



Confessions  
of a  
Panentheist

FRANK ARUNDELL

# Confessions of a *Panentheist*

“The Being of God includes and penetrates the whole universe, so that every part exists in him, but his Being is more than, and not exhausted by, the universe. In other words, God and the world are ontologically distinct and God transcends the world, but the world is in God ontologically.”

John W. Cooper

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Cover: An interior view of Old Wardour Castle,  
ancestral home of the Arundell's  
Wiltshire, UK

# Confessions of a Panentheist

“Panentheism literally means “all-in-God-ism.” This is the Greek-English translation of the German term Allingottlehre, “the doctrine that *all is in God.*” It was coined by Karl Krause (1781– 1832), a contemporary of Schleiermacher, Schelling, and Hegel, to distinguish his own theology from both classical theism and pantheism.” (John W. Cooper, *Panentheism--The Other God of the Philosophers: From Plato to the Present*, Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.)

Baltimore Catechism # 1 was originally issued by the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1885. The Words and Meanings copyright was recorded in 1898 and 1933. It was sold by Benziger Brothers, New York, USA. Every Catholic child about the age of six learned the rudiments of his and her religion from this wonderful, little, grey, soft covered book issued to each pupil. By the time you reached the forth grade, chances are you would have gotten to know all the answers from memory. The simple answers without detailed explanations laid the very basic theological foundations for what you would understand about the Catholic faith when the mind became accustomed to more intellectual pursuits in higher levels of education. The graduated more detailed series of catechisms, Baltimore #2, #3, #4, lasted in primary and secondary Catholic schools into the sixties where it, and almost everything else worthwhile, seemed to have fallen out of favor. Lesson Second, in Baltimore # 1, on God and his perfections, posed an interesting question concerning the whereabouts of God; and gave us an equally interesting answer:

“15. Q. *Where is God?* A. *God is everywhere.*”

I don't really remember what I thought about this specific question, but I can say, generally, we were just memorizing words; similar to the way we would “sing-song” prayers in class. The vague concept of God to begin with would be one of an old person with a white beard who was able to see everything you do, so you'd better behave and obey your parents and teachers. If God was “everywhere” there would be no way you could escape his gaze. In reality, everywhere, for a six and seven year old, is everyplace he or she remembers being. With the use of reason rapidly developing, remembrance was more or less objective rather than subjective. Although I will say, as reading and radio listening increased a young mind was able to imagine fantasy landscapes of unknown worlds, but all within the range of personal experiences. For example, when envisioning the Lone Ranger and his Indian companion Tonto galloping off into the sunset, one was not exactly equipped to mentally see the cactus, the tumbleweed or the vast expanse of the High Chaparral. The reality of these spaces would be learned only by later experiences when one was able to see these landscapes in the movies, or for the more fortunate kids to visit these locations on family vacations adding to ones intellectual consciousness. I must add though, there was not to much good fortune in the 30's

Considering “everywhere” as a mental concept, I would imagine that for it to be a reality, *everywhere* would have to be within the confines of the known cosmos, every nook and cranny of the universe we know of, notwithstanding the fact that we don't know whether the universe is open or closed. What is beyond what we can technologically see has yet to be determined . If God is *everywhere*, as Baltimore #1 says, it

leaves the question of him being not only in places we know of, but places beyond those we know. Theologically speaking God has always been known as spirit and infinite. We have come far enough to realize that God, the Father, is not really able to be seen in human terms as the old man with the beard except in Michelangelo's conception, and still not to be seen by us in Trinitarian terms as one who *is* ontologically (in being) one and the same as Jesus of Nazareth who humanity did see.

Scripture tells us: “*No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.*” (John 1:18) and: “*God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.*” (John 4:24). Those who are believers must reconcile themselves to the fact that the Father cannot be seen in this life except in Christ, or darkly in the vagaries of theology. It is theology that drives the curious to further seek the Father in human terms. Those who see a defining connection with the Deity in life itself must work through and in the Spirit to achieve at least some sense of being close to the Father, through the Son. One could say that doing theology in this way could be considered a form of meditation, which in a practical terms could be called prayer.

