Some findings of this book will be of use in this paper.

<sup>3</sup> Adolphe Gesché, *Dieu pour Penser : IV. Le Cosmos* (Paris, France: Les Editions du Cerf, 2004), 91.

<sup>4</sup> Adolphe Gesché, *Dieu pour Penser : III. Dieu*, Troisième Edition (Paris, France: Les Editions du Cerf, 2010), 36-40.

<sup>5</sup> Gesché, *Dieu*, 39-40.

<sup>6</sup> Aloys Grillmeier, *Le Christ dans la Tradition Chrétienne*, Vol. 1 : *De l’âge Apostolique à Chalcédoine (451)*, Traduit de l’Anglais par Sœur Jean-Marie OP et Monique Saint-Wakker, (Paris, France : Les Editions du Cerf, 1973), 21.

Teilhard de Chardin whom he criticizes on the very issue of the Holy Spirit, he himself only frugally expands on cosmic pneumatology. So, Kärkkäinen's treatment of panentheism in creational pneumatology seems appropriate to close this conversation.

Notwithstanding the conclusions the paper will reach, let me state from the outset that any space, as far as it involves God, can no longer be a mere space; it becomes a "place," at least in the way Walter Brueggemann distinguishes space and place: a space is a meaningless arena, void of relationship and authority, while a place has historical meaning, provides identity, carries the weight of important words spoken and vows exchanged within it, defines vocation, and helps to grasp destiny. "[Place] is a declaration that our humanness cannot be found in escape, detachment, absence of commitment, and undefined freedom."<sup>7</sup> More importantly, places where God is encountered are sacred places that shape one's vision of the life with God who is "absolute/marvelous love;" they "receive God's glory (rain) and engender praise and worship (vapors)."<sup>8</sup>

### ***God's Presence in the World According to Gesché***

While discussing the gratuitousness of creation, Adolphe Gesché affirms that "creation is brought forth for itself, freely. Whatever He does, God never does it driven by a necessity or a need that governs His actions, but by a pure gift and gesture which He does not need and through which He then offers precisely and only in full glut: our existence is well wanted by God, for itself."<sup>9</sup> Not only is human existence desired by God, Gesché sees through it more of the space for interaction between the Creator and the creature: God creates by inspiring "creators, beings capable in turn of being subjects," to the point that God ultimately reveals Godself to be "a 'sensitive,' reachable, and concerned by His creation, *quia ipse voluit...* endowing his creature with an ability to touch Him while granting Himself the ability to be. The creative act [is] gratuitous, without recovery, [and] without repentance."<sup>10</sup> Thus, once these premises are laid, Gesché discusses heaven and earth from Psalm 113:24 (Vg): "*Caelum, caeli Domino; terram autem dedit filiis hominum*" and concludes that it is important to think of God from the world, the cosmos where "the human is at home and in their glory." From the cosmos, the *Pater noster* can be said: "Father, you who have your place, keep us in ours" or the psalm 121:2 (Vg) can be recited as follows: "*Auxilium meum a Domino qui fecit caelum et terram.*"<sup>11</sup>

It seems to me therefore that, as in any journey, the starting point is to situate oneself before asking where he/she comes from and where he/she is headed to. As human, we are in this world and in the cosmos first,<sup>12</sup> although our destiny is elsewhere. Simply talk about and even naively talk about "our crazy reasons to love and want to save this world" in which we find ourselves, is already a nod to God who created it so that it is lived in (Is 45:18) and gave us the right to inhabit it, a right so deeply rooted "that, if we can so say, God himself cannot dispossess us of it, if it is true, as we have seen, that the creative act, because gratuitous, is without recovery, without

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<sup>7</sup> Walter Brueggemann quoted by Alejandro García-Rivera, *The Garden of God: A Theological Cosmology*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009), 44-45.

<sup>8</sup> García-Rivera, *The Garden of God*, 10-11. The rain and vapors analogies are my own.

<sup>9</sup> "*La création est posée pour elle-même, gratuitement. Quoi qu'il fasse, Dieu ne le fait jamais mû par une nécessité ou un besoin qui le gouverne, mais par un pur don et geste dont il n'a pas ontologiquement besoin et qu'il offre alors précisément et seulement en pleine surabondance: notre existence est bien voulue par Dieu pour elle-même.*" Gesché, *Le Cosmos*, 38-39.

<sup>10</sup> *Dieu crée en suscitant "des créateurs, des êtres capables à leur tour d'être des sujets," au point que Dieu se révèle en définitive "un Dieu 'sensible,' 'muable,' atteint, concerné par sa création, quia ipse voluit... dotant sa créature d'une capacité de le toucher et s'accordant à lui-même la capacité de l'être. L'acte créateur [est] gratuit, sans reprise, [et] sans repentance."* See Gesché, *Le Cosmos*, 40-45.

<sup>11</sup> *Le cosmos où "l'homme est chez lui et dans sa gloire."* "Père, toi qui as ton lieu, garde-nous dans le nôtre" Gesché, *Le Cosmos*, 43-47.

<sup>12</sup> "*On se plaint d'un monde sans Dieu. N'est-ce pas parce qu'on a trop pensé Dieu sans monde ?*" Gesché, *Le Cosmos*, 47.

repentance.”<sup>13</sup> In the same vein, as Gesché points out, the love of the neighbor which consists on feeding the hungry or giving a shelter to the homeless, etc. is no less than sharing a portion of this cosmos with others.<sup>14</sup> In other words, the human relationship to God and to fellow humans is like mediated by the world (the cosmos) in such a way that even the full anthropological and cosmological understanding must posit God in this world.<sup>15</sup> But how does God too inhabit the cosmos and how are we to make sense of it?

