Towards the theology of place

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This thesis seeks to give a theological account of the human experience of place. In the first part of the thesis three ways in which human beings relate to places are described. All human beings relate existentially to 'my place' with feelings of belonging or outsideness. Each human being relates to a place in a unique way which reflects personality, experience and socialisation; the mental map of each individual of any place is always a simplified version of reality. Each human being observes and experiences places through learnt patterns; these patterns are preserved in institutional forms and are expressed in a socially organised structure within which all human beings are placed.

In any relation a place can influence and constrain. It can function as an agent just as powerfully as a human being can. 'A place' can be of any scale. The people of a continental block may share features of history, culture, building style and world view which may be different to those of other parts of the world. However, those same categories can vary, in other ways, over very short distances of time and space. A place may be as small as 'my place'; that is, where I call home.

A place is always a complex of interrelations between the past and the present; between human society and natural

landscape and climate; and between this place and another place with which this place relates. Furthermore, competing scales of place coexist. I might feel at home in my country but out of place in a neighbouring village or suburb.

In the second part of the thesis it is argued that a relational ontology will account for the way human beings operate in and with places. It is suggested that space and time present a four-dimensional framework for describing the location of any object; that God is present in a place by virtue of his creative and life-sustaining Spirit and no human agency is required to actualise this presence; and that McFadyen's model of Christian personhood may be applied more widely than to individual human beings. It describes how all things may be said to relate.

In this theological anthropology it has not been possible to deal at any length with the way in which God is present in place. Nor has it been possible to consider questions of place in the Bible or in the Christian tradition. Clearly the land, the spiritualisation of the presence of God and territorial expressions of Christianity through time are important questions but they lie beyond the scope of this thesis. It is the concern of this thesis merely to describe how the relation between human beings and 'place' operates and to offer a theological account, based on a relational ontology, of the relationships described.

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INTRODUCTION: THE LOCATION OF THE PROBLEM

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Because I know that time is always time
And place is always and only place
And what is actual is actual only for one time
And only for one place
I rejoice that things are as they are ...

T. S. Eliot[1]

The experience of place is common to all human beings. In this thesis we maintain that to be a human being is to be 'in place'. All human beings are necessarily located in space and time at a particular location on the surface of the earth. Therefore, all human beings are always in one particular place rather than in any other. All human beings are also placed in a social order which is usually characterised by a political distribution of responsibility. Therefore, all human beings are also necessarily placed on a social map at a particular location. This thesis is an attempt to provide a theological account of what being 'in place' means.

1.1.1 The Use of the Word 'Place'

The English word 'place' is used in a variety of ways in modern English. First, it is widely held that a place is a collection of houses in which human beings live. Scale is not important except in

[1] T. S. Eliot, 'Ash Wednesday 1930', Lines 16-19, p. 83, *Selected Poems*, Faber and Faber, London, 1961.

so far as 'a place' must consist of a group of dwellings. Almost all human beings, it is thought, live in such a place. Places are named and their location can be described. Each place is unique, because no two places occupy exactly the same location. Places are therefore, particular phenomena. This place must be different from that place. The difference is a result of the particular characteristics of the space which each place occupies and of the unique history of each particular place.

To talk simply of 'place' is to talk in the abstract, for place understood in this first way is always this-place-with-a-name-which-is-here. In other words, places are differentiated from one another by two mechanisms. Firstly, by their name, and occasionally the addition of an administrative district in which they are located and secondly by reference to their particular location in the physical world.

Secondly, a place can be modified by the addition of a personal pronoun. One no longer speaks of place or places (in general) or of a-place-with-a-name-which-is-here (in particular) but of 'her place' or 'my place'. In this modified usage an important change has occurred in the notion of place which is operating. A place is no longer defined as a point in space in which buildings are located and which is described by a name. It is now defined as belonging to a human being. The place is what it is because it is mine. Particularity is retained for only this place is also my place.

Where human beings own more than one place further modifiers are available as in the phrase 'his place in the country'. The locational referent here need not be specific; the governing modification is not 'in the country' but 'his'. It is no longer important that my place is here as opposed to there. The name of the place in which my place is located is not important. The only significant description of this place is that it belongs to me. It is therefore possible to describe it as 'mine' and to make no reference beyond this to the physical world of space and time at all. Scale is even less important here and may refer to the smallest owned space imaginable.

To use the language of 'my place' is to avoid abstractions. It is not any place but this place which is mine. It is in this sense, a notion of place in which particularity is important. It is however, a notion of place in which the physical aspect of a place is relatively unimportant. That is to say, it is not important to this notion of place that my place exists in space and time. It is mine, and although it could be described in physical terms (it is there, in that place, and is made up of physical material), this is not of primary interest. It is to do with feelings, memories, nostalgia and experience. My place is therefore treated as though it were out of space and time.

In both of these examples of the use of the term 'place' particular places are denoted by naming. This naming takes two forms. In the latter example the place is named 'my place'. In other

words, the naming occurs by reference not to the place but to the person who names. This is in contrast to the method of naming, and also to the notion of place operating in the first example. This notion is also concerned with particular place and the name ascribed to the particular place will usually be related to events which have occurred in or near the place or to distinguishing physical features of the place. Names which emerge through this process of denotation by attention to the history and topography of a place do not ensure that a place receives a unique name but they serve to locate places not just in the landscape but also in the collective consciousness of the social order.

The use of a name is a simplifying technique which human beings use as a shorthand to speed communication or to remind one another of the important moments of the collective cultural memory. Place-names might describe the physical location of the place by referring to the shape of the location, the lie of the land. Before long the name becomes known and the need for directions based on the lie of the land has passed for all except the stranger. Alternatively, a place-name might record the founder of the settlement or an important battle in the history of the people.

These two methods of naming a place differ in that one refers to the physical world and acknowledges that the place is located in, and is heavily shaped by, the nature of the physical world around it. For this reason and in this sense, an account of place must take

account of the possibility of the power of the land and its inanimate, physical forms to shape and influence the nature of the place. The other refers to important events in the history of the society living in the place. The place-name is used to bring to consciousness key events from the history of the society. In this way place-names function alongside myths, stories and songs as part of the collective cultural consciousness of a society. Therefore, although the process of naming places can follow widely different routes, one primarily physical and spatial and the other largely cultural, historical and therefore temporal, both are constructing a simplified world out of a complex and hostile material, historical and cultural context.

There is however, a third and very important way in which 'place' is used in contemporary English. When dealings have occurred in the past in British culture between sub-cultural groups it has been important to 'know one's place'. That is to say, it is important to know where one is placed within society. A failure to understand one's social location would be likely to involve behaving in an inappropriate manner and one would risk ostracism or humiliation. This way of using place to indicate location not in a physical environment but in a social context is both widespread and of considerable importance for a complete account of place.

This account needs to be aware of three ways in which 'place' is most commonly used in modern English. A place is that point in space where a group of human beings have chosen to

settle and to which great symbolic significance is attached. These places are often named and the names function as a way of taming or simplifying an often highly complex physical or cultural reality. In this way places are often one of the means through which power and influence over others can be exercised. The place or a named place is unique. No other place is quite like it.

Places are personalised or reduced in scale by being given significance for only one person either through mechanisms such as memory or nostalgia or through direct political mechanisms such as ownership. 'My place' will either be the place for which I am the holder of the title deeds and for which I have paid or it will be a place for which I have a particularly strong attachment because of its significance for me. A place which has been collectively denoted by the ascription of a name will also be the locus of symbolic significance.

Names are an example of the way in which symbols operate. A place might be named by an immigrant after the place which has been left behind. There are numerous examples of this in several former British colonies in North and South America, Australia and New Zealand and in pre-independence names in Africa. Alternatively, a place name in a minority language (such as Welsh or Gaelic in Britain) may be retained to try to prevent the dominant language from destroying the minority language completely.

In both these examples the place name operates as a symbol which embodies the meaning which it symbolises. To name one's new settlement after the place which one has left is to attach to the new settlement the feelings of nostalgia and loss which one feels. To retain the use of a Gaelic or Welsh name for a settlement is to embody the struggle for life which is being waged on behalf of the dying language. The act of naming externalises the feeling or mental activity. It gives the human emotion or struggle an external, physical dimension for a place now functions as a symbol and embodies the meaning which it has been given. It is no longer separate from that meaning but offers that meaning as a part of itself whenever anything comes into relation with it.

The name of a place is part of what a place is. A place cannot be divorced from its name and the meaning which that name embodies. Consequently, whenever anyone is in relation with that place they will be in relation with the content of the symbol of the name. Far from understanding a symbol as a signpost to something other than itself we maintain that a symbol will embody that which it symbolises. Thus the use of a Gaelic name not only points to the struggle for a minority language but it is also part of the struggle. To see the place name or to experience the place is not only to be reminded of the struggle, it is also to be caught up in its midst. The way in which places function as symbols is of considerable importance to us.

In every social grouping there is a social order. It is our contention that all human beings are part of a social order and that such social orders are constituted, in part, by a political structure in which human beings are placed. A group of domesticated hens will form themselves into a social order known as the pecking order. The pecking order is an expression of the status of each hen in relation to the other. When the pecking order is realised in behaviour the hens are often placed physically in a way which is related to the social pecking order. Thus, to be placed physically in relation to the other hens operates as a physical expression of social placing. Despite the fact that human society is rather more complicated and usually operates in a rather more sophisticated manner than that of the hens, nevertheless, human relations operate in a broadly similar way. Physical and social placing are both constitutive of human being and will either operate to influence being independently of one another or simultaneously and in such a way as to make the distinction unnecessary. So a place is the focus for existential relations, a simplified view of the world and a social order.

1.2 ONTOLOGICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS

1.2.1 A Case Study

There is a small village in Co. Durham called 'No Place'. The absurdity of the name of this small village which consists of three rows of terraced houses serves as an illustration of the presuppositions upon which this thesis is based. It is not possible in

the context of this thesis to give a complete substantiation for these presuppositions but some attention is given to the need to conceive of being in the way described below.

The residents of No Place do live in a place. Many of the residents will have never lived anywhere else and would say that they 'belonged' to No Place. They mean that this place and no other is the place where they have been brought up and where they have been shaped into what they now are. This sense of belonging by birth to a particular place is an expression of the importance that that place has had in changing what those residents would have been. In other words, if all other things had been equal and the same people had been born and brought up in a different place then what those people are would have been different. The village operates as an agent affecting those people who live in it.

This simple statement makes several far reaching assertions. First, it concerns itself with a particular place. It is only this village which has affected that people in this way. It therefore maintains that they are not affected by general principles but by the specific events or phenomena of a particular place. It is these events or phenomena which might be used as the experimental data from which general principles are abstracted from particular reality. Reality, we argue, is constituted by specific events or phenomena and the interaction between human beings and the physical world occurs at the level of the particular. In other words, the people of No

Place know instinctively that it is No Place that has played an important part in making them what they are.

Some of the influence of the village could be said to be due to the features which No Place shares with other settlements. It is, for example, very small; it is a former mining village; it is located in a particular region - North East England and in a particular part of the North East - Derwentside District; it is on an exposed hillside; it is socially uniform and so on. However, No Place is the only place which shares its particular range of shared characteristics. It is not, for example, a farming community in Devon even though, being small, it shares some characteristics with faming communities in Devon. No other place occupies the same physical location.

No other place has the same people living in it. These people each have their own histories and will also share a collective No Place history to which no other place can lay claim. It is of primary importance to recognise that the first requirement of a theology of place is that it acknowledges that places are particular phenomena. Each place is unique.

Second, it asserts that a place can exert an influence over those people who live in it, or indeed who come into contact with it in any way. There are some obvious ways in which a place will operate as a constraint on those who are in it. To live in a place means not living anywhere else. Thus all that happens to or in a

place will also happen to those people living in that place. Most housing in No Place is terraced and very few houses have gardens, the winter weather is severe and most houses are within a very short distance of farmed land. These are states of affairs which will affect the people of No Place. No Place acts as a constraint on those people who live in it because possibilities are denied or granted by the physical form of the village. It is simply impossible to do or to experience a variety of things in No Place because some things are not there to be done. Conversely, other possibilities are available. In this way a place can be understood as an agent affecting people.

Third, it will have become clear in our discussion that a place is also constrained by the activities of human beings. Consequently, what a place is is partly a result of what human beings have done and partly due to natural, physical considerations. No Place is located in the physical world at a particular point. Human beings cannot alter the geographical position of No Place. Once built it remains where it is until it is destroyed. (It will become clear that we would maintain that where a settlement has been relocated then, although the name has been retained, the settlement is a new settlement because it occupies a new geographical location. There are numerous examples of the dislocation caused by the rebuilding of slum areas.) However, the way in which human beings chose to build No Place, the reason for which it was built and the economic and political changes which have affected the village since, have all

been human influences which have made the village what it is today. In other words, the ontology of a place is a result of the interactions of the physical world and human agency at a particular point in space and through time. Furthermore, a place can become an agent in and of itself. It will carry with it the power to exert an influence upon or to constrain events which affect it and other places. This can occur both in human affairs - for example, roads must usually be built to avoid settlements - and also in the physical world as local climate, for example, can be greatly altered by places.

1.2.1 The Ontological framework

It is clear that where one is affects the potential that one has for future action. However, we wish to argue for a more radical ontology of place in which it becomes possible to say that where one is will affect what one is. If a place can constrain the activity of a human being then the human being has been engaged by the place in a relationship. The place and the human being are in relation. Furthermore, it is a relation in which both parties are able to exert an influence over the other. It is our view that the influence which is exerted is such that it will change both the place and the human being. This statement is therefore an ontological statement. Being in relation is the only possible way of existing. Physical objects are in relation with other physical objects by being part of the same system of physical interaction. Similarly human beings are in relation with other human beings from the moment of birth

and cannot avoid either relations with other human beings or the absence of relations with other human beings.

It is our view that a relational ontology is the most effective way in which the ontology of human beings can be adequately described. The relations in which human being must be located are of a highly complex nature and must take account of three elements.[2] First, a human being is constituted by those relations which have already occurred. The parents to whom a child is born not only affect the genetic make-up of the child but will usually also determine the nature of the physical, economic and emotional environment within which the child will spend its formative years. All relations from the past will to some extent, sometimes very little and sometimes to a very high degree, affect the being of all people.

Second, a human being is constituted by those relations occurring in the present. The relations of the present will be present experience, they will help to shape the relations of the future and they will be substantially, though not completely, determined by the relations of the past. A human being is a residue of past relations to which present relations are added thus shaping the nature and location of future relations. We can note here that the relations of the present are largely shaped from outside themselves, namely

[2] A. McFadyen, in a recently published book *The Call To Personhood*, C. U. P., Cambridge, 1990, has developed a relational ontology to explain human sociality. There are limitations to his account but these lie only in the scope of the book and not in its content. We follow his understanding of human sociality and the non-substantive ontology which he proposes. Such an ontology is used in this thesis to support the theology of place proposed.

from the past. Further to this, the residue of past relations is continually in flux as it is added to by the relations presently experienced. Thus the ontology of human being is not static and substantive but it is dynamic, fluid and non-substantive in nature.

Third, the relations by which a human being is constituted are not only relations between people, past and present. Relations also occur between people and physical things. We have argued above in the context of the absurdly named No Place that where one is is just as significant a relation as who one is with. Therefore, where one is born is influential on what one is just as who one's parents are influences what one becomes. Clearly, the parents one has will open and close possibilities for a human being. In the same way where one is born will open and close possibilities for a human being. The same is true of present relations. A human being is by definition in relation with the people by whom he is surrounded, but relations also occur between the human being and those things by which he is surrounded. This external agency opens the possibility of a radically new future for, when an external agent is able to exert an influence then what the individual will become is not dependent solely upon what one is and what has been. Therefore the existence of relations between a human being and other people (including the inhabitants of places) and things (including places in themselves) makes the future of that human being an open-ended question and not simply a reworking of what that human being already is.

These relations are mutual. It is not simply that the human being engages with other people and things as though they were not there and taking only what is useful from the encounter. Both parties, whether both are human or not, are inevitably changed by virtue of the relation having taken place. To be in relation is to be changing. This changing takes place in the context of the residue of relations which can function to secure identity in two ways. First, it operates as a history such that any present relation does not occur in a vacuum but occurs in the context of a history of relations. Indeed, the nature of the human being engaging in the relation is largely determined by the relations of the past. Second, this context of relations serves to provide a sense of continuity. McFadyen argues convincingly that the notion of the self can be redefined as that sense of internal continuity which all human beings share. Places can also be said to have a sense of continuing existence in which the 'spirit' of the place remains unaltered through time.[3]

Throughout this thesis we will be arguing that a relational ontology is the most effective account for the way in which place operates in society, and therefore, a relational ontology is the most appropriate ontological framework for a theology of place. Such a theology must take account of the relational nature of the being of both human beings and of places. In order to do this it is necessary for a theology of place to be particular, to acknowledge the

[3] See for example the work of D. Pocock in: *Humanistic Geography and Literature; The Novelist and the North; Place and the Novelist.*

existence and agency of inanimate objects and to be non-substantive. It is also important that it recognises the complex variety of ways in which places operate and in which human beings are placed.

1.3 THE TERMS DEFINED

1.3.1 Relational Ontology

Most ontologies which have emerged in recent centuries in Western philosophy and theology have been based on the conviction that to exist is to be independent of other things which might also be said to exist. In any relation it is thought that the existents engaged in the relationship are independent of one another. It is therefore difficult for a substantive ontology to admit that anything other than the subject of a relation can act as an agent. Furthermore, because entities are given such a high degree of independence, it is hard for a substantive ontology to account for change.

In a relational ontology nothing is independent of anything else. The degree of interpenetration is so high that, by definition, anything which can be said to exist is said to exist *in relation*. That is to say, it can only exist because it is some sort of relation with something else which exists. This relational manner of existing is not only necessary for this thing to exist, it is also a necessary part of the notion of existence. To be is to be in relation. Furthermore, anything which is is in relation with its own past, with other similar

objects and with the physical world in which it finds itself. All these elements in the relation will change frequently and, therefore, so will the existent which is in relation. Thus not only is a relational ontology non-substantive but it is also highly fluid and very dynamic.

It is non-substantive in the sense that all things and all human beings are not discrete objects which exist untouched by other objects. These objects are said to exist only in relation. However, despite existing in relation, some degree of discreteness is necessary if any sense of self-identity is to be retained. Following Mc Fadyen, we argue that self-identity is assumed in order to make functioning in such a complex and fluid environment as the relational world possible. Consequently, the world looks as though it is constituted by discrete objects. The language of substantivity may therefore be appropriate but it must be remembered that the location of an object's existence is not in itself but in its relations.

1.3.2 Particularity

At the beginning of this chapter we argued that human beings live in particular places. By this we mean that human beings do not live in generalised 'place' but in a particular place which can be distinguished from all other places in a variety of ways. Only by attending to the details of what this particular place is can a description be made of the place in which a human being finds himself. Despite this most theories which deal with the way human

beings operate in space assume a high degree of homogeneity in both the space in which human beings operate and in the way in which human beings respond to circumstances. These are false assumptions because human beings are unique creatures and the places in which they operate are also unique. Braudel, a French historian, has shown that failing to take due note of the particular circumstances of events, of human beings (and also therefore, of places), can lead to a limited or even a mistaken understanding of what is happening.[4] When we speak of particularity we refer to the unique circumstances of the individual object in distinction to the generalised common circumstances of 'object-like-things'. Particularity is also the process of inquiry and decision making which begins with the individual and moves, if at all, to the common features of all individuals or to the needs of the universal organisation.

[4] See for example, F. Braudel, *Civilisation and Capitalism 15th-18th Century: The Structures of Everyday Life: The Limits of the Possible*, trans. S. Reynolds, Collins, London, ET 1981, in which Braudel observes three different economic systems operating simultaneously within pre-industrial societies. There is the 'market economy' which is visible, quantifiable and is used as the raw material upon which economic science can work. There is an invisible 'material life' operating below, and being non-quantifiable, invisible to the market economy in which transactions occur on the basis of self-sufficiency and bartering. Communication networks here are very small. There is also a third economy operating above the market economy in which a small hierarchy is able to manipulate the market economy to its benefit. A small group of individuals who control wealth are able to influence the economy from a great distance. Braudel argues that

"... economists ... tend to see the economy as a homogeneous reality which can legitimately be taken out of context and which can, indeed must, be measured on its own, since nothing is intelligible until it has been put into statistics." p 23.

He describes his own contrasting approach: "I ... had intended to be guided by concrete observation and comparative history alone." "... concrete observation is still in the foreground. My purpose throughout has been to see and to let others see, by allowing what I show to speak for itself, in all the richness, complexity and heterogeneity of real life." p. 25.

1.3.3 Physical Objects or Things

All things which exist and which are not purely mental acts are physical things (and it may be that all mental acts exist *as* physical phenomena). They occupy time and space and can be located in the spatio-temporal realm. We will argue that all things may constrain other things including human beings. They may therefore, act as agents in a relationship. Human beings and physical objects relate to one another. It is asserted that all things are created by God. This includes all physical things which are characterised by their being constituted by matter. It also includes all social relations, most notably those between human beings. In this case, it is the potential for society and the ability to create culture rather than the form in which the potentiality and the ability find expression which is said to be created by God. Consequently, and by virtue of their createdness, all things and all the relations between things are a symbol of the presence of God. That is to say, the existence of things and the relations between them embodies the presence of God. God is to be found within what he has created as well as beyond it. The natural is therefore, at one and the same time, a signpost to the supernatural (it points beyond itself to what it is not) and also a symbol of the supernatural (it points within itself to what it is).

1.3.4 Realism

We assert that physical objects, things, places and people exist in space and time. They exist in and of themselves and their

existence needs to be verified by my experience. My perception and my experience are simply ways in which I gain an insight on the reality of the external world by which I am surrounded. We use realism to refer to a position which is in opposition to William of Ockham and the long tradition of epistemological scepticism which has followed his redefinition of the nominalist argument. The physical universe and the events occurring within it are not seen as abstract or ideal but as real existents or occurrences. We are therefore, taking a contrary view to idealism which has dominated much theological thinking in recent centuries and which holds that thought, or the mind, is the only reality and that external objects have no existence in their own right.

1.4 FROM AN UNDERSTANDING OF PLACE TO A THEOLOGY OF PLACE

We have so far made clear that we wish to assert that human beings are defined as beings in relation. We have shown that we presuppose that these relations occur between human beings (they are placed within social systems which involve the organisation and distribution of political power and custom) and between human beings and physical things (they are in a particular physical place which can be located in the spatial and temporal realm). Relations also occur between human beings and God. It is taking adequate account of relations with God which will turn this thesis into a theology and prevent it being simply an account of a way of understanding the manner in which places and placing function in

human society.

We presuppose that relations with God are part of what it is to be a human being. In the course of the thesis we will frequently offer a critique based upon the degree of realism which a position purports to uphold. It is our contention, as has been seen, that not only do physical objects and phenomena exist in and of themselves but that they exert an influence upon human beings because human beings are in relation with them. The same is true of God. It is not possible to defend this position in a thoroughgoing manner either in the introduction or in the body of this thesis.

It is our position that human beings are in relation with God by virtue of their having been created by God. In other words, the normal state of a human being is to be in full and open relation with God. Such a relation occurs directly through the Spirit and also occurs indirectly through relations with other human beings and through relations with the created world. Thus, to be placed is a social reality (an inevitability if, as we argue, to be human is to be in relation with other human beings) that is, not only in relation with other human beings but also in relation with God. Similarly to be in relation with a place (also an inevitability if to be human is to be located at a particular point in the spatio-temporal realm and therefore, to be in relation with a particular place), however such a relation may be construed, is also to be in relation with God.

We are concerned primarily with a theological anthropology of place. Our aim is to offer a coherent theological account of how human beings operate in place. We are not therefore concerned to present a detailed defence of a relational ontology as applied to God or to account for the easy way in which we place God as a relational being within and beyond all things. Such defence can be made but our attention must be drawn towards human experience of placedness and to the agency of placed phenomena. To be strictly accurate our theology of place might more appropriately, and less ambitiously be termed a 'theological anthropology of place'. Equally, we do not aim to survey historical accounts of placedness in the Christian tradition nor will we describe place in the Christian scriptures. Such tasks may be required for a thorough-going theology of place but must lie beyond the limitations of a thesis which aims only to offer some suggestion for the route towards a theology of place.[5]

1.5 TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF PLACE: THE ARGUMENT

1.5.1 Introduction

In the opening paragraphs we saw that it is possible to use the language of place in a wide variety of ways. Firstly, place refers to where one is either in space or in a social structure. Secondly,

[5] We are aware of the work of, for example, W. D. Davies in *The Gospel and The Land*, and W. Bruggemann in *The Land*. A treatment of the literature on place in the Bible and in the Christian tradition would take up more space than is available.

place is always particular, that is to say, when one speaks of place it is always of this or that place or of my place. When one speaks of this place one speaks as though it has real existence, as though it has a physical reality in space and time and as though it is able to function as an agent in a relationship. When one speaks of my place the existence of the place is not of primary concern.

The task of this thesis is to investigate ways in which the philosophical and theological tradition enables us to give an account of the ways in which human beings operate in place. We will investigate how it is that human beings relate to places and what it is to be placed in a social context. The topic is complex for the following reason. It is our view that human beings are always at a place in time and space. Therefore, at one and the same time human beings are being changed by the physical place in which they find themselves, they are also changing the place by their presence in it and are also constructing an image of their place which only bears a partial resemblance to the reality of the place itself. Furthermore, these dynamics are not only operating in the present for there is a considerable history for both the place and the person relating to the place which will affect not only the place and person but also the way in which they interact with one another.

In addition to this both the place and the person exist within a social structure. The place will relate to other places primarily, but not exclusively, through human activity. People also exist within a

social structure in which social placing acts as a considerable constraint on activity as it both gives and removes possibilities for behaviour. All these dynamics are operating at the same time. Consequently, the compartmentalisation which is necessary to make each discussion manageable is dangerous because it can tend to give the impression that each section is a discrete unit. This is not the case for all the ways of being placed are operating simultaneously and feedback systems operating between the various ways of functioning serve to make the whole operation of place greater than its constituent parts.

It will be clear that it is our view that it is a relational ontology which is best to provide the necessary condition for an adequate account of the way in which places and placing functions. Therefore, a theology of place must be grounded in a relational ontology. However, it is not the only ontology that is able to deal with aspects of the ways in which place can be described; it is simply the approach most suited to bearing the weight required of an adequate account.

1.5.2 Part One: How Human Beings Operate Within Places

The first part of the thesis deals with how human beings relate to places and are constrained by places. In chapter two the existential expression of feelings about 'my place' or of feeling an outsider in a place are described and their origins traced. A popular strand of geography has adopted phenomenological and existential

solutions to questions of human experiences of place. It has proved to be a fruitful way of researching the meaning of place and placedness. It is concerned only with 'my experience' and illustrates universal experiences of attachment and unattachment to particular buildings, locations and places.

In chapter three we illustrate the human need to construct a simplified picture of the world in which they live by describing Pannenberg's theological anthropology. This illustrates the ability of human beings to relate to the places which they experience by simplifying the enormously complex nature of those places. By constructing 'mental maps' human beings are able to filter out unimportant information but still function in the 'real' world. The 'place' here includes the social structure of the locality as well as the physical form in which the society and its culture are located.

The social nature of human beings and the institutional forms of socialisation and social organisation are described in chapter four. Institutions are products of social organisation and can express themselves in physical forms and are a significant part of the way in which places constrain human behaviour. The development of culture is also an important product of human behaviour in a place and in turn goes on to constrain human activity.

Each chapter in Part One illustrates one of the three major ways in which human beings operate in places. They experience a

place as 'mine' or as somewhere where I am an outsider. They construct a simplified picture of a complex reality in order to function more effectively and they develop a social structure and cultural form specific to the place. In all these the place itself will influence the nature of the experience, the content of the picture, the type of social structure and the way in which it is expressed in space. These will then constrain human activity or open it up to unexpected and unpredicted possibilities.

An appendix to Part One contains a brief description of the work of Gottwald. He has suggested that the land allotment traditions of the Judges were compiled retrospectively and were used as a way of cementing the unity of Israel. The question of the accuracy of his analysis is not at issue. Gottwald presents a plausible account in which the potential and the power of place functioning as an agent by establishing social identity is shown. A particular place is seen to act upon social identity and to influence social placing both of human beings within the Israelite community and of the Israelite community itself within the order of kingdoms and other social groupings. It might be said therefore that the 'natural' creation and society function together in a unified manner for Gottwald shows that the land can function as an agent for socialisation. By the end of Part One we have illustrated how human beings operate in places and have established that it is possible to conceive of places functioning as agents.

1.5.3 Part Two: Relational Ontology and God

In the second part of the thesis we begin with a comparison of some of the work of Torrance and Boff. Both consider the place of theology within the body of all knowledge, both place the incarnation at the heart of their theology and both argue explicitly for the presence of God in the created order under certain circumstances. In Torrance we find an argument for a relational understanding of reality based on modern science and for the actualisation of the presence of God through the mental activity of human beings. Boff places theology within knowledge rather than at its crown and finds the presence of God in liberated social structures. Both grapple with the possibility of a relational ontology and with the presence of God in places.

In the final chapter after a brief description of Dussel's third world relational ontology McFadyen and Moltmann are used to illustrate two routes to a relational ontology and it is Moltmann who shows that God is present in all things. Consequently, we can account for the human experience of being placed described in Part One, for the agency of places in relations and for the presence of God in places whether it be an existential experience of my place, the constraints of my perception of this place or the social and cultural order of this place. We will then have worked towards a theology of place via our theological anthropology.

PART ONE

PHENOMENOLOGY AND THE THEOLOGY OF PLACE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The experience that this is or is not 'my place' is an experience common to all human beings. The sense that I am 'at home' here or conversely, that I am an outsider there, is a fundamental experience of human beings. It is not possible to be a human being without feeling related or unrelated to the location in space in which one finds oneself at any particular moment in time. These feelings are brought to consciousness in a variety of common experiences. The sense that this is 'my place' has already been alluded to in the first chapter as an example of the existential attachment to particular places shared by all human beings. Where little such attachment is felt then it is the absence of 'rootedness', a sense of dislocation which prevails. The widespread use of the phrase 'my place' to indicate 'my home' or 'my land' has been described.

To leave my place for somewhere else, a common experience in a highly mobile culture where employment is in short supply, may be to induce two experiences with respect to the place which has been left behind. Nostalgia views one's home as an ideal place as memories of a sense of belonging to the old place and the experience of not belonging to the new give a positive gloss to the old and a negative feeling toward the new. One of the reasons that moving house is thought to be a highly stressful

experience is that all the familiar landmarks of life which made one feel 'inside' a place are replaced by unfamiliar landmarks where one is clearly 'outside'. There are a variety of reasons for this experience which will be discussed below, nevertheless nostalgia yearns for the feeling of 'insideness', of belonging to 'my place' while at the same time delaying the development of such feelings by heightening the sense of 'outsideness' felt toward the new place.

Homesickness is a less positive feeling in the sense that it does not view one's previous place in such a positive manner but at the same time it is less damaging to the relation with the new place. It too is a conscious experience of the loss of a place. Fried went as far as to suggest that this experience should be understood as a form of grief.

> There are wide variations in the success of post-relocation adjustment and considerable variability in the depth and quality of loss experience. But for the majority it seems quite precise to speak of their reactions as expressions of *grief.* These are manifest in the feelings of painful loss, the continued longing, the general depressive tone, frequent symptoms of psychological or social or somatic distress, the active work required in adapting to the altered situation, the sense of helplessness, the occasional expressions of both direct and displaced anger and tendencies to idealize the lost place.[1]

These experiences have become of interest to geographers over the last thirty years and, in this second chapter, we will describe their accounts of these experiences. We will examine briefly the

[1] M. Fried, Grieving for a Lost Home, p. 151, in *The Urban Condition*, L. J. Duhl, ed.,Basic Books, New York, 1963, pp 151-171.

sometimes confused use made of phenomenology and existentialism by the geographers interested in the human experience of place and we will assess this way of understanding that experience.

2.2 THE 'PHENOMENOLOGICAL GEOGRAPHY' OF E. RELPH

2.2.1 Introduction

Relph begins the preface to his influential book *Place and Placelessness*[2] with a justification for the book. He writes:

> Much of the recent discussion on environmental issues I have found both unsatisfactory and disquieting. Unsatisfactory because the analyses of behaviour or of particular problems are so frequently mechanical and abstract, simplifying the world into easily represented structures or models that ignore much of the subtlety and significance of everyday experience. Disquieting because these simplified structures often serve as the basis for proposals for the design of environments and the manipulation of people and places into patterns that are supposed to be more efficient.[3]

Relph objects to the then dominant rationalist and empirical schools of geographical analysis. These traditions both tried to produce simplified models of geographical landscapes in order to construct models which would operate not simply to describe existing conditions but which could also be used to predict future developments. These models were constructed on the basis of generalised data collection using, usually, statistical data which, it was thought, could be described as 'objective'. It was considered

[2] E. Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, Pion, London, 1976.

[3] E. Relph, *op. cit.*, preface.

important to remove all possible traces of subjective analysis because this would limit the ability of the model produced to be applied in other contexts.

If, for example, an analysis was to be made of the nature of village life in a settlement of, say, 2,000 people then a variety of settlements of this size would be selected, probably at random, for analysis. These villages would constitute the data base from which extrapolations would be made to give indications about the nature of all settlements of about 2,000 people. Statistical data would be prepared and maps might be drawn illustrating the range of services available, the age, gender and occupations of the inhabitants, the distance each person travelled in order to achieve certain ends, how long the inhabitants had lived in the village and so on. But, in order to obtain objectivity, no value judgments about the desirability of the village as a place to live, to find work, to buy property, to bring up children, to shop, to retire to and so on, would be sought. It was this phenomenological enquiry that Relph and other geographers wished to introduce into geographical enquiries about the nature of human beings and their relationships to places. Consequently, he went on to write:

> This book ... is concerned not with abstract models and theories, but with the 'lived-world', with the settings and situations we live in, know and experience directly in going about our day to day activities.[4]

[4] E. Relph, *op. cit.*, preface.

2.2.2 Existential Insideness/Outsideness

The phenomenological basis of geography for Relph is clear from the opening page of *Place and Placelessness*. He writes that:

> To be human is to live in a world that is filled with significant places: to be human is to have and to know *your* place.[5]

He is interested in giving an account of the phenomenon of place but is only interested in the experience of place which we characterised as 'my place' in the introduction. In developing an account of the human attachment to particular places he develops the twin concepts of outsideness and insideness. For Relph all experiences of place can be reduced to an experience of feeling inside or outside a place.

He defines insideness by saying that:

> To be inside a place is to belong to it and to identify with it, and the more profoundly inside you are the stronger is this identity with the place.[6]

Insideness is feeling of identification with a place but it can take several forms and Relph identifies four. Vicarious insideness is an identification with a place not visited but experienced vicariously through the stories of others who have visited it. So, to read the diary of a traveller, to hear a place described by a poet or to watch a film set in a particular place are all media through which an experience of vicarious insideness may be induced. The extent to which one feels inside will depend upon the quality of the

[5] E. Relph, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

[6] E. Relph, *op. cit.*, p.49.

description, the imagination of the reader/viewer and the extent to which one's own place corresponds to the place described.

Behavioural insideness involves a sub-conscious manner of behaving in a place which relates one to where one is. It is possible to visit a place but pay very little attention to the details of its location, structure and atmosphere. Behavioural insideness is a description of a pattern of behaviour which notices where one is. If one is behaving in such a way as to respond to the place then it is the physical location of the place, the architecture and the building materials employed, the availability of functions other than those which brought the individual to the place and the ambiance of the place which will be noticed and value judgments will be made about the place based on these observations.

It is possible that a sense of what the place is like will gradually merge into a concern for the place. It may be manifest first as a concern for the appearance of the place but may become a concern for all aspects of the life of the place. This is what Relph calls empathetic insideness. He argues that this is a much richer experience of a place than behavioural insideness for a relation is developed between the symbols and meanings of the place and those which originate from one's own experience. There is here, an interplay between the identity of the place, which one must respect and one's own identity through which one is experiencing the place. Only by being willing to be changed oneself can one fully

experience the place as it really is. One might question whether it is ever possible to 'experience the place as it really is' but nevertheless, Relph clearly argues that in certain sorts of relations place can function as an agent changing the identity of a human being.

The most complete sense of insideness is existential insideness. This is the sense of belonging to a place. It is the sense that this place and no other is where I belong. In all other places one will feel an existential outsider regardless of the extent to which one might feel an empathetic insideness. One is existentially inside the place where one is subconsciously aware of a wide range of meanings which are attached to the place and places within it. It is the place where one is accepted as belonging. In other words, to be existentially inside a place is not only to be in a particular sort of relation with a place but it is also to be in a particular type of relation with the people of that place. And, by extension, to be in the opposite relation with other places and with the people of other places. Where one is not existentially inside one is inevitably existentially outside.

To be existentially outside a place is both the most complete form of outsideness and the most universal for all human beings have to learn from a very early age to be existentially outside most places. The consequences of feelings of outsideness can however, be considerable. To be outside is to sense, selfconsciously, an

alienation from the symbols and rituals of a place and its community. There is a sense of not belonging and of being a stranger. This may lead to feelings of rootlessness and homelessness and of insecurity. We have suggested above that moving from one place to another will always lead one to feel existentially outside the new place even if one is determined to 'fit in' and even if one is anxious to develop a sense of empathetic insideness as quickly as possible. It is just such feelings that rational and empirical geographies did not discover; indeed they were not looking for 'subjective' experiences of place. However, as Russell makes clear in his analysis of life in rural areas these feelings can be very powerful and shape the experience of being in a place:

> ... among some of the unhappiest newcomers are those young wives whose husbands take the one car to the station or to work; the young wife is left with young children, 'trapped' in a house on a new development on the edge of the village, aware that there is a community life to which she does not relate.[7]

This is a classic description of the experience of existential outsideness.

Relph identifies two other types of outsideness. Both involve the development of an attitude towards the place which imagines that it is not there or that it is entirely irrelevant to one's existence. Objective outsideness is a conscious decision to distance oneself from the reality of the place and to treat it only as a functional object present in the world for certain ends. Relph criticises geographers

[7] A. Russell, *A Country Parish*, SPCK, London, 1986, p. 173.

and planners harshly for believing that places can be "changed from facts of immediate experience into things having certain attributes,"[8]. It is possible that the recent trend to involve communities in decision making arises out of the realisation that places are not just things with certain attributes but are also locations within which powerful feelings are experienced.

Finally, incidental outsideness is an unconscious experience of an absence of a place. Travelling by train involves passing through stations in places but the places themselves are hardly experienced. The only tangible evidence of being in a particular place is a change of scenery and a group of passengers with a different accent joining the train. The only impact of incidental outsideness arises because of the speed of travel; the greater the distance, socially and culturally as well as geographically, the greater the impact of the fleeting experiences of the places one travelled through. Had one travelled slowly it is possible that the dislocation experienced upon arrival in a place very different from one's own would have been reduced, but the rapid change from one to the other can make any sense of insideness hard to develop.

So, for Relph the human experience of a place is rather more complex than the simple question 'do I feel that this place is 'my place'?'. He has shown that to identify with a place as 'my place' is only the most complete and positive example of a variety of ways in which it is possible to relate to a place.

[8] E. Relph, *op.cit.*, p.51.

> ... there exists a full range of possible awareness, from simple recognition for orientation, through the capacity to respond empathetically to the identities of different places, to a profound association with places as cornerstones of human existence and individual identity.[9]

But the question of the experience of a place remains an existential question. It is about my experience of this place. After a brief description of Relph's enthusiastic use of the phenomenological notions of authenticity and inauthenticity we will offer a critique of the use to which he puts his analysis using the example he uses.

2.2.3 Authentic and Inauthentic Places

Relph argues, following Heidegger, that to be 'authentic' is to be open to one's potential and to one's experiences and to be honest and responsible in the analysis of how one has faced the open question of one's existence. Consequently, the individual faces a place and is willing to experience the place in a genuine and open manner without relying on the traditions and customs of others which might limit his experience of the place.

Inauthenticity with respect to place is to rely on the prevailing stereotypes when experiencing a place. If an individual was temporarily seconded to work in another part of his country an inauthentic attitude might, for example, prevent an enriching experience with another subculture by encouraging an incidental outsideness to develop thus insulating the individual from what was thought to be a disturbing, damaging or threatening experience.

[9] E. Relph, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

Immunity to the living conditions of others can be quickly acquired regardless of whether these others are seen through the lens of a television camera or through a commuter train window.

Authenticity, on the other hand, takes a place as it sees it and is not willing to use the value judgments of others about a place before it has experienced it for itself.

> An authentic attitude to place is thus understood to be a direct and genuine experience of the entire complex of the identity of places - not mediated and distorted through a series of quite arbitrary social and intellectual fashions about how that experience should be, nor following stereotyped conventions. It comes from a full awareness of places for what they are as products of man's intentions and the meaningful settings for human activities, or from a profound and unselfconscious identity with place.[10]

An individual employing an authentic attitude will watch the television or look out of the window and allow first a behavioural insideness and then an empathetic insideness to develop. This may occur unselfconsciously, when any division between the individual and the place will become blurred, or it may occur selfconsciously, when the distinction remains but insideness develops as a result of observation, reaction and reflection.

This use of the notions of authenticity and inauthenticity requires a considerable ability from the individual to decide for himself, albeit unconsciously, without regard to the place how he is going to experience it. Even if we allow for the powerful effect of

[10] E. Relph, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

culture and prevailing stereotypical attitudes no reference is given to the power of a place to shape the way in which it is viewed. The examples Relph uses show that a place is never more than either the product of human energy or the object of my experiences.

2.2.4 The Principle Applied

Relph sees a selfconscious authenticity in the building of a number of monuments or in several cities at particular moments in their histories. He argues that in Athens in the Hellenic period the city itself was an embodiment of a universal belief system. Similarly, the construction of Gothic cathedrals is an example of 'authentic place-making'.

> ... but the results at Chartres and elsewhere were cathedrals and abbeys which were an expression of a total faith, a manifestation of an I-Thou relationship between man and God, and between man and the earth as the home of God.[11]

The last significant attempt to create a place in an authentic manner is said to have occurred in the early Renaissance when humanism provided the principles on which city construction was based. It is hard to imagine that Relph's criticism of the modern period when

> such authentic and selfconscious place-making seems to be reserved largely for inspired individuals; most of us are condemned to live in other people's houses and machine-made places.[12]

was not equally applicable then. The assumption of a universalised world view is without substantiation and the decisions to create large buildings were taken by only a few powerful individuals,

[11] E. Relph, *op. cit.*, p. 73

[12] E. Relph, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

sometimes at the expense of some less powerful people and usually not purely as the selfconscious expression of a corporate belief but with also in the hope of self-aggrandizement.

At the same time as applauding the structure of Hellenic Athens or the beauty of Chartres cathedral, products, Relph argues, of places where "intentions, activities, and physical form were completely bound together"[13], he criticises the building of places in the modern era as being part of the trend in which "Uniform products and places are created for people of supposedly uniform needs and tastes,"[14] He may be right to argue that modern planning methods do not take adequate account of the experiences of the people on whose behalf the planning is taking place. But it is not reasonable to suppose that when planning lay in the hands of the electorate in Athens, with the Church and wealthy people of Chartres or with the Medici family and their contemporaries in Italy that things were any different for the majority of people living in a place where planning decisions of the wealthy few were enacted.

It is hard to see why Relph views the past in such a positive manner. It is unlikely that the 'pace of change' was felt to be much slower in times when scales and technological abilities were both less than they are today. It would also seem likely that an authentic response to one's own place may have been more widespread in the past as reduced mobility reduced one's horizon's and

[13] E. Relph, *op. cit.*, p. 71.
[14] E. Relph, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

increased the proportion of one's horizon within which one felt existentially inside. However, at the same time, with limited experience of the area beyond one's immediate home it is more likely that people relied on the stereotyped image of distant marshes, forests, towns and cities and of the people who lived there.

2.2.5 The Principle Assessed

Relph recognises the complex nature of places, and has done much to add to the understanding of the way in which places are understood and he does not wish to provide an absolute category for the description of the experience of place. Nevertheless there is an underlying assumption behind the use of the notions of authenticity and inauthenticity. It is assumed that the judgments of others are to be avoided. One must base one's judgments purely on the evidence of one's own experience. He suggests that it is not the case that inauthenticity is 'worse' than authenticity but this is clearly not maintained in the polemic of the book.

To transfer "responsibility [for one's existence] to large, nebulous, unchangeable forces, for which he cannot be blamed and about which he can do nothing."[15] is a necessary part of human existence. It is a form of constructionism as those parts of one's experience of the world which cannot be understood or controlled are made 'safe' by being treated in a stereotypical manner or by

[15] E. Relph, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

transferring responsibility for them from oneself to forces both distant and uncontrollable such as God, fate, or government. We will discuss the human need for simplified view of the world in the next chapter but here we note that Relph sees the tendency to limit one's horizon as an expression of inauthenticity.

This stems from a conviction that it is possible to know a place in all its complexity. As we have seen above[16] an authentic attitude to place is an "experience of the entire complex of the identity of places". Such an experience cannot occur and the "quite arbitrary social and intellectual fashions about how that experience should be" are not so much preventing an experience of the place in itself as part of the experience of the place. For Relph it is the way in which the complex identity of places and the arbitrary fashions are experienced which is important not the places or the fashions in and of themselves.

Although Relph suggests that the experience of a place should involve an interplay between the individual and the symbols and traditions of the place (experienced in an authentic manner) there is no further reference to the possibility that a place might act as an agent and affect the individual. For this reason the attitudes adopted towards a place by an individual or group of individuals are not considered part of the place. They are not to be experienced but to be filtered out. All that is of concern to phenomenological geography is 'my' experience. And this experience should not be

[16] See note 10 on page 38

prescribed by the experience of others. We might ask if it is possible to approach a place in such an isolated manner. When we relate to a place we not only relate to a highly complex phenomenon but we also relate to it in the context of our other relations and these will inevitable prescribe, to some degree, the nature of our relation to the place.

Relph rightly argues that my experience of a place will be an important component of the nature of a place for me. He shows that places are experienced in a variety of ways. He suggests that places can be approached in either a broadly open or a basically closed way and that this will affect the way in which I will relate to the place. His greatest contribution to the understanding of the way in which places operate is in arguing for a more sympathetic approach to a phenomenological analysis of place by planners and architects. However, at the same time, he is reluctant to illustrate the role of a place as an agent affecting me and the people who are part of it. He does not take account of the necessity of limiting one's horizons in order to make sense of them and by reducing the analysis of a place to my experience he reduces what is significant in a place to my experience of it. Given the phenomenological origins of his geography it is not surprising that he should do this. We will examine those origins in the next section.

2.3 THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL TRADITION

2.3.1 Introduction

Geographers, such as Relph, anxious to broaden the scope of geography to take account of the experience of the individual, have used the the tradition of philosophy beginning with Husserl. The tradition is highly complex and geographers have used different strands of phenomenology without making clear how these philosophies differ. We will describe the most influential philosophies, those of Husserl, at some length, and Heidegger, rather more briefly, in order to offer a more complete critique of the existential geography of Relph described above.

2.3.2 Husserl

2.3.2.1 Introduction

Husserl stands within the tradition of philosophy which tries to establish foundations upon which accounts of the way things are can be built. Taught by Brentano, he was a key thinker in the development of the phenomenological tradition which has been of enormous influence in the twentieth century. Phenomenology is, selfconsciously, a methodology and not a system or doctrine. It was an attempt to validate philosophy in an age of great scientific development and consists of a distinctive but genuine method of inquiry which was neither scientific nor speculative in the sense that philosophy was understood to be. Husserl made the bold claim, which others have since made, that he had described a new and wholly appropriate way of doing philosophy.

The phenomenology tradition is not a clearly defined and discrete body of philosophical thought. Other thinkers, also interested in a methodology rather than a system have developed, changed and disagreed with Husserl. However, Pivcevic, while admitting that even the definition of phenomenology has not been shared suggests that agreement has been reached on the correct object of philosophical inquiry.

> The disconcerting fact is that philosophers who regard themselves as 'phenomenologists' often radically differ in their handling of key philosophical issues. What unites them - and I am thinking here primarily of the 'phenomenological school' initiated by Brentano and Husserl - is their acceptance of the general principle that philosophical priority should be given to an analysis of experiences from the point of view of those who have the experiences or are able to have them.[17]

2.3.2.2 The natural attitude

Husserl's concern was to investigate the everyday, common sense world of experience in which all human beings find themselves at all times. Following Brentano, he saw all experience as an experience of an object, for all mental acts must have an objective, though unlike Brentano, not necessarily an existent, content. From this understanding came Husserl's most fundamental observation that consciousness is always irreducibly consciousness of something. Relph observed in turn that

> The essence of place lies in the largely unselfconscious intentionality that defines places as profound centres of human existence. [18]

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[17] E. Pivcevic, *Phenomenology and Philosophical Understanding*, CUP, London, 1975, p. xii.

[18] E. Relph, *op.cit.*, p. 43.

In other words, consciousness is not merely consciousness of something but of something in its place. This basic attitude to the world in which it is assumed that

> there is a real, external, existent world which persists in time and space and which is much the same for all men.[19]

is termed by Husserl the 'natural attitude'. In his view, all human beings make an 'implicit metaphysical commitment' in order to function and it is the nature of this commitment rather than the objects of the commitment which interested him.

Phenomenology is directed towards the experience that all human beings share, namely, that there is an experience, or a consciousness of an external existent world which serves as an arena for the entirety of human life. The question of the validity of this experience is, for Husserl, not a question at all. What is important, indeed *all* that is important is the natural attitude in which one assumes universal experience of the external existent called the 'world'. Methodologically, Husserl makes no comment on the question of the existence of those things which the natural attitude claims to exist for, being interested only in what is presented to perception as it is presented, he refuses to allow the validity of any further ontological question. Indeed, the natural attitude, although it is the starting point for phenomenology, is suspended because, in Husserl's view, the universal common-sense assumption of an external, existent world is a presupposition which renders the

[19] M. Natanson, 'Introduction', in M. Natanson, ed., *Essays in Phenomenology*, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1966, p.4.

analysis of the presentation of phenomena to consciousness problematic. The problem is located in the tendency to search for explanations rather than to investigate the presentations of phenomena to consciousness which must be rendered free from the orientations which, in the case of the natural attitude, occur in a metaphysical form. The wish to avoid the need to give an account of the relation between the object of the mental acts and the mental acts themselves is deliberate.

Husserl's phenomenon is simply that which is given to consciousness. It does not carry the Kantian implication of an appearance which points beyond itself to a 'noumenal reality'. For Kant,

> a phenomenon is an articulated system of appearances, unified by the categories in the form of an object.[20]

But for Husserl, there is simply the self-giving of objects in acts of consciousness which involves no comment on the assertion that appearances form part of an "articulated system" or can be considered by any thing, such as the notion of the category, into any particular form such as the object.

2.3.2.3 Transcendental Phenomenology

Husserl's refusal to comment on the source and origin of his presentations is an attempt both to utilise a Cartesian approach and to go beyond it. He rejected the techniques of scientific inquiry and

[20] A. Quinton, 'The Concept of a Phenomenon', p.3, in E. Pivcecic, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 1-16.

of philosophies which utilise the natural attitude because he demands an inquiry into what is presented immediately in experience. Like Descartes, Husserl is attempting to establish the foundations of inquiry on certain grounds.

Schacht begins his summary of Husserlian phenomenology with the assertion, supported from Husserl's own *Cartesian Meditations* that:

> Husserlian phenomenology is first of all an epistemological enterprise. Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations* is an explicit attempt to renew Descartes's program of a systematic reconstruction of knowledge which would render it immune to skeptical doubt. Descartes's aim, which Husserl characterizes as "a complete reforming of philosophy into a science grounded on an absolute foundation" (*Cartesian Meditations*, p. 1) is also Husserl's own: ... the first order of business for the Husserlian phenomenologist is to identify "those cognitions that are first in themselves and can support the whole storied edifice of universal knowledge", with a view to "constructing on their basis a science governed by the idea of a definitive system of knowledge" (*Cartesian Meditations*, p. 14).[21]

In other words, the decision to investigate only what is presented to consciousness is an attempt to establish what cannot be refuted under any circumstances. This process mirrors Descartes' threefold reduction of the methods of doubt which establishes that the act of doubting can never be doubted for, in Husserl's view, the fact of an act of presentation to consciousness can never be doubted. The direct awareness of a presentation in consciousness remains a direct awareness regardless of the ontological status of the content

[21] R. Schacht, *Hegel and After: Studies in Continental Philosophy between Kant and Sartre*, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, 1975, p. 211.

of the presentation. One simply cannot go beyond pure consciousness in order to establish the 'real' existence of the content of a presentation, and in a sense it does not matter. It is this that leads to Husserl 'bracketing out' the world. Thus, one cannot ask where the experience came from, one can only state that it happened. This has the merit of treating all consciousness whether derived from the 'real' or the 'imagined' equally. However, although not Husserl's intention, it has the effect of denying that the world has any real existence in any meaningful sense. It is not possible to describe the world in terms which would accord it agency.

Husserl's process of 'bracketing out' the world occurs within a two-fold reduction which renders the world subordinate to consciousness. The complexity of experience is made accessible to description and these two reductions are common to all experiences. The first reduction, eidetic in nature, is concerned to look beyond the actuality of the presentation to the essence of the actuality. The particular instance, is, for Husserl, merely an example of an essence which resides transcendentally elsewhere. It is this reduction which makes possible the description of essences, and through eidetic reflection the description of the relationships between essences.

To become uniquely phenomenological however, a second transcendental reduction is necessary. It is this reduction which, technically, involves the bracketing out process. The first reduction

looks beyond the instance to essence while the second looks toward the act of presentation of the essence in consciousness. The focus of attention becomes located in the mind of the conscious subject for one is only concerned to understand the essence as it is presented *for me*, because

> phenomenology ... presupposes a peculiar shift of attitude [from natural to phenomenological] and arrives at the immanent sphere of consciousness as the source of all certainty.[22]

At this point phenomenological enquiry becomes possible for the precise description of the experiences can now be achieved.

2.3.2.4 'My Experience' as Geographical Data

It is a method of enquiry which some geographers have adopted in an attempt to make the understanding of the way in which communities function and the way in which planning theory is developed more closely related to human experience. In a study of the experience on living in Towcester, Eyles uses individual recollections and accounts of present experience to build up a picture of what it is to live in Towcester at a particular moment in time.[23] Godkin argues that alcoholism can be linked to feelings of being uprooted and of not belonging in a particular place.[24]

Similarly, Fried, studying the effects of enforced dislocation

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[22] J. S. Fulton, 'The Cartesianism of Phenomenology', p. 62, in M. Natanson, *op.cit.*, pp.58-78.

[23] J. Eyles, *Senses of Place*, Silverbrook Press, Warrington, 1985.

[24] M. A. Godkin, 'Identity and place: Clinical Applications Based on Notions of Rootedness and Uprootedness' , pp. 73-85, in A. Buttimer and D. Seamon, ed., *The Human Experience of Space and Place*, Croom Helm, London, 1980.

following slum clearance in the West End of Boston (USA), simply asked a cross-section of individuals to relate their experience of dislocation as they remembered it. This highly subjective form of analysis yielded the unsurprising result that:

> ... the loss of an important place represents a change in a potentially significant component of the experience of continuity. "... In studying the reasons for satisfaction that the majority of slum residents experience, two major components have emerged. On the one hand, the residential area is the region in which a vast and interlocking set of social networks is localized. And, on the other, the physical area has considerable meaning as an extension of home, in which various parts are delineated and structured on the basis of a sense of belonging. These two components provide the context in which the residential area may so easily be invested with considerable, multiply-determined meaning." ... Nor is the intensive investment of a residential area, both as an important physical space and as the locus for meaningful interpersonal ties, limited to the West End. What is common to a host of studies is the evidence for the integrity of the urban, working class, slum community as a social and spatial unit. It is the sense of belonging some-place, in a particular place which is quite familiar and easily delineated, in a wide area in which one feels "at home".[25]

Rather than using the disembodied, and in that sense, sterile statistical data of rational and empirical geographical enquiry phenomenological geographers use individual records of experience as the raw material for study. Indeed Seamon defined geography's subject matter as

> *everyday environmental experience - the sum total of a person's first-hand involvement with the geographical world in which he or she typically lives.*[26]

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[25] M. Fried, 'Grieving for a Lost Home', p. 153-4, in *The Urban Condition*, L. J. Duhl, ed., Basic Books, New York, 1963, pp. 151-171.

[26] D. Seamon, *A Geography of the Lifeworld: Movement, Rest and Encounter*, Croom Helm, London, 1979, p.15-16.

The "everyday environmental experience" is an experience of a partial world and is particular to the individual. However, in using the "everyday environmental experience" of a large number of individuals Seamon

> search[es] ... for certain basic patterns which epitomise human behavioural and experiential relationships with the everyday geographical world.[27]

Therefore, phenomenological geography shares with both cognitive and behavioural geography a tendency to denigrate the particular in the search for the general pattern. In the search for "basic characteristics which extend beyond the particular person, place and time"[28], Seamon follows the wider methodology which he seeks to avoid. The aim moves quickly from the particular story to the general pattern which all stories exhibit. This does not negate the methodology of phenomenological geography for it introduces a new category of subject matter - subjective personal story - into any geographical enquiry; but the claims made on behalf of phenomenological geography must be kept in context.

The apparent particularity of phenomenology becomes a generalisation because of the tendency to look beyond the actuality and towards the essence of a thing. The eidetic reduction, paving the way for the transcendental reduction, renders the objective particularity impossible, establishing instead the potentiality of

[27] D. Seamon, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
[28] D. Seamon, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

subjective particularity. In other words, by making the eidetic reduction, phenomenology refuses to allow the possibility of the question of the actual instance of the object of intention. The particular thing intended is removed from view in favour of the essence of the type of thing intended. Objective particularity is rendered impossible. In its place however, subjective particularity is established by the transcendental reduction as a possibility. By focusing attention on the consciousness of the individual 'I', phenomenology makes possible the acknowledgement of the particularity of the meanings felt and projected by the experiencing subject.

Phenomenological geography begins by understanding the importance of the transcendental reduction. Phenomenological psychologist Giogi writes

> Phenomenology is the study of phenomena as experienced by man. The primary emphasis is on the phenomenon itself exactly as it reveals itself to the experiencing subject in all its concreteness and particularity.[29]

That Seamon should quote this sentence would suggest that his starting point is self-consciously Husserlian. Indeed, he dismisses the alternatives with Husserlian terminology and wit:

> On the one hand, I bracket the assumption that movement depends upon the cognitive map; on the other, that movement is a process of stimulus response.[30]

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[29] A Giorgi *et al*, *Duquesne Studies in Phenomenological Psychology Vol. 1*, Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh, 1971, p. 9, quoted in D. Seamon, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

[30] D. Seamon, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

However, as we have suggested, the search for "basic characteristics which extend beyond the particular person, place and time" is not a methodology which preserves the transcendental reduction. This failure has occurred because individual stories have become empirical data. The consequence of this is that the phenomenological approach becomes a rigid framework obscuring the experience of phenomena and revealing only the bland and the general.

Not all phenomenological methodologies rely on the transcendental reduction. Seamon himself argues that

> In contrast to the view of the cognitive theorists, I argue that cognition plays only a partial role in everyday spatial behaviour; that a sizable portion of our everyday movements at all varieties of the environmental scale is pre-cognitive and involves a prereflective knowledge *of the body*. In contrast to the behaviourist perspective, I argue that this prereflective knowledge is not a chain of discrete, passive responses to external stimuli; rather, that the body holds within itself an active, intentional capacity which intimately 'knows' in its own special fashion the everyday spaces in which the person lives his typical day. Further, I argue that this bodily knowledge is not a structure separate from the cognitive stratum of spatial behaviour but works in frequent reciprocity with it.[31]

This is not a statement of an Husserlian phenomenologist for whom the retention of a Cartesian dualism and the restrictions of the transcendental reduction remove considerations of the body from the discussion except in any form which denies the possibility of a "pre-reflective knowledge of the body". Seamon alludes to the Heideggerian criticism of Husserl's position.

[31] D. Seamon, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

2.3.3 Heidegger

2.3.3.1 The Relation Between Husserl and Heidegger

The relationship between Heidegger and his teacher Husserl is complex and few commentators agree in their assessments of the influence of teacher over pupil. There is undoubtedly a marked similarity between them for both seek a new point of philosophical orientation from which the accepted 'scientific' world-view can be challenged. Thiselton summarises McGinley's assessment of the differences between them. Firstly, for McGinley, Husserl's work is epistemological: his fundamental problem is certitude whereas Heidegger begins with the question of ontology. Secondly, as we have implied, Husserl maintains the Cartesian distinction between mind and body while a major part of Heidegger's criticism of Husserl is precisely against this dualism. Thirdly, and consequently, Husserl engages in a transcendental reduction which abstracts consciousness from the world. For Heidegger however,

> involvement with the environment is an indispensable characteristic of human subjectivity. For Heidegger, the intentionality of 'consciousness' is made possible only because *Dasein* discovers itself (becomes conscious of itself) as already factually involved with its environment.[32]

For Husserl, discussion occurs at the level of reflective consciousness because, being interested primarily in epistemology, knowledge is a reflective consciousness of something.

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[32] J. McGinley, 'Heidegger's Concern for the Lived-World in his Dasein-Analysis' in Philosophy Today xvi (1972), pp. 92-116, quoted in A. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons*, Paternoster Press, Exeter, 1980, p. 145.

2.3.3.2 Heidegger's Phenomenon

Heidegger observed, that a common object (a phenomenon) is known not as a thing but as a function. In grammatical terms this is replicated when a noun is the same word as a verb. Heidegger's example, the hammer, is not a particular thing but that which is ready-at-hand for hammering. Here, function is no longer distinct from ontology but is subsumed within it. We noted that with Husserl the particularity of the object is lost but the particularity of the subject is enhanced. We find the same process occurring with Heidegger. The thing 'hammer' is known only in its functionality, this being defined as its being. This necessarily reduces the importance of the type of hammer the thing may be. The size, constitution and mode of construction of the hammer are all less important than the fact that it is a hammering sort of thing, that is, that it is, available for hammering. If attention is drawn to the hammer's description, it is because it may be too small for the job at hand or that a wooden-headed hammer should not be used for hammering metal objects. In other words, reference to the hammer's ontology as more traditionally understood serves only its functionality, for this is what Heidegger means by ontology. Existence has, in Heidegger become use and to exist is to be ready-at-hand for something.

Heidegger does not reduce all things to "equipment ready-to-hand or Nature present-at-hand"[33]; in an encounter with a ready-to-hand hammer we will also encounter, indirectly, an Other, the

[33] M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Trans. J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Blackwells, Oxford, ET 1962, p. 154.

individual who made the hammer and the Other for whom the thing being made with the hammer is being made. Being with Others is to know Others as they are ready-to-hand for us and they are not just present-at-hand to us.

> ... Dasein's world frees entities which not only are quite distinct from equipment and Things, but which also - in accordance with their kind of Being *as Dasein* themselves - are 'in' the world in which they are at the same time encountered within-the-world, and are 'in' it by way of Being-in-the-world. These entities are neither present-at-hand nor ready-to-hand; on the contrary, they are *like* the very Dasein which frees them, in that *they are there too, and there with it.*[34]

Others are not those who stand over and against me but those with whom one feels a sense of unity; Heidegger terms this 'Being-present-at-hand-along-with'. Others are encountered not as the hammer, present-at-hand for use but in their own Dasein, that is, within-the-world for themselves. In this sense

> they are not encountered as person-Things present-at-hand: we meet them 'at work', that is, primarily in their Being-in-the-world.[35]

Husserl wishes to analyse phenomena which are 'appearances in the consciousness of the observer'; Heidegger however, denies that phenomena are ever appearances and argues that what is observed is located outside the consciousness of the observer. Phenomena are 'already-there' in the world and what is seen is 'what thus shows itself *in itself*'. Schacht describes the contrast:

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[34] M. Heidegger, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

[35] M. Heidegger, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

> Nothing could be less Husserlian than to speak of entities in this way; for doing so commits one to some form of realism, in the modern sense of the term - a position which Husserl holds to be "in principle absurd" (Ideas p. 12). Yet it is precisely with its investigation of the nature of entities so conceived that Heideggerian phenomenology is concerned.[36]

Husserl denied the validity of any question about the world beyond the consciousness of the observer which may have given rise to the appearance. Heidegger, by contrast is interested in just what gave rise to the appearance, in the nature of the Being experienced and the effect on one's own Being (Dasein).

2.3.3.3 Heidegger and Place

This means that a place is encountered not as a fixed and inanimate object but as a something 'within-the-world-for-itself'. It is encountered as an object 'being a place' in space and time. This has led geographers to argue that it is the responsibility of planners to ensure that the experience of place is positive and not negative. They argue that, if living means living in a place, then all human beings must experience their place as an 'other'. But it is clear that for many people the experience of their place is not an experience of an 'other' with which they feel a sense of unity but an experience of an object with which there is a sense of dislocation, of being out of place and of not belonging. Following Heideggerian phenomenology, geographers are freed to suggest that my experience of place will affect my sense of well-being. The origin of this experience lies in the place which I am experiencing.

[36] R. Schacht, *op. cit.*, p.221-2.

However, it has not proved possible for geographers to go beyond this observation. They have made considerable progress in refining techniques for discovering and evaluating the experience of human beings in particular places and in developing responses to dislocation. But most of the contribution from these studies has been channelled into the search for a way of ensuring that a place is an 'other' for which one feels a 'sense of unity' and not disunity. Such a search is of great importance for it highlights the effects that political and planning decisions can have on human beings. But it is impractical in the sense that the utopia of a universal experience that this is 'my place' cannot exist. As we have seen even the experience of travel will lead to complex emotions about the places through which one is travelling and these emotions will vary from one individual to another. What these emotions are will depend upon the psychological history of the individual, and this in turn may depend upon individual experiences of places. A well travelled individual may find the dislocation of travel an excitement, the insecure person may try to avoid all experiences which remove what is familiar.

Phenomenological geography is able to highlight and account for fundamental experiences of place as 'my place' but little attempt is made to account for other ways of being in place such as one's location in a social structure or the cultural projections put on a place by a social group.

2.4 SUMMARY

We began this chapter by showing that the experience of 'my place' is both universal and of considerable importance. We argued that all human beings share a sense of belonging or not belonging in a place and used Relph's development of the twin concepts of insideness and outsideness to illustrate ways in which belonging or not belonging may be expressed by individuals in western cultures. The roots of phenomenological and existential geography were traced and a summary and critique offered of the benefits and limitations which have accrued since geographers started to use Husserl, Heidegger and others to provide a philosophical framework for their geography.

We have argued that geographers have not always been clear when they have used the phenomenological tradition and, further, while attempting to discover 'my unique experience' have been forced to generalise from the particular in order to make specific planning conclusions. However, they have been very successful at showing that my experience of a place is an important part of what it is to be me. They have been less successful at avoiding isolating the individual from the complex network of relations in which any individual is to be found. This problem becomes most noticeable when the possibility that human beings might be in relation with places is raised.

Although a meaningless suggestion for Husserl, for

Heidegger to encounter an object is to meet more than a 'functional thing'. A relationship is struck between object and individual which takes the individual beyond the object and its use to its maker, to its location in space and time, that is, to its location in a complex set of relations. Relph acknowledges this by suggesting that places can function as agents in their own right. However, having made this suggestion, at no time in the subsequent discussion are examples given of places operating in this way. This reluctance to proceed to a relational ontology in which an individual is part of a network of relationships is shown in two areas.

Firstly, by treating a place as though it is always the recipient of human agency is to remove any element of relation between human beings and places. To be in relation is to be exposed to the possibility of change by the other party in the relation, in this case a place. Relph, despite an early suggestion to the contrary does not treat place as an agent in any practical sense. Secondly, his use of the notion of authenticity requires an individual to be isolated from all other human beings in order to act upon a place without regard to prevailing social codes.

Such an isolation may require a two stage movement by the individual. The individual must move towards the social order within the place in order to understand the prevailing customs and unspoken rules of behaviour which every existential insider knows intuitively. Then the individual must become distanced from those

socialised customs in order to act in an 'authentic' manner. Alternatively, the individual may choose to not to conform to social patterns which she has made no effort to understand. This will be a more deliberate and more successful form of existential outsideness but will result in 'authentic' behaviour towards the place.

The contradiction here is that, in order to be sufficiently distanced from the place to act in an authentic manner one must inevitably cease to be, or to never become, existentially inside the place. To be existentially inside is to know, by nature, the customs and values of the place but it is precisely these customs and values which authenticity seeks to avoid. Consequently, the ideal behaviour of the individual is an isolated individual, one who is not part of the community to such an extent that prevailing social rules are not obeyed. There is clearly some value in such a lifestyle for many unspoken customs oppress rather than liberate. However, as Relph makes very clear, there is also some value in living within the security of being existentially inside a place. He cannot argue for planning policies which encourage existential insideness and for an individual response to patterns of social behaviour which discourages existential insideness.

Here place is separated from the society which is located in the place. The two cannot be separated. Both influence and change the other. When one is existentially inside a place it is partly

because one is at home in the society of the place. Being at home in the social order of a place will encourage and accelerate the pace at which an outsider becomes existentially inside a place. In the next chapter we will describe the processes by which social groupings impose a view of a place and the world on individuals thus encouraging existential insideness or outsideness, enveloping the individual in a very complicated set of relations and locating the individual in a social structure.

PANNENBERG'S THEOLOGICAL HERMENEUTIC

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the second chapter we showed that human beings are always part of an existential relationship with places. It is impossible to be a human being without relating to the place in which one finds oneself at any one time. The existential relationship occurs through the mechanisms of existential insideness and outsideness and their variants and is often experienced as feeling at home, or as homesickness.

We saw that in the philosophical tradition which is used by the existential geographers and others who first drew attention to the existential experience of place, and in the geography which they developed, very little attention if any is given to the place which gives rise to feelings of at-homeness or homesickness. It was this lack of attention which led us to suggest that the relational nature of the existential experience is insufficiently emphasised.

In this third chapter we will look more closely at the place which human beings experience. Existential (and phenomenological) geography is not concerned about the place which gives rise to the experience. It is not therefore possible to ask questions about the relationship between the experience of a place by an individual and the place itself. For Husserl, for example, to ask how far the experience of a place accurately reflected the reality of the place itself would be to ask a nonsensical question.

However, such a pessimistic view about the ability of human beings to distance themselves from their experience is not shared by everyone.

When human beings exist in a place, as all must, they are part of a complex web of relationships between other human beings who also live in the place and between themselves and the place and its location within a wider locality. This world of relationships is highly complex for each individual stands in a unique location within the web of relations and views that part of the web which can be seen from their unique perspective. It is not possible to see the whole place in all its complexity and so, in order to function in such a complicated social and physical environment, details are simplified and a less complicated map of the web in constructed, subconsciously, in the mind of the individual. The individual then relates to the place through the simplified map which has been acquired. The map is subject to constant revision and modification.

It is the tension between the importance of belonging, and thus accepting the map given to an individual by a social hierarchy and the need for an individual to act in an 'authentic' manner by questioning features drawn on the map which was highlighted in the last chapter as an unresolved paradox in a solely existential approach to the human experience of place.

In this chapter we shall describe Pannenberg's theological

anthropology which seeks to explain the relationship between human beings and their environment and culture and we shall use examples from particular places to show that the processes described operate in everyday human experience.

3.2 PANNENBERG'S ANTHROPOLOGICAL THEOLOGY

3.2.1 Introduction

In *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* Pannenberg continues and develops a long-running attempt to understand what constitutes the uniqueness of the human being. It is consistent with Pannenberg's understanding of the role of theology with respect to philosophy and science, especially the social sciences, that his theology should rely heavily on the German tradition of anthropology and sociology.[1] He suggests that a distinction may be made between dogmatic anthropology in which the existence of God and the image of God in human beings is presupposed, and a 'fundamental-theological anthropology' in which attention is directed towards the human sciences and in which one's intention

[1] See *Theology and Philosophy of Science*, p. 422, DLT, London, ET 1976, where he writes

> The most general foundations of systematic theology will therefore have to come from anthropology. Moreover, theology broaches the anthropological phenomena with a view to their religious and theological implications. ..., anthropology itself is concerned with the relationship of the more abstract, and for that very reason more fundamental, questions of biological anthropology and sociological analysis of the social forms of human behaviour to the historical concreteness of the living-out of human life into which the philosophy and theology of history translates the *abstract* levels of anthropological enquiry.

For Pannenberg science is *Wissenschaft*, that is to say, it is to do with the acquirement and achievement of wisdom by human beings. However, he makes it clear in *Theology and Philosophy of Science* that he prefers to see disciplines separated in the modern manner rather than unified and integrated as they are in the traditional conception of wisdom.

is to draw out relevant implications for theology.[2] The attempt to understand the human being began with a series of popular radio broadcasts in 1959/60. The broadcasts were later published in English in 1970 under the title *What is Man?*.

3.2.2 'Open to the world'

Pannenberg's understanding of human beings is that they are 'open to the world'. By this, he means that human beings can stand apart from the world which confronts them and they can respond to the world in a creative manner. Human beings are not tied to their environment in the way animals are because of their imaginative potential and their propensity for a meeting with, or at least asking about, God. The human potential for infinite openness to the world is, for Pannenberg, evidence of the existence of, or the potential for, a relation with God. This is because an infinite openness to the world will take one beyond the world. The propensity to ask questions of the world when extrapolated infinitely in a context of openness will take one beyond the world and towards God.

All animals have an environment to which they are limited and, for all animals except human beings, this environment is less than the world. While this means that animals do not perceive what is beyond their environment, (environment is understood as a geographically defined and limited area of space), the interesting

[2] See W. Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1985, p. 21ff.

point is that that environment, as perceived by an animal is less than the world of that unit of space. The first distinction then, between animals and human beings which Pannenberg draws out from the notion of openness to the world is that "Animals notice only that part of their environment which is instinctively important for their species."[3] whereas

> Man is not bound to an environment, but is open to the world. That means he can always have new experiences that are different in kind, and his possibilities for responding to the reality perceived can vary almost without limit.[4]

Human beings have the freedom and the responsibility to respond to the world. However, the manner in which they respond is of the greatest importance.

Pannenberg's view could be described as another way of saying that human beings transcend the world. By virtue of the way human beings are they are able to go beyond the limited and enclosed material environments of all other living things and, in so doing, raise questions about the status of themselves, the world and the future. If human beings are able to question the world in this way, then they are able to go beyond the world to something greater than the world or which at least contextualises the world. In this process the world is treated as a 'something' which is placed within an historical context and, ultimately, within a universal horizon.

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[3] W, Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, ET 1972, p. 4.

[4] W, Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, *ibid.*, p. 5.

Pannenberg's hermeneutical method is, therefore, a two-fold hermeneutical technique of interpreting the world both as a thing and as a thing in its wider context. He shows a methodological similarity to Polanyi who develops an account of knowledge which incorporates this sort of double understanding. For Polanyi there is a body of knowledge which is known tacitly, the status of which, despite its tacit character, is the same as more traditionally valid ways of understanding what constitutes knowledge.[5] Pannenberg's 'beyond-the-world' of human beings is of the same type as Polanyi's tacit knowledge.

3.2.3 Openness to God-beyond-the-world

Pannenberg, as we have seen, maintains that that which is beyond the world is God. Human beings, led to ask the question about beyond-the-world, are necessarily asking the question about God because human potentiality is infinite and infinitude is divine. Here Pannenberg is drawing upon Schleiermacher's use of dialectic. Schleiermacher argues that religion characterizes human beings neither as finite beings, as in 'metaphysics', nor as striving after the infinite, as in 'morals', but as participants in the infinite in and through finitude.[6] It is in the finite that the infinite is seen and in the temporal that the eternal is to be found. This makes possible Pannenberg's claim that, by being infinitely open to the world, human beings become open to God. To see the world is, for human

[5] See chapter five where Torrance's use of Polanyi is also described.

[6] See F. Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, CUP, Cambridge, 1988, especially The Second Speech: On the Essence of Religion, pp 96-140.

beings, to see the universal horizon of the world and, in so doing, to see God. However, we might ask; are the world and God necessarily linked in such a way? To say that God must be found by a creature able to be open to the finite nature of the world solely on the basis of a dialectical argument need not, as we shall see in chapter six, be the only account of the activity and presence of God in the history (and geography) of the world.

We will argue below that it is possible to move from an immanent understanding of God in the world to the transcendence of God. It will be argued that God is present in the world, in idealist language, as an active subject. Pannenberg however, does not talk of the presence of God here but of the legitimacy of moving from the finitude of the world to the infinitude of what is beyond the world. There is therefore no grounding of God in the world, but only an ability by the world to reach beyond itself and an equation of what is beyond the world with God.

3.2.4 God in History

It is not surprising that Pannenberg should place the understanding of history at the centre of his theological system for it is in the unfolding of the universal history of the world that the world is seen in its context, and the infinite, and therefore God-revealing nature, of that context is made apparent. History not only points to the infinite however; it also points to the finitude of human existence in the world wherein, for Pannenberg, daily life is experienced and

the question of God begins. Pannenberg's interest in history as the category for understanding the concreteness of human life[7] leads him to treat the present in a way which Moltmann appears to echo in his *Theology of Hope*. For Pannenberg, human beings construct a succession of cultures each arising out of the failings of the last in a never ending progression towards an imagined goal.

> Thus man finds no final satisfaction even through his own creations, but immediately leaves them behind again as mere transitional points in his striving.[8]

We find an apparently similar dissatisfaction with the present and a striving after the future and the new in Moltmann. In Moltmann the arrival of the future, in dialectical tension with the present, renders the present 'God-forsaken'. Only the qualitatively new action of God in the future can make Christian hope genuinely Christian and genuinely hopeful.

> From the first to the last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present.[9]
> Christian hope ... thereby brands the visible realm of present experience as a god-forsaken, transient reality that is to be left behind.[10]

Moltmann writes here with a strong element of rhetoric for, whilst dialectic plays a major role in his understanding of the way in which God and human history interact (it should be noted that the qualitatively new of the future is an act of God which comes

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[7] W. Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, *ibid.*, p. 485ff.

[8] W. Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, ibid., p. 9.

[9] J. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, SCM, London, ET 1967, p. 16.

[10] J. Moltmann, *op. cit.*, p 18.

unexpectedly to human beings), analogy too is important as it is only through analogy that the new is intelligible to human beings.

Pannenberg does not understand the course of history in a dialectical fashion - it is the hermeneutic of history which, in his view, functions dialectically. For Pannenberg following Troelstch, history functions analogically; the past and the future are understood from the present. It is this understanding which lies behind his disagreement with Schleiermacher over the relative importance of history and hermeneutics.[11] The present is for him an essential part of the experience and understanding of human beings which, by its inadequacies, points beyond itself to God and to the future. Human beings, whose destiny lies in fulfilment, find themselves dependent upon more than the world in all its richness, and this dependence upon what is beyond the world, God, becomes infinite because it lies out of reach.

> Man is dependent not just on particular conditions of his surroundings but, beyond that, on something that escapes him as often as he reaches for fulfilment.[12]
>
> Men's dependence upon God is infinite precisely because they never possess this destiny of theirs but must search for it.[13]

Thus, cultural inadequacy is interpreted as an expression of

[11] see W. Pannenberg, 'Hermeneutics and Universal History', p. 122-152, in *History and Hermeneutics*, W. Pannenberg ed., Trans. P Achtemeier, Harper and Row, New York, 1967.

[12] W. Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, *ibid.*, p. 10

[13] W. Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, *ibid.*, p. 11

the failure of human beings to reach their destiny, but it is also interpreted as an expression of the essential nature of human beings which is seen to be open to the world, and therefore to beyond the world. The natural home of human beings is located beyond the world and not merely in the world as it is for animals. Thus the world is not so much godforsaken (as in the common dualist legacy), but rather the world is only part of the 'natural habitat' of human beings who are also created to live in the environment of the question about God. Similarly, human beings are capable of living beyond the present, by their imagination, and by understanding the future as future. Pannenberg suggests that

> The animal's bondage to its environment corresponds, not to man's relation to the world of nature or to his familiarity with his cultural world, but to his infinite dependence on God. What the environment is for animals, God is for man. God is the goal in which alone his striving can find rest and his destiny be fulfilled.[14]

3.2.5 Making the World a Simpler Place

Pannenberg makes it clear that he understands human interaction with the world to be active rather than passive. In other words, the human response to the world is not so much a response which allows the world primacy and takes the world as it comes. It is more that the human being interprets what it meets in a highly active way which ensures that autonomy remains with the human being. The complexity of the world is simplified by 'imaginative constructs' which permit access to the reality of the world. We can

[14] W. Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, *ibid.*, p. 13.

see that this activity does indeed occur when human beings encounter places. Places are complexes of interactions between people, the artificial creations of human beings and natural landscapes. Human beings choose to simplify their world which is constituted by a variety of places, by making places which are more simple that the partially perceived reality around them. It is this partial perception and a subconscious process of simplification which makes up the 'imaginative construct' of the world.

These simplified places can take one of two forms. It is possible for human beings only to acknowledge the existence of part of the complex which constitutes a place, and thus to simplify the world by ignoring those parts of it which are considered unimportant or undesirable. Alternatively, human beings can take a place as they understand it and make it safer and by thus acting, make it more accessible to greater numbers of people.

Firstly, the world is not perceived in its totality by human beings at a conscious level; it is only selectively grasped. The subconscious activity here is linked to the hermeneutical debate in which Pannenberg argues, against Schleiermacher, that history and context are more important than the text itself. The point is that the conscious mind deals only with a limited picture of place (or any other phenomena) because the subconscious mind filters out those elements of a place which it does not understand, perceives as unimportant or which it is simply unable to locate. The ability of the

mind to understand or even recognise the symbols, codes and language of places is as limited as it is in any other sphere.

Secondly, even that which is perceived by the conscious mind is not always integrated into an understanding of a place because to do so would result in an unwieldy picture of such complexity that the human subject would not be able to cope with the range of decisions and choices made available. In other words, the construction of imaginary pictures of places is a necessary activity partly because it is impossible to have a complete knowledge of a place even if one were to exclude the very important historical element to place, and partly because it is necessary to understand a place in such a way that one will be able to function effectively within it. To do this a certain limited distance is necessary from oneself and one's object in order to facilitate the establishment of imaginary constructs. The role of the imagination and the ability of human beings to stand outside of themselves is of fundamental importance to Pannenberg's understanding of the process operating within human beings, society and culture. In *What is Man?* Pannenberg characterises imagination as:

> the ability to detach oneself from one's own situation and to transpose oneself into any other position one might choose ... the element of newness [and] ... [the] experience of future as future, that is, as something not yet present.[15]

[15] W. Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, *ibid.*, p. 25-26.

3.2.6 'Present to What is Other'

Anthropology in Theological Perspective provides Pannenberg with an opportunity to systematise this understanding of human uniqueness and place it within the context of an anthropological and psychological understanding of human self-consciousness. The ability of human beings to be 'present to what is other' becomes the foundational condition of humanity (as an expression of the notion of openness to the world) which allows human beings access to their distinctness, through the process of seeing themselves as other to someone or something who is other to them.[16] Access to the world is made possible by placing oneself to the world as other.

It is a major problem in this approach that the process of becoming other to one's other, either in relation to consciousness of oneself or of the world, is a process in which the 'I' appears the dominant, and indeed perhaps the only active, partner. While the 'I' appears to be placed in a wider context by being defined in relational terms, the 'I' is the only element in the relationship which can be defined because it is the only element in the relationship which can be subject. It is only given a transient objectivity in order to define its subjectivity more completely.

> In his material culture man produces a system for the arrangement of things in nature so that they become submissive to his needs.[17]

Access to reality is opened up precisely through

[16] W. Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, *ibid.*, p. 62.

[17] W. Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, *ibid.*, p. 22.

imaginative constructs, ...[18]

However, the construction of a simplified but dynamic map of the world, a dominant theme in *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* which can be traced back to an underlying emphasis in *What is Man?*, is a major process in human relations with places.

3.3.7 The Unity of a Culture

The most important part of Pannenberg's understanding of anthropology from a theological perspective lies in Chapter Seven of his book. He begins the chapter with the uncompromising statement that "The world human beings share has never been a natural world"[19] and the chapter explains and supports this assertion by answering the self-posed question -

> What is it that grounds the unity of a culture, a unity that manifests itself in the specific "style" of its various forms of life and distinguishes this culture from others?[20]

The interest in this question lies in the posited relativity of a culture and its simultaneous power over those who live within it. It is assumed, following Portmann[21], that culture is a common and shared experience experienced by all human beings. Pannenberg is willing to assert that it is this universal experience of, and participation in, culture, that is the feature of the lives of human beings which sets them apart from other animals:

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[18] W. Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, *ibid.*, p. 24.

[19] W. Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, *ibid.*, p.315.

[20] W. Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, *ibid.*, p. 316.

[21] W. Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, p. 429, quoting A. Portmann who wrote that human beings are "by their nature cultural beings". Source not given.

> A social way of life and the formation of groups are not specifically human realities but are widespread among the higher animals. The specifically human form of common life is constituted by the concept of a shared world, which we call "culture".[22]

3.2.8 Symbols in Culture

Culture, understood symbolically, is a system of codes and symbols which are used to establish meaningful communication between individuals. A shared understanding of the meaning or the signification of symbols, which is culture, is necessary, although the awareness that the medium of communication and knowledge is symbolic is not. Language, myth and the arts are examples of the symbolic systems which are mutually established and utilised to facilitate the functioning of society. Without such constructs society would be impossible and communication meaningless. The role of a name becomes important because, it is argued, a name is a symbolic representation of what is named. To be named is to be known. Indexical terms such as 'this' or 'here' and pronouns such as 'I' merely

> have as their function to make clear to the hearer or reader the precise thing, person, episode, place, or movement of which there is a question.[23]

Pannenberg recognises the obvious question which is raised by this understanding of the internal operation of society. Symbolic creation is primarily an individual act. The corporate acceptance

[22] W. Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, *ibid.*, p. 315.

[23] W. Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, *ibid.*, p. 207.

and use of common symbols is dependent upon individuals within the community accepting the symbolic reference and agreeing to use it, although not necessarily in a premeditated, reasoned and conscious manner. However, the cultural world which only exists in society, is essentially a corporate world. It is shared and experience is often prior to individual behaviour. The tension between the two is made even more sharp by the awareness of the feedback which operates within the mechanics of a society. It is clear that corporate symbols are individual creations, the corporate world is prior to conscious behavioural decisions and, despite this, the corporate is nevertheless influenced by individual acts.

Pannenberg goes on to suggest that a concept of culture must attempt to combine the twin poles of individuality and corporateness. This concept must cater adequately for the fact that only through cultural forms can human social formation be said to acquire its special character; and yet, cultures must always take shape within a socially organised reality. Pannenberg argues that it is necessary to locate a "third level which is distinct from individual and society and on which the symbolising activity of the individual is related to the foundations of social life"[24]. He locates the third level in 'play'.

3.2.9 Socialisation Through Play

In play, he argues, individuals are introduced to a shared world and lose their egocentric desire to define their identity over

[24] W. Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, *ibid.*, p. 319.

against the world; they learn to cultivate their exocentric desire to shape their destiny within the world and the wider question about God. It is through play that exocentricity is discovered, experience, perceived for what it is and allowed to become the governing principle in life-decisions. It is here that we see that the emphasis placed on the self and the ego for methodological reasons earlier in the book has, despite an expectation to the contrary: "... the goal is the restoration of community, the reintegration of the individual into the community,"[25] led to the supremacy of the individual over society.

Part II of *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* ends with the promise that a high place will be accorded to the 'shared world' even if, so far, the interests of the individual have been paramount.

> Individuals recover their identity through reintegration into the community; they recover a freedom which they neither possess nor can exercise for themselves in isolation, but which they possess only as recognised members of the shared world.[26]

In other words, the shared world is a *sine qua non* for individual freedom and identity; and it is this pattern which is maintained. For Pannenberg, however important society may be, the individual remains at the centre of attention. Such interest in society as society can command lies in its role in permitting freedom and expression for the individual.

> Thus the theme of play links together the question of the identity of the individual, which provided the guiding thread for the second part of the present book, with the further question, arising out of the previous one, regarding the shared world in which individuals are given

[25] W. Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, *ibid.*, p. 311.

[26] W. Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, *ibid.*, p. 312.

the opportunity for achieving their personal identity.[27]

3.2.10 Summary

Pannenberg argues that all human beings are able to see beyond an horizon limited by the instincts necessary for mere survival. Consequently, human beings are able to reflect on their environment, to place it and themselves in a wider context and to wonder what lies beyond the limits of both understanding and perception. This inquisitiveness leads human beings both to discover what lies unknown within the perceived horizon and what lies metaphysically beyond it. Thus human beings are also responsive to the possibility of God.

It is because human beings are able to see beyond what is instinctively necessary for survival that they also, paradoxically, find it necessary artificially to simplify the world in which they live. This happens automatically in animals for whom instinct removes all confusing and complicating information leaving only what is needed for the survival of the animal. Human beings however, quickly discover that the world is a highly complex place and that much of the information received does not appear to be necessary for living.

In order to function more effectively in such a complex world many of the details of the world are subconsciously filtered out or adapted so that they fit a preconceived world view. The ability of

[27] W. Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, *ibid.*, p. 322.

human beings to reflect and to use imagination enables them to construct a picture of the world which is less complicated than the world really is but which enables them to operate successfully in it. It seems likely that any horizon is so complex that it could never be known by an individual or a group of human beings, the very existence of relationships makes this inevitable, and therefore the construction of simplified maps of the world are essential for human being.

It is clear that these simplified maps are shared by individuals who have things in common. Pannenberg accepts that common cultures promote shared symbols which are understood by everyone who is at home in the culture. These symbols not only serve to include or exclude individuals within or from the culture but they also function as major landmarks on the constructed map. It is through the shared cultural symbols that each individual, who must, necessarily have a slightly different map from everyone else because everyone views the world from their own unique perspective, recognises locations in the shared construction of the world.

Pannenberg argues that this shared perception of what the world is like is learnt through play. Play involves enacting what will become the things of adult life in a safe environment which promotes both understanding and experience and also encourages the development of a common way of interpreting the world. It is this

common hermeneutic which leads to the individual both possessing the ability to reflect on more than the immediate horizon but which also tends to limit the individual to interpreting what is perceived in particular ways.

Consequently, while the shared process of simplifying the world is necessary for human being, the shared hermeneutic limits the ability of the individual to step outside the dominant culture and challenge the common map of the world. It is precisely the same tension which we saw in chapter two. Being part of the dominant culture is to be existentially inside one's environment. However, each human being is the unique meeting point of a wide variety of relationships and in order to express one's uniqueness it may be necessary to step outside one's environment and thus becoming existentially outside where one formally belonged.

This is not to deny the need for a simplified construction of what the world is like which is shared through the common understanding of the ways in which culturally determined symbols work. It is simply to recognise that there are a wide variety of culturally mediated maps of the world which overlap with one another to varying degrees. Furthermore, each time an individual step outside a common world view and considers another then the commonality of the shared symbols is reduced for as each individual become less at home in a place so the understanding of the way in which that place understands its environment is also

reduced.

3.3 EXAMPLES OF CONSTRUCTIONS IN PLACES

3.3.1 Introduction

If the view described in this chapter is correct it ought to be possible to point to ways in which human beings construct a simplified picture of the world which enables them to function more effectively within their own environment. The environment of human being is present in two forms. Firstly, it is present as the physical form of the place; the buildings, the shape and nature of the land and the climate. Secondly, it is present as the people who live in the place; the way in which the society is organised, the cultural values of the society and the extent to which it varies within itself and to which it relates to other places outside of itself. A place, in both senses, can vary enormously in scale for nations and entire continents share things in common which other peoples beyond the limits of the nation or continental block do not share, and yet even a few streets can show significant variations of class, cultural values and physical properties.

3.3.2 Interpretations in Social and Physical Form

All places consist of natural or man made forms which are understood by the people who live in those place in particular ways. In many older cities, towns and villages the largest building, at least until the nineteenth century, was a cathedral or a church. The building functioned as a physical form of the presence of God, and

in many cases of the wealthy benefactor or local landowning family who paid for the building. Since the nineteenth century townscapes have been dominated not by religious buildings but first by factories and then by financial institutions. While this was partly of necessity as technological advancement and economic forces made such buildings first possible and then necessary it also reflected changes in the way in which society operated and in the dominant values of the society. There is therefore, a circularity in the relationship between the physical form of a place and the dominant social and cultural values held by the people who live in it. As values change and influence building types and styles so new buildings reinforce those values which led to their creation. This mirrors the circularity in the relationship between social structures and cultural forms and between individual and corporate priority in society and culture.

The shape of settlements will usually reflect the nature of both the land upon which the settlement is built and the way in which the settlement operates. Settlements built in valleys where dry flat land is in short supply will have a high density and the lack of easy communications and the inward-looking shape of the settlement may contribute to the closed nature of such communities even today.

The knowledge an individual possesses of 'their place' will be based on those parts of the place which have special meaning and which they frequent regularly. Consequently, the route to work,

to school, to the shops or to the station will form part of the simplified 'mental map' of the place. Areas not needed by the individual will not feature on the map in such detail.

During the late middle ages distinctive styles of farmhouse developed in which houses in highland areas of England and Wales were of the longhouse type. These houses were rectangular in shape and the dwelling area and the livestock area were both located under the same roof separated only by a wall. In lowland areas houses were more substantial, often included three separate rooms and animals were kept in separate buildings.

Studies have shown that variations in architecture and technology in mediaeval Wales were due to the proximity of parts of eastern Wales to the wealth and new ideas available in the West Midlands. Western Wales without easy access to either the markets or the new technology and ideas continued with less complex buildings for longer.

> The eastern borderland [of Wales], characterised by storeyed houses, had very high standards of material culture on account of ease of access to the markets of the west Midlands and exposure to new ideas of construction. West Wales, in contrast, has been associated with the single-storeyed cottage, with earth or stone walls, in contrast to the timber-building of the east.[28]

Here the physical location of a settlement has influenced the way it

[28] R. A. Butlin, The Late Middle Ages, c. 1350-1500, pp 119-150, in R. A. Dodgshon & R. A. Butlin, *An Historical geography of England and Wales*, Academic Press, London, 1978, p. 141, referring to P. Smith, *Houses of the Welsh Countryside*, London, 1975, pp 14-15.

is constructed, the experience and technological capabilities of its inhabitants and the extent to which the prevailing views of the world held by the inhabitants of any particular settlement have been influenced or challenged by meeting alternative world views.

It is therefore, possible to conceive of ways in which the natural use of imagination by human beings to simplify the world in which they live in order to function in it more effectively is influenced by the place in which they live. This is because the shared cultural values of a place, the dominant hermeneutic through which all things are interpreted is influenced by the physical form of the settlement and by the degree to which the villagers come under the influence of other values which modify their own. Furthermore, the forces which operate in the mediaeval village in eastern Wales also operate at every scale of place from the street to the continental.

3.4 CONCLUSION

It seems likely therefore, that Pannenberg's description of the way in which human beings simplify their world through the use of imagination, shared cultural and physical maps and symbolic landmarks is an accurate way of describing how human beings operate in places, both in terms of a place's physical form and in terms of the cultural and social content of the society located in a particular place. All human beings construct a simplified mental map of part of their place, its geography, its history and its culture.

It is important for Pannenberg that it is not assumed that the acquired map is what is real over against the reality which inspired the map. Both in their different ways can be said to be real. But the assertion of their reality can be made because both the place and the constructed image of the place can function as agents in a relationship. This aspect of the reality of both the construct and the world which gave rise to the construct receives little attention from Pannenberg. It is however, of great importance to us.

Rykwert observes, in a study of classical towns in a variety of ancient cultures, that

> I have been concerned to show the town as a total mnemonic symbol, or at any rate a structured complex of symbols; in which the citizen, through a number of bodily exercises, such as procession, seasonal festivals, sacrifices, identifies himself with his town, with its past and its founders.[29]

There is no significant acknowledgement here that the citizen and the town are engaged in a relationship in which the town is operating as an agent influencing and changing the citizen. The citizen does not change himself into a being who feels at home with the history of the town in which he would like to belong. He agrees to allow the town to influence him through a wide variety of subtle and mostly subconscious processes in which the symbols of the community in that place are quietly absorbed. This way of understanding the relationship between a person and a place is

[29] J. Rykwert, *The Idea of a Town*, Faber and Faber, London, 1976, p. 189.

reflected in the perception of Psalm 103:15-16; a short passage which receives little attention from the commentators.

> As for man, his days are like grass;
> he flourishes like a flower of the field;
> for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,
> and its place knows it no more.

It is the place which knows here, not man.

SOCIAL PLACING

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter we saw that human beings construct a simplified view of the real world in order to function in it. This view is learned and then modified through life. Places are treated in the same way as all other phenomena with which human beings relate. Any particular physical space is unique because it is different in a wide range of physical properties to any other physical space. It will occupy different geographical coordinates to any other physical space. The space is rendered a place because of the relations occurring in it. These relations will be between physical phenomena and living things, plants and animals and, in some cases, human beings. The complexity of any place makes the use of simplified pictures of a place essential.

All places, but especially human places are characterised not only by a physical structure but also by a social structure. Human beings, characteristically, will 'know their place' within the community in which they live. They will know that the way they behave, the vocabulary they use, the place where they live and a wide variety of other variables will reveal where they are located within the social hierarchy of the place. This social placing is the subject of this chapter. However, the complexity of the interactions operating within places is such that examples which show how places can function as 'subject' because their unique physical

nature may also illustrate the constraining effect of social placing on human activity. Each is mediated in part through the other.

Human places are characterised by high levels of organisation. Institutionality is a feature of all cultures and contributes to their form and their historical character. Institutions function as a constraint upon the individual or group in a way very similar to physical paces. It would be possible to construct a co-ordinate geometry illustrating the relational nature of social 'placedness'. Such cultural, social and historical notions of place are not new and continue to provide a useful way of understanding the way in which places operate.

Institutionality will be explored through the work of sociologist, Peter Berger, and social anthropologist, Mary Douglas, both of whom have sought to suggest that society and culture, and therefore place, function in a interactive feedback system and that this dynamic operates partly though the operation of institutions.

In his study on *The Social Reality of Religion*, to which more attention will be paid later, Berger reveals where he stands in the sociological tradition. He states that "Society is a product of man. ... Yet it may also be stated that man is a product of society."[1] Berger wants to explore the notion of society understood dialectically. The second footnote of the book makes clear that he is trying to

[1] P. Berger, *The Social Reality of Religion*, Faber and Faber, London, 1969, p.3.

establish, on the basis of a dialectical understanding of man and society, a synthesis between the sociological approaches of Weber and Durkheim. Weber saw "social reality as ongoingly constituted by human signification" while Durkheim emphasises the objectivity of society. Spelling out the dangers of each approach if pursued in isolation, Berger argues that both are correct and that "the two understandings are only correct *together*."[2] Thus Berger is eager to stress that institutions function symbolically and are constructed by the individual operating within society; but he is also eager to stress the historical nature of institutional symbols. In other words, institutions predate the individual and function because of this, as regulatory subjects in the dynamic relationships within society.

Mary Douglas also follows this approach and has coined the apparently contradictory phrase 'natural symbols'. Arguing along Durkheimian lines she suggests that society precedes the individual and, because of this fact, correlations between symbolic systems and social systems can be located. In *Purity and Danger* she tries to show how the organic system can function as an analogy of the social system and, as such, provide a pan-cultural means of understanding. Like Berger, Douglas sees the 'body social' as preceding the individual and as the origin of the variety of constraints operative within society. She goes so far as to describe attempts to escape these constraints, which include the constraints of institutionality, as illusory. For Douglas the symbols of society, and indeed society itself, are not simply awkward systems of control

[2] P. Berger, *op. cit.*, note 2, p. 189.

upon the key loci of reality, in other words, upon individuals, but they are the given, the primary, and in that very narrow sense, the real.

4.2 PETER BERGER - INSTITUTIONALITY AND SOCIAL PLACING

4.2.1 Introduction: The Possibility of Social Control

Berger understands institutions as one of a variety of phenomena operative within society at a level which is above and beyond the individual. Forces of social control operate in which the free activity of the symbolising individual is limited, and indeed shaped by broad coercive systems shared by all members of a society such as legal and political systems and codes of morality, customs and manners, and by less extensive circles of control shared by only a few, such as the controls imposed following the choice of an employer, local folk traditions of dress, language and religious affiliation and those of one's family and friends.

In opposition to the suggestion that individual human activity is free in any pure sense Berger writes, "... location in society means to locate oneself with regard to many forces that constrain and coerce one."[3] The active voice of Berger's verb is misleading here. In understanding one's location in society, and in making attempts to change one's location one could be said to be 'locating oneself'. However, more frequently, one is located by forces beyond one's control and a passive voice would be more appropriate.

[3] P. Berger, *Invitation to Society*, Doubleday, New York, 1963, p. 93-94.

In addition to social control, social stratification represents a major restrictive force on individual activity; the class system is a widely recognised British example. We can find both these phenomena operating in place. For example, it is clear that social stratification is partly expressed in localities. One geographical area is considered more desirable than another and is able to command a higher market value. This has the effect of reducing the ability of poorer members of a society to relocate in that place at will. The wide awareness of locality ranking by those who 'know their place' also acts as a constraint upon the free movement of individuals because, apart from economic factors, behavioural and minor cultural differences will discourage even those who have the economic power from choosing to relocate in a particular district where they do not belong.[4] The choice only appears to be free; it is in fact seriously limited by the institutional features of place stratification, the economic circumstances created by this stratification and the consequent local subcultural differences. This is a subtle but very powerful example of how institutionality can operate in a constraining manner. Similar variations also occur between places.

Physically differentiated zones in a town mediate social stratification and this stratification prevents human beings from exercising their 'free will'. Berger's analysis appears to recognise

[4] Not belonging here can be seen both in terms of existential outsideness and in terms of failing to understand the symbols of the local subculture.

the 'subjectivity of the institution' and the 'objectivity' of the so-called free human agent.

Berger follows Durkheim and Gehlen in his understanding of institutionality. For Durkheim, a realist, social facts are 'things', that is to say, they have an objective existence outside of the individual in the same way as the phenomena of nature have an objective existence outside of the individual. In other words, "We are *in* society, located in specific sectors of the social system."[5] Gehlen argues that institutions function in a regulatory manner, turning the complex world met by individuals into a coherent set of patterns and norms in which life is made easier.[6] Thus, we are located in society in a pattern of institutional forms and rules which contribute to the social system and which, being 'things' with an 'objective existence', have an effect upon us.

Berger uses language as an example of an institution to illustrate his point because language, the fundamental institution, functions by objectifying reality, organising the world, regulating and limiting interaction and possessing an historical and objective existence beyond the abstract individual, but also by facilitating common interaction because of the power it possesses by virtue of its existence beyond that individual. He argues that an institution possesses five essential characteristics: externality, objectivity,

[5] P. Berger, *Invitation to Society*, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

[6] See the discussion of Pannenberg's understanding of institutions, also dependent upon Gehlen, in the previous chapter.

coerciveness, moral authority and historicity. We have seen each of these characteristics at work in our discussion so far. Central to Berger's understanding of the way in which institutions operate are the concepts of externalization, objectification and internalization.

4.2.2 The Establishment of Social Order

It is argued that humans being are unique among the higher mammals in that they do not possess an instinctively restricted environment. Rather than existing within a particular species-specific environment human beings view the world intuitively and in an open manner. A much wider range of phenomena is available to human beings with the inevitable corollary that the world of human beings, unlike that of the higher mammals is very poorly organised. Order must be established out of relative chaos and institutionality is one response to the need to construct a pattern of organization to simplify the environment in which the individual lives.

However, it is important to remember that the human being is not fully developed at birth and the process of humanization occurs in the context of an environment, which is both natural and human, and with which extensive interaction occurs; indeed it is such interaction that is a central element in the definition of what it is to be human. To illustrate this point and to show that the institutional organisation created by human beings precedes the individual, Berger writes:

> ... the developing human being not only interrelates with a particular natural environment, but with a specific

> cultural and social order, which is mediated to him by the significant others who have charge of him.[7]

He argues that human beings construct themselves during the post-birth period and, crucially, at this time they are in relationship with their environment. This relationship can neither be finished nor ended and because of the environmental context of human self-production, self-production is necessarily a social enterprise.

> Men *together* produce a human environment, with the totality of its socio-cultural and psychological formations.
>
> As soon as one observes phenomena that are specifically human, one enters the realm of the social. Man's specific humanity and his sociality are inextricably intertwined. *Homo sapiens* is always, and in the same measure, *homo socius*.[8]

The social order is here seen to be the product of the continuous process of human externalization. The process of externalization, like that of objectification, is a continuing dialectical process in which human beings are constantly formed and reformed by forces within themselves and without, and these external forces include those of place. The process of objectification is the process by which the social order becomes established as a 'thing' with an external, objective existence. The crucial elements in objectification are the processes of habitualization and the phenomenon of historicity.

In the process of habitualization, Berger maintains, action is

[7] P. Berger & T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1966, p.66

[8] P. Berger & T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, *ibid.* p. 69.

solidified into a pattern which can be repeated without the necessity for the solidification process to be repeated. The individual begins to perceive the pattern rather than the action. The environment is simplified because the complex variety of information received is itself received in a simplified form. The range of choices open to the individual becomes limited and, crucially, the elements of the environment are perceived objectively. They are not open to a variety of interpretations or to incorporation into a variety of meaning systems because they have already been fixed into a pattern. In other words, in certain circumstances, a degree of objectification has taken place because the basic unit of the environment is the pattern. This pattern cannot be tampered with and therefore the environment gains some defence against the autonomous 'free' individual. More importantly however, habitualization has important ramifications for institutionality. Habitualization can lead to institutionalism when the patterns typified become typified by types of individuals. Berger comments on the implications of this observation:

> What must be stressed is the reciprocity of institutional typifications and the typicality of not only the actions but also of the actors in institutions. The typifications of habitualized actions that constitute institutions are always shared ones. They are *available* to all members of the particular social group in question, and the institution itself typifies individual actors as well as individual actions.[9]

4.2.3 The Historical Context of Institutionality

Institutions which are objective in the sense that they are

[9] P. Berger & T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality, ibid.*, p. 72.

external to the individual and part of society limit the range of options presented to the individual. Institutions limit the free action of and the power to symbolize by individuals in a more profound way. Institutions in particular and society in general do not exist in a timeless context but are part of history. The society of today is a society formed yesterday and the society of tomorrow is the society formed yesterday and modified, but only modified, today. Thus, the social world is received objectively, as an external, existent thing, already shaped and formed and exercising control on the one who receives it.

The change in language used from a passive society which is perceived to an active and dynamic society which is received is important. The receiver begins in a passive manner during the childhood phase of socialisation and becomes more active through life. It would be more appropriate to talk of an active adult confronting an active society. Because society, and therefore institutionality, is historical, it is to a large extent shared. A common history is received even if not in an identical manner. Berger comments:

> Institutions further imply historicity and control. Reciprocal typifications of actions are built up in the course of a shared history. They cannot be created instantaneously. Institutions always have a history, of which they are the products. It is impossible to understand an institution adequately without an understanding of the historical process in which it was produced. Institutions also, by the very fact of their existence, control human conduct by setting up pre-defined patterns of conduct, which channel it in one direction as against the many other directions

that would theoretically be possible.[10]

> An institutional world, then, is experienced as an objective reality. It has a history that antedates the individual's birth and is not accessible to his biographical recollection.[11]

If we apply this thinking to the operation of place we can see that, in a way analogous to the function of institutions, place also functions as a regulatory force within a historical context over human beings. Human beings are unable to take 'free decisions' because they are part of a place. Human beings always find themselves operating within the context of a place. The place in which they are located constrains behaviour by virtue of a number of the simple constituent parts of a place. In the second chapter we gave examples of place operating through a sense of belonging; in the last chapter we showed that the physical shape and lie of a place can affect human behaviour, potential and becoming. It will also mediate social placing. The social hierarchy within the place and the social hierarchy between places will be reflected in an institutionalised system of cultural, economic and political values and forces. Political power, for example, may be restricted to certain physical locations because of the social placing of the people who are able to live in them because of their economic power.

The location and architecture of Gothic cathedrals or Victorian town halls for example, gives a particular message to the

[10] P. Berger & T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality, ibid.*, p. 72.

[11] P. Berger & T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality, ibid.*, p. 77.

inhabitants of the town in which such buildings are located. The cathedral may speak of the power, majesty and presence of a monarchical God and of the wealth, temporal power, generosity and holiness of the benefactor. The town hall may convey messages about the success, wealth and generosity of the leading industrial families of the town, but also of the importance of the town in relation to its rivals. In the latter case therefore, the building encourages town dwellers to feel both gratitude and inferiority to their benefactor but also pride in 'their' town and, therefore, superiority over the inhabitants of other towns nearby. This would help to foster the sense of rivalry and competition necessary for the further success of both town and business in the future.

The physical expressions of social placing are historical in nature. Any place is yesterday's place which human beings today can only modify. The rapid removal of the physical expressions of yesterday's dominant social group will not remove the powerful collective memory of the period when that group was dominant. The Victorian town hall speaks of an order and ethic of the nineteenth century. The Gothic cathedral reflects a mediaeval theology. The architecture of Le Corbusier and others is the architecture of a particular philosophy whose influence is beginning to wane. However, the buildings and places remain. Some of the meaning and message also remains. Even while places have existential meaning and are simplified by us through socialization they still exert an influence upon individuals and society as a whole. Each

age will add to and change the 'collective meaning' of a place, that meaning which is absorbed by the existentially inside, but each generation must begin with what the context of yesterday's place, human beings, buildings and geography together, gives to the succeeding time.

4.2.4 Berger's Analysis Assessed

We have so far presented Berger's argument for understanding society as a product of human beings and for a degree of objective reality to be accorded to society. However, in the description of the process of internalization he argues that human beings are themselves the products of society. We have already shown how this is possible. The process of socialization involves an individual being confronted by a society which is already formed and already exists as an objective external reality at a time when the human being is not yet fully formed. Therefore, because of the external and historical nature of society the decisions made, consciously and subconsciously, by the individual are made in the context of a particular society. The decisions which are made are from a range of options already limited by that society, or that part of it within which the individual is socialized. Only as the individual develops sufficiently to perceive the relativity of the position held can the human emerge from the constraints of the process of socialisation.

However, one can never achieve 'freedom' from the legacy of

having been socialized into a particular sub-society and one's understanding of the world will be one which experiences a series of modifications as greater refinement is achieved. Ultimately, the individual can contribute to the building of a new society but only in historical continuity with the old into which the individual was socialised.

> ... the same body of knowledge is transmitted to the next generation. It is learned as objective truth in the course of socialization and thus internalized as subjective reality. This reality in turn has the power to shape the individual.[12]

So far, we have given the impression that the reality which is a property of institutionality is for Berger the reality of an external object with the power to operate independently of a cognitive, rational subject. This is certainly our view but despite some indications to this effect even some material quoted above shows that this is not in fact the case. For example, Berger states quite simply that:

> An institutional world, then, is experienced as an objective reality. ... the objectivity of the institutional world, however massive it may appear to the individual, is a humanly produced, constructed objectivity.[13]

Berger indicates here the extent to which he understands institutions as possessing the objective, external existence of a thing. The institutional world only appears as an objective reality because that is the manner in which it functions. Berger follows the Kantian conviction that one cannot know things-in-themselves but only things-as-they-appear-to-be.

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[12] P. Berger & T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality, ibid.*, p. 84.

[13] P. Berger & T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality, ibid.*, p. 77-78.

Berger does not appear to permit the 'qualitatively new' in the history of a society. In the history of a group all development must appear out of the historical context of the group. In other words, modification and change proceed out of the intellectual resources of the context of the group. All new ideas are not so much new ideas as modifications of previously accepted concepts. Thus history proceeds in a way which Pannenberg describes as 'by analogy'.[14] There is therefore, no dialectical component to the history of culture and no suggestion that the culture can produce a new idea of its own or, more seriously, be affected by ideas from other sources. The 'other' here, be it an original thinker, a different culture or God is unable to influence the history of a culture in a radical and qualitatively new way. We do not wish to overstress our case however, for it is more the possibility of such influences for which we argue rather than the expectation that such influences abound.

4.3 MARY DOUGLAS: INSTITUTIONALITY AND 'NATURAL SYMBOLS'

4.3.1 Introduction: The Unity of The Whole

Mary Douglas, a leading English social anthropologist, has, for many years, been addressing the question of what constitutes the cohesiveness of societies and cultures in which human beings are, or in many cases, have been located. Like Berger, she has followed Durkheim and maintains that individuals are in some

[14] See the discussion on page 43-46.

senses secondary to and constrained by institutions. She has devoted much time and attention to the phenomenon of institutionality, recognising that institutions are both cohesive mechanisms and systems of control. We will attempt a summary of important aspects of her work which have bearing on our subject, and we will draw out some of the implications both of her work and of the presuppositions behind her work.

On the opening preliminary pages of *Purity and Danger* Douglas acknowledges two important contributions which lie in the background of her work on pollution. They reveal much about the social and anthropological concerns which have informed her writing. Firstly, she refers to Evans-Pritchard to whom she attributes the insight that social and political institutions are to be considered by social anthropologists together and not separately, as had been the practice hitherto. Thus at an early age, she was introduced to the understanding that an institution functions as part of a larger and wider whole and that institutionality is but one part of a larger and wider system of perceiving the world.

Secondly, however, she comments that differences between herself and her husband introduced her to the 'relativity of dirt'. This is a crucial observation for anyone who wishes to comment on the manner in which a society or culture functions must take into account the relativity of perceptions and the differing function of apparently similar institutional, symbolic or ritual features of a

society, culture or, we can add, place. Recognition of this phenomenon is at the heart of Douglas' social anthropology and forms part of the criticism of the work of the nineteenth century anthropologist Frazer.

4.3.2 The Critique of Nineteenth Century Dichotomies

The opening chapter of *Purity and Danger* is a summary of some late nineteenth century analyses of ritual uncleanness. Douglas' critique of the major protagonists whom she discusses, Robertson Smith, Frazer and Durkheim again gives us insight into the heart of her thinking. Robertson Smith, although an Old Testament scholar, was a convinced evolutionist and his anthropological theories reflect this. Douglas summarises his position thus:

> Primitive rules of uncleanness pay attention to the material circumstances of an act and judge it good or bad accordingly.
>
> Christian rules of holiness, by contrast, disregard the material circumstances and judge accordingly to the motives and disposition of the agent.
>
> The less uncleanness was concerned with physical conditions and the more it signified a spiritual state of unworthiness, so much more decisively could the religion in question be recognised as advanced.[15]

For Robertson Smith the hallmark of primitive religion is that its rules of purity are closely concerned with physical things. That is to say, one can understand the cleanliness rules of primitive society

[15] M Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1966, p. 11.

by looking to explanations such as hygiene or the concerns of social stability. More advanced religions, and the most advanced was of course, his own Calvinistic Protestantism, are able to disassociate themselves from materiality and, consequently, explanations for taboos about dirt must be sought in typology, analogy and similar forms of spiritualised account.

The origins of Robertson Smith's views are both complex and varied and we are not able to pursue his analysis further. However, it is a position which has important similarities with a significant strand of early Christian theology as well as a strong philosophical heritage and it is immensely influential in the popular anthropology and popular theologies of today.

Robertson Smith is of particular interest to Douglas because of the influence of his distinction between magical practice and the practices of evolved religion. For Robertson Smith, and in some anthropology and contemporary popular Protestant theology, magic involves practices of the cult and expects an immediate response to its demands. Evolved religion however, is ethical in its emphasis and, consequently, expects to find results not in the material of the cult but in the ethical conduct of the religion and the religious. His 'spiritualising' of ritual activity is part of the de-materialising tendency of a belief in the efficacy of ritual activity which dominated Robertson Smith's intellectual context. Douglas is quick to point to the mistaken assumptions which this context made.

Douglas suggests that 'automatically effective rites' do not necessarily imply a primitive religion and, similarly, a highly developed ethical content in a religion does not necessarily imply that that religion is highly evolved. The effect of Robertson Smith's dualism is to make a distinction between magic and religion on the basis of a distinction between ritual and ethics. This was the aspect of Robertson Smith's anthropology that Frazer developed. It is through Frazer and his threefold evolutionary sequence, magic - religion - science, that much which is least attractive and culturally blinkered in Robertson Smith has been distilled. Durkheim however, emphasised a distinction between the sacred and the profane. Robertson Smith had denied that this distinction was valid but it is not in conflict with the non-material emphasis of Robertson Smith's anthropology as seen from a sociological point of view.

4.3.3 The Unity of the External and the Internal

Douglas, as we shall see, accepts neither distinction for she has a higher view of 'primitive religion' than Robertson Smith and a more complex and sympathetic understanding of the place of the symbol in society. Consequently, she appears to view physical things, those things which have physical form and shape, in a positive light. For Douglas, the vigorous anti-ritualist tradition, which we also interpret as an anti-physical tradition, is the result of a mistaken view of the way in which symbolic activity functions in society.

All social interaction must have a symbolic element in order to be interaction. The ritual activities of the social animal 'human being' give form to the internal substance of the social activity, interaction and even religion of human beings. Social rituals, according to Douglas, can precede and even create social realities. For example, the ritualised handshake between two former protagonists can precede the reality of the reconciliation and even speed the arrival of it. Indeed, the symbol of the handshake is not to be separated from the reality of the reconciliation because symbol and reality can merge imperceptibly into one another. The ritualised courtesies of the fencing match or martial arts fight function in a similar manner. The symbol of courtesy before a contest reminds the fighters of the humanity of their foe.

Douglas argues that to participate in symbolic activity is to allow oneself to be subjected to three processes. That is to say, participation in symbolic activity permits the processes to be subject while the human being is object. Firstly, it can focus attention on a particular object. To shake hands is to be forced to dwell on the fact that reconciliation is inevitable or desirable. Secondly, symbolic enactment is a device which simply reminds one of something. To shake hands is to be reminded of the desirability or inevitability of reconciliation. Thirdly, one's experiences are controlled, limited and even created by enacting the symbol. If one shakes hands then part of the external process of reconciliation has occurred and one

because of the external event. In other words, in certain circumstances, an external event can precede a corresponding internal event. In our example, reconciliation was enacted symbolically and externally and this enactment both preceded and made more likely internal reconciliation.

We have continued to operate with the language of internality and externality here while implying that it would be desirable to compress the duality into the single phenomenon of reality. Douglas' 'natural symbols' are not the constructs of the human mind, because they not only precede the mind but also act as a very powerful constraint upon the mind. Douglas has distanced herself from the evolutionary method of interpreting 'primitive religion' of Robertson Smith and proposed her own explanation for the ritual activity of 'primitive religions' and, of course, of modern societies and religions.

This explanation appears to conflate the common duality between external ritual, which is supposedly empty, and internal religion, which is supposedly genuine. The example of the handshake can be used to show how we would wish to explain human being. Rather than using idealist categories of subject and object, the conflation of symbol and intention in the handshake can be understood in terms of a physical act affecting the nature of the relationship between the two individuals. The symbol embodies the

reality it symbolises - reconciliation between two individuals. By engaging in a physical act of reconciliation which precedes the mental acknowledgement of reconciliation, a change in the relationship between the individuals is nevertheless brought about. The two individuals, despite the lack of a change in their mental attitude to one another have changed because of the physical movement. This example summarises our philosophical thesis. Being is located in relations and physical and particular phenomena are as important as mental phenomena. Place is important because it can function as a focus for the issue and because of the scale of the influence which place has on what things are.

4.3.4 Implications of the Analysis for Place

Douglas' comments are of interest to us for two reasons. Firstly, she appears to provide us with an example of the primary activity of an object. Place, in either its physical or sociological form could be said to operate in the same manner as external ritual, namely as a powerful constraint upon the activity of human beings. Furthermore, this constraint would operate before human beings are able to act. Thus the subjectivity of place would be preserved. Following Douglas, place might also operate in three ways.

Firstly, it might act as a focussing agent. It might direct the attention of an individual human being to both the particular place in which he is located and to the human being himself. The human

being would be alerted to his context as being placed in this place at this particular time, with all the particularity that this would entail. For example, it could be said that to notice a prominent statue in a market square will focus one's attention on the uniqueness of the particular place in which the statue stands and in the unique social place one occupies .

Secondly, place might act as a mnemonic symbol enabling the human being to link his past with his present by observing the particularity of the place in which he finds himself. This will alert him to his past because differences between places will be recognised. Dislocation between past and present will be mediated through the perception of different places because the particularity of those places, and the differences between them, will become apparent. For example, a human being who now lives in a different place will see a different statue, or perhaps no statue at all, in the square. Similarly, the same geographical place will change through time so that, perhaps, the surroundings of the statue will have altered a great deal and, as a result, dislocation will be felt. It is entirely possible of course, that with respect to the place, very little dislocation will be felt because the place will have remained similar over a long period of time.

Thirdly, however, place would control, limit and even create human being. Place acts as a constraint upon the activity of human beings simply because attention is focussed upon the particularity

of their location in space and time. This necessarily limits the activity of human beings. Certain things will be impossible in particular places while they will be, or will have been possible in another place or time. We have already seen that location and social placing are often very closely related and both may limit human freedom because human activity is limited; it is, to a certain extent, controlled. As we discovered above, Douglas has shown that when something such as a place functions symbolically it can also give rise to new responses in human beings. The statue for example, might inspire, encourage or disturb.

It is an important feature of these observations that places can be used by the powerful to control or influence those over whom they have power. The most substantial, awe-inspiring buildings have been cathedrals or palaces and, in modern cities, the offices of multi-national corporations, banks and other financial institutions. In the 'English village' the church is a powerful symbol of both God and an idealised social structure marked by order, stability and rootedness. Part of the power possessed by the church is due to its size; being the dominant building in the village it will function in a symbolic manner as Douglas suggests.

As we have seen, the Victorian town hall, by its location, architecture and sheer size communicated the message which the benefactors of the building and powerful men of the town wished to pass on to the less powerful in the community. To observe the place

is to observe the skyscraper, the timeless church and the massive symbol of order, thrift and philanthropy. It is to be reminded of, and to focus upon, a way of perceiving the world, in all its complexity, and to internalise the external symbols. Part of what it is to be a human being is to be affected by the physical elements and the sociological make-up of a place in the same way as we suggested, following Douglas, that one would be closer to reconciliation simply by shaking hands with one's protagonist.

4.3.5 The Primacy of Culture

For Douglas all phenomena are interpreted by criteria which are heavily prescribed by the social grouping to which an individual belongs. She writes:

> It is not impossible for an individual to revise his own personal scheme of classification. But no individual lives in isolation and his scheme will have been partly received from others.
>
> A private person may revise his pattern of assumptions or not. It is a private matter. But cultural categories are public matters. They cannot so easily be subject to revision.[16]

Culture is part of the dynamic of place construction. Shared ideas not only form the lens through which a place is interpreted but they also prescribe what is viewed and help to construct the very object which is being viewed. In other words, the institutions and history of a culture are a part of the complex forces which operate to produce the place for society. In this sense a place is a product of society constructed historically, institutionally and symbolically by the

[16] M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, *ibid.*, p. 38-39.

culture located at a specific set of spatio-temporal co-ordinates. Individuals are organised into groups and classes within a place by the culture and the institutionalised power of politics and economics.

Economic power is used to segregate the classes. It is used to preserve the political position of those who hold power by providing the resources for the construction of buildings which become symbols of the desirability and inevitability of maintaining the status quo. It is an important part of the account of how people operate in places. People themselves are active agents in a society which they help shape through the mediation of a culture which they help to form. Place is one of those elements of both culture and society which are a product of culture and society. However, as we have suggested above place also acts as a constraint upon culture and society and thus, through feedback mechanisms, place is both produced by society and culture and helps to produce them. This is as Berger and Douglas, seeking to conflate the observations of Durkheim and Weber, maintain with respect to human beings and society.

Douglas maintains that symbol and 'reality' are closer together than is usually suggested and that symbols are necessary elements of all cultures. Thus, it is inevitable that all societies will contain a symbolic element. The attempt to dispose of a set of symbols is simply to remove one set of symbols which are

recognised and to replace them with another set which are not. Furthermore, Douglas argues that symbols will often use bodily imagery or activity as vehicles for meaning.[17] In doing so the body takes the meaning of the symbol. It was this process that was at work in the handshake example given above.

However, as early as the introduction of *Natural Symbols* Douglas writes "... each person's religion has to do with himself and his own autonomous needs."[18] This indication of a notion of an autonomous individual who is free to make decisions unaffected by constraints is more an indication of Douglas' intention to avoid the full implications of a determinist position in sociological explanation. In doing so however, she often finds it difficult to admit of any objective agency. Her criticisms are often valid but the solutions are not necessarily the only reasonable ones available which will account for the relationships between human beings located in particular places and between those places and the human beings in them. An example of this from Douglas' sympathies with phenomenology will serve as both explanation and criticism.

Addressing the appropriateness of phenomenological analysis Douglas makes some predictable and valid criticisms of

[17] Wolff has investigated at length the body imagery of the Old Testament. In the Old Testament such imagery would appear to function as an illustration of the text, as an illustration of what it means to be a human being and as a coded description of Hebrew culture. Bodily imagery is therefore functioning as a natural symbol and is related to the social system. See H. W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, SCM, London, 1973, ET 1974.

[18] M. Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, *ibid.*,p. 26.

the way in science operates. She comments that such scientific techniques which are popularly conceived as true science do not take account of subjective experience. It was this observation which inspired phenomenological geography. She remains primarily concerned to avoid implying that constraints determine individual behaviour when she argues that:

> For the sake of living together in peace, each society will combine the active voice and the passive voice in different measures, to make harsh judgments acceptable to unfortunate persons ...[19]

This mutuality is a device of individuals who, in a Hobbesian manner, choose to cooperate for their own benefit. In defining a 'full programme for a sociology of religion' she writes:

> ... the interaction of human agents must be its subject; and in so far as they choose beliefs, they choose their institutional forms and try to make sense of them, justifying their choices at the same time.[20]

Here it is admitted that the choice of belief may not be free but that, at the same time, judgments about the nature of belief are made by individuals.

The delicate balance between the uniqueness of human beings for

> Among all living beings, humans are the only ones who actively make their own environment, the only ones whose environment is a cultural construct.[21]

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[19] M. Douglas, 'Passive Voice Theories in Religious Sociology', in *In The Active Voice*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1982, p. 10.

[20] M. Douglas, 'Passive Voices Theories in Religious Society', in *In The Active Voice, ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

[21] M. Douglas, *In The Active Voice, ibid.*, p. 189.

and the constraining activity of physical forms, institutions, and unconscious existential experience is clearly difficult to strike. The primary criticism of Douglas is that her system does not permit her to strike the balance in the most convincing manner. As we shall see in the final chapter, a notion of being based in relationships and not in discrete subjects and objects would unify Durkheim and Weber in a way which both Berger and Douglas desire and would also make it possible to speak of a socially placed human being who both influences the social place occupied while being shaped by that place.

4.4 CONCLUSION

We have shown that a place is the locus of social formation, organisation and stratification. In any place human society is organised and the rules and patterns of this organisation are learnt by young people as they develop into adults. The variations between individuals and groups of people are reflected in a spatial pattern which both reflects and strengthens the social structure of the place. Places are therefore integral to social structure. Institutions regulate human behaviour, mediate social structure and influence the physical form of the place. In turn they too are modified by human behaviour, social structure and the constraints or opportunities afforded by the physical form of the place.

The relation between place and society usually occurs in symbolic forms. The buildings, layout and organisation of the place,

its physical form, contains cultural statements about the nature of the society which built them. The existential insider will read these symbolic statements correctly and will consequently, 'know his place'. The outsider will not always understand the language being used. So places both result from and help form the social organisation of human beings. The social structure which human beings create creates for itself the physical structure which reflects itself but which goes on to influence and even change it.

The so-called free autonomous individual would have to be free of any social structure as well as to remain placeless if he was to remain free. But, any socialised individual acquires a social structure and a place in it, and any social structure is necessarily acquired in a place. And this place with its social structure then acts as an agent restricting the freedom and autonomy of the individual. All people have a place in society and a place in the world in which they either belong or to which they are an outsider.

APPENDIX

N. K. GOTTWALD: PLACE AS SOCIAL AGENT - THE EXPERIENCE OF THE ISRAELITES

Gottwald is interested in forms taken by Israelite society and the effect these had on the religious beliefs adopted by the society.[22] Gottwald's study lies in a field where gaining access to 'what actually occurred' is highly problematic. The nature of the evidence is such that schools of thought are likely to wax and wane through time and they will be as much an expression of their time as they are likely to approach the truth. Fortunately, however, our case does not stand or fall upon the accuracy of Gottwald's work. Even if it were to become unfashionable - and Mayes, for example, raise some major questions[23] - we would not need to change our argument.

He maintains that the land allotment traditions of Judges probably emerged in the rise of the monarchical period. He cites three major reasons: firstly, because the tribal holdings represent the natural socio-economic division of premonarchical Israel which were simply transformed into administrative districts under the monarchy; secondly, because the new 'tribal' areas helped assimilate previously Canaanite and Philistine areas into the Kingdom of Israel; and thirdly, because

> The "boundaries," which had once existed between tribes simply as the points where the people of one tribe lived contiguously with the people of another tribe, now became political dividers for designating the internal

[22] N. K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh*, SCM, London, 1980.

[23] See A. D.H. Mayes, *Judges*, TSOT Press, Sheffield, 1985, pp. 69ff..

articulation of the centralised state apparatus.[24]

Gottwald's three reasons, which he uses to support his suggestion that the compiling of the land allotment traditions was retrospective, raises three interesting features of place when it functions as an agent or an instrument for socialization. Firstly, Gottwald suggests that the sociological (tribal) grouping acquired a physical expression as well as a communal expression. The third point below makes a similar suggestion. Indeed, one might argue that the nature of the sociological grouping required a physical expression as well as a sociological one. In other words tribal groupings, and perhaps other sociological units as well, must have or must acquire for themselves, units of space, their place, which they make and which makes them. Failure to possess land, or roots, that is, to be without a sense of place in this sense, will leave the tribe rootless in every sense because it will have no positive means by which it can enter into the relational nature of reality - both the created physical world and the created sociality of human beings. This is one of the most important functions of territoriality.

Secondly, when any force, internal or external, leads to a conscious concretization and expression in physical place or territory, then, by its very delineation, the power of the governing or guiding force grows dramatically. The territory can function as a magnet or gravitational pull by focusing identity inwards upon itself.

[24] N. K. Gottwald, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

The establishment of a territory has then the effect of heightening the sense of group identity, self-consciousness and idiosyncracy. The territory here can be seen, in a relational understanding of reality, as the point in space and time in which the created world and the society which human beings must, by definition, form, become united in a single entity. The territory 'the place' is occupied by 'placed' human beings.

Having a territory will encourage the group to defend its territory against external attack and against internal minorities; racism, for example, can be described as a defence by the group against a perceived threat which is increased by the presence of an apparently distinct grouping within the territory, because 'their territory' becomes an expression of themselves. In other words, having a territory governs choices and actions which the group makes. The group will be more likely to provide for itself foci for political, religious or cultic activity because they function as an expression of self-identity. The territory becomes an identifiable possession of one group and not only leads to the oppression of minority groups both within and without the land. It can also encourage the oppression of the territory for a group may feel that it 'owns' the land and may therefore act towards it in any way which it chooses. This tendency is seen in the exploitation of the land in modern societies.

Thirdly, as we have seen, the power associated with place is

an important theme. Gottwald suggests that the monarchy was able to control its empire by creating sub-territories each of which was jealously guarded by sub-tribes. Nationalistic or tribal identity can be fostered by a strong sense of identity with the land and with a particular social tradition and cultural idiosyncracies. Such an identity can also lead to the emergence of local rivalries and tensions which are due to the uniqueness of physical place and social and cultural history which each nationality or tribe enjoys.

The land functioned for the tribes as a means by which their identity as a single theo-political unit was enhanced, their control over the physical space was consolidated and their internal political structure was developed. Here place is defined in relation to particular spatial and temporal coordinates, to a particular group of people who are considered insiders and in distinction (that is, in a negative relationship) from other particular groups of people who are considered outsiders. We may also observe that, in turn, the particular group of people are also defined in relation to a particular area of land. To describe either the land or the people without the other would be nonsense.

Gottwald unwittingly gives an example in which the interaction between an area of land - a place - and a social group - in which all members are placed - define one another. Neither could be said to be described fully without reference to the other. The being of each exists in the relation which exists between them (and

many other things) and not discretely 'inside' either. In this way a change in the land or in the society will result in a change in the other. The land and the society, in so far as they can be said to exist independently of one another, both operate as agents. This can help to explain the devastating nature of the exile for the Israelites.

PART TWO

PLACE IN THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the second part of this thesis we will turn our attention to specifically theological ways in which the issue of place may be addressed. In the first part of the thesis we have considered three ways in which human beings relate to and with place and understandings of the operation of human beings which, in part at least, reflect one or more of these ways. In this part of the thesis we will deal with specifically theological ways of considering issues which the issue of place focuses. Through this discussion we will evolve a framework within which our previous discussions can be placed.

We are required to continue to work with a number of distinctions simultaneously. First, there is a distinction between a physical place, the geographical environment of shape, form and space, and a social space, the location occupied by an individual in a socially and politically organised community. Second, there is a distinction between the general and the particular. The particularity of a location in space or in a community must be acknowledged if any account of what it is to be placed or of the operation of place is to be complete. Third, we continue to work with the ontological distinction between a philosophy in which all existent objects are discrete and in which being is located deep within the object, and a philosophy in which all existent objects are related to one another

in such a way that being is located in the relations between existent objects.

These distinctions are addressed in a discussion of the way in which God and the created order, physical and social, interrelate. A full discussion is impossible but a distinction is made for convenience and brevity between a sacramental and a non-sacramental understanding of the manner in which God is present and reveals himself in the created order. This distinction is addressed through a critique of the work of Torrance and Boff.

Torrance and Boff are discussed in this chapter because, in their very different ways, they both give theology a place within knowledge. The incarnation is at the heart of both theologies and it is human activity which makes possible the presence of God. Furthermore, Torrance discusses space as well as time and develops the notion of a single spatio-temporal realm for the description of the location of all physical objects. This enables us to explain the uniqueness of each placed object more clearly. With other exponents of liberation theology Boff is anxious to develop a regional theology which is valid only because it is an expression of the People of God in a particular locality. He has been criticised by other Roman Catholic Theologians, especially orthodox thinkers because this aspect of liberation theology is perceived as a threat to the universality of the teaching of the Church.

The role accorded to theology can only be a backdrop to the discussion of this chapter. For Torrance theology is the pinnacle of all knowledge offering the hermeneutic by which the rationality of the universe can be observed. Boff, by contrast, is willing only to grant theology an equal status with other academic disciplines because it shares with them an interest in the human condition. The manner in which theology is contextualised either by offering the crucial hermeneutic 'from above' or by sharing similar concerns 'from alongside', is a symbol of the debate with which we are engaging in this chapter. The dominance of theology, and more particularly the incarnation, is like the centralising tendencies in Roman Catholicism which have challenged Boff's regional theology; this is illustrated by his placing theology alongside other academic disciplines.

5.2 SPATIO-TEMPORALITY: THE WORK OF T. F. TORRANCE

5.2.1 Introduction

Much of Torrance's work is directed at the question of the nature of knowledge both in terms of its constitution and the manner in which it is to be apprehended. He is concerned to unite theological and 'natural' science and to present all knowledge as a unified and interdependent whole. The key to understanding this whole lies in a correct response to what is revealed. For Torrance, such a response requires the interpretation of what is revealed in the light of the fact of the resurrection. There are a number of

important themes in Torrance's work which are of interest to us and which inform his attempts to integrate natural science and theology. These attempts give us a relational category - the four dimensional and highly dynamic spatio-temporal realm - which is of considerable interest.[1]

At the outset we should mention Torrance's desire for an open and respectful attitude to the created order which is of the same kind as that accorded to God. Following Polanyi's work on the 'multi-levelled structure of human knowledge'[2] and the demise of the deterministic, Newtonian understanding of reality, Torrance argued that it is necessary to adopt an open attitude to the contingent order. Such an attitude does not view the contingent order in a fixed, static or closed manner but, rather, understands explanations of the contingent order to be provisional, partial and to some degree relative. It is only then, when operating in an *a posteriori* fashion that the human ability to formulate patterns which interpret the self-revealing reality is able to formulate patterns in an accurate manner. The intuitive development of integrated explanations depends upon theoretical elements which belong at a 'higher level' than the phenomenon for which an explanation is sought. Ultimately one is led from a humble observation of what the intelligible universe reveals to a dependency upon the self-

[1] We have drawn here on the following books by Torrance: *Theology in Reconstruction; Space, Time and Incarnation*; *Theological Science*; *Theology in Reconciliation*; *Space, Time and Resurrection*; *Divine and Contingent Order.*

[2] See T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1976, p. 188-191.

revelation of the Creator God.[3]

Torrance suggests that scientific thought has developed in a number of ways which are highly significant. He argues that theology should take note of these developments for two reasons. Firstly, knowledge is a single integrated whole and, therefore, theology must take account of developments in other fields of knowledge. Secondly, important developments in scientific thought offer theology new categories for its own thought, offering resolutions to long-standing tensions between science and theology and contributing to the development of a new cosmology. We may sketch out three of these developments before devoting some time to a fourth - the four dimensional space-time continuum.

5.2.2 Paradigm Changes in Science

Firstly then, Torrance suggests that science is a contribution to a new 'concept of reality'. In this new concept there has been a move away from deterministic Newtonian science based upon causality. Torrance characterises this move writing that the old distinction between "real, mathematical time and space" and "the apparent and relative time and space" of our "ordinary experience" is replaced by

> a new concept of reality in which that kind of dichotomy is transcended and in which structure and matter, or the

[3] It is possible to begin to argue here that the transcendent nature of the being of God is closely related to the immanence of God in creation. We might argue that it is possible to move from an observation of the immanence of God to the realisation of the transcendence of God. This move could be made on the basis of the hierarchical basis of knowledge which Torrance takes up from Polanyi. In Chapter Six we will attempt a similar exercise based on a different argument.

theoretical and empirical components of knowledge, are inseparably one.[4]

There are two important consequences of this revolution in scientific philosophy which are of interest to us here. Firstly, a particular thing or event must be considered on its merit rather than being analysed in terms of its accordance with the prevailing systems. The result of this is that things or events which are unusual, or indeed completely new, such as - and this is Torrance's concern here - the resurrection, are not rejected as misinterpretations simply by virtue of their novelty.[5] This is an example of the 'open' attitude to the contingent order at work.

Secondly, and closely related to the proposed methodology of particularity, things and events are not so much discrete objects occupying particular volumes of space and lengths of time as discrete bodies which must by their nature possess a variety of relationships. The crucial philosophical development is that these relationships are no longer a matter of cause and effect; relationship has become an ontological category. In other words, all things and events are partly defined by relationship. Thus relationship is no longer a way of explaining how something came

[4] T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, *ibid.*, p. 184.

[5] There is a tension in Torrance here between his desire to incorporate the qualitatively new into scientific knowledge without the need to integrate it into the dominant causality-based system, and his suggestion that interpretations of reality, while open to what reality has to say, must be related to the theories of truth of earlier generations. For each generation to produce theories which function as 'disclosure models' must limit the degree to which the genuinely qualitatively new can emerge. This debate is, in essence, very similar to that on pages 70ff in Chapter Three between the analogical thought of Pannenberg and the primarily dialectical thought of Moltmann.

to be the way it is but rather, it is a way of describing what something is. It is therefore, altogether more dynamic, fluid and elusive. This notion of non-substantive being is highly particular for only one set of relations can constitute any particular being by definition, because any particular being is defined by the particular set of relationships by which it is constituted.

Torrance describes the new 'concept of reality' thus

> ... and since the emergence of relativity theory [this - the old concept of causal reality] has had to give way to a profounder and more differential view of reality in which energy and matter, intelligible structure and material content, exist in mutual interaction and interdetermination. This is a dynamic view of the world as a continuous integrated manifold of fields of force in which relations between bodies are just as ontologically real as the bodies themselves, for it is in their interrelations and transformations that things are found to be what and as and when [and, we might add, where] they are. They are to be investigated and understood not by reference to a uniformity of causal patterns abstracted from the actual fields of force in which they exist, but in accordance with their immanent relatedness in the universe and in terms of their own inherent dynamic order.[6]

Torrance discusses the "multi-levelled structure of human knowledge", a major theme in the work of both Einstein and Polanyi. Here it is suggested that scientific knowledge, which includes theological science, operates at least three levels: the physical, the theoretical and the meta-theoretical.[7] These levels are

[6] T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection, ibid.*, p. 185.

[7] Such distinctions are misleading for these levels are not discrete and separate but are highly dependent upon each other and are difficult to distinguish from each other.

hierarchical and a higher level of analysis will often bring meaning and coherence to otherwise confusing and incoherent circumstances. For Torrance, God, understood through Christ and the resurrection, forms the ultimate level for all knowledge.

Thirdly however, Torrance does not understand knowledge in a constructionist sense. For him the multi-levelled structure of knowledge reflects a multi-levelled structure of reality itself. Here Torrance reveals a preoccupation with understanding the whole. Despite indications discussed above to the contrary, he argues that, as scientific understanding advances, an intelligible rationality within the universe is revealed which points towards a transcendent and awe-inspiring reality which meets us as subjects. He writes

> All created things have a significance of their own which invites inquiry, but this is a significance which we find to intensify the higher up the scale of existence we move. As the universe becomes progressively disclosed to our scientific inquiries it is found to be characterised by an intrinsic intelligibility of an ever deepening dimension which far outranges our powers of comprehension, invoking from us awe and wonder. Moreover, we become aware of being confronted in and behind it all with a transcendent reality over which we have no control but which, while utterly independent of our minds, has an infinite capacity for revealing itself to them in quite unanticipated ways.[8]

We see an explicit attempt to return to a re-expressed notion of the hierarchy of being. This acknowledged, it is not surprising that the particularity which appeared to be dominant in the new concept of reality is hardly present at all. There is a move away from the

[8] T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, *ibid.*, p. 191.

particularity of the thing or the event, through the integrating system of knowledge towards the self-revealing Creator God. What we find here is not a developed notion of creation but an understanding of the rationality of the incarnation. Consequently, science is not an outworking of a theology of creation in which the rich variety of creative provision, in which the inherent rationality of the created order can be discerned and in which, through the presence of the Spirit of God, the particularity of each thing or event is affirmed and celebrated, but a preparation for a theology of the incarnation into which the totality of scientific knowledge is integrated. We will see below that this notion of science, and the theology of creation and the understanding of the way in which God is present in creation which underpins it, is too narrow.

We have seen that major changes in the scientific understanding of the ways in which knowledge functions and the way in which reality is to be perceived have occurred during the middle part of the twentieth century. In summary, these changes have been concerned with the interrelated nature of both reality and knowledge. For Einstein, Polanyi and Torrance, reality and knowledge function with a series of three levels arranged hierarchically but, and this is the most important point, interdependently. No one level can do without the others. Similarly, the new concept of reality maintains that all things and events are related at an ontological level with a variety of other things and events in a highly complex but dynamic continuum of interactions

and interdependencies. It is therefore, impossible to speak of any thing or event without also speaking of the relationships that the particular things or events have with other things and events. This is so because these relationships are ontological descriptions not causal explanations. The fourth development in science concerns the application of this relational concept of reality to the spatio-temporal realm.

5.2.3 Greek Notions of Space

In the preface to *Space, Time and Incarnation* Torrance states that his purpose in publishing the book is threefold:

> (i) to lay bare the ground on which modern Protestant theology has attempted to detach the message of the Christian Gospel from any essential relation to the structure of space and time; (ii) to examine the place of spatial and temporal ingredients in basic theological concepts and statements and to clarify the epistemological questions they involve; (iii) to offer a positive account of the relation of the incarnation to space and time, by penetrating into the inner rational structure of theological knowledge and letting it come to articulation within the context of modern scientific thought.[9]

This aim is pursued through a critique of the receptacle notion of space in Christian thought. Such a critique is rare for theologians have traditionally been much more interested in time than in space.

Torrance suggests that there are three main ways in which the receptacle notion of space, and by implication also of time, was developed by Greek thought. The simplest solution to the questions posed by the problem of space was proposed by Plato. For Plato,

[9] T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation*, OUP, London, 1969, p. v.

Torrance argues, space is a receptacle of the most rudimentary kind, having existence only in the sense that space must be said to exist if physical objects can be said to exist. Physical objects must exist somewhere or in something - and the somewhere or the something in which they exist is space. Clearly however, one cannot ascribe materiality to space because space itself would then become a physical object itself and would have nowhere in which to exist. The receptacle which is space is therefore entirely passive; it has no limits of any kind and it does not contribute to objects in any way at all.

Space is the servant of the object and cannot act as a constraint upon it. Space is also necessarily cosmological because it is through the medium of space that an object is related to its archetype. It is because an object is 'in space' that it can be said to point to the reality beyond itself. Torrance describes this as bridging

> the separation or chasm (χωρισμοσ) between the realms of the intelligible and the sensible (the νοητα and the α'ισθητα) . [10]

The implications of this position are clear. Space is nothing more than a medium for the material manifestation of the real. The extreme position of early Christian aesthetes in which the body was seen simply as a container for the mind is closely related to this Platonic cosmology. A tradition of Platonic dualism, regularly represented in new forms, remains in the Christian, and especially in the Protestant, tradition.

[10] T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation, ibid.*, p. 5.

In the early part of the thirteenth century more of the writings of Aristotle became available in Latin translation. They greatly influenced the young Aquinas and, following his massive contribution to the theological tradition, it is Aristotle, rather than his teacher Plato, who has been the greater influence upon Roman Catholic theology. Aristotle understood the "chasm between the realms of the intelligible and the sensible" not as a qualitative distinction but as a quantitative separation. Therefore the separation between the 'intelligible and sensible' was to be understood only in spatial terms. The result of this change is dramatic for the intelligible and the sensible, which in Plato were radically dissimilar, are now in Aristotle of the same kind. Both exist in the spatio-temporal realm. They are related in a material sense and therefore also in an ontological sense. Aristotle went further than this. He maintained that the receptacle itself was also related ontologically to the material of the intelligible and the sensible and, indeed, it was the origin of all materiality. The consequence of this is that there can, by definition, be no 'empty space' and, therefore, space is limited and finite.

The Aristotelian legacy, Torrance argues, has been to establish distinctions which arise out of the static nature of finite space. A static space makes anything genuinely new impossible because all material must merge out of the common pool of materiality which is already incorporated into what exists. The

notion of plenitude is essentially Aristotelian. Consequently, there is a gulf between the natural and the supernatural in Aristotelian cosmology which is just as great as that which results from a Platonic cosmology. However, the point and mode of linkage between the natural and supernatural realms in the Christian developments of these Greek traditions have proved very different.

Torrance sees Stoic thought on space and time as a more fruitful resource for the modern thinker. He draws attention to its distinction between that which is, that is space, and that which is not, namely nothingness or void. He summarises Chrysippus who, following the pattern later adopted by the ontological argument suggested that

> what is 'somatic' is limited or determinate and therefore capable of being thought, but what is 'not somatic' is indeterminate or unlimited and incapable of being thought.[11]

Attention is focussed by the Stoics on "what is somatic", and consequently, the universe finds its unity in the material of which it is made. A more dynamic 'placeness' is now a possibility because the physical is not rejected (Platonic cosmology) or treated in a timeless and static fashion (Aristotelian cosmology), but is positively affirmed as the locus of activity and agency, and therefore of the inherent rationality of the universe in Stoic cosmology.

We must however, be more negative about the Stoic position that Torrance and point to some significant problems with the

[11] T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation*, *ibid.*, p. 9.

account and its implication. Torrance writes that for the Stoics

> The material universe is not held together, ..., as Aristotle thought, by an exterior continent or an upper sphere which forces the parts to stay together, but by an interior cohesion or tension (ἕξις or τόνος) or by an immanent reason (λόγος), which manifests itself in the laws of nature as the determinate and rational structure of the universe.[12]

Stoicism is therefore very close to immanentism. An immanentalist position will stress the immanence of God rather than or in preference to the transcendence of God. A variety of modern theologies attempt to do just this; and we will be devoting some attention to Moltmann's form of panentheistic immanentism in chapter six. However, it can also argue that explanation for phenomena are to be found in the world. An immanentist position will therefore, discount any explanation which includes God, or any other supernatural agent. This clearly is not Torrance's intention but there must be a concern that the rigidity of Stoic immanentism is incorporated into his understanding. Such a thorough-going immanentism is not a necessary position for, as we shall see in Chapter Six, by understanding transcendence and immanence as a single phenomena then it is possible to retain an immanental location for a transcendent God. In other words it is not nonsense to say that God is both transcendent and present in this place. If transcendence and immanence are considered terms to describe opposite sides of a single boundary, it will be seen that transcendence and immanence can be located together. Each is not therefore the absence of the other but the locus of potential for

[12] T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation, ibid.*, p. 9

the other to exist.

The wider implications of this incorporation are that, in a manner similar to that of naturalism, scientific understandings are used to interpret the events and phenomena of the universe when, as Torrance makes clear in his work on theological science, a wider hermeneutic which will include the agency of God, is needed. Newtonian science, with its emphasis on laws and causality, is a result of this sort of cosmology. The eighteenth century interest in a dualism between God and nature is closely related to the dualism between revelation and natural theology which has been common in theology. Such naturalistic scientific understandings are entirely legitimate but their role must be restricted to that of their place within the wider sphere.

5.2.4 Torrance's Notion of the Spatio-temporal Realm

Torrance is, as we have shown anxious to present a way in which theology can appropriate the contemporary natural scientific manner of understanding space and time. We have seen that he wishes to bring together natural science and theological science as, in his view, both are concerned with the same rational structure of divinely created and sustained reality. It is ultimately through God that all knowledge is made both rational and comprehensible.

He begins by suggesting that

> ... space and time therefore ... [is] the determinate and intelligible medium within which God makes Himself

> present and known to us and within which our knowledge of Him may be formed and grounded objectively in God's own transcendent rationality.[13]

This statement gives us important indications of his argument. Firstly, it must be made clear that it is not, despite appearances, a retreat into the receptacle notion of space. Space and time are part of creation because spatio-temporality is relative and mediatory. It is not two absolute existents which encompass creation but it is, as a single event, part of creation. Secondly, as indicated, spatio-temporality is a single four-dimensional realm. This is the reason for the awkward use of the singular when referring to space and time.

The key to understanding spatio-temporality lies in the incarnation because it is the key to understanding God. For Torrance, it is in and through the incarnation that God has chosen to interact with the world and to establish a relationship between it himself.

> ... the Incarnation together with the creation forms the great axis in God's relation with the world of space and time, apart from which our understanding of God and the world can only lose meaning.[14]

This position is rooted in Einstein's thought in which the Newtonian and Kantian view of absolute space and time are both rejected in favour of a relational notion of space-time. Space is defined in terms of material objects which act in their own agency and which are not dependent upon human operation. The concept of space-time is therefore organic, dynamic and powerful and, by its ability to

[13] T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation, ibid.*, p. 61.

[14] T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation, ibid.*, p. 68.

link the abstract with the concrete, it also provides a link between natural and revealed theology. Space-time is the medium of the incarnation and it is therefore through the space-time that God can be perceived not only as revealing himself but revealing himself in a physical form.

According to Torrance, creation is held together by the relation structure of the events of spatio-temporality. These form the locus for God's activity with creation and, more particularly, with human beings. The

> ... organised structure of space-time [is] ... kept *open* for a transcendent rationality that preserves its creatureliness and gives it meaning. [15]

In other words, spatio-temporality as relative event is the manner in which relations within creation are given reference. Furthermore however, and more importantly, it is also the manner in which relations between God and creation are given reference. The horizontal dimension of the spatio-temporal realm is intersected by the vertical dimension of relationship to God through the mediation of the Spirit. Creation keeps its dynamic, its history and its future because it is related in this dynamic manner to a dynamic Creator who takes on the limitations of space and time in his relation with his creatures.

Our discussion above shows that this limitation does not imply the necessity of conforming to a strictly regular notion of

[15] T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation*, *ibid.*, p. 73.

space and time conceived in an absolute and unchanging manner because the "organised structure of space-time" is a structure of relational co-ordinates that occur within creation; and it is not a measure of an absolute reality. It is this mistake which has, in part, led to the abstract division placed between the natural and the supernatural in which, for example, miracles are placed in the latter category - usually to their detriment. Perceiving the spatio-temporal realm in relational terms makes the previously clear-cut distinction between what can be considered 'natural' and what can be considered 'supernatural' much harder to make because the spatio-temporal realm must be understood in a dynamic and open manner.

Central to Torrance's argument is that it is in the event of the incarnation that the intersection of the horizontal and vertical occurs. He writes that

> This relation established between God and man in Jesus Christ constitutes Him as *the place* in all space and time where God meets man in the actualities of his human existence, and man meets with God and knows Him in His own divine Being.[16]

In Jesus Christ, and because of the intersection of the horizontal and the vertical (the agent here is God), the futile meaninglessness of total relativity is prevented and contact is made with the ontological ground of human existence.

The language of the horizontal and the vertical dimension avoids an existential interpretation because of the reality of the

[16] T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation, ibid.*, p. 75.

event, but Torrance acknowledges that problems exist in providing a modern expression of the dynamic operative in the incarnation. He seeks to

> express the space-time of the Incarnation as a coordinate system of real relations.[17]

Through a critique of the application of his notion of space-time we will see both the richness of the notion of the relational four-dimensional spatio-temporal realm and some of the problems which accompany Torrance's position.

Torrance draws on the understanding of the Church Fathers. The Fathers understood

> ... Jesus Christ in space and time as God's place in this world where He is present in our place. This is not to be treated as merely a metaphorical way of speaking, for this place is not a vacuum but location in the context of real being, divine and human. Jesus Christ is the place of contact and communication between God and man in a real movement within physical existence, involving interaction between God and nature, divine and human agency.[18]

Torrance, as we have seen, is optimistic that Stoic thought, which, it must be remembered, was also utilised by the second century apologists, can provide categories for the rehabilitation of theological science, at least in the area of space-time. His adoption of the analogy of two intersecting lines - the horizontal and the vertical - reveals the difficulty which he faces. We have seen that the implied naturalism of the Stoic position, despite Torrance's work in

[17] T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation, ibid.*, p. 77.

[18] T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation, ibid.*, p. 78.

theological science, is a system which consists of rigid laws and causalities which are perceived to be accurate representations of 'the way things are'. Torrance creates a series of rigid laws which concern the nature of the intersection between the horizontal and the vertical and which are incompatible with the relative nature of space-time. It is not possible to underpin the way in which knowledge works, as Torrance does, in a fixed and highly restrictive manner. It is necessary to see the activity of God in terms of a union of transcendence and immanence which occurs on a far wider and more open basis than Torrance is able to.

We wish to locate such a wider basis in terms of the sacramental presence of God who, in such an understanding, is present, immanent in all things. As we shall see in Chapter Six, it is through such immanence that God's transcendence become possible. Furthermore, by understanding the interrelation of all things in a more fluid and dynamic manner not only are the laws which concern the nature of the intersection less rigid but also what constitutes God's activity becomes less easy to define. Torrance, however retains a non-sacramental noetic understanding of the presence of God which cannot locate the transcendence of God in things because it does not locate God in things at all. The consequence of this is that the presence of God is de-materialised because it is located in physical things only in terms of noetic possibility and, therefore, the rigid structure of knowledge which he proposes does not help to locate God.

For Torrance, the transcendent God becomes immanent in the event of the incarnation in all the richness of what this implies. He uses this event as the ontological basis for all scientific knowledge but does not acknowledge that science is the outworking of creation. It is for Torrance simply the preparation for understanding the incarnation in a more complete way. Paradoxically then, while accepting the immanentism of Stoic thought on space, Torrance is willing only to accept science as pointing noetically to the presence of God in creation and not sacramentally. This important distinction, which lies at the heart of the revealed theology/natural theology dispute and which we consider to be an unnecessary dualism, has the effect of making places somewhere from which God is perceived noetically rather than somewhere in which God is found to dwell already. We will be developing this theme later in the chapter.

This is neither to say that Torrance does not have a realist understanding of the presence of God nor to imply that his noetic understanding of the presence of God is not also ontological. However, the presence of God here, being located noetically, remains real but only in the mind of the thinker. It is in this sense a de-materialised real presence. Place is somewhere in which God dwells only by virtue of the noetic possibility of his indwelling. Where there is no noetic possibility there is no indwelling. Therefore, for Torrance, this makes human presence, and indeed

Judaeo-Christian presence both a precondition of and prior to the presence of God.

5.2.5 Interim Conclusion

In summary then, Torrance provides a system in which all knowledge is unified into a single interdependent whole. Such a system derives in part from the observation that physical objects are to be defined in a relational manner and not in the more traditional substantive fashion. Place therefore becomes a dynamic event in the single spatio-temporal realm, constantly changing and defined only inaccurately as a particular configuration of highly variable and interdependent relationships. The particularity of a place is therefore of primary importance.

Torrance's system becomes theological because it is intelligible only when it is perceived in the light of the incarnation - the key to understanding both God and the universe. However, Torrance's notion of the incarnation is highly static and non-sacramental in the sense that it is made present in the mind of the believer and not in any other way. It is difficult for Torrance to allow for a qualitatively new future or for the high degree of fluidity which a relational ontology requires. This ontology demands a reduced sense of the substantive nature of being. It is necessary to retain an ontology which is substantive to the extent of acknowledging the independent existence of physically discrete objects but which is non-substantive in the sense that these objects exist in relationship

to other objects and that any description of the existence of an object without reference to its relations will be meaningless.

A particular place, for example, has a real existence just as much as it has a name. However, what constitutes the place is a variety of relationships between physical objects, houses, trees, land, people and so on. Thus the place is, in one sense, the sum of these relationships. It has therefore a non-substantive existence. However, it is more than the sum total of these relationships for it can act as a single subject in a way which it cannot when understood purely as a set of interrelationships. It could therefore, be said to have a substantive existence. Nevertheless, this substantive existence is dependent upon the non-substantive for it can only be considered in this abstract substantive sense in a derivative and subsequent manner. Only as a relational nexus does a place have a substantive existence. Furthermore, the relational nexus is highly dynamic, it is constantly changing and doing so in a manner which makes such changes difficult to measure accurately or observe clearly. Therefore such derivative substantive existence as a place can be said to have is necessarily only a partial and out-dated summary of what that place is becoming. This does not make the substantive existence of place any less important except in so far as what constitutes 'more than the sum total of these relationships' is itself a highly fluid phenomenon.

There can be no doubt that human beings tend to differentiate

between discrete substantive entities to a greater degree than is warranted. This is not only the legacy of ontological systems which encourage such a practice but it is a necessity. It is essential that human beings simplify their highly complex world. One way in which this is done is to impose a degree of discreteness upon phenomena in the world which they do not possess.

For Torrance, God is made present by the mental activity of human beings who recognise the inherent rationality of the universe by reference to the incarnation. There is no element of symbol or sacrament in Torrance's notion of the presence of God which is unable to account for the immanence of God in any way which is prior to or independent of human beings. We prefer to argue however, that God is present by virtue of his creative activity and that the created world is a symbol of the God who made it. It therefore embodies the God to whom it points. As God is present in the world so he is present in this place, wherever this place may happen to be. A place becomes the location in which the presence of God is to be discovered. In the second part of this chapter we will consider the social organisation which human beings organise for themselves and offer a critique of a leading liberationist account of placedness.

5.3 PLACE AS A CONTEXT FOR A PARTICULAR THEOLOGY : THE WORK OF L. BOFF

5.3.1 Introduction

Places then, can be located in a four dimensional spatio-temporal realm. It is the location and context of events. It can function as an active agent moulding the self-identity and the structure of a young society, and consequently it is not only the context for reality but part of reality itself. We assert that God, the creator of all things, must relate to place in some way. That is to say, that God must be present in places, or be made present in places by some mechanism. For Torrance, God is present through noetic possibility, through the rationality of the created order, and supremely through incarnation - the event which gives meaning and rationality to all things.

Leonardo Boff, a leading Roman Catholic Liberationist, shares much with Torrance but differs radically in his understanding of the nature of the presence of God in the world and in the importance he attaches to the particular. This theology introduces another way of understanding the possibility of a real presence of God in the world, and a genuinely particular *and* realist approach to the world.

Boff shares with Torrance an integrated view of knowledge and of the centrality of the incarnation, but applies his incarnational theology in a very different way. Torrance uses the incarnation to

show how the spatio-temporal realm is constituted and Boff uses it to incarnate secular thought and activity[19]. By this we mean that Torrance is interested to show that the universe is a coherent and rational whole. He argues that it is only possible to do this if theology is allowed to take part in the scientific endeavour for only when the incarnation is placed at the pinnacle of the structure of knowledge does the rest of knowledge become intelligible and rational. Boff, by contrast, is not concerned with the rationality of knowledge but with the coherence of knowledge. That is to say, he is concerned not with knowledge itself but with the object of knowledge, namely the condition of human beings in the world. In his view, the incarnation does not so much complete knowledge by adding to it as complete it by being part of it. In other words, for Boff all knowledge incorporates the incarnation because the incarnation is present in all human activity, whereas for Torrance, the incarnation is present only at the pinnacle of the structure of knowledge and not immediately at all levels of the hierarchy.

The notion of integral liberation, which emerges out of Vatican II and the Medellin and Puebla documents, suggests that theology is related to all other academic disciplines and has a relevant interest in all aspects of life. In a commentary on the

[19] A similar process has occurred following Vatican II, in a variety of Roman Catholic liturgies which have been adapted to local, usually African pre-Christian rites, see for example: A. Barrett SPS, 'Incarnating the Church in Turkana', *Spearhead* 52, 1978; and P. Tovey, 'Inculturation: the Eucharist in Africa', *Alcuin/Grove Liturgical Study* 7, 1988. Boff argues that inculturation can be seen as an attempt by a place at liberating itself from another place, see L. Boff & V. Elizondo, 'Theologies of the Third World', *Concilium* 199, 1988, L. Boff and V. Elizondo (Ed).

Puebla Document in *Salvation and Liberation* Boff describes integral liberation as being concerned with all possible forms of liberation which might be conceived. It is maintained that any form of liberation must necessarily have a theological dimension. Vatican II, having broadened the notion of salvation to include not only traditional understandings of salvation history, but also more contemporary notions of anthropology and eschatology permits salvation to be defined as " ... a process of liberation *from* situations that contradict God's salvific design."[20]

Boff adopts a conservative approach to the texts with which Gottwald deals but nevertheless stresses the need for theology and sociology to work together in considering the nature of Israel when it saw itself as the People of God.[21] Therefore, in his view economics, sociology, anthropology, history, geography and so on must all have theological components because these disciplines are concerned with human beings. Furthermore, theology must also concern itself with economics, sociology and so on because it too is concerned with human beings. Place is therefore an important theological topic simply because it is an important topic. Places impinge upon human beings and, consequently, they are an appropriate subject of theological discourse. Making the content of these disciplines theological requires establishing the relevance of

[20] L. & C. Boff, *Salvation and Liberation: In Search of a Balance Between Faith and Politics*, Trans. R. Barr, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1985, p. 18.

[21] See the use of Gottwald's study of the land allotment traditions of Judges in *The Tribes of Yahweh*, SCM, London, 1979, discussed at the end of Part One as an example of the plausibility of place acting as an agent.

discussion about God in the subject matter of these disciplines. We will see later that Boff maintains that God is present in the world in a variety of ways which makes all discourse about human beings have a theological element and to be of interest to theology.

In his discussion of the sociological primacy of the people and the theological primacy of their self-awareness as the People of God, Boff makes few specific references to the territoriality of the People of God. His discussion of the covenant omits one of its primary elements - the land. The agency of the land is of great importance. Agency here means, as elsewhere that the land may act as a subject towards human beings. Boff does not have a well developed notion of the possibility of the land acting as agent in the way in which Gottwald suggests that the land acted in the formation of the settlement community of Israel.

Vatican II has sought to reflect the particularity of the cultural context of the contemporary Christian and has adapted the term 'People of God' to describe the world wide historical community of the faithful which, with its Old Testament reference, implies election and particularity. Boff summarises the teaching of *Lumen Gentium* in this way:

> For Vatican II the People of God only comes into existence when communities have a historical existence, the fruit of the incarnation of faith in the midst of the characteristics of each people. This is not a formal concept devoid of historical materiality. It seeks to be a real and not a metaphorical designation of the Church; but for it to be a real designation there has to be the real

> historical existence of a people which through its manner of organising itself in its Christian faith emerges as the People of God.[22]

5.3.2 Place and Particularity

Boff's apparent lack of a territorial or spatial element to his incarnational theology is a common strand in much of his writing. His notion of the Kingdom is temporal not spatial. He writes

> The Kingdom is certainly the Christian utopia that lies at the culmination of history. But it must be repeated that this Kingdom is found in the process of history wherever justice and fraternity are fostered and wherever the poor are respected and recognised as shapers of their own destiny. All individuals, institutions and activities directed toward those ideals favoured by the historical Jesus are bearers of that Kingdom.[23]

It is the "process of history" which concerns Boff and the "wherever" is the context within which "justice and fraternity are fostered" and "the poor are recognised as shapers of their own destiny". This appears to be a non-placed location of the Kingdom of God. The spatial context of integral liberation is of no consequence providing that liberation tending to justice is occurring.

This impression is mistaken however, and it is mistaken for two reasons. Firstly, as we shall see later, Boff does refer to the land in addressing the image of the People of God as a model for understanding the church. Secondly however, it is mistaken because of Boff's use of language. For Boff, to be historical is to be

[22] L. Boff, 'A Theological Examination of the Terms "People of God" and "Popular Church"', in *Concilium* 176, 1984, p. 93.

[23] L. Boff, *Church, Charism and Power*, SCM, London, ET 1985, p. 10

engaged in the ordinary realities of living. Place is not therefore a neutral backcloth it is a part of everyday life; it is historical. Place cannot therefore, be termed an independent sterile fact, but an event, like historical events, in that it is part of the warp and weft of all life, an integral element in the complex web of interrelationships which we have described above.

In this way, Boff particularises and relativises place. It is particularised because each place is a unique phenomenon occurring at a unique time. This place, which is different to any other place, contributes to each unique event in the historical process; historical being understood as a spatio-temporal referent and not simply as a temporal term. In other words, each event is the coming together of a unique set of variables into a particular configuration. This coming together is a dynamic process and place is one of the variables. It is relativised because place is part of a web of interacting forces each element of which affects and is affected by the others. Each element therefore is constantly subject to change and any summary of what constitutes a particular element, place or time, must necessarily be provisional.

His discussion here can be seen in terms of an intersection of horizontal 'events' in the spatio-temporal realm which involve a community with the vertical dimension of the incarnation which turns that community into the event of the People of God. Both Torrance and Boff are, in this sense, realists. However, as we shall

see below, discussion of this intersection reveals as much about the differences between them as it shows a degree of agreement.

5.3.3 Place, Particularity and the Church

We have seen above that Boff understands the Kingdom in terms of the presence of "activities directed towards ... ideals favoured by the historical Jesus". Apart from questions concerning the historical Jesus which do not concern us here, there is much in this statement about the nature and manner of God's self-revelation and presence. Traditional post-Trent Roman Catholic ecclesiology has understood the Church as "the guardian and conserver of revelation".[24] Boff however, following the lead of Vatican II, and while not wishing to dismiss the notion of the institutional church, is anxious to redefine the manner in which the church is present in the world.

By doing so, Boff changes the way in which God and the church are seen to be present but remains remarkably conservative in his understanding of the relationship between God and the church. That is to say, the indissoluble link between God and the church is preserved; where the church is, there is God and vice versa. What Boff introduces is the explicit suggestion that the church which is linked to God in this manner is not to be confused with the institutional Church which may, on occasion, be thwarting the realisation of liberation and thus standing in the way of the Kingdom

[24] A. Dulles, *Models of the Church*, Gill and MacMillan, Dublin, 2nd Ed. 1988, p. 177.

of God. He suggests that

> In a theological sense, it can be said that the Church is the encounter of the community of the faithful, an encounter prompted by Christ and the Spirit to celebrate, deepen faith, and to discuss the questions of the community in the light of the Gospel. Church, in this primitive sense, is more an *event* that may take place beneath an oak tree, in the house of some coordinator, or within a church building, rather than an *institution* with all of its goods, services, laws, doctrines, ministries, and historical continuity.[25]

He is eager to affirm the particularity of the experience of the event and is in agreement with Torrance in his desire to show that the place of the intersection lies in the incarnation. But, as we have suggested, the manner in which Boff and Torrance understand the incarnation to be made manifest and perceived is very different. Neither understands the Kingdom of God to be attached to any particular place (in distinction to any other particular place) *per se* because places point to the Kingdom. It is the manner in which places point to the Kingdom which interests us and which separates Torrance and Boff.

As we have seen, Torrance uses the incarnation to show how the spatio-temporal realm is constituted and, through the notion of noetic possibility, how human beings are linked in epistemological terms, to both the contingent reality of the spatio-temporal realm and to the self-presentation of divine reality. By contrast, Boff is attempting to incarnate secular thought and activity by locating divine activity in events within the historical process of the spatio-

[25] L. Boff, *Church Charism and Power*, SCM, London, ET 1985, p. 154-5.

temporal realm. He understands God, and therefore the church, to be present wherever "justice and fraternity are fostered" and "the poor are recognised as shapers of their own destiny". This does not depend upon an awareness of the presence of God in the midst of the activity wherein he dwells. Indeed God will be present in an act simply because of the nature of the act. This sacramental rather than noetic notion of the presence of God requires acts by human beings which recognise or make possible the presence of God. Here God is present in places where liberation occurs.

Boff develops his theme in an analysis of the notion of the 'People of God' - a concept which lies at the heart of post-Vatican II ecclesiology. He suggests that the command to the Israelites to dwell as the People of God in a particular place, the promised land, was a command which gave identity, value and meaning to the Israelite tribes. In the New Testament too, " ... the new People of God was made up of the union and communion of a vast network of Christian communities spread throughout various peoples".[26] Consequently, for Boff, the People of God are not a fact but an event. In other words, "... they result from a process of communitary productive forces".[27] The People of God are therefore more of a social phenomenon than the institutional expression of a hierarchical Church. In Boff's view, the enthusiasm of Vatican II for the image of the People of God as a way of describing the Church

[26] L. Boff, ' The Terms "People of God" and "Popular Church"', in *Concilium* 176, 1984, p. 91.

[27] L. Boff, ' The Terms "People of God" and "Popular Church"', in *Concilium* 176, 1984, p. 93.

means that

> The model of the Church as a perfect society under the hegemony of the clergy, leading to the pathology of clericalism, is giving way more and more to Church as a communications network structured round the participation of everyone, producing a true People of God.[28]

The event-fullness of the People of God means that the Church is not an absolute and objective institution but a contingent, subjective and evolving network of relationships. That is to say, in Boff's interpretation of the phrase, that the Church is located in particular places among particular people where the liberating work of God is seen and undertaken. It is therefore subjective in the sense that it is dependent upon the activity of people for its existence and it exists only where people are participating in the liberating work of God. It is not the universal institution of traditional Catholic ecclesiology which is, in its very being, the presence of God. Thus for Boff

> For the Church to become the People of God ... it must, primarily, *bring into focus those characteristics that form a people: consciousness, community, and practices designed to enhance consciousness and the possibilities of participation and communion within the community.*[29]

This approach to the Church, born out of the insights of Vatican II and Boff's view of the interrelationship of theology with the social sciences is entirely consonant with his other theological

[28] L. Boff, ' The Terms "People of God" and "Popular Church"', in *Concilium* 176, 1984, p. 94.

[29] L. Boff, ' The Terms "People of God" and "Popular Church"', in *Concilium* 176, 1984, p. 93.

concerns. For Boff, the spatio-temporal particularity of the incarnation is not to be seen as a qualitatively new act of God, but as a distinct but essentially similar expression of love towards his creation.

> ... the eternal Son is at work within creation from its earliest moment, making creatures express their nature as sons and daughters. This Son is supremely at work in taking on the humanity of Jesus of Nazareth, in whom he communicates himself completely. The filial structure that pervades the whole of creation took on its most definite and supreme form in Jesus of Nazareth, because from all eternity he was planned and willed to be the vehicle for the full coming of the Son to his creation; this is the mystery of the incarnation.[30]

The incarnation is primarily the overflowing of the love of the Trinity beyond itself with creative activity which provides other beings with whom to be in open communion. The task of the Son, resulting from human sinfulness and seen most clearly in the spatio-temporality of the incarnation

> ... consists in this immense process of liberation from the sin that hides the glory of the Father. So, as the Word goes on bringing in the Kingdom of life, liberty, reconciliation and peace, he redeems the sonship of all created beings, particularly of human beings in the position of captivity in which they now find themselves.[31]

Consequently, the Son is present in the world in a sacramental fashion as the mediator of liberation. It is not therefore, true to say that God is present in the world sacramentally *per se* , but only in the context of liberation, however broadly defined. In other words, human activity which furthers the liberation of human

[30] L. Boff, *Trinity and Society*, Burns and Oates, Tunbridge, ET 1988, p. 187.

[31] L. Boff, *Trinity and Society*, Burns and Oates, Tunbridge, ET 1988, p. 188.

beings is, by virtue of the incarnation, divine activity, whereas activity which is neutral (if such can be said to exist) and that which contributes to the lack of freedom of particular human beings in particular places at particular times is simply human activity. Such human activity unrelated to and in opposition to the divine activity present in liberation processes, remains firmly human activity. It is subject to the futility and sin of unredeemed and enslaved humanity. To put it another way, acts which further liberation are a sign of the presence of God.

5.3.4 Physical Location and Particularity

For Boff therefore, as for Torrance, God is not present in all places at all times, for a human activity is required to make the presence of God real in a particular place and at a particular time. For Torrance the particularity of the presence of God in the spatio-temporal realm is a problem because all particularity is a problem. While beginning with the event located at particular spatio-temporal co-ordinates, Torrance moves quickly to the significance of particular events within the general, universal rationality of the universe. A similar movement from particular to general was seen in the application of phenomenologically derived data by geographers in chapter two. The incarnation is more significant for its function as the rationality behind the universe than for its uniqueness as an event at one particular time and place. Furthermore, the place and time of the presence of God are not central to Torrance's position for it is in the noetic act that God is present.

Boff is able to provide the theoretical tools for dealing with the particular nature of place. He wishes to begin with the People of God in a particular place with particular liberation promoting human actions. He also proposes an incarnationally based sacramental theology for understanding the presence of God at a particular instant of space-time. This presence is real, but as with Torrance, it is not a presence in place but a presence in human action.

5.4 CONCLUSION

Having shown how places operate in Part One we have seen in this chapter that it is possible to speak both of the relations between objects in non-substantive terms and to conceive of the presence of God in the world. Torrance argues that modern science requires us to hold that objects are related to one another in such a manner as to be defined by their relations. A relation is not an explanation of origins but a statement of being. Further, the location of all things is described by reference to the four dimensional spatio-temporal realm. All knowledge however, must be interpreted by the ultimate truth of the incarnation and the rigidity imposed by this way of locating theology is extended into the account of the way God relates to his creation. Having created and acted, supremely in the incarnation, it is only through a mental response to God's love that his presence in the world can be said to be realised. There is therefore, little sense of God being present in his creation in a way which is independent of human activity.

Boff recognises the power of the particularity of being located here as opposed to there. He has worked for the right to develop a theology which is particular to the place in which he finds himself and which consequently, is perceived by some to be a threat to the universality of the church. He locates theology within knowledge rather than at its pinnacle and this could be a picture of the way in which God is present in creation. However, beyond the development of a regional theology, Boff has little sense of the power of the land as a consciousness-shaping agent and tends to locate God only in the liberating activity of human beings. Ways in which places operate other than through social organisation and institutional forms are not given much attention. Consequently, chapter six is concerned to establish the ontology of place to which Torrance drew attention and to suggest that God is present in creation simply because he creates.

A RELATIONAL ONTOLOGY FOR THE THEOLOGY OF PLACE

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this sixth chapter we will describe a relational ontology which can provide a framework for a theology of place. In the previous chapter we have seen both the development of relational ideas applied to theology and a substantively conceived theological system. In this chapter we will follow two different routes to a relational ontology which is non-substantive in nature. McFadyen, developing a Christian theory of social relations, applies an ontology based on speculation about the operation of the Trinity to human relations with other human beings. He uses a model of the individual as a relational being for whom the sense of self-identity and continuity, the self, is a construct which enables the individual to make sense of the complex relations which constitute the locus of one's being.

Moltmann, by contrast, argues for a non-substantive, relational theology of creation which, by implication, considers the relations between all created things. He has been commenting for some time on the shortcomings of many theological accounts of the created order. He is unhappy that creation is often seen as completed and that created things are treated as objects. We will end the chapter with a critique of his theology of creation which seeks to be particular, relative and non-substantive. The language which McFadyen and Moltmann employ is not the same but the

principles used are closely related.

In chapter five both Torrance and Boff conclude that the presence of God is dependent upon the activity of human beings. McFadyen devotes little time to relations between human beings and physical things or places but argues that human relations are made whole by being transformed by the presence of God. At the invitation of the individual and with the intention of transformation God becomes present and makes possible whole relations. Moltmann however suggests that God is present through his creative presence in what he has made and that the presence of an immanent God is the access point to the reality of a transcendent God. Here the presence of God is not dependent upon some form of human activity but is simply a given, a part of the way things are.

We begin with a brief consideration of the work of Dussel, a South American writer who uses a genuinely relational ontology in an account of the presence of God in and through the operation of communities of people. He merges economy with essence and argues that to be a human being is to engage in relations with other human beings. The suggestion that there is a part of me which remains unaffected by my relationships or which is not perceived by a person with whom I relate is for Dussel a nonsensical suggestion. I exist in relation and it is through my relations that I not only have my being but that I am the way I am. A community is not formed or created by human beings in the sense that they choose to exist in

community for the choice to not exist in community does not exist. Human beings must group together and can only exist by relating to one another.

6.2 DUSSEL: A NON-SUBSTANTIVE WAY FORWARD

6.2.1 The Development of a Relational Ontology

Dussel has taken more account than most of the need to establish a new ontology which recognises the mutual interdependence of all things. In the Introduction to *Ethics and Community*, he explains his methodology: "I shall proceed ... "from the simple to the complex" - that is, "from the abstract to the concrete".[1] In an earlier book maintaining that "the only locus of revelation is history" he goes on to say that to perceive this revelation one must look to concrete, particular history because that is where God chooses to reveal himself. To miss this or to look for generalised timeless and placeless truths, Dussel maintains, would be to miss God.[2] Despite the use of the term 'history' which is misleading in this context because it appears placeless, this is a particularist understanding of the way in which God reveals himself.

Dussel sees the presence of God in the world in a way related to Boff. However, he pursues the consequences of this understanding more fully than Boff and proposes a dynamic understanding of human beings and communities and their

[1] E. Dussel, *Ethics and Community*, 1986, Tr. R. Barr, Burns and Oates, Tunbridge Wells, ET 1988, p. 2.

[2] See E. Dussel, *History and the Theology of Liberation*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, ET 1976, p. 2.

relations with each other and with God. Dussel suggests for example that

> *praxis* or *practice* denotes any human act addressed to another human person; further, praxis denotes the very relationship of one person to another. Praxis is both act and relationship: "Those who believed lived as one." (Acts 2:44).[3]

Here Dussel combines action and relation. This has the effect of uniting intention, a mental act of an individual, with both the physical act of the individual, the intention enacted, and the result of the act upon someone else. In this way the two people involved are automatically in a relation. By virtue of the fact that action is occurring between two people they are inevitably in relation to one another.

A further effect of the combination of action and intention is the conflation of economy and essence. What one is and what one does become linked in such a way that it becomes possible to see one when observing the other. In other words when one observes an act one is also observing the being which is generating the act. When Dussel adds "Strictly speaking one is a person only when one is in a relationship of praxis",[4] he is saying that part of what it is to be a human being involves acting towards other people. Acting towards other people is a constituent part of being a person.

It is therefore impossible to conceive of a human being who

[3] E. Dussel, *Ethics and Community*, *ibid.*, p. 8

[4] E. Dussel, *Ethics and Community*, *ibid.*, p. 9.

is independent of other human beings. Consequently, a human being is a relational being. To posit the existence of a human being who is not relational in essence, as opposed to being in relationship with another human being, would be a contradiction. Being in a relationship has long been recognised as a characteristic of human activity. However, it has not been thought to be a feature of 'human being-ness' at an essential level. The implication of Dussel's position is that essence and economy cannot be distinguished because they are a single entity. In other words, actions arise out of what someone is and there is no distance between being and act. Therefore, to see the action which one takes is, to some degree, to see what one is.

6.2.2 The Implications of a Relational Ontology for Places

Dussel is saying that it is impossible to conceive of human beings existing in relation with other human beings at an ontological level. Because it is possible to conceive of human beings existing in this way, and only in this way, then all things which act as agents upon human beings, things like history, social organisation and physical objects can also be in relation with human beings. It is therefore possible to say that one's 'place' is a factor in determining what one is. Place here refers to any of the several understandings of place which have been discussed at length above.

Dussel however, is unwilling to take account of things as well

simply does not refer to the action of inanimate objects on human being. His argument, applied to our illustrations of the agency of inanimate objects, suggests that things act as 'subjects' on the human essence and not upon an outer layer which protects 'what really is' from change and provisionality. That is to say, what a human being is, is the point at which a complex variety of relations meet in a thinking and reasoning physical being. One of the most important sources for a set of relations is what constitutes the physical structure of a place, the social structure of a place and the complex cultural landscape of a place. The physical structure of the place contributes to the being of a particular human being. What a particular human being is, is in part a result of the relations between that human being and the place, which can act, therefore, in traditional language, as 'subject' towards what the human being is.

One's place, therefore, is that set of interrelationships which are unique to a particular person and which constitute a particular person. These include one's social position: a relative position open to interpretation and change. Here, being is influenced by the nature of the relations of which one is a part, the people with whom there is a relation and - and here the complexity of this way of understanding ontology is revealed - the nature of the relations of these people and the people with whom they are in relation. The process of socialisation discussed in chapter four is not one of appropriated social constructions for this implies a distance

between the individual being socialised and those from whom he learns his world view. Such a distance does not exist, for the individual's being is changed by his relations; he does not acquire a world view which is added on to what he already is.

They also include the structure of the place and the fact of the existence of the place. The subjectivity of these aspects of place has been illustrated in the appendix to Part One and can influence what a person is and be a very powerful influence in moulding group identity. Dussel chooses to refer only to human relations as constitutive of being but his argument holds nevertheless. It can be applied by analogy to all human relations even if they are with inanimate objects or with a 'world view' or cultural value.

6.3 McFADYEN: THE RELATIONAL NATURE OF HUMAN PERSONHOOD

6.3.1 The Development of a Relational Ontology by Analogy

McFadyen develops what he calls a "Christian theory of the individual in social relationships"[5]. He begins with observations about human behaviour and speculation about the nature of God. He argues that human beings are both dialogical and dialectical creatures in that a person is formed through social interaction and therefore is always in the process of being formed. He writes

> The communication may then be said to have informed the recipient, in so far as the recipient has been changed by it.[6]

[5] A. McFadyen, *The Call To Personhood*, CUP, Cambridge, 1990.

[6] A. McFadyen, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

> ... we are what we are in ourselves only through relation to others.[7]

In other words, as Dussel argues, a human being can only be conceived as a relational being, interacting with other human beings.

He uses the interactive, interpenetrative relations by which the individual identities of the persons of the Trinity are achieved as a model for the relations of human beings. He argues that

> Being a person means existing in relation. Personal identity or discreteness is not asocial, but the form of punctuation which both separates and links one to others.[8]

It is in the dialogical move towards the other that a person becomes an individual. To be an individual is to recognise that limits are placed on what one is, what one is able to do and what one will be. Only then is the individual able to see that it is in the relations with others that the individual is formed, and constantly reformed, and in the process of formation and reformation distinguished from those others with whom the individual is in relation. Only through dialogue can dialectic be achieved.

In social relations the interactions between human beings, each operating as an agent upon the others, form what it is to be a particular human being. An individual enters into social relations with a being already formed by a history of social relations.

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[7] A. McFadyen, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

[8] A. McFadyen, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

However, that identity is not fixed, it is fluid and dynamic and is open to reformation and recreation in new social relations. Therefore to be placed in a politically organised social environment is to be in an open nexus of relations between human beings in which all past relations and all present relations interact to reform the being and the self-identity of the individuals within the community.

One's being here is not located internally in a discrete 'self' which remains immune from the influence of events, people or places. Being is non-substantive in the sense that it is located in the relations which one has. What one is is located in the relations which extend from one's sense of self-identity to other things, to other people and to the past. The 'open nexus of relations' is where the being of any individual is to be found.

6.3.2 The Operation of Relational Ontology: Self-identity and Identity-in-Relation

It is however, a different matter to say that this is where I am to be found. 'I' exist in two different senses. The first is my sense of self-identity. This is what I am to myself. It is constantly changing because this 'self', which McFadyen terms 'deep self', is a product of my reflections, conscious and sub-conscious, on what 'I' am in the second sense. In this second sense 'I' am the relations I have with other people, other things and with the past. What I am will not be constant because it is partly dependent upon the things with which I am relating. For example, one relates in a different way to

one's family and to one's employer. This is not only my choice but is something which I feel constrained to do and something which I cannot help but do. Therefore what I am in this second sense is also fluid and open to change. It is external and it is variable. This does not however, make it less important or any less 'me'. Externality does not lead to superficiality. McFadyen describes the distinction between deep 'self' and local 'self' like this:

> There is ... a continuity between deep 'self' and local 'self'. This is a matter of continuity between public and private and between the particular appearance in a relation and the enduring identity which transcends particular relations.[9]

'Self' consistently appears in apostrophied form because for McFadyen

> There is no 'self' in itself, but only as it is with and for others. ... Personal integrity must be understood in terms of public appearance in communication through which the form of one's commitment (...) to oneself and others materialises, is experienced and may henceforth be expected by others.[10]

Human beings are beings in relation but clearly some sense of personal identity exists. The 'self' is a construct which has no material existence but which facilitates personal identity. It is through behaving as though I have a self that I am 'myself'. This imaginary core makes it possible to speak of 'me'. It does this because it is 'experientially transcendent'. In other words, its existence cannot be verified by empirical observation because

[9] A. McFadyen, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

[10] A. McFadyen, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

there is nothing substantive to observe. However, the organisational effects of the self can be observed empirically. For McFadyen, then, "Selfhood does not indicate a substance but an organisational process."[11] and "A 'self' theory enables personal centredness"[12].

This theory of an "experientially transcendent structure of organised and continuous identity" which is merely a construct and has no material existence appears to bear striking similarities with existential theories of the self. However, the difference here is that it is the self which is considered a construct in order to account for the reality of the relations between two human beings and to make it possible to locate being externally using a non-substantive ontology.

6.3.3 Physical Place in Relational Ontology

McFadyen does not develop his argument to include a consideration of relations between human beings and inanimate things. He does not therefore, discuss the possibility or the nature of relations between human beings and physical locations. However, it is clear that the ontology which he uses to describe the nature of social relations may also be used to describe the nature of relations human beings have with inanimate objects.

These objects, as we have seen, can act as agents and are able to influence what human beings will become. We have seen in

[11] A. McFadyen, *op. cit.*, p. 100
[12] A. McFadyen, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

the introduction to this thesis that where one lives will set limits upon what one can do and that this will, in turn, affect what one will be. A place can exist in exactly the same way as McFadyen describes the being of a human being. A place is necessarily in relation with other places, with the history of that and other places and with any living things which are a part of that place. Amongst such living things we may also number human beings. A place can be considered to have a variety of local 'selves' which are presented in relations and a deep 'self' which is the 'spirit' of a place.[13]

When the language of 'self' is applied to inanimate objects it needs to be remembered that the self is a construct which is used to account for the sense of self-identity and the perception of the identity of others and it does not refer to any materially real thing. Consequently, although never reflective, a place can be said to have a 'self' for it is both a unified entity and it can present itself in a variety of different ways in different relations. A particular place cannot present itself in an infinite variety of ways. It is limited by itself, its history, its geography, its sociology, and so on, that is to say, by its present relations. These prescribing limitations contribute to a sense of identity which can be termed deep 'self'. However, as with human beings, a place will present itself in relations, indeed it will be itself in relations, but these relations will be different and will depend upon the nature of the relation and the nature of the things

[13] The notion of the 'spirit' of place has been widely discussed. See for example, the work of Pocock.

or person with whom the place is relating. The variety of local 'selves' will not be infinite but their number will be considerable.

6.3.4 The Place of God in Relational Ontology

McFadyen then, provides us with an explanation of human relations which is able not only to explain social placing but which can also be used by analogy to explain the operation of geographical, physical places. For McFadyen, God is present in the transformation of human relations. God is a model for perfect relations which are seen in action in the being of the Trinity and in the obedience of the incarnate Word.

> Christ is therefore the place where divine address and undistorted human response coincide, the place where God's call and proper human response meet. Christ is therefore the enacting of the image in its fullness. Jesus is the human person properly for God and others, and therefore properly for Himself - both his relations and his identity are undistorted. To be fully in God's image, to make a right response to God and others, is therefore to be conformed to Christ.[14]

Here we not only see that it is in being "properly for God and others" that one becomes properly oneself, but also that God is present in the world by virtue of his historical incarnation and through the existence of properly constituted relations.

Unlike Torrance's explanation, this is not a static notion of the incarnation, nor is it a notion which replaces the particularity of this relation or that relation by relations in general. Furthermore, it is not

[14] A. McFadyen, *op. cit.*, p. 46-47.

a notion which locates the presence of God in human action and in human actions alone for the Spirit is present in relations. However, a human response appears to be necessary for the transformation of relations and it is in this transformation that the presence of God is made real.

> Christian faith, however, speaks not only of human incapacity, but of divine empowerment in these things. The Christian language of community and of redemption can only achieve its full meaning in the kingdom - the community where the true meaning of communal and personal life will be perfected and lived out in the structures of intersubjectivty and formal reciprocal co-intention. This vision of community and Christian talk about it comes from the future, as does God's creative-redemptive activity which calls us towards it. We may therefore be empowered by this future as it is made available to us primarily (but only primarily) through God's communication re-presented and mediated to us through the institutions of the Church. But appropriate response on our part remains necessary and, because the intention is of a dialogue partnership, whatever empowerment we may receive in the spirit of the future cannot take away our personal and collective responsibility for and towards it.[15]

God is present empowering the transformation of relations but the manner of his relation with human beings is through a call from the future. Furthermore, in order to actualise the presence of the kingdom through transformed dialogue a human response is inevitably required.

The presence of God occurs here in two ways. It exists 'vertically' between the individual and God in a transformed relation with God. The relation takes the form of a call from God to which the

[15] A. McFadyen, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

individual responds. It also exists in transformed relations between individuals. Here the presence of God comes as a call to establish a transformed relation in which he is then present in so far as that relation foreshadows the nature of relations in the kingdom. With this ontology a call can constitute a 'real' presence but there is little sense of God dwelling on earth in the midst of a fallen world. He simply issues a call and empowers those who choose to respond to the call. By extending the ontology to include all things animate and inanimate and by arguing that God is present by the indwelling of the Spirit as creator it is possible to argue that God is present in places. Consequently human beings relate to God in and through their relations with places and with one another as well as directly with God as the transforming Other in the way that McFadyen describes.

6.4 MOLTMANN: THE INDWELLING OF THE CREATOR GOD

6.4.1 Introduction

The German theologian Moltmann has, amongst other things, tried to show that traditional Protestant understandings of creation have had several problems inherent within them. In the final section of this chapter we will offer a critique of his analysis of these understandings in order to show that the 'natural created order' is not only an agent in relations with human beings but is also the locus of the presence of God. It will then be possible to argue that the relational ontology developed by McFadyen and

applied to the physical world can also be applied to relations with God who indwells those things which he has created. We must begin with a brief summary of traditional Protestant views of creation.

6.4.2 The Establishment of the Ontology: A Theology of Creation

6.4.2.1 Traditional Protestant Attitudes: Creation as Object

Throughout this thesis we have maintained that it is important to understand that objects, animate and inanimate alike, relate to one another and that what these objects can be said to be is located in these relations. Much modern thought may be said to have its roots in a deistic Protestant tradition and does not find it easy to share such an understanding. The issue of place reveals the tension between this tradition and newer models of interdependence arising out of changes in scientific models.

Places, we have argued, are where human beings meet with one another, with the physical world and with God. They are the context within which relations occur as well as being part of the complex web of relations themselves. Traditional Protestant doctrines of creation have often been in danger of becoming deistic rather than theistic. God is acknowledged as the creator of the universe who, having completed the act of creation then only deals directly with his people. Such involvement as there is in the world, which is often perceived as hostile, is frequently the 'supernatural' act of God revealing himself to his people in history. It is this

theology of creation which informs Torrance's view that God relates to his people through noetic possibility and not in sacramental presence. It may also be linked to the marked reluctance amongst theologians to talk of God relating to anything other than human beings.

This has not actually been the case in Protestant theology as Brunner states:

> Now the recognition of a divine preservation of the world, as distinct from His creation, does not exclude the truth that God is still actively and creatively at work in a world which He has already created, and which He preserves.[16]

However, the Lutheran tradition contains an emphasis on God as distinct from his creation for he is seen to exert no creative energy following the completion of the act of creation.[17] Even Calvin's theology, which allows for creation *ex nihilo* in and through time,

[16] E. Brunner, *Dogmatics Vol. II: The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, Lutterworth Press, Lutterworth, 1952, p. 34.

[17] For example, Luther translates Romans 8 as "For we know that every creature groans and travails in pain, even til now." and makes little reference to the creation except to offer tacit support for a popular theory of the day: "that, in the first seven days when the world was created, the sun was much brighter than it is now, but that it became darker by fault of the sin of man who fell into sin on the seventh or sixth day; they say also that, in the world to come, it will be seven times brighter than it was then. This opinion cannot be proved from Scripture, though in a certain sense it can be sustained." *Library of Christian Classics Vol. XV: Luther on Romans*, ed. W. Pauck, SCM, London, 1961, p. 238-9.

tends only to deal with human beings.[18]

The dangers of understanding the creation as 'object' are to be seen in Brunner's unintentional isolation of the individual.

> The Christian statement on Creation is not a theory of the way in which the world came into being - whether once for all, or in continuous evolution - but it is an "existential" statement. In His revelation the Lord meets me, my Lord, as the Creator, as my Creator and the Creator of all things.[19]

Althaus takes this approach to its existential conclusion:

> The statement about the creation of the world is not theory - not a hypothesis to explain the world. It is personal, existential knowledge ... the assurance about the world as creation is based on God's encounter with me.[20]

The discussion in earlier chapters concerning the limitations of the idealist conception of subject and object is central to our argument here. A theological doctrine of the creation cannot reduce the understanding of belief in creation to the existential knowledge of an individual. To do this would be to suggest that the individual is

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[18] Creation clearly has a function for Calvin and that is to *point* man to God. "Undoubtedly, were one to attempt to speak in due terms of the inestimable wisdom, power, justice and goodness of God, in the formation of the world, no grace or splendour of diction could equal the greatness of the subject. Still there can be no doubt that the Lord would have has constantly occupied with such holy meditation". "The other course, which has a closer relation to faith, remains to be considered - *viz.* that while we observe how God has destined all things for our good and salvation, we at the same time feel his power and grace, both in ourselves and in the great blessings which he has bestowed upon us; thence stirring up ourselves to confidence in him, to invocation, praise and love. Moreover, as I lately observed, the Lord himself, by the very order of creation, has demonstrated that he created all things for the sake of man." *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, J Calvin, trans. H. Beveridge, J. Clarke, London, 1962, I xiv 21 and 22, p. 156, 157.

[19] E. Brunner, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

[20] P. Althaus quoted in J. Moltmann, *God in Creation*, SCM, London, ET 1985, p. 36.

an isolated entity who is more important than and independent of creation. By this we mean that, if we are to agree with Althaus we are forced to concede that the individual is more important than belief in creation for it is only in the existential knowledge of an individual that such a belief can be said to exist. Thus the individual must also be independent of creation for the status of creation as creation is consequent upon the content of the existential knowledge of the individual. A doctrine of creation must refer to the world in such a way as neither to elevate human subjectivity nor denigrate the subjectivity of the 'natural', that is to say, the non-cognitive or non-human world.

6.4.2.2 Contemporary Ecological Attitudes: Creation as Mutual Subject

As we have seen in earlier chapters, it has been the tendency of Western thought for several centuries not only to denigrate the subjectivity of nature but to deny it altogether. Nature is perceived not as a subject acting in its own right upon other objects but simply as an object upon which human experiment and within which human discovery can take place. Ultimately, it was envisaged that mastery over the object 'nature' would be obtained. The increasingly popular observation that this goal is false coincided with the recognition that it is also illusory and that such mastery cannot be achieved.

This popular observation is beginning to receive

philosophical and theological undergirding. Clark argues that

> My being and my welfare cannot be disentangled from the being and welfare of the created universe. The living world ... is like "the federation or community of interdependent organs and tissues that goes to make up [a physician's] patient".[21]

Clark's language makes it clear that he is affirming the subjectivity of both human beings and the created world for they each impinge upon the other. That is to say, it is his view that human beings and the natural world both act as subjects upon each other, for each is partly formed by the other. A more thoroughgoing way of stating this is to say human beings and the natural world are in relation with one another and that the interdependency which is predicated by these relations is so fundamental as to be at the level of ontology. What I am is determined by my relations with human beings and with the natural world.

His use of a medical illustration is significant. Moltmann also uses medical practice to illustrate how the "calamitous dichotomy between the subjectivity of human beings and the objective world of 'mere things'"[22] is a false way of viewing the universe. Moltmann comments that in a medical surgery the subject undertaking treatment confronts a subject undergoing treatment. In other words, "the hard and fast distinction between human being and nature cannot be applied to the human being himself."[23] Moltmann argues

[21] S. Clark, 'Animals, Ecosystems and the Liberal Ethic', Vol. 70, *The Monist*, 1987, p. 126.

[22] J. Moltmann, *God in Creation*, SCM, London, ET 1985, p. 35.

[23] J. Moltmann, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

here that the patient and the surgeon are in a relationship with one another in which each is dependent upon the other. It is often thought that the surgeon is a subject who operates upon an unconscious object, the patient. This is not the case for the patient has agreed to undergo treatment. The patient therefore enables the surgeon to act. Without the activity of the patient, functioning as a subject, the surgeon would not be able to operate. Furthermore, the patient allows himself to become an object in the hands of the doctor. Thus both parties function as subject and object at some stage in the lengthy relationship. Each is forced to allow the other to act as subject while he remains passive as object.

Although Moltmann retains the misleading traditional language of subject and object he is making the same point as McFadyen: relations between human beings occur at the level of being and that being resides in the relations. However, Moltmann takes the debate an important step further with his observations that it is nature which is subject and the human being is a subjective sub-set of nature. This observation is not new. Clark refers to the pithy nineteenth century saying that

> If men spit upon the ground they spit upon themselves. Man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand of it. Whatever he does to the web he does to himself.[24]

It is of interest to us for two reasons. Firstly, it suggests that human beings and nature are related ontologically for each determines, in part, what the other is. This is a summary of the importance of place.

[24] S. Clark, *op. cit.*, p. 126-7.

The being of persons is determined, in part, and probably in very large part, by the 'place' which they occupy. We have seen a number of ways in which one's place can be defined. We are suggesting, following McFadyen, that one's place, understood existentially, socio-economically and geographically, is a fundamental statement about one's relations. Therefore 'being placed' is about one's location in 'the web of life' and not, as others might suggest, to do with decisions which a free individual night have made.

Secondly, it is of interest to us because it affirms the importance of the particular over and against the general. If we are concerned with relations in a complex network then we will be concerned with particular relations between particular things. We have maintained throughout that places are particular, they are unique locations in time and space with a unique impact on each of the things upon which they impinge and with which they are related. To be placed is to be located at a particular point in time and space in the web of life.

There are two elements to Moltmann's argument. Firstly, he relies heavily on Bloch's philosophy of nature in which, following Spinoza, human beings are understood to be part of nature, albeit an exceptional and unique part. He summarises Bloch thus

> In the human being she certainly concentrates all her energies into what Bloch poetically calls her 'supreme flowering'. But she none the less remains the subject, and

never becomes the object of the subject 'human being'.[25]

Secondly, he recognises the scientific observation that systems are open and are often unpredictable by their very nature. Consequently, it is not possible to conceive of a discrete entity, for all things in the universe are, to some degree, dependent upon all other things. From these observations Moltmann develops the notion of mutual subjectivity.

To be placed is to be part of a very wide and complex network of relations which are dynamic by nature. This network is of such complexity and fluidity however, that it is impossible to understand precisely all the relations in which a person or thing is involved at any one time and place. To be placed therefore, is to be subject to a variety of forces which are not only beyond the control of the subject but are also, on occasion, beyond the consciousness of the subject, and which must remain so because of their complexity. Similarly however, all things function not only as the object of unknown influences but also as their subject, changing them in one way or another.

Moltmann argues, with respect to his ecological agenda, that

> If the modern metaphysics of subjectivity is to be made responsible for the estranging objectification of nature, then the new self-interpretation of men and women must be founded upon a non-subjectivistic metaphysics. If the centralistic buildup of modern industries has a destructive effect on the environment, then the new interpretation of the world of human beings must provide the foundation for a non-centralistic culture. The Cartesian 'subject'

[25] J. Moltmann, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

> metaphysics was just as centralistic a theory about the world as the Aristotelian metaphysics of substance. Both can only be done away with by means of a relational metaphysics, based on the mutual relativity of human beings and the world.[26]

If attention is restricted to the subject, it becomes difficult to account for the existence of the object. Indeed, it may even be impossible to do so, for the object can only be said to exist in so far as a subject interacts with it. In the sense then, that the existence of the object cannot be established, a Cartesian metaphysics is non-realist. As we have seen, Moltmann suggests replacing subjectivistic and centralistic metaphysics with a relational ontology which firstly, is realist and assumes the existence of the other and which secondly, is particular and recognises that being is established by particular and unique relations with particular and unique things at particular and unique times and places.

6.4.2.3 Mutual Subjectivity :The Objectivity Assessed

Moltmann's notion of mutual subjectivity is a way of accounting for the existence of the other, and more importantly, of accounting for the subjectivity of the other - a suggestion which appears to be a contradiction. Because of the ambiguities of the language we might ask whether or not this is a truly relational metaphysics. The problem is this: if mutual subjectivity proceeds by two subjects agreeing at various times to forgo their right to function as a subject in the relationship in favour of the subjectivity of the other then there are a number of ways in which a proper relationship cannot be said

[26] J. Moltmann, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

to exist. In such a relationship each subject continues to understand itself as a subject, even though it knows that other things and people also function as subjects, that is to say, even though the metaphysics claims to be realist. Furthermore, it is implied that the subject is able to choose when to function not as the subject which it is, but as the object it is not. The objective state therefore, is only temporary, is not part of the subject's being in the same way that its subjectivity is, and is entered into in a deliberate and calculating manner, although not necessarily in its own interests.

In a 'proper' relationship neither subject nor object will exist because each being will be dependent upon each other being and self-awareness will not imply consciousness of primacy. Many if not most of the effects of other things will be unconscious, involuntary or unavoidable. What something is, understood in terms of relational metaphysics, will largely be beyond its control. Our concern is this: the language of mutual subjectivity does not appear to permit the full range of implication which the adoption of a relational metaphysics requires. However, it is our view that this is a problem of language; the mistake is not in the metaphysics but in the traditional language used to describe it.

Moltmann succeeds in the two most crucial areas. Firstly, he preserves the particularity of the existential interest in the subject. What is most important is the particular relation upon which attention is being focused. In chapter two we showed that existential

thinking, being derived from a Cartesian metaphysics has little sense of the reality of the other, but a high sense of the particularity of the existent subject. Here, Moltmann preserves the particularity of the subject by concerning himself with the nature of the relation which the subject has with the other.

Secondly, he stresses the reality of the other, be it another person, inanimate objects, or God, for this other is also seen as a subject. The language of subjectivity preserves particularity while remaining intelligible within an idealist framework. For the reason explained above we find it unnecessary and misleading to retain this language. McFadyen speaks of a relational ontology which is not concerned with subjects and objects but with mutually interdependent and highly fluid beings in which being is located in relations. This remains particularist because what constitutes a being can only be described in terms of the particularities of that being. Any change of time or place, of relation or experience, brings a change of the being. It is also a realist understanding of being because the being of any thing is defined in terms of the things with which it is related.

6.4.2.4 The Relation Between the Particular and the Universal

If a being is defined in terms of its particularity, that is to say, in terms of the range of relations by which it is constituted at any particular time, then that being is also distinguished by its particularity. It is in its particularity that its uniqueness is located.

Certain relations are shared with other human beings. All solids share a manner of relating to other objects by virtue of their solidity. All the members of a particular species or a particular place will be likely to have similarities in certain relations. But such similarities or ways in which relations operate are not to be confused with an Aristotelian or Cartesian understanding of being in terms of properties which determine the variations of the individual from the norm. In such an ontology one's place in the web of relations is dependent upon and consequent upon the type of being which one is. It is a far less dynamic ontology in which change cannot be said to happen to what is really important but rather to the peripheral properties through which being is manifested.

We wish to suggest that it is the particularity of any being which reveals similarity between the 'place' of any two beings. Commonality is discovered through the apparent juxtaposition of beings within the web of relations. It is thus consequent upon the particularity of being. It is not defined at the outset and modified by relatively trivial variations from the universally agreed norm. This ontology has the effect of making the discovery of universality secondary to the description of particularity. Previously, definitions of universality have been proposed which have left room for the observation of particularities which do not impinge upon the central definition of what something is.

Consequently, universality is located in particularity. It is only

because something is given particular attention that it can become in some sense universal. Thus Moltmann argues that the incarnation is only of universal significance because God became a man and not Man. To maintain that God became Man would be in accordance with dominant universalist philosophies. However, while it is a claim that the incarnation was to do with that which every human being shares, namely 'human being-ness', this is not what all human beings share. What is common to all human beings is the fact that all are particular human beings. It is the particularity of being which is universal and only in particularity can universality be found.

6.4.3 The Presence of God in Creation

The incarnation is of universal significance because God became a particular human being located at a particular point in the spatio-temporal realm. It is this that all human beings share. Thus, we are also able to maintain that God is present in particular place by virtue of the presence of the Spirit, the creative breath of life. It has been traditional to maintain that God is present in universal place if he is present in place at all. However, by analogy with the incarnation, it is clear that only by being present in a particular place can God be said to be present in all places.

In a similar way, it is possible to locate the transcendence of God, who dwells in particular place (and thereby in all places) in the immanence of God. By virtue of God's indwelling presence one can

locate God's transcendent non-dwelling. Moltmann argues that immanence and transcendence are not different concepts but opposites separated only by an infinitely small boundary point. This boundary is simply the point at which what is immanent, that is seen and known, becomes transcendent, that is unseen and unknown, or that point at which what is transcendent become immanent. This boundary point must vary; it is unquantifiable and is consequently very difficult to locate. A statement of how it is that what is immanent contains its own transcendence, and therefore of how the immanence of God is, in itself, the presence of the transcendent God is beyond the scope of this thesis, but it is, nevertheless, the direction in which a properly particular, realist and relational theology of place points.

The notion of the *Shekinah* describes the indwelling of God in a particular place. It expresses the truth that God is present in places, and in this way, dwells amongst people. The presence of God located precisely in the Ark of the Covenant and then in the Holy of Holies in the Temple, is an expression of universality through particularity. It is only because God dwells in one particular place that it is possible to say that he also dwells in all other places.

It is because God is the creator of all things that he is present in all things and that, therefore, all things are in relation to God. In summarising his intention in writing *God in Creation* Moltmann writes that

The trinitarian concept of mutual perichoresis is matched

> by an ecological doctrine of creation: the triune God not only stands over against his creation but also at the same time enters into it through his eternal spirit, permeates all things and through his indwelling brings about the community of creation.[27]

This is very similar to McFadyen's understanding of the presence of God in the transformed relations between human beings except that it is a presence in all things and a presence which does not require the prior action of human beings. It is a presence which is unconditional and which is guaranteed by virtue of the creative activity of God and not by the re-creative activity of either God or human beings.

This is a crucial difference and allows us to say that God is present in this place and therefore in all places by the indwelling of his spirit and that thereby to be in relationship with a place, however construed, is

[27] J. Moltmann, *History and the Triune God*, SCM, London, ET 1991, Trans. J. Bowden, p. 181.

to be in relation with God.

6.5 CONCLUSION

In conclusion we may say that the theology of place is an account of the relational nature of ontology - human and non-human being is constituted by relations with other things. These relations are what being is. A major part of what constitutes an individual is, therefore, the relations which that individual has with the ways in which the individual can be said to be placed. It has traditionally been easier to speak of one's social place - one's location in society; but place must involve 'natural' creation as well as the 'human constructs' of social organisation. Human beings are placed in relations to other human beings but also in relation to the land, to the physical structure of the locality and to other living organisms, both plants and animals. Furthermore, human beings are located in cultural groups, societies and institutions which regulate behaviour and influence attitudes to social and physical placing. These groups are also influenced by their relation to the land.

CONCLUSION

It is impossible to conceive of a human being who does not have relatives. All human beings must, by definition, have a father and a mother. To have parents is part of what it is to be a human being. There need not be a knowledge of who these people are but every human being must have had parents who existed at one time. Therefore all human beings are in relation with other human beings. At the very least every human being is in relation with his father or mother, that is, with the human beings who were involved in his conception and birth. Consequently, one cannot be said to exist in isolation; a human being is not a discrete individual who acts with complete control and independence. Even a human being who survived from birth in complete isolation from other human beings would retain a relation with his parents. The absence of present relations would itself act as a powerful influence on the behaviour, thought processes and actions of the unfortunate individual.

A human being is therefore in relation with some other human beings. This means that these other people place constraints on the behaviour and thoughts of the subject. These constraints exist because the family, friends and colleagues of an individual locate the individual in a series of complicated relations. There are relations with other human beings. These relations are organised into a social and political structure within which the individual is placed. The social placing which all human beings

experience as a constraining force both limiting and facilitating different thoughts and actions begins within the family and is then experienced within a variety of more complex institutional forms such as cultural, religious, political and class structures into which all human beings are socialised. These constraints operate in the present and are also informed by the past.

To be brought up within a family is to have one's self-identity formed partly by forces acting upon the self from outside the self. In other words, what one is, one's being, is partly a result of relations experienced. A family will introduce a variety of expectations, behavioural patterns and thought processes to the growing individual. These will be a result of the particular social location of the family, of the self-identity of the family, and of the cultural values which the family has adopted. Some of these influences will be mediated consciously and other subconsciously but all will be moulded by the past. Each of the influences is evolving through time in the identity of the family.

What is true of the family is also true of the social grouping within which the individual and her family is located. There are many sub-cultures in any society and many of these will act as agents on an individual. Some will act positively by resonating with what that individual is, others will act negatively, exerting an influence by exposing differences which the individual will wish to protect. There will be a complex series of interactions between the

historical and present relations, between the familial and the wider social relations, and between the conscious and subconscious relations all of which also interact with each other.

The result is that the individual is a highly complex being whose being is constantly reformed. Each new relationship brings about a modification, however slight, in the being of the individual. To be a human beings is to exist in relation with other human beings in a highly dynamic and fluid manner.

However, human beings have a sense of self-identity and, in order to make sense of such a fluid 'self', create an internal 'deep self' which functions as the locus of all the relations which comprises the individual. It is at this point that 'I' can say that 'I' am me even though 'I' actually exist in a complex set of relations. The 'deep self' is the point at which these relations come into focus and self-identity is realised. This 'deep self' is itself in relation with the 'local selves' of the particular relations. It is how it is formed. Therefore, a change in any relation will also exert an influence on the 'deep self' and this will find expression in the conscious or subconscious perception of self-identity.

Hitherto we have been summarising the thesis by describing the relational ontology on which it is based within the context of the social placing which all human beings experience. However, human beings are also related to physical places. A place is a

geographical location and all human beings must, by definition, be placed geographically as well as socially. Just as any human being has a set of particular relations with other human beings so all human beings enjoy these relations in particular places. A place is not however, simply a backdrop against which human drama unfolds. It is part of the drama and acts as an agent just as powerfully as any human being or cultural norm does. To live in a place is to be constrained by it, by its history, by its geography and by its potential.

All the social forces described above, families, cultures and so on are also located in places and they too are influenced by the place. A particular place is not just a location on a map, nor is it simply a cultural phenomenon with no relation to its physical form, rather it is a combination of the two. At a particular location there will be human beings whose nature is located in relations with history, other human beings, sub-cultures and institutional forms or social organisation, social values and the physical environment. Each of these will have partly informed all the other relations in which any human being is engaged. Indeed a place could also be said to have a variety of 'local selves' which are presented in relations to a variety of inanimate, animate and constructed phenomena.

A small but influential set of relations which all human beings experience has not yet been mentioned. All human beings will construct a series of images of the world around them in order to

function within the complexity more adequately. These not only simplify the world but can also construct new experiences and emotions. The feeling of 'being at home' in a particular place, the feeling of nostalgia, is a constructed relation based on relations with particular and real places, with human beings and memories of experiences in the past. Such relations are immensely powerful and are often attached to geographical places as well as human relations.

So far we have only been summarising an anthropology of place. It has been argued that, by continuous life-giving and life-sustaining creative activity, God is present in the created order. God is present in all things and maintains the order of creation by being present in all things through the Spirit. It is the presence of the Spirit which ensures that all things are ordered, are in relation with one another and it is the life of the Spirit which makes things live. There has not been space in this thesis to give a theological explanation of this argument. It has been necessary simply to assert that, on the basis of the relational nature of the Trinity and of the life-giving nature of God, all things are not only made and sustained in creative life by God but are also in relation with him. Thus, to be is to be in relation and to be in relation is to be relation with God. Therefore, to be is to be in relation with God.

Consequently, to be placed is to be in relation primarily with God who made all things, who sustains all things and who keeps all

things ordered. This relation is of a similar nature to other relations in that it need not be recognised for it to exist and it occurs between two parties both of whom are capable of acting as agents. It is also, however, dissimilar from other relations in that it is the most fundamental of all possible relations and it occurs in two different ways. Not only are human beings in direct relation with God but also, by virtue of his presence in all things, to be in relation with any created thing is also to be in relation with God. It is through this series of relationships, as well as through a direct relation as a created human being, that human beings relate to God.

To be placed is to be located in a wide variety of relations which, when taken together, constitute being. These relations are with the past, with constructed images of reality, with human beings, with institutions and cultural and class based value systems, with social and political organisations and hierarchies and with physical locations in time and space. But it is also to be placed in relations to God as mediated by all the other relations in which one is engaged. By being present in all things God is mediated to an individual through, or rather by being in, all the rich variety of relations which constitute the ontology of any particular individual.

Therefore, to be is to be placed. Where one is placed, in all senses described, will partly determine what one is because what one is is a relation between one's 'self' and one's fluid set of relations. It will also affect what one becomes. And God is to be

found in each of these relations. The issue of the theological account of place focuses the issue of ontology, but at the same time, it is not possible to account for being or social organisation or for the manner in which God is present in creation or makes himself known to human beings without also addressing the question of the theology of place. The observation that to be is to be placed in a physical location, in a social hierarchy and in a constructed world view and that God is present in all these relations is fundamental to all theological discussion.

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