One of the un-comfortable feelings about engaging with Christian theology without accreditation, is the fear of heresy and the possibility of corrupting the spiritual thoughts of those with whom you share your thoughts. The only thing that gives one a bit of comfort is the fact that we have been reading and reasonably understand most theological treatises we read for about fifty years or more, in itself somewhat miraculous since I have never considered myself very “bright” nor do I have even the slightest idea of what drew me to the discipline in the first place; except perhaps, that my sister sent me books by Thomas Merton, and in high school I found reading the *Imitation of*

*Christ* by Thomas a Kempis inspirational. After a few years of orientation to the terms and the players, theology like philosophy becomes a very exciting endeavor. Theology is enormously varied. Since theology is described essentially as: “The study of the nature of God,” I have concluded with no basis in fact, that God’s “nature” cannot really be known in any substantial way by any human being save one; Jesus of Nazareth. Theological ideas about the “nature” of God the Father, have come from the fertile minds of many men and women through the centuries by adding or subtracting from what has been said by those who came before them. Christian theology is a totally human endeavor predominantly relying on revelation, tradition, and a good deal of western philosophy. There have been so many concepts of God’s nature that are credible, or at least thought provoking, it would be impossible to treat even a handful in these twenty or so pages. However, I think it is true that theology is a religious endeavor, and many of the Early Fathers and great and successful practitioners since then have been directly inspired by the Spirit of God. They have given us systematized and organized formulas for belief and worship primarily due to their unshakeable faith in Jesus as revealed in the gospels. One cannot do theology without being a humble and true believer in the God whose “nature” you are inquiring about. Anyone who claims to be doing theology without that belief would simply be doing what is known as pragmatic “Religious Studies.” Let’s have a look at the word spirit from Wikipedia, trying not to over complicate its meaning.

“The English word **spirit** comes from the Latin *spiritus*, meaning ‘breath’, but also ‘spirit, soul, courage, vigor’, ultimately from a Proto-Indo-European (*s*)*peis*. It is distinguished from Latin *anima*, ‘soul’ (which nonetheless also derives from an Indo-European root meaning ‘to breathe.’ The

word ‘spirit’ came into Middle English via Old French. In a lecture delivered to the literary Society of Augsburg, October 20, 1926, on the theme of “Nature and Spirit,” C. G. Jung, expressed: “The connection between *spirit* and *life* is one of those problems involving factors of such complexity that we have to be on our guard lest we ourselves get caught in the net of words in which we seek to ensnare these great enigmas. For how can we bring into the orbit of our thought those limitless complexities of life which we call ‘Spirit’ or ‘Life’ unless we clothe them in verbal concepts, themselves mere counters of the intellect? The mistrust of verbal concepts, inconvenient as it is, nevertheless seems to me to be very much in place in speaking of fundamentals. ‘Spirit’ and ‘Life’ are familiar enough words to us, very old acquaintances in fact, pawns that for thousands of years have been pushed back and forth on the thinker's chessboard. The problem must have begun in the grey dawn of time, when someone made the bewildering discovery that the living breath which left the body of the dying man meant more than just air in motion.”

Jung made my point better than I could ever have made it. The word spirit and the word life are inexorably connected. “*It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and [they are] life.*” (John 6:63) Not surprisingly, Jesus made the point more profoundly than Jung. The life in the flesh is spirit. The “words” that Jesus was referring to on this occasion was his Eucharistic body, which today, under the accidents of bread and wine, are believed to be his “body, blood, soul and divinity,” i.e., his life. In short, God the Father, through the Son, *in the Spirit*, instituted a living communion between himself and all humanity at the “last supper.” Every single mass is the reality of that event, not an act of symbolism. It is the act of calling on his real presence, by

repeating his own words, by his command: *“Do this in remembrance of me.”*

When Jesus said God is Spirit and humanity understands spirit as life, one would have to logically conclude that, among other things, God is Life in a generative sense; and our life, though not literally his life, is an image of *his* life (Imago Dei), freely given to know, love and serve him as a “special” created creature of Himself— similar to the person of Jesus, who is one with him, but with two natures, ours and God. It is in this sense he is both the Creator and created, yet one in the being with the Godhead. Grace then is the cognizance of sharing in the life of God; of being one with God, mind and heart, reason and will, in the Spirit, through Christ. One might honestly and legitimately ask, how is it possible to be an Imago Dei when we are such imperfect creatures subject to sickness, disease, sin, misfortune and death; continually struggling for survival in what, for the most part, appears to be an imperfect world? A religious oriented answer to this question is generally not suitable to those who for one reason or another have no grounding in matters of the Spirit. What is ultimately true for them is the strict laws of nature, leaving out even the possibility that nature might have had a Creator and did not come about by chance. The order in nature suggests otherwise, but nature also has its downside; its materiality as well as its ordered purpose; its becomingness. Like all references in Christian theology the most cogent answer came from Jesus himself: *“If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”* (Matthew 16:24) What does that mean?

The message of the Son of Man, the ultimate man of all men and women revealed to us by his life, words and works, seems quite clear, *this so called imperfect world is not all there is*. The essential promises of Christ rests on his resurrection— bringing

us “salvation” from disintegration, attested to by the scriptures as eternal or everlasting life, in common terms, the after life. Paul put it bluntly:

*“If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.”* (1 Corinthians 14:15) This leaves all of us with a totally free choice— to trust the grace that leads us to faith in Jesus as the Word of God, or not to trust his promises to mankind. Our hope is that grace will bring us to faith.

With regard to spirit, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger commenting on Teilhard de Chardin’s theological impressions gave us a few words which altered the course of “scholasticism” at least for me. Scholasticism was “the philosophy and theology, marked by careful argumentation, that flourished among Christian thinkers in Europe during the Middle Ages. Central to scholastic thought is the idea that reason and faith are compatible.” (Wikipedia) It is quite true that reason and faith are compatible. It may be reasonable to have faith, but reason does not necessarily lead to faith, grace does, because it is the indirect “touch” of the God of creation, the Father of Jesus and us all . Certain changes in those Aristotelian based thought processes came as a result of the many great leaders of Vatican II, and the need for reform following the rapid advances in science, particularly evolution, and following the cataclysmic disasters of WW I and II. Although we have repeated it many times, we will do it once more because it ties in very well with with the the concept of panentheism which we will be getting to shortly:

Ratzinger, (Benedict XVI emeritus) said:

“In the writings of Teilhard de Chardin, we find the following ingenious comment on this question [spirituality]: “What distinguishes a materialist from a spiritualist is no longer, by

any means (as in philosophy, which establishes fixed concepts), the fact that he admits a transition between the physical infrastructure and the psychic superstructure of things, but *only* the fact that he incorrectly sets the *definitive* point of equilibrium in the cosmic movement on the side of the infrastructure, that is, on the side of disintegration.” Certainly one can debate the details in this formulation; yet the decisive point seems to me to be grasped quite accurately: the alternative: materialism or a spiritually defined world view, chance or meaning, is presented to us today in the form of the question of whether one regards spirit and life in its ascending forms as an incidental mold on the surface of the material world (that is, of the category of existing things that do not understand themselves), or whether one regards spirit as the goal of the process and, conversely, matter as the prehistory of the spirit. If one chooses the second alternative, it is clear that spirit is not a random product of material developments but, rather, that *matter signifies a moment in the history of spirit*. This, however, is just another way of saying that *spirit is created and not the mere product of development*, even though it comes to light *by way of development*.” Which, of course is cosmic evolution eventuating with the discovery of natural selection in God’s plan by Darwin and others.

I waited for years to hear those words. There was just too much physiology to deny evolution. Most unscientifically informed Catholics were on the shelf about it, and Fundamentalist Protestants went to war on it. Contrarily, if you had a tendency to over do spirituality with Christ, there was always the possibility you could fall into some sort of weak gnosticism about him. Aside from being true God we must never lose sight of the fact that Jesus was also true man. The early councils always deliberated on a scriptural basis, even though they had been given a mandate from Jesus himself: “*Truly I say to you,*

*whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.” (Matthew 18:18)* Surely an important issue when the Curia picks a Pope. As the white smoke appears above the Cappella Sistina we all hold our breath. Some papacies have failed generally due to politics, but others have had great successes as the vicars of Christ with many saints among them; particularly the leaders during and after Vatican II. Again, we are always re-assured by Christ: *“I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.”* and: ... *“[teach] them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:20.)

It is not as though pantheism hasn't been around for a while in one form or another, but one thing is for sure, it is not *pantheism*, the theology of Spinoza. If God is “everywhere” that does not mean all things are God. Obviously there is a distinction between the Creator and the created. It is good to note though, that this theological distinction does not apply to the Godhead where the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity are identical. In other words the presence of the Father, Son, and Spirit as the One God in three divine persons (inferentially revealed in the gospels) has been understood by the councils from the beginning entirely depending on the words of Christ.

“John W. Cooper (b. 1947) is Professor of Philosophical Theology at Calvin Theological Seminary (1985). Cooper received an A.B. from Calvin College (1969), his M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Toronto (1974, 1978), and his M.T.S. at Calvin Theological Seminary (1983). He taught Philosophy at Calvin College from 1978 to 1985, at which time

he joined the seminary faculty. Cooper is also an ordained minister in the Christian Reformed Church.” (Theopedia)

Dr. Cooper’s contribution to these pages is from a book he has written titled: *Panentheism The Other God of the Philosophers: from Plato to the Present*. Although the word panentheism was not applied to this theological concept until the nineteenth century Cooper’s survey covers what he believes to be its precursors through history. Generally, we think he got most of it right. Since Cooper is a Calvinist I would not expect all of his theological commentary to harmonize with those of the Church of Rome, but his survey is an excellent tour of the “other” God of the Philosophers who, in my opinion, we know a little better by way of panentheism. Dr. Cooper does not subscribe to this view. He is a classical theologian of the Protestant Reformation. In Cooper’s book he included a few pages on two heroes of mine of the Catholic faith which he feels expresses more than tendencies towards panentheism. In a broad sense I would agree with him. Aside from Benedict XVI they would be Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) and Fr Karl Rahner (1904-1984). I will cherry-pick his section on Fr. Rahner, since his theological proclivities are more pertinent to the subject and helps to promote a better understanding of the concept. Dr. Cooper writes:

“Karl Rahner (1904– 1984) is probably the most influential Catholic theologian of the twentieth century, a status apparent already at Vatican II. His writings are numerous and difficult, [Not so difficult for Catholics] and so we rely mainly on *Foundations of Christian Faith*, his final summary. Basic tenets of his theology are implicitly panentheistic, but he does not explicitly endorse this position. We consider this implication in his anthropology, his doctrine of the Trinity, and their conjunction in his theology of the incarnation.

Rahner studied with Heidegger and uses his analysis of human existence as the starting point for his own theological anthropology. Heidegger identified the ontological structures, called “existentials” of human being-in-the-world. Rahner adds a “*supernatural existential*” that bridges being-in-the-world with God. Although ontologically (beingly) constitutive of human existence, the supernatural existential is not part of human nature but is supernaturally added to it. *It is God’s presence as the infinite Ground in the existence of all humans.* Thus it affords ‘a capacity of dynamic self-movement of the spirit, given a priori with human nature directed toward all possible objects.’ *With the supernatural existential, all people have implicit awareness of God as the transcendental Ground of all things, and they also have an openness to specific divine revelation and genuine freedom to respond. Rahner’s ‘supernatural existential’ suggests panentheism because it implies that the real presence of God is a constitutive part of the ontological structure of human existence and thus that all humans participate in God ontologically*”(beingness.) I personally see this in a way that the current catechism calls “Grace: participation in the life of God.”

Now, when any seven year old Catholic child answers the question: Where is God? with: God is everywhere; one could veