

Contents

Introduction	1
Part I.	
1. Language and Reality	15
2. The “Inside” and the “Outside” of Everything	39
3. Panentheism Hierarchically Ordered Systems of Existence and Activity	65
4. Other Approaches to Panentheism in the Current Religion-and-Science Debate	91
Part II.	
5. “Incarnation” as Key to the Argument for Panentheism	115
6. A Systems-Oriented Approach to the Trinity	137
7. Tradition and Traditioning Church as Both System and Institutional Entity?	163
8. Miracles and the Problem of Evil	189

9. Resurrection and Eternal Life	217
Conclusion	247

of intelligibility for a concrete empirical event or a theoretical hypothesis about that event that would be impossible for either of them acting separately. This possibility is fully in accord with my own systems-oriented understanding of reality wherein a higher-order system and lower-order system can be in dynamic interrelation, with each having significant influence on the mode of operation of the other and yet without either system fully incorporating the other into its own ongoing self-identity in what is natural versus what is deemed supernatural.

Scriptural Accounts of the Resurrection and its Aftermath

One final question or objection must be dealt with before bringing this chapter on resurrection and eternal life to a close. If Jesus in his human nature entered into eternal life immediately after dying on the cross, what is one to say about the empty tomb and the appearances of Jesus to the holy women and the Apostles on Easter Sunday in the resurrection accounts of the four Gospel writers? This is not an easy question to answer since it involves both an explicit reference to historical evidence and an implicit appeal for faith in a new way of life inspired by the life and preaching of Jesus in the Gospel narratives. Yet both sources of information should be involved in whatever answer one ultimately employs. I would argue, for example, that the best historical evidence for the claim that Jesus died and rose again is that the message of Jesus during his earthly life continues to be a source of inspiration for those who call themselves Christians. Trusting in the historical reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ as empirical verification of Jesus' saving message has dramatically changed the lives of many Christians over the centuries since Jesus lived and died. They have moved from a basically self-centered to an other-centered form of personal existence and activity, attaching

much more value to love of God and neighbor than to protection of the self with its narrow interests and values. The alleged fact of the empty tomb on Easter Sunday morning only serves as indirect confirmation of what they already believe in terms of their own religious experience.

Moreover, no one saw the resurrection take place; no one watched as the badly disfigured corpse of Jesus suddenly became a living human being again, this time with a “heavenly” body (1 Cor. 15:36–40). As a result, there might be other possible explanations for the empty tomb that would not demand supernatural intervention but in their own way would still be in accord with the laws of nature. For example, if the human body (as I have claimed) is a hierarchically ordered set of physical systems that after death slowly but surely collapse, until only atoms and molecules that are invisible to normal sight remain, then conceivably God could arrange for that process of gradual decomposition of Jesus’ body to be enormously accelerated and thus be complete by Easter Sunday morning when the stone was rolled back by an angel (Matt. 28:2). This explanation, moreover, seems to be in accord with the law of the conservation of energy. That is, the physical energy that kept Jesus alive during his lifetime was not completely destroyed but preserved as part of the total energy-pool of the cosmic process for use elsewhere. This, of course, is conjecture on my part rather than proof of what actually happened on Easter Sunday morning.

Likewise, the various Gospel narratives that describe the appearances of the risen Jesus to his followers on Easter Sunday testify not only to the reality of the resurrection but even more strikingly to the fact that Jesus no longer inhabits an earthly body subject to the limits of space and time. When he appears to the disciples in the upper room on Easter Sunday, for example, he does not first knock and ask to be admitted into their presence behind locked doors. He

is suddenly there, comforts the disciples in their grief at his totally unexpected death, and then just as suddenly is no longer there (John 19:19–29). When Mary Magdalene realizes that the stranger standing behind her at the empty tomb is not the gardener but Jesus himself in his risen body, she rushes to embrace him (John 20:11–18). But he gently tells her that this expression of love for him is no longer appropriate since he has “not yet ascended to the Father.” Jesus seems thereby to imply that what she sees and tries to embrace is only a temporary and partial manifestation of his new life in full union with the Father and the Holy Spirit within the divine communitarian life. After the Ascension he would instead be present to his followers interiorly (i.e., in their minds and hearts through the power of the Holy Spirit), not exteriorly through some sort of unexpected physical appearance. Finally, at the Parousia or the coming of the risen Jesus on the clouds of heaven in great power and glory at the end of the world (Mark 13:26–27), it will be the divinity of Jesus more than his humanity that will be somehow revealed not only to the followers of Jesus but also to all the peoples of the world.

In brief, then, accounts of Jesus’ resurrection and of his post-resurrection appearances to his followers are a blend of reasonably reliable historical testimony and overt religious belief in a reality that transcends the natural order and thereby testifies to the reality of a higher-order pattern of existence and activity beyond what is naturally possible. This accords very nicely with my own systems-oriented understanding of reality wherein a higher-order and a lower-order process can be dynamically linked in producing one composite reality without loss to the ontological integrity of either level of existence and activity in its own mode of operation. What I am proposing here, of course, is only a theory, not a factual statement, about the nature of reality. But I am encouraged in putting forth this hypothesis by what I take to be a similar line of thought

in *Space, Time and Resurrection* by Thomas Torrance. I end this chapter by summarizing what I believe to be his understanding of the relation between the natural and supernatural in human life and then indicate how his proposed cosmology and my own allow for both the transcendence of God to creation and the immanence of God in creation to be simultaneously fulfilled.

In the final chapter of *Space, Time and Resurrection* titled “The Lord of Space and Time,” Torrance sums up his own understanding of the interconnected workings of the natural and the supernatural in the event of the resurrection of Jesus as follows:

In fulfillment of his eternal design God has acted in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead in such a way that, far from setting aside or infringing or interfering with the spatio-temporal order of the universe which he created (and which we try to formulate in what we call “laws of nature”), he accepts and affirms its reality, but he introduces into the situation a transcendently new factor which brings about an utterly astonishing transformation of it which is quite inexplicable in terms of anything we are able to conceive merely within the intelligible structures of the world, or in accordance with our scientific formulations of them.³⁶

What he seems to imply here and elsewhere in his book is that one and the same empirical event can allow for two quite different explanations. First, the resurrection of Jesus is a one-time, nonrepeatable event in the natural order that has definite empirical consequences for Jesus’ followers but that in itself cannot be explained in terms of the known laws of nature at present. Second, for a Christian who believes in the divinity of Jesus, his resurrection on Easter Sunday is historically connected both with the doctrine of the Incarnation and with belief in the Second Coming of Jesus, the Parousia at the end of the current temporal order. The three

36. *Ibid.*, 190.

mysteries of faith combine to give a rational explanation of the deeper meaning and value of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, and ultimate vindication as the Lord of space and time.³⁷ That is, if the Son of God is born into this world as a human being, he will in due time die either by natural causes or violently at the hands of his enemies; but afterwards he will just as inevitably rise from the dead and live a new life as a result of the singular self-giving way of life which he both taught to others and personally practiced his entire life. "Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the Gospel will save it" (Mark 8:35).

There is then no contradiction involved in studying the alleged event of the resurrection of Jesus in terms of two interrelated thought-systems: from a naturalistic perspective as the historical starting-point of Christianity, one of the major world religions, and from a supernatural perspective as one of the three key doctrinal beliefs of institutional Christianity. The Christian interprets the resurrection of Jesus, so to speak, from within the Christian belief-system, and the professional historian interprets it from outside that belief-system as a major factor in the empirical origin and historical growth of institutional Christianity. Moreover, from the perspective of natural science, in line with proper scientific method one should suspend judgment whether or not it really happened as described, given current understanding of the laws of nature, and how it might have come about through supernatural rather than natural causal forces. In this way, the autonomy of the natural and supernatural orders is respected even as one concedes that for the Christian believer there is a higher-order layer of meaning and value if one can find a way to synthesize the truth-claims of the natural and the supernatural levels of existence and activity within nature in

37. *Ibid.*, 154–55.

one comprehensive explanatory scheme or philosophical/theological cosmology.

Torrance seems to be making much the same point in his claim that the risen Lord meets us only on the actual ground of the historical Jesus:

The whole life of Jesus from his birth to his resurrection and beyond is an indivisible continuum, in which the historical Jesus is consistently and indissolubly one with the life of the risen Jesus, so that now after the resurrection the historical Jesus confronts us only as suffused with the light of the risen Lord. . . . [T]he life of the risen Jesus takes up the life of the historical Jesus into itself as its permanent material content so that the risen Lord meets us only on the actual ground of the historical Jesus, in his birth, life and passion.³⁸

The Gospel narratives, in other words, are both reasonably reliable historical accounts of the public ministry of Jesus in Judea and Galilee before his unexpected arrest, trial, and execution at the hands of his enemies, and at the same time faith-documents, theological interpretations of the meaning and value of Jesus' message and way of life. Accordingly, while historico-critical analysis of the Gospel texts is quite important in understanding how these documents relate to one another and to various outside sources, both oral and written (e.g., the so-called "Q" document), it "has only a limited validity, beyond which it can only lead to the destruction of meaning."³⁹ That is, it would artificially separate empirical and theoretical components in the New Testament text and inevitably impose the interpreter's own subjective bias on the proper interpretation of that text. Here too, objective reason and subjective belief in divine revelation should work in tandem with one another, rather than be seen in competition

38. *Ibid.*, 169.

39. *Ibid.*

with one another, within the mind of the spiritually minded reader of the sacred text.

Thus with reference to the Gospel narratives dealing with the bodily resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday and his intermittent appearances to his followers during a period of forty days until his ascension into heaven, one should be particularly careful to respect the different methods of inquiry and truth-claims of legitimate historical scholarship and authoritative religious belief. They are not in open contradiction with one another, but their full compatibility is likewise not apparent. For example, an open-minded reading of these same texts reveals minor inconsistencies in the factual account of what really happened on Easter Sunday and afterwards. Each of the Gospels has a slightly different story-line, attesting to the different oral traditions about the risen Jesus at work in the early Christian communities. So a professional historian would necessarily have to suspend judgment on the precise details of what happened on Easter Sunday. Yet the same professional historian could readily join with Christian theologians in noting how the followers of Jesus were profoundly changed in their understanding of Jesus and his message as a result of what they experienced on Easter Sunday. These followers of Jesus lost their antecedent “fear of the Jews” (John 20:19) and at the risk of their own lives openly proclaimed the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ through the power of the Spirit to anyone who would listen to them. As a result, they converted a great number of people to a Christ-like way of life everywhere in the Mediterranean world and beyond it, “baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:20). For the professional historian, why this happened remains unclear. For the Christian theologian, it is quite clear: “And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). Belief in divine

revelation thus adds a new level of meaning and value to the bare historical account of what happened on Easter Sunday and in the years that followed up to the present day.

Postscript

Robert John Russell in a recently published book uses his broad knowledge of theoretical physics and Christian systematic theology to outline a way in which natural science can illuminate the traditional beliefs of Christianity, and the way in which these religious beliefs when suitably revised in the light of contemporary natural science can help to resolve longstanding metaphysical issues in the natural sciences.⁴⁰ With this project, I am completely in accord since it nicely correlates with the basic project of this book. But I have reservations about Russell's strong reliance on the theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg to set forth his own understanding of the philosophical relation between time and eternity in connection with the doctrine of the Trinity and the role of Jesus within salvation history. As I indicated in chapter 6 on the Trinity, Pannenberg's endorsement of "Rahner's Rule" (the identity between the so-called immanent and economic Trinity in Salvation History) is ambiguous. On the one hand, he seems to reaffirm the traditional understanding of the transcendence of God as Creator to the world of creation; but, on the other hand, he also says that, once creation came into being as a result of a free decision by the divine persons, the Lordship of the Father must include the Father's Lordship over creation as well as the Lordship of the Father within the immanent Trinity from all eternity. Russell in his understanding of the Lordship of the Father seems to follow the lead of Ted Peters in claiming that "[t]he existence of God

40. Robert John Russell, *Time in Eternity: Pannenberg, Physics, and Eschatology in Creative Mutual Interaction* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012).

as Trinity depends upon the future of God's coming kingdom [in this world]; and the coming of the Kingdom depends upon the person of Jesus—in the form of the anticipation of its future and as revealing the love of God."⁴¹ Based upon my proposal of a systems-oriented approach to panentheism from a Trinitarian perspective in this book, I beg to differ. In what follows, I simply lay out my own position without trying to defend it with further argument.

First of all, since I share with Whitehead the conviction that actual entities, momentary self-constituting subjects of experience, are the ultimate constituents of all open-ended systems in this world, I claim that *pace* Pannenberg and Russell there is no ontological priority of the future over the past and the present in Salvation History (the historical process proper to the human race in its ongoing relation to God). All three time dimensions (past, present, and future) are involved in the self-constitution of every actual entity in all the various subsystems within the overall system proper to Salvation History. If there is any ontological priority among the three time-dimensions, it should belong to the present as the moment of decision in which a potentiality available in the projected future of the actual entity is actualized and, a moment later, is added to the determinate reality of the past history of the actual entity. Within the process proper to Salvation History, accordingly, there is no strictly predetermined goal of the process but only a directionality and, to borrow a term from the life-sciences, an "attractor" which draws the evolution of the system to itself without predetermining the outcome.⁴²

Secondly, *pace* Russell, I do not believe that Jesus of Nazareth by his life, preaching, death, and resurrection inaugurated a New

41. Peters, *God as Trinity*, 135.

42. Joseph A. Bracken, *Does God Roll Dice? Divine Providence for a World in the Making* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2012), 32–36.

Creation within the cosmic process. Rather, Jesus by his life, death, and resurrection revealed “the plan of the mystery hidden from ages past in God who created all things” (Col. 1:26). The New Creation, in other words, has been going on since the Big Bang and will continue until the end of the cosmic process at some future date. It consists in the progressive incorporation of everything that happens within the cosmic process into the divine communitarian life along the lines indicated above in this chapter. What Jesus did for us human beings was to reveal how to live in this world so as to share more fully in the New Creation after death: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Non-Christian but religiously oriented human beings will likewise be saved through Christ in ways that we do not at present understand. Finally, nonhuman creation in terms of all the actual entities at work in this world will be saved through Christ in ways that are proper to their own pattern of existence and activity as indicated earlier in this chapter. Perhaps the best description of how the New Creation presumably works to redeem all the entities of this world is provided by Whitehead in his description of how the consequent nature of God works at every moment of the cosmic process:

The revolts of destructive evil, purely self-regarding, are dismissed into their triviality of merely individual facts; and yet the good they did achieve in individual joy, in individual sorrow, in the introduction of needed contrast, is yet saved by its relation to the completed whole. The image—and it is but an image—the image under which this operative growth of God’s nature is best conceived, is that of a tender care that nothing be lost.⁴³

Thirdly, as a final inference from my systems-oriented understanding of the God-world relationship, I claim that time is fulfilled in eternity; eternity is not fulfilled in time. The lower-order set of subsystems

43. Whitehead, *PR*, 346.

proper to the world of creation is progressively being incorporated into the higher-order system of the divine community. As Pannenberg says in his *Systematic Theology* as noted above, the Lordship of God the Father within the immanent Trinity is extended to the Father's Lordship over the world of creation both here and now in a hidden way and later at the end of the cosmic process in full visibility. The movement of incorporation of creation into the divine communitarian life is, to use a spatial metaphor, upwards, not downwards. A lower-order system is incorporated into a higher-order system, not vice versa. At the same time, of course, as indicated earlier in this chapter, the higher-order system of the divine communitarian life is enriched (though not essentially reconstituted) by its incorporation of the lower-order system into itself. In other words, the divine persons are enriched in their relations both to one another and to all their creatures through incorporation of Salvation History into their own "history" as a divine community. Yet we human beings have no way of knowing whether the three divine persons have brought into existence other forms of intelligent life within our universe⁴⁴ or, given an infinity of existence for the three divine persons, whether they have brought into being universes that existed before our own, that currently exist at the same time as our own, or that will exist after the end of our universe. It is, accordingly, presumptuous to believe that our own Salvation History has made a decisive impact on the communitarian life of the three divine persons. It is much safer simply to believe that we are part of a reality much bigger than ourselves and our world, namely, the ongoing "history" of God.

44. Thomas F. O'Meara, *Vast Universe: Extraterrestrials and Christian Revelation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2012), 1–17.

Conclusion

In the Introduction to this book, I noted how Wentzel van Huyssteen has tried to bridge the current gap between scientifically oriented and religiously inspired worldviews in the postmodern Western world by proposing a new kind of interdisciplinary rational reflection, namely, what he calls “transversal rationality.”¹ This new type of rationality is not theory-based or purely cognitive but likewise a performative praxis: “the practice of responsible judgment, that is at the heart of a postfoundationalist notion of rationality, and that enables us to reach fragile and provisional forms of coherence in our interpersonal and interdisciplinary conversations.”² My counterargument was that, while transversal rationality is a valuable tool for sustaining interdisciplinary conversation between scientists and philosopher/theologians, it may not be enough to create a new commonly accepted worldview for use in the religion-and-science dialogue. Only a common language, use of the same foundational concepts both in the sciences and in philosophy and theology, has a chance to bring about over time a common overarching worldview. Aquinas succeeded in persuading the philosophers and theologians

1. J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, *Alone in the World? Human Uniqueness in Science and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 23.

2. *Ibid.*

of his day to use in their own disciplines the metaphysical language of Aristotle who was both scientist and philosopher. But, given the changes of perspective in the natural and social sciences since the beginning of the modern era, it is certainly debatable whether the philosophy of Aristotle and the theology of Aquinas are well suited for the current religion-and-science dialogue. A new common language based on a new worldview is needed in our age to keep the dialogue going.

Now in this brief Conclusion, I compare and contrast the work of another distinguished theologian/philosopher of science, the late Gordon Kaufman, with my own project in this book. I find myself largely in agreement with Kaufman on key methodological issues but disagreeing with him on the way he applied this methodology to a contemporary understanding of Christian theology. In particular, I am wary of his attempt to find common ground with scientists via a strictly naturalistic approach to Christian theology that nevertheless lays heavy emphasis on the absolute transcendence of God to this world as Ultimate Reality or Divine Mystery. For, rather than finding common ground with scientists on various controversial issues, he seems thereby to have yielded the higher ground to them and then appealed to God as Divine Mystery to relativize what might otherwise be seen as absolute claims to truth and objectivity on the part of some scientists. The basic point of my book, however, has been to claim (a) that philosophers and theologians could possibly share much more common ground with natural and social scientists if they would exchange the language and worldview of classical metaphysics for the language and worldview of a systems-oriented approach to reality, and (b) that scientists for their part could benefit from accepting, at least in principle, the possibility of a trans-empirical or supernatural dimension to physical reality over and above their empirically grounded understanding of the laws of

nature. In contrast to Kaufman, then, I have consciously tried to “naturalize” the supernatural order and “supernaturalize” the natural order of things by describing both the natural and the supernatural dimensions of reality in terms of a common process- or systems-oriented approach to reality.

Review and Critique of Kaufman’s Approach

Accordingly, in what follows I will first make clear where in my judgment Kaufman is “on the mark” in his methodological assumptions and then where in my view he is “off the mark” in his efforts to set forth a naturalistic understanding of the God-world-self relation that equivalently eliminates any reference to the possible workings of the supernatural in human life. In the opening chapter of *In Face of Mystery*, Kaufman asserts that contemporary theologians “must develop their conceptions of God, the world and the human in dialectical interrelationship with one another, instead of trying to derive any of these from the other(s) in linear fashion.”³ I completely agree. This is why I proposed at the beginning of this book that a new worldview employing the language of integrated processes or systems may be needed to exhibit the logical interdependence of key terms for both scientists and theologians who profess to be Christians. This is not simply a word game, a change of terminology simply for form’s sake. Thinking in terms of processes or systems carries with it the further metaphysical implication that physical reality is intrinsically social. That is, physical reality is based on relationships between specifically corporate realities made up of interacting parts or members (living organisms, communities, or environments) rather than on contingent relationships between individual entities as

3. Gordon Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 14.

fundamentally separate realities (Aristotelian “substances”). Precisely for this reason I welcome Kaufman’s evaluation of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity as pivotal for the dialectical interrelationship of the concepts of God, self, and the world within a Christian worldview: “The trinitarian idea breaks decisively with the substantialistic assumptions of our philosophical traditions—that reality consists fundamentally of *substances* (“thing-like” somethings), and that it is with the concept of ‘substance,’ therefore, that we designate most precisely that which is truly real.”⁴ Instead, the notion of *perichoresis*, mutual indwelling of the divine persons in one another’s existence and activity, should be the model for understanding the physical world and all the individual entities that inhabit it.

But in his elaboration of what he means by a Trinitarian God, Kaufman ends up affirming a philosophical monism that stands in sharp contrast to the notion of panentheism as developed by myself and others in chapters 3 and 4 of this book. That is, all of us affirmed in different ways that the notion of panentheism mediates between the rival concepts of ontological dualism (an irreducible opposition between matter and spirit) and ontological monism (either the derivation of matter from antecedently existing spirit or the derivation of spirit from antecedently existing matter). Instead, the basic presupposition of panentheism is that all of finite reality exists within God as its ontological source and ultimate goal, but still remains distinct from God in its current finite existence and activity. Kaufman’s understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity, however, is unmistakably monistic in its philosophical implications:

In this interpretation of Christian faith, the symbol “God” is intended to designate (a) the ultimate reality (mystery) with which we humans

4. *Ibid.*, 412.

have to do, a reality regarded as the creativity which is at work in and through all things (first motif); that which (b) is thus present in and with all realities of our world . . . as that which enables them to be real, their very “reality” so to speak (third motif); and which (c) is at work, therefore, within the evolutionary–historical trajectory which has produced our humanness and is moving us toward a more profound humaneness, a trajectory manifest in and paradigmatically identified by the Christ-event (second motif).⁵

The “persons” of the Trinity are thus ultimately identical with “motifs” or “intentions” of a monistic cosmic process that includes an evolutionary–historical trajectory aimed at the achievement of humaneness among human beings as active participants in the cosmic process.

At the same time, I understand and appreciate what Kaufman has in mind with his description of God as *serendipitous creativity* since “it enables us to connect important theological concerns with central features of modern/postmodern thinking about the cosmos, the evolution of life, and the emergence and biohistorical development of human life and culture on planet Earth.”⁶ It avoids, to be sure, thinking of God as a personal being or agent as in traditional Christian theology. But, as Karl Peters perceptively notes, “this creativity is not an additional cause operative in the universe, beyond those causes that are discoverable by empirical and scientific inquiry. Rather *serendipitous creativity* is a unifying symbol for all creative physical, chemical, biological, and historical causal processes. . . . It includes the human creativity that constructs the story of this scientifically grounded epic of creation, this ‘big history’ of our universe including ourselves.”⁷ Hence, even though the term “creativity” is not much used in reports on scientific research and

5. *Ibid.*, 423.

6. Gordon Kaufman, *In the Beginning . . . Creativity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 76.

7. Karl E. Peters, “A Christian Naturalism: Developing the Thinking of Gordon Kaufman,” *Zygon* 48 (2013): 581.

technological development, it applies equally to a generic understanding of God, self, and the world. Moreover, insofar as creativity is serendipitous rather than destructive in its workings, creativity even as a symbol remains mysterious and unpredictable, pointing to something beyond human comprehension.⁸ Why is there something rather than nothing? God, understood as serendipitous creativity, seems to be the only answer.

Yet I remain dissatisfied with this understanding of God as serendipitous creativity not only on theological grounds, that is, its radical departure from the traditional Christian understanding of God as Trinity or at least as transcendent personal agent and Creator of heaven and earth. My deeper dissatisfaction with the notion of God as serendipitous creativity is rather metaphysically grounded since in my view creativity is an activity, not an entity in its own right. As such, it passes from potentiality to actuality only in and through its instantiation in entities, whether the entity be God or some finite entity. Whitehead makes basically the same claim in the opening pages of *Process and Reality*, even though he uses the word “accident” rather than “instantiation” to point to the necessary actualization of creativity as a unifying activity in entities.⁹ Creativity, when understood as an activity rather than an entity, thus has the same basic meaning as Be-ing in classical metaphysics when understood as a verb, rather than a noun. That is, it empowers beings to act in line with their nature or substantial form. Similarly, creativity empowers God and all finite entities to exist and consistently to act in accord with one another.

I still agree, of course, with Kaufman and Karl Peters that it is very difficult to establish a strictly philosophical understanding of

8. Ibid.

9. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, corrected edition, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1978), 7. Hereafter: *PR*.

God. As Whitehead noted in *Science and the Modern World*, since the time of Aristotle the notion of God in Western philosophy has been grounded much more in ethical and religious presuppositions than in purely rational argument.¹⁰ To regain a strictly philosophical understanding of God, he himself describes God simply as “the Principle of Concretion.”¹¹ By that he means that from a strictly philosophical perspective God sets limits to the possibilities for the self-actualization of each actual entity in its process of self-constitution. Creativity, in other words, is by nature boundless in terms of the possibilities for existence and activity that it offers to individual actual entities for their self-realization. Hence, over and above creativity, there must be a transcendent personal agent at work to limit these possibilities so that the actual entity in the end will have some significance and value for the cosmic process of which it is here and now a momentary part.¹² Admittedly, for Kaufman and Peters, part of the mystery of serendipitous creativity is the very fact that it is consistently serendipitous and not destructive, a positive rather than a negative factor in the cosmic process. But, in line with Whitehead’s thinking in *Science and the Modern World*, I would say that there is indeed mystery within the workings of creativity, but the mystery attaches to the existence of God as the Principle of Concretion for the cosmic process, not to creativity whose sole task it is to keep providing possibilities for the self-realization of actual entities, whether or not these possibilities are consistent with the overall order and purposive directionality of the cosmic process. Creativity as the principle of process within an evolutionary worldview thus empowers the independent decision of the actual

10. Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: Free Press, 1967), 173–74.

11. *Ibid.*, 174.

12. *Ibid.*, 178.

entity; it does not overpower it in line with its own alleged goals and values.

One more feature of Kaufman's revisionary systematic theology needs attention before I end this discussion of our differing views on the proper approach to the religion-and-science dialogue from a Christian perspective. I completely agree with Kaufman that from a Christian perspective the triad of God-self-world must be expanded to include Christ as a necessary fourth component. Belief in the role of Christ as a transcendent reality directly impacts upon the Christian understanding of self and the world as well as on the Christian understanding of God. But Kaufman and I differ in how we understand that role of Christ in the cosmic process. Kaufman proposes a "wider view" of Christology than what is customary in traditional Christian belief: "Christ' is understood to refer to and name major features of the whole complex of events and relationships surrounding, including, and following upon the ministry and death of Jesus. On this view it is the appearance of a new communal ethos in history, rather than a metaphysically unique individual, that is the matter of central importance."¹³ By "new communal ethos" Kaufman has in mind "an inclusive egalitarian community that welcomes all sorts and conditions of women and men, no matter what their racial, religious, or ethnic background."¹⁴ He thus distinguishes sharply between the historical Jesus of the Gospel narratives and the cosmic Christ in the Pauline epistles to the Colossians and the Ephesians (Col. 1:15-20; Eph. 1:3-23). The cosmic Christ is no longer "a single supernatural individual" but a powerful symbol of what human beings are destined to become in pursuit of greater humanness and humaneness.

13. Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery*, 396.

14. *Ibid.*, 396-97.

While I would agree with Kaufman that there is a significant difference between the historical Jesus and the cosmic Christ, I would argue that the historical Jesus and the cosmic Christ refer to one and the same individual entity who is both human and divine at the same time. Here I appeal to the process-oriented understanding of the doctrine of the Incarnation that I elaborated in chapter 5 of this book. That is, two processes are at work here. The one process is characteristic of the person of Christ as the Divine Word or Eternal Son of the Father. The other process is characteristic of Jesus of Nazareth as a member of the human race at a given time and place in human history. As I see it, the process proper to the human Jesus is incorporated into the process proper to Christ as the Divine Word or Eternal Son of the Father within the divine life. But it retains its own ontological identity, its distinct form of existence and activity, as a lower-order process within the higher-order process of the divine life. During the earthly life of Jesus of Nazareth, the process proper to the Divine Word was active, but its impact upon Jesus was constrained by the limits of the lower-order process proper to Jesus as a human being. Accordingly, whatever the Divine Word did in conjunction with the humanity of Jesus had a finite empirically verifiable effect. Even when Jesus allegedly performed a miracle, the result was always something finite and within the natural order of things. A blind person began to see clearly again. A leper was cured of his leprosy. The only indication that the supernatural agency of the Divine Word was at work in this miraculous event was that it was so unusual, so unlike the normal course of events in human life. Calling such an unusual event a miracle would be due to one's antecedent belief in the existence and activity of the supernatural order of things in the workings of the natural order. All that the senses empirically confirm is that it was an unexpected event beyond human comprehension at the present time.

After the bodily resurrection of Jesus, however, the roles of the divine and the human processes in the person of the risen Christ are reversed. At this point, the process proper to the humanity of Jesus continues to exist but in clear subordination to the workings of the process of the divine life proper to Jesus as the eternal Son of the Father become incarnate in this world for our salvation (John 1:14). Jesus was thus no longer bound by the conditions of space and time in his appearances to the apostles and to the holy women. He appeared and disappeared without prior notice. Moreover, they did not always recognize him when he appeared (e.g., his appearance first to Mary Magdalene and then to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus). Yet upon closer inspection he was evidently the same person that they knew and cared for during his earthly life. Thus Kaufman's notion of the cosmic Christ as an "inclusive egalitarian community"¹⁵ does not refer to Christ as an individual entity (the Risen Lord) but to what Christians following St. Paul have traditionally called the Mystical Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-27). Christians as the Body of Christ certainly need the life-giving connection to the risen Christ as their Head, but even here Christ is an individual person, not a symbol for the network of Christians throughout the world.¹⁶ The real symbolic value of the image of Christ as the Head of the Mystical Body is, in my view, that it points to the possibility that the higher-order process of the divine life in and through the person of Jesus can be active in the lower-order process of human life and thereby "redeem" it, lift it to a higher-order form of existence and activity than would be possible by human effort alone.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*, 397.

Overview of the Contents of This Book

With these brief comments on how Kaufman and I try to align Christian systematic theology better with current scientific understanding of the world in which we live, I have highlighted many of the leading ideas of Part Two of this book without having to summarize the details of each chapter in linear fashion. But for the sake of completeness, I offer in the next few paragraphs a quick overview of the contents of the entire book. In the Introduction, I made reference to Wentzel van Huyssteen's interdisciplinary approach to topics in religion and science via the concept of transversal rationality before setting forth my own proposal of a new common language for analysis of controversial issues in the religion-and-science debate. Accordingly, in chapters 1 and 2 I proposed that theologians and scientists cease talking about individual entities (Aristotelian substances) in relation to one another and instead start talking about systems of such individual entities in dynamic interrelation. Within these systems the individual entities come and go, but the patterns of their interrelation remains to condition (though not totally control) the interplay of new individual entities that take their place within the system. The focus of attention is then no longer on entities but on the enduring patterns of their dynamic interrelation. Moreover, as I see it, such a systems-oriented approach to physical reality is easier to explain if one uses a somewhat revised understanding of the category of "society" in the metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead. That is, while Whitehead himself proposes that a society is a genetically linked set of actual entities (momentary self-constituting subjects of experience) with a common element of form or defining characteristic, I suggest instead that a society is an enduring field of activity that has been structured by successive sets of actual entities with this common element of form

or defining characteristic. As an objective reality that endures over time, a structured field of activity together with its ever-changing constituent actual entities can be considered a process that has from moment to moment the objective reality of a system. To commonsense experience, it appears to be a stable individual entity, but closer examination reveals that it is a system with a consistent mode of operation. Yet, since its components are self-constituting subjects of experience (actual entities) whose common element of form itself slowly evolves over time in response to an ever-changing environment, the system is invariably open-ended, not closed or completely fixed in its ongoing mode of operation.

In chapters 3 and 4, I used this systems-oriented approach to Whiteheadian societies to analyze various theories about the notion of pantheism as a suitable middle-ground position between monism (either matter alone or spirit alone as the basic “stuff” of physical reality) and dualism (matter and spirit in dialectical opposition as the “stuff” of the universe). For pantheism by definition claims that all finite things exist within God but retain their own ontological identity, albeit in dependence on God as the vital source of their existence and activity. Yet, whereas all the other versions of pantheism reviewed in chapter 4 presuppose that God is an infinite or all-encompassing individual entity that somehow includes within itself all finite individual entities, I instead argue that the Trinitarian God is a complex system composed of subsystems, each subsystem corresponding to one of the divine persons. In this way, the three divine persons together co-constitute the higher-order system of a divine community. The divine community, however, like all Whiteheadian societies, is the enduring structured field of activity for the interaction of its constituent parts or members, in this case the divine persons. Within this divine energy-field the current cosmic process originated and continues to exist to this day.

As the *imago Dei* or finite counterpart to the corporate reality of God, the cosmic process is a complex system of subordinate systems. These subsystems in turn have still more subsystems, the ultimate components of which are momentary self-constituting subjects of experience, Whiteheadian actual entities, as “the final real things of which this world is made up.”¹⁷

The God-world relationship as a whole is then an all-comprehensive or super-system in which the divine system, the communitarian life of the divine persons, serves as both the ontological source and ultimate goal of the cosmic process as itself composed of hierarchically ordered subsystems. The superiority of this systems-oriented approach to the notion of panentheism is that systems can be hierarchically ordered without the subsystems losing their ontological identity as subsystems with their own mode of operation within a still larger system. This is not so readily accomplished if one is dealing with individual entities rather than systems. In an Aristotelian-Thomistic setting, lower-order entities cannot be incorporated into higher-order entities without losing the actuality of their own substantial form, at least while they are components of the higher-order entity.

In Part Two of the book I indicated in chapters 5 and 6 how this systems-oriented approach to reality addresses longstanding controversial issues within Christian systematic theology as to the proper understanding of the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity. To say that Jesus has both a divine and a human nature is to claim that Jesus is a full participant in two systems, one divine and one human, with the human system integrated into the divine system but still retaining its own ontological integrity as a finite system of existence and activity. Likewise, to say that God is three persons and

17. Whitehead, *PR*, 18.

yet only one God is to claim that God is a Whiteheadian structured society, a society of interrelated subsocieties or subsystems.¹⁸ In chapter 7 I proposed that the Church is an unfinished historical process rather than a corporate entity with a fixed institutional structure through the centuries. In chapter 8, I explored the role of miracles within the natural order of things in this world, above all, with reference to the recurrent problem of natural and moral evil within a panentheistic understanding of the God-world relationship. Finally, in chapter 9 I offered arguments for the rational plausibility of life after death for human beings and in some measure also for the nonhuman creatures of this world, given that the cosmic process is a set of systems that originated in and continue to participate in the overarching system of the divine life.

In brief, then, what I have set forth in this book is a hypothesis about the nature of the God-world relationship that is grounded in three philosophical presuppositions that in turn have significant consequences for theological reflection on basic Christian beliefs (as indicated in points 4 and 5 below):

1. A commonly accepted philosophical worldview is indispensable for fruitful dialogue between theology and science. Consciously or unconsciously, both theology and science presuppose an underlying philosophical worldview. If the two worldviews are in conflict with one another, then theologians and scientists will invariably clash over more particular issues. But if they share the same worldview or at least have two very similar worldviews, then theologians and scientists are much more likely to agree on these more particular issues.
2. The best philosophy for this ongoing dialogue between theology and science should be grounded in the conviction that reality is socially organized into integrated processes or systems with individual entities as their constitutive parts or members. Unlike

18. *Ibid.*, 99.

classical metaphysics, therefore, whose starting-point is the ontological priority of the individual entity to the community or environment in which it finds itself, this more socially oriented approach to reality presupposes the ontological priority of the community or environment to its constituent parts or members here and now. Relationality is operative in both worldviews. But in classical metaphysics it is primarily the relation of individual entities to one another; in this metaphysical system it is primarily the relation of integrated systems to one another.

3. Finally, the ultimate constituent parts or members of these integrated systems are mini-organisms, momentary self-constituting subjects of experience with internal rather than external relations to one another. The systems themselves are not organisms, subjects of experience, but rather the objective byproduct or result of the interaction of these mini-organisms with one another from moment to moment. As momentary self-constituting subjects of experience, the organisms come and go; the systems with their relatively fixed patterns or modes of operation remain. The systems, to be sure, also evolve in terms of their patterns or modes of operation but only in virtue of ongoing interaction with other lower-order or higher-order systems. So from top to bottom, reality is hierarchically ordered into integrated systems.
4. From a theological perspective, this systems-oriented approach to reality nicely correlates with a Trinitarian understanding of God as a specifically social reality, namely, as a community of divine persons whose communitarian life is both the starting-point and endpoint of the cosmic process. For, if God is a corporate or systems-oriented reality, then creation as the finite collective image of God should also be socially organized, composed of a vast network of dynamically interrelated systems.
5. Likewise, other key Christian beliefs can be rethought and represented within the context of a systems-oriented approach to reality: for example, the doctrine of the Incarnation, the nature of the Church, the role of miracles as signs of Divine Providence in a world process marked by trial and error, and finally the possibility of eternal life, the New Creation, for all God's creatures.