Gesché underlines four ways in which the divine *Logos* too inhabit the world (*oikos tou Theou Logou*): (i) through eternal divine Wisdom preexisting the creation, but having the project of a home within it, delighting with human beings as it can be deduced inter alia in Ps 77:2, Pr 8:30-31, Pr 9:1 and even Mt 13:35; (ii) through creation since it came forth according to the *Logos exemplar*, i.e. made with intelligence and reason (Ps 135:5) to be precisely a cosmos;<sup>16</sup> (iii) through the Incarnation in which God “*in propria venit*” (Jn 1:11) and made his dwelling among us (Jn 1:14); and (iv) through the *Parousia* not only in the sense that, as it is said in the creed, “Jesus will return in his glory,” which means that “it is on this earth that the table of eternal banquet stands,” but also in the sense that creation itself, while passing away (1Cor 7:31), will share the glory of Christ in its final form (Rm 8:19-22).<sup>17</sup> Through creation, the *Logos* is at once (i) “*Verbum Incarnandum*” (St Bernard), that is the eternal Verb capable of Incarnating himself,<sup>18</sup> (ii) “*Logos per quem*” of the creation, (iii) “*Verbum Incarnatum in propria venit*,” and (iv) the *Logos* of the *Parousia*, and in all these instances the world is *oikos Logou*. From the above, Gesché concludes that “the relationship between God and the world is not a relationship of immanence, but, precisely, a relationship of habitation.”<sup>19</sup> I almost think of the paradoxical phenomenon of the house growing to the extent of its host:<sup>20</sup> the cosmos will better itself, not physically, but to the extent of the gradual welcoming of God’s fullness.

Although Gesché’s four modes of God being in the world still focus on time, a notion to be challenged later on by Alejandro García-Rivera’s vision, they have the advantage of offering us at least two learned elements on the talk on God and places: (i) not only does creation reveal the

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<sup>13</sup> “Ce droit de l’homme au cosmos s’enracine si profond que, si l’on peut dire, Dieu lui-même ne peut nous en déposséder, s’il est vrai, comme nous l’avons vu, que l’acte créateur, parce que gratuit, est sans reprise, sans repentance.” Gesché, *Le Cosmos*, 45 & 84.

<sup>14</sup> “Donner du pain à qui n’en a pas, un toit à qui en est dépourvu, etc., qu’est-ce, chaque fois, sinon donner un morceau du cosmos (un morceau de pain, un lopin de terre à qui est ‘sans feu ni lieu,’ une maison pour habiter la terre) ?” Gesché, *Le Cosmos*, 45.

<sup>15</sup> “[Il] est important pour l’homme, et pour sa demeure qu’est la terre, qu’il y ait un Dieu sur cette terre.” Gesché, *Le Cosmos*, 86-87.

<sup>16</sup> It is interesting to realize that the English nouns and adjectives “cosmos,” “cosmic,” and “cosmetic” have a same Greek root κοσμέω which means “to put in good order” as one can arrange his or her hair. Hence, the connotation the cosmos has with order, decency, and ornament in classical writings. In other words, by creating the cosmos, God called order out of chaos and that order itself was beautiful. “A cosmos,” states García-Rivera, “is a beautiful ordered unity.” García-Rivera, *The Garden of God*, 10.

<sup>17</sup> “La terre est jusqu’au bout lieu de Dieu où agit son Logos. ‘Dont le règne n’aura pas de fin.’” Gesché, *Le Cosmos*, 87-89.

<sup>18</sup> “Il y a en Dieu une ‘structure de capacité’ d’humanité.” Gesché, *Le Cosmos*, 91-92.

<sup>19</sup> Gesché, *Le Cosmos*, 93. He also writes: “[Le] Logos divin n’est pas immanent au monde (comme une âme), mais transcendant (comme une Personne, un Sujet). Mais transcendance veut néanmoins dire présence (ce qui est d’ailleurs bien plus qu’immanence).” *Le Cosmos*, 107.

<sup>20</sup> In his *Poétique de l’Espace*, Gaston Bachelard is particularly interested in the phenomenology of the function of inhabiting and goes so far as to examine how the most soft being (the Giant Clam/ “*Grand Bénitier*”) builds the hardest and most scalable moving house. Bachelard writes the following: “La nature a une manière très simple de nous étonner : c’est de faire grand [à la manière du] *Grand Bénitier* ; ...le mollusque ne pèse que 14 livres, mais le poids de chacune de ses valves est de 250 à 300 kilogrammes, et elles ont un mètre à un mètre et demi de longueur... La coquille de l’escargot, la maison qui grandit à la mesure de son hôte est une merveille de l’Univers... Le limaçon a fabriqué son ‘escalier.’ Ainsi, toute la maison de l’escargot serait une cage d’escalier. A chaque contorsion, l’animal mou fait une marche de son escalier en colimaçon...” Gaston Bachelard, *La Poétique de l’Espace*, (Paris, France: PUF, 1957), 116-119. Emphasis added.

*Logos* as the *ad intra per quem* of the Trinity, but also, (ii) once the creation being made and still growing, the human becomes somehow the *ad extra per quem* of God, in such a way that it is possible to consider human beings as involved in some measure in the process of co-creation with God, i.e. “ensure, respect and complete this home of the *Logos*.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, not only does creation talk about God, it reveals as well who we are as humans, “destined beings to one day share in full the very God’s life.”<sup>22</sup> It means also that both God (*Logos*) and human beings inhabit the world (*oikos anthropou* and *oikos tou Theou Logou*) which in turn becomes “the place of encounter, dialogue and exchange” between them, with human beings “taking God’s breath and staying in city with God.”<sup>23</sup> In the same vein, Ian McFarland asserts that “when God takes flesh, the ontological ‘space’ between God and the world does not collapse; it is rather confirmed as a space of grace—the condition of creation’s fulfillment rather than a threat to it.”<sup>24</sup>

### ***God’s Immanence and Transcendence According to Tanner and McFarland***

If we leave aside the two Gesché’s modes of God’s presence in the world that imply time (Eternal Divine Wisdom and *Parousia*), Kathryn Tanner and Ian McFarland may help unite the two remaining modes: creation and Incarnation, without falling in the danger of “either [blurring] the distinction between God and creatures, or [making] God’s relation to creation [fall] short of full personal presence.”<sup>25</sup> According to Tanner, there is “fundamental consistency between the doctrines of incarnation and creation, such that God’s taking flesh in Jesus does not entail any fundamental shift in or disruption of God’s way of relating to creatures generally. (...) [If] creatures are by definition always *present to God*, who is the direct and immediate cause of their existence, only in taking flesh does God, too, become *present to creatures* by living among them as a creature. (...) [Incarnation] describes God’s normal way of being in the world.”<sup>26</sup> Contrary to Gesché who denies God’s immanence in the world, Tanner affirms both immanence and presence: “the incarnation is best understood (following Tanner) as an unexpected intensification of human experience of God’s immanence *and* transcendence, grace *and* judgment, that comes with God being present not only *in* the world, but also *to* it. In other words,

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<sup>21</sup> See Gesché, *Le Cosmos*, 89 and footnote 13. Being particular within the creation does not make the human race a dominant and abusive potentate to the rest of creation. On the contrary, it is a matter of much more responsibility. Gesché disserts in length on the notion of “safeguard” and “preservation” of creation as a human duty to “care for what God saves or wants to save.” “*Ce que nous avons ... à préserver ici touche à notre naissance et à notre essence. (...) L’homme n’est pas fait pour cette terre seulement. (...) Le monde lui-même est fait pour plus, et il en gémit (voir Rm 8,22-23).*” *Le Cosmos*, 102-107, 111-115.

<sup>22</sup> Gesché, *Le Cosmos*, 90.

<sup>23</sup> “*La terre sera terre de rencontre, de dialogue et d’échange –de parole (logos) précisément-, non de confusion ou de fusion meurtrières. (...) Dans son rapport à notre terre, Dieu n’est pas quelconque, ...mais Sujet. Sujet ex Quo [Père] : Eph 3,25 ; Sujet per Quem [Jésus] : Jn 1,3 ; Sujet in Quo [Saint-Esprit] : 1Cor 2,10-16 ; [mais aussi] Logos séminal (le Père), Logos proféré (le Fils, sa Parole subsistante) et Logos ‘endiathète’ (l’Esprit qui séjourne en nous comme en son temple et y parle à notre propre esprit en gémissement inénarrables, voir Rm 8,26).*” Gesché, *Le Cosmos*, 94-95, 98, 117. In the last part of the citation about God’s breath and dwelling in city with God, Gesché quotes Clement of Alexandria: “*Theon anapnein*” and “*Theoi sumpoliteuesthai*.”

<sup>24</sup> Ian A. McFarland, “‘Always and Everywhere:’ Divine Presence and the Incarnation” in Rosemary P. Carbine & Hilda P. Koster (editors), *The Gift of Theology: The Contribution of Kathryn Tanner*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 59-79, at 64.

<sup>25</sup> McFarland, “‘Always and Everywhere:’ Divine Presence and the Incarnation,” 62.

<sup>26</sup> McFarland, “‘Always and Everywhere:’ Divine Presence and the Incarnation,” 60-61. *Italic original.* See also Niels Henrik Gregersen (ed.), *Incarnation: On the Scope and Depth of Christology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), a collection of sixteen theological essays by prominent scholars such as Gerald O’Collins, Jürgen Moltmann, Richard Bauckham, John Behr, Elizabeth A. Johnson, Denis Edwards, Torstein T. Tollefoen, and so forth. This book explores and debates the idea of “deep incarnation”—the view that the divine incarnation in Jesus presupposes a radical embodiment that reaches into the roots of material and biological existence, as well as into the darker sides of creation. The notion of “darker side” entails the inclusion of vulnerability, suffering (pain, disease, hunger, thirst, and unjust tears), death, biological decay, and all the tragic aspects of material existence within the scope of God’s getting flesh in Christ.

although it had never been possible to flee from God's presence (Jer. 23:24 / Ps. 139:7), only with Jesus is it possible to *identify* that presence with a particular created reality—to be able to point to a creature and say truly, "This [one] is God."<sup>27</sup> Following Tanner's understanding of God's presence in creation as both immanence and transcendence, McFarland uses Maximus the Confessor to make the point that the Incarnation "has nothing to do with an increase in God's presence in creation," but serves two purposes: (i) the visibility of God as Person ("what we see in Jesus is flesh and blood—created substance—but the one *whom* we see is no less than God, the eternal Word, the Second Person of the Trinity, ...the visible image of a God whose nature remains inherently invisible (Col. 1:15)"), and (ii) make understand the process of *theosis* through the relationship between the *Logos* and *logoi* (Jesus is "the *Logos* in a *logos*, the infinite in the finite, of the Creator as creature, such that it becomes both necessary and possible to say, "This creature is God."").<sup>28</sup> On the one hand, McFarland explains,

the point of the incarnation is not that a God who had been distant from creatures should now draw close to them, or that a God who had been nowhere in the world should now be everywhere; [it] is rather that God should be present to creation in a new, visible mode, distinctively different from the primordial relationship of Creator to creature whereby the world is sustained in being. God cannot be present visibly as divine, because the divine nature is inherently invisible by virtue of its transcendence. (...) [The] point of the incarnation is not the revelation that God is everywhere (although it does serve as confirmation of that fact), but precisely that God can be identified with a particular individual living at a specific time and place. [Though] we are always present to God, it is only by assuming flesh—taking on a creature life that can be heard, seen, looked at, and touched (1 John 1:1)—that God is present to us. (...) God is present everywhere in creation quite apart from the incarnation. But in the incarnation—and only there—this presence becomes visible: we behold a creature, and yet we see God.<sup>29</sup>

On the other hand, McFarland develops the relationship between the one divine *Logos* and the *logoi* in several steps that can be summarized in the following statements:<sup>30</sup> (i) All created natures are characterized by a distinct principle or *logos* that defines them as the particular kinds of creature they are. (ii) The created *logoi* are grounded in the one divine *Logos* and are projections of the divine *Logos* in such a way that they can be called "portions of God." (iii) Each created *logos* participates in God in accordance with its own particular way of being. (iv) No being is created perfect. For a creature to achieve perfection is for it to conform as fully as possible to its distinctive *logos* and therefore, the perfection of creatures is a process, not an event. (v) To deviate from God's will is to fail to be the creature God willed us to be in creating us (God's aim in creating is precisely that creatures should receive and enjoy their created being to the fullest). The process of deviation can go so wrong that there is a possibility that God should say to a creature: "I do not know you" (Mt 25:12), as to indicate how unrecognizable it has become. Instead, Jesus, the *Logos* in a *logos*, perfected so well that that it becomes both necessary and possible to say, "This creature is God." God the Father himself can testify to him as during the transfiguration on the high mountain of Tabor: "*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him*" (Mt 17:5). (vi) The end of the process of perfection is deification or *theosis*, while McFarland does not pronounce himself for the end of the opposite process of deviation. (vii) Although every creature has a peculiar *logos* of its own that is grounded in the one divine *Logos* (meaning the whole creation is called to perfection), all creatures come to God through humanity, and all humanity comes to God through Christ. (viii) There is no way for us to ascend

<sup>27</sup> McFarland, "Always and Everywhere: Divine Presence and the Incarnation," 63. *Italic* original.

<sup>28</sup> McFarland, "Always and Everywhere: Divine Presence and the Incarnation," 74-77. The order and the reformulation are my own; so, I am responsible for any misstatement they may contain.

<sup>29</sup> McFarland, "Always and Everywhere: Divine Presence and the Incarnation," 75-78.

<sup>30</sup> The eight statements that follow are gleaned here and there from McFarland, "Always and Everywhere: Divine Presence and the Incarnation," 70-78.

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on our own from the myriad creaturely *logoi* to the one divine *Logos* because the whole exceeds the fragments by too much to be deduced or extrapolated from them.

As it can be deduced from the above analysis, Tanner and McFarland would agree with Gesché's "*per quem*" and "*in propria venit*," but their views would diverge on the issue of God's immanence in the world. In my view, it makes more sense to talk in terms of both immanence and transcendence of God's presence in the world, as Tanner does. As for McFarland, while his treatment of God's visibility as a Person and of the relationship between the one divine *Logos* and the infinite created *logoi* clarifies Gesché's notion of divine inhabitation, it blurs even more the issue at hands, namely whether God is everywhere. In fact, McFarland remarks that

[the] incarnation does not mean that God draws near to us physically in Jesus, because the divine nature is not a physical quantity for which the concept of spatial distance or proximity has any meaning. [All] things are distant from God not by place, but by nature. [It] makes no sense to conceive of the incarnation in terms of any sort of quantitative augmentation of divine presence, since the latter is already at an absolute maximum. God draws near to us in Jesus in that God becomes a creature, encountering us personally by living and breathing as a flesh-and-blood human being.<sup>31</sup>

In other words, while examining the locus of divine presence in creation, we should not focus on the physical nature and calculate quantity and distances as we would for a created thing or being; God is of different nature: God is everywhere according to divine nature, but *what* we see in Jesus (not *whom*) was limited in space and time. This limitation (or so perceived) raises at least two questions related to the notion of place: (i) Where is Jesus now? And (ii) What is the meaning of the Ascension? The answer to the first question orients the second, but in overall it is the Incarnation itself which is at stake: Should God become incarnate multiple times and what becomes of "*what we see*" at each incarnation?<sup>32</sup> Perhaps here is the point where the late Cuban-American physicist and theologian Alejandro García-Rivera (1951-2010) can come to aid. Indeed, he approached these issues in terms of discontinuity and continuity, and harmoniously connected the physical and the spiritual, the exterior and the interior, earth and heaven.

### ***God's Ordaining Love and the Cosmos According to García-Rivera***

Contrary to Gesché who considered aspects of time (eternity and *parousia* being among them) to understand how God inhabits the creation, García-Rivera insisted that

a revised doctrine of creation must help us understand the way to [the] 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. It is not a question of When will we get there? but Where are we going? ...We are going to the *garden of God*, our home in the cosmos.<sup>33</sup>

He then urges to "fall in love with the earth if there is to be a heaven [or] the true intersection of heaven and earth [where] the two 'hands' of God –Christ and the Spirit– are shaping a new cosmos, a place of beauty—indeed, a garden."<sup>34</sup>

García-Rivera does not give specific ways God inhabits creation nor does he speculate with concepts such as Gesché's "*per quem, in propria venit*" or "*Parousia*," but invites "to see the

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<sup>31</sup> McFarland, "'Always and Everywhere:' Divine Presence and the Incarnation," 64-66, 76.

<sup>32</sup> McFarland thinks that God "can" become incarnate again and again, "just that there is a certain appropriateness to the uniqueness of the incarnation, insofar as it is God's way of being personally present to creation." McFarland, "'Always and Everywhere:' Divine Presence and the Incarnation," 76-77, footnote 32.

<sup>33</sup> García-Rivera, *The Garden of God*, 6-9. Note the interesting remark García-Rivera makes about gardens: "[Gardens] are not manufactured but cultivated, their craft a collaboration between ourselves and the earth. They are not so much designed but discovered" (ix).

<sup>34</sup> García-Rivera, *The Garden of God*, ix.

interconnectedness of the world to grasp its complexity” in “a kind of knowledge known only by being enjoyed [as beauty]” and grasp “the ‘where-ness’ and ‘what-ness’ of place, the twin human helix of frailty and abundant life, the fully cosmic Christ and the equally cosmic Holy Spirit.”<sup>35</sup> García-Rivera’s project of raising “a true cosmological consciousness” entails at least four components: (i) getting beyond the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, by combining both **God’s absolute power** (that created the Garden of Eden) and God’s ordaining love (that helps understand that creation is not simply about existence but also about a place of existence); (ii) connecting creation and redemption, and giving an account of both the original creation and the new, as a journey both into the future and to a place; (iii) reexamining the meaning of the resurrection of the body; and (iv) addressing the question of being at home in the cosmos and the quest for our final place.<sup>36</sup> Considering only God’s absolute power in *creatio ex nihilo* darken the understanding of why the world is ordered this way and not some other way, and fails to account for some challenges such as suffering and evil. Instead, **God’s ordaining love** allows to see suffering in a cosmic way (as in Rom 8). Even evil has something to do with creation, not in terms of pointing fingers to God as the guilty-one, but as one of the absurdities of creation that allow to believe in God’s ordaining love:

[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. (...) 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.<sup>37</sup>

Therefore, **connecting creation and redemption** is important, but we should not think of it much as a matter of a time when the end of our suffering will occur than as reaching a place, our home in the new creation being made.<sup>38</sup> Thus, after underlining some characteristics of evil and trauma,<sup>39</sup> García-Rivera defines the meaning of paradise as “what makes us truly human,” at home in the cosmos:

The challenge to finding our home in the cosmos 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.<sup>40</sup>

For García-Rivera, being at home in the cosmos implies also **being at home in the flesh**. Matter matters to God; it makes spirit visible: we should resist the human tendency to minimize

<sup>35</sup> García-Rivera, *The Garden of God*, x-xii.

<sup>36</sup> García-Rivera, *The Garden of God*, 9-21.

<sup>37</sup> García-Rivera, *The Garden of God*, 16.

<sup>38</sup> “There is a struggle in nature herself that includes pain and extinction, suffering and agony. ...It is *the struggle of a new universe being built*. This new universe is meant not to replace, but to *fulfil and complete*, the original. It is the universe struggling to become a cosmos. [The] end of our suffering will occur when we reach a place, our home.” García-Rivera, *The Garden of God*, 12-14.

<sup>39</sup> “Evil tends to be brazen in its presence and yet radical in its concealment. [It] is illusory and mysterious, and at the same time blatantly obvious and concrete. [Evil is a process, unlike a trauma which is an event]” Sue Grand, J. Jeffrey Means and Mary Ann Nelson quoted by García-Rivera, *The Garden of God*, 18.

<sup>40</sup> García-Rivera, *The Garden of God*, 19. In the same way García-Rivera sees in Jesus the key to our home in the cosmos, Gesché affirms: “*Jésus est le lieu, l’ubi par excellence de la recherche et de la rencontre de Dieu. Toute christologie est une théo-logie.*” Gesché, *Dieu*, 40.

the physical<sup>41</sup> and see in the body only “that makes it difficult to live in the cosmos (pain, disease, hunger, thirst, and tears).”<sup>42</sup> This paradox of the flesh’s capacity of tying the human to the cosmos and its frailty indicate the direction where to find the meaning of the resurrection of the flesh: “frailty finds God’s favor; not God’s condemnation. The frailty of the flesh is the strength of God.”<sup>43</sup> Then, addressing the question of **being at home in the cosmos** is first, an attempt to seeing God in all things, i.e. seeing the inner meaning of things. Second, it is a participatory task wherein, as humans, we contribute to building our final place:

We do not simply observe; we participate. [We] are meant to know and love the phenomena in the world, including the phenomenon that we are. [We], among all creatures, are meant to see the world as a cosmos. (...) Our ability to see a cosmos is our ability to experience God’s presence in all things.<sup>44</sup>

In other words, God is everywhere; we just need to experience divine presence. In this sense, Jesus who is God, would not simply give a physical address to Andrew and the other disciple to indicate where he stays (Jn 1:35-39), but invite them to experience his company and proximity: “*Come and see*” and “*they stayed with him that day. It was about four in the afternoon*” (Jn 1:39).

There is more: García-Rivera considers after Pierre Teilhard de Chardin another aspect of God’s ordaining love, namely that “nature is marked by a double drive toward greater complexity and deeper interiority”<sup>45</sup> and ends up giving to theological cosmology “the form of an ellipse with two foci: (1) the human and his or her place in the cosmos and (2) Christ and his significance for both humanity and the cosmos.”<sup>46</sup> In this theological cosmology, not only are the human and Christ central elements,<sup>47</sup> but also in it does García-Rivera answer the question “Where is Jesus now?” by bringing three new dimensions in Christology: (i) the notion of place, (ii) the relevance of the ascension, and (iii) the role of beauty.<sup>48</sup>

The **notion of place** addresses comic implications within already existing Christological doctrines. Given the notion of place I alluded to in the introduction, meeting Jesus and staying with him (Jn 1:39) is spending time with him in order to create places pregnant of a fruitful relationship. It’s a matter of place, not time. García-Rivera calls to return to “the traditional theme of the land” if we have to build the “bridge between heaven and earth: Christian emphasis on salvation history as opposed to inheriting the land does not jibe with either the Old Testament or New Testament witness.”<sup>49</sup> He suggests that “Israel’s journey through the desert to the

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<sup>41</sup> I think of Ellen F. Davis’s affirmation that “biblical poetry steadily resists the tendency that is common among us to isolate the physical from the spiritual, and further, to isolate the human body from the rest of the order of creation.” See Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible*, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 169.

<sup>42</sup> García-Rivera, *The Garden of God*, 19.

<sup>43</sup> García-Rivera, *The Garden of God*, 21.

<sup>44</sup> García-Rivera, *The Garden of God*, 22.

<sup>45</sup> “Teilhard proposes that evolution of creatures followed a law toward greater complexity. Such complexity is the result of a drive to closer union at work in the universe. But greater union has one other consequence. It means greater consciousness or interiority. Thus, along with the law of greater complexity, Teilhard adds the law of greater interiority. [He] proposes the laws of greater complexity and interiority as the principles of a grand evolution on a cosmic scale.” García-Rivera, *The Garden of God*, 27.

<sup>46</sup> García-Rivera, *The Garden of God*, 25.

<sup>47</sup> “If the key to the universe is the human, then the key to the human is Christ” García-Rivera, *The Garden of God*, 27. See also above McFarland’s statement that “all creatures come to God through humanity, and all humanity comes to God through Christ.” See also Hans Urs von Balthasar’s consideration of Christ as “a go-between joining God and the people, heaven and earth.” Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale* (Translated with an Introduction by Aidan Nichols, OP.), (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2005), 21.

<sup>48</sup> García-Rivera, *The Garden of God*, 51.

<sup>49</sup> “Salvation is more than emancipation. [It is not] separation from community but location within it, not isolation from others but placement deliberately between generation of promise and fulfillment. This restoration of

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promised land in communion with God becomes, in the New Testament, the human journey through the cosmos to a new creation enabled by the Holy Spirit who makes the risen, ascended Christ present and ...at the right hand of the Father.”<sup>50</sup>

The doctrine of the **ascension** is first and foremost the link between heaven and earth. Inversely the traditional theme of heaven and earth ties the creation with the ascension. The relevance of this doctrine is that “[it] strongly implies the cosmic Christ: Heaven is not a reality outside of the creation. The ascended Christ did not leave the universe but is now at the helm of the forces that shape and direct the universe ...the forces of reconciliation and interpenetration of heaven and earth.”<sup>51</sup> Thus, “ascension was not simply a movement upward but also forward: with Christ-the-Evolver at the helm, evolution is taking us upward and forward to the omega point where a new form of life awaits us. Christ is present in the cosmos both as eschatological (heaven) and pneumatological (earth) presence.”<sup>52</sup> Since wherever Jesus is, so is his Church, the relevance of the ascension understood as above is also to affirm the cosmic dimension of the Church: “It is one, holy, catholic, apostolic, and cosmic.”<sup>53</sup>

The place where heaven and earth intersect is not any space; it is a place of **beauty**. Beauty plays a crucial role in a doctrine of the cosmic Christ. There is a part of Christology that can be called theological aesthetics, as that moves the heart as to guide the mind: “sensible knowledge (sensation, imagination, and feeling) in relation to God, religion, theology, the beautiful, and the arts.”<sup>54</sup> That is why, leaning on Pseudo-Dionysius who noted that “the closer we come to naming the reality of God, the less adequate ordinary language becomes,” García-Rivera sees beauty as part of the “extraordinary language more adequate to name the reality of God.”<sup>55</sup> He lists the visual, music, the arts (and I would gladly add nature, architecture and urbanism) among the “forms of sensibilities to beauty [that] offer us a kind of sensible knowledge about God.”<sup>56</sup> Thus, while contrasting Saint Bonaventure’s notion of light with Teilhard’s, García-Rivera asserts that “[the] beauty expressed in [the] beautiful earthly forms is expressed through their life. Beauty not only is experienced as life, but gives life. Beauty has the character of light, but it is vivifying light that transfigures matter into beautiful forms.”<sup>57</sup> More importantly, García-Rivera manages to weave together beauty, cosmos, Christ, Church and Holy Spirit as in the following statements:

The cosmos is not a mirror of Christ’s beauty. Rather, it is the life of beauty ...to be found in the cosmos [and] in the Church, ...the most visible sign of the work of the Holy Spirit. ...If the Church is to regain its prophetic and eschatological voice in our world today, it must develop a convincing cosmology. [Such] a cosmology is a place of beauty, built with the help of the Holy Spirit where abundant life is offered by the cosmic Christ who ascended into heaven but is returning by reconciling heaven and earth. ...Beauty [one of God’s names] is experienced above all as a gift. It is what makes reality a cosmos and not merely a universe. Beauty allows us to see the cosmos not only as a *datum* to be understood but also as a *donum* to be received.<sup>58</sup>

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the physical meaning of what the Synoptics call kingdom (or dominion) of God, John calls eternal life, and Paul calls inheritance should alert us to the crucial significance of the cosmic Christ. The dominion of God cannot be delocalized. It is not space. It is not even a time as the future. It is place.” García-Rivera, *The Garden of God*, 44.

<sup>50</sup> García-Rivera, *The Garden of God*, 45.

<sup>51</sup> García-Rivera, *The Garden of God*, 42.

<sup>52</sup> García-Rivera, *The Garden of God*, 42-43.

<sup>53</sup> García-Rivera, *The Garden of God*, 44.

<sup>54</sup> García-Rivera, *The Garden of God*, 45-47.

<sup>55</sup> García-Rivera, *The Garden of God*, 47-48.

<sup>56</sup> García-Rivera, *The Garden of God*, 48.

<sup>57</sup> García-Rivera, *The Garden of God*, 48-49.

<sup>58</sup> “The *donum* of the cosmos comes to theology not merely through the doctrine of creation but also through the doctrines of incarnation and ascension. [In] the creation, God gives the cosmos its own rationality and dignity. In the incarnation, God opens up Godself as gift to the cosmos. Finally, in the ascension, the cosmos is opened up to God.” García-Rivera, *The Garden of God*, 50-52, 58-59.

The notions of “life” and “gift” as related to God’s presence in creation and redemption are perhaps more clearly treated by Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen who claims that “the Holy Spirit broods and makes alive creation” and that “[behind] the Trinitarian account of creation is a robust theology of gift, divine hospitality.”<sup>59</sup> So, let us briefly harvest some of his insights pointing to places where to find God.

### ***God Everywhere: Kärkkäinen’s Spiritual Panentheism***

After denouncing “the strictures and attitudes in which pneumatology was too often bound,” and advocating for a “plural/hollistic” pneumatology over a “unitive” pneumatology, which in itself is an indication of the ubiquity of the presence of the Spirit inside and outside the ecclesial (even European) mental and religious space,<sup>60</sup> Kärkkäinen specifically explores the Spirit in creation.

Kärkkäinen marvels that “the whole ministry, role, and work of the Spirit is [now] put in a robust cosmic, evolutionary, and scientific context,” and advocates after Kilian McDonnell that we turn “from a theology of the Word to a theology of the world.”<sup>61</sup> He evokes after Paul Tillich dynamic conceptions in which the Spirit is at work: “self-identity, self-alteration, self-integration, self-creation, self-transcendence, ‘the Spiritual Presence’ in human spirit, in religion, in culture, in morality — and [even] in the ‘new being’ (Christ) and in ‘new community’ (Church).”<sup>62</sup> He cites Wolfhart Pannenberg (and many more theologians) and expresses the need “to forge an integral link [of the Spirit] with the whole of creation,” so that “the Spirit [is not] cut off both from bodily life and from the life of nature.”<sup>63</sup> He, then, agrees with Jürgen Moltmann and Elizabeth A. Johnson, affirming that “a robust creational pneumatology pushes theology toward panentheism,” and that “[the] possibility of perceiving God in all things and all things in God is grounded theologically on the understanding of the Spirit of God as the power of creation and the wellspring of life.”<sup>64</sup> Panentheism (not to be confused with pantheism) attempts to “discover God in all the beings he has created and to find his life-giving Spirit in the community of creation that they share.”<sup>65</sup> The notion of “*ruach*” (which coincidentally relates to my Swahili mother tongue concept of “*roho*”) helps understand the difference between the “pantheism” to be avoided and the totally correct “panentheism” to be assimilated. After affirming that “to be God is to be life,” Kärkkäinen understands “*ruach*” as “a life-embracing principle of life. Not only

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<sup>59</sup> Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World, Volume 4: Spirit and Salvation*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2016), 67-70. Talking about the Trinity working jointly in creation, Kärkkäinen echoes Luther’s poetic assessment of creation: “The Father creates heaven and earth out of nothing through the Son... the Word. Over these the Holy Spirit broods. As a hen broods her eggs, keeping them warm in order to hatch her chicks, and, as it were, to bring them to life through heat, so Scripture says that the Holy Spirit brooded, as it were, on the waters to bring to life those substances which were to be quickened and adorned. For it is the office of the Holy Spirit to make alive.” He also refers to Saint Basil’s “original cause (the Father),” “creative cause (the Son),” and “perfecting cause (the Spirit).” “Creation is the united work of Father, Son, and Spirit in both intimate connection and real distinction.” Kärkkäinen “highlights the Spirit’s role in bringing about and sustaining life” without setting a competition within the Members of the Trinity. “Deep within the fabric of the universe, the Spirit is present as the Go-Between who confronts each isolated spontaneous particle with the beckoning reality of the larger whole and so compels it to relate to others in a particular way; and that it is She who at every stage lures the inert organisms forward by giving an inner awareness and recognition of the unattained.” (J.V. Taylor quoted by Kärkkäinen, *Spirit and Salvation*, 99. Altered to fit the option of this paper in footnote 1). This aspect also reminds McFarland’s affirmation that “God alone sustains every creature in existence in every aspect of its existence at every moment of its existence.” McFarland, “‘Always and Everywhere:’ Divine Presence and the Incarnation,” 66.

<sup>60</sup> Kärkkäinen, *Spirit and Salvation*, 25-26. “Plural pneumatology” considers a multiplicity of contexts, resources, traditions and even faiths to better understand the working of the Spirit in the world.

<sup>61</sup> Kärkkäinen, *Spirit and Salvation*, 71.

<sup>62</sup> Kärkkäinen, *Spirit and Salvation*, 71-72.

<sup>63</sup> Kärkkäinen, *Spirit and Salvation*, 73-74.

<sup>64</sup> Kärkkäinen, *Spirit and Salvation*, 74.

<sup>65</sup> Kärkkäinen, *Spirit and Salvation*, 74.

reason or will but also the bodily, the earthly, the “animal” — everything created and living — owes its existence to the divine Spirit. The *ruach Yahweh* as the life principle, [is] not detached from but rather energizing and supporting all life of the cosmos, including the physical/material.”<sup>66</sup> Panentheism allows to understand the becoming of creatures in such a way that to be and to have is not exactly the same in regard to life: “God is being, but all created things only have being.”<sup>67</sup> Thus, panentheism also points to what Kärkkäinen calls “immanent transcendence.”<sup>68</sup> In any case, Kärkkäinen’s insistence on a dynamic correlation of the divine and human wherein a balance is “found in God’s immanence in human experience, and in the transcendence of human beings in God”<sup>69</sup> is worth considering.

Another aspect whereby Kärkkäinen demonstrates panentheism in creational pneumatology is his use of metaphors that he defines (after Polanyi and Aristotle) as “means of ‘misnaming’ that allow us an intuitive perception of the similarity of the dissimilars.” Following Jürgen Moltmann and Jung Young Lee, Kärkkäinen then presents at least five groups of metaphors for the Spirit:<sup>70</sup> (i) *The formative metaphors*: the Spirit as energy, as space, and as *gestalt*; (ii) *The movement metaphors*: the Spirit as tempest, as fire, and as love; (iii) *The mystical metaphors*: the Spirit as source of light, as water, and as fertility; (iv) *The cloth metaphors*: the Spirit as weaver, protector and sustainer of all things on earth;<sup>71</sup> and (v) *The mother and kettle metaphors*: the Spirit as nourishing not only the soul, but also the body.<sup>72</sup>

## Conclusion

At the end of this conversation on the dialectical God’s presence in heaven and in the cosmos, it is fitting to claim that God is indeed “everywhere,” but this presence is only postulated in heaven, while here on earth it is “experienced” in the manner Jacob did at Bethel: “*Truly, the LORD is in this place and I did not know it!*” (Gen 28:16).

The Lord “is” “in” “this place.” Jacob is convinced that God “is” in that place as he is speaking, not in the past nor in the future; the real time of God’s encounter is “the present.” Yes, God was with our ancestors and God will be with our children and our children’s children, but we need to encounter God today as we speak, reflect, write, and pray... Since God is “in” the place, it is a sacred place although Jacob didn’t know it at the time he went there to spend the night. God appears to him at a sacred place that Jacob had visited only to take a night’s rest. Jacob has no idea “the place” he has come upon is sacred; only when he wakes up does he realize it is sacred. The place was Bethel (Gen 28:19), a sacred site that existed as early as the time of Abraham (Gen 12:8). Jacob’s unawareness of the holiness of the place and his own state of sinfulness underscore the graciousness of God’s gift. It is God’s holy presence that fills any space

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<sup>66</sup> Kärkkäinen, *Spirit and Salvation*, 75-76. “There is a cosmic range to the operations of the Spirit, the Lord and giver of life. ...Spirit is the ecstasy that implements God’s abundance and triggers the overflow of divine self-giving. ...The universe in its entirety is the field of its operations.” Clark H. Pinnock quoted by Kärkkäinen, *Spirit and Salvation*, 77.

<sup>67</sup> “The Holy Spirit is the force of being and the giver of life, but, according to the very concept of creation, this being and this life exist only as becoming, that is, not in fullness but only in the striving toward fullness.” Sergius Bulgakov quoted by Kärkkäinen, *Spirit and Salvation*, 77-80.

<sup>68</sup> Kärkkäinen, *Spirit and Salvation*, 74. “God is irreducibly Other, always beyond our grasp. But not beyond our touch” Mayra Rivera quoted by Kärkkäinen, *Spirit and Salvation*, 81.

<sup>69</sup> Kärkkäinen, *Spirit and Salvation*, 33. He argues that “the Spirit of God is not so external to human experience that She cannot be experienced (contra Barth), nor is the Spirit of God so much identified with the human spirit that Her otherness is denied (contra liberalism).” (Quotation altered, see above footnote 1).

<sup>70</sup> Kärkkäinen, *Spirit and Salvation*, 78.

<sup>71</sup> “The Spirit as *ch’i* also weaves through the entire cosmos and gives life. The Spirit is a weaver and a protector of all things on earth, for cloth is the symbol of her presence.” (Jung Youn Lee quoted by Kärkkäinen, *Spirit and Salvation*, 78).

<sup>72</sup> “In fact, the Spirit as *ch’i* is the vitality of the material principle, and the nourishment of soul is, in fact, the nourishment of the body.” (Jung Youn Lee quoted by Kärkkäinen, *Spirit and Salvation*, 78).

(physical, mental or social), blesses it, makes it “sacred place,” and provides it with knowledge, wisdom, and love. When we, as human beings, are disoriented and worried about an uncertain future, it is the Spiritual pantheism as described by Kärkkäinen that can guide us towards uncanny places where God is experienced, viz. towards sacred places, and make us aware of divine presence so that we never miss God again.

In this sense, God being “everywhere” is not a matter of a statement in the vacuum; rather it is a statement born of a religious experience (a kind of a prayer review): Gesché fittingly observes that “God is ‘practiced;’ there is a divine praxis before theology.”<sup>73</sup> This means as well that any space is potentially a place of encounter with the divine, with both poles of revelation (theological and anthropological) doing their part. This is only possible thanks to, as Elizabeth Johnson rightly pointed out, the mystery of God who walks with the people in everyday life, *lo cotidiano*, in graphic and tangible ways. God is here and there, with the people despite all the odds that life can bring. What really matters is not success as this world can define it (in terms of knowledge or wealth or power), but an affective relationship that can be built between God and humanity, with the human part putting the accent on visual, oral, dramatic mediation of a lived faith.<sup>74</sup> It is a lived faith that encounters and names God “from within [people’s] experiences of life and death, word and silence, joy and suffering, liberation and oppression.”<sup>75</sup> Who cares if this kind of faith is called by its detractors “exotic or folkloric customs” or “animism,” as far as God is celebrated, “personal trust and love of God” is developed, it is a living religion and the vibrant presence of God which is experienced in the midst of people is surely capable of transforming everything into goodness, truth and beauty. Starting to experience God this way does not diminish the importance of places of worship and special time for it, but emphasizes that God can also be met everywhere and anytime. It is not a loss of place or degradation of time; it is a gain for the building of a relationship of love that goes beyond the limitation of places and times: God is everywhere. Indeed, “if God is everywhere,” as Madeleine Delbrêl famously stated, “then let us make sure we are not anywhere else.”<sup>76</sup>

Alluding to time and places recalls a recurring theme of this discussion that, in García-Rivera’s words, redemption is tied to a place than it is to time. This place is a place of beauty. It is a journey to where heaven and earth intersect. This journey is a process and a task that start here and now while seeing God in all things, focusing on God’s ordaining love.<sup>77</sup> There is a necessary connection between creation and redemption, through Incarnation that McFarland defines in terms of God’s visibility as a Person and of the relationship between the one divine *Logos* and the infinite created *logoi*. Thus, as Balthasar nicely puts it, “the basis of the existence of the God-man,” a “decisive turn-about in the way of seeing God: God is not, in the first place,

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<sup>73</sup> “Dieu, si j’ose dire, ‘se pratique.’ Il y a une ‘théopraxie’ qui précède peut-être la théologie.” Gesché, *Dieu*, 39.

<sup>74</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2007), 136-137.

<sup>75</sup> Maria Pilar Aquino quoted by Johnson, *Quest for the Living God*, 137.

<sup>76</sup> Madeleine Delbrêl, *Oeuvres Complètes, Tome IV. Alcide et le Petit Moine* (Paris, France: Nouvelle Cité, 2006), 67. English translation mine. The exact French quote is a short prayer: “*Mon Dieu si vous êtes partout comment se fait-il que je sois si souvent ailleurs?*” Delbrêl also affirmed: “To find God, you have to know that He is everywhere; if you go deep inside yourself, you will find God Himself.” All we need is just to “believe with all [our] might that this street, this world, where God has placed [us], is [our] place of holiness.”

<sup>77</sup> Robert Sastre would say: “[La] merveille du Christianisme [est d’avoir] l’immanence qui est à la mesure de la transcendance. Embrasser le Christianisme, c’est se ‘convertir,’ c’est ‘être engagé’ dans un dialogue dont on n’a pas l’initiative, et conséquemment, c’est ‘se renoncer,’ se perdre, mais pour se retrouver sur un plan qui surclasse infiniment l’humain.” Robert Sastre, “Liturgie Romaine et Négritude” in Léonard Santedi Kinkupu, Gérard Bissainthe et Meinrad Hebga (éd.), *Des Prêtres Noirs S’Interrogent: Cinquante ans après...* (Paris, France: Karthala-Présence Africaine, 2006), 153-169, at 162.

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'absolute power,' but 'absolute love'."<sup>78</sup> In Jesus Christ and creation, one finds the "ubi" par excellence for searching and encountering God.

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<sup>78</sup> Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 31, 74, 77-78. Seeing God in terms of "absolute love" and "God's ordaining love" implies that a balance is reached between an anthropological vision of a world without God and one where only God's sovereignty reigns ("If the world is too closely tied to the being of God, its own proper reality is endangered, for it is too easily swallowed up into the being of God, and so deprived of its own proper existence." Colin E. Gunton quoted by Kärkkäinen, *Spirit and Salvation*, 69). It is such kind of balance that Kathryn Tanner advocates for. In her *God and Creation in Christian Theology*, she shows that the conflict between a vision of "human powers of self-determination" and another of "God's sovereignty," "is only apparent when [the] theological claims are unpacked according to the Christian rules for discourse." Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment?* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), Kindle 99-101/2508.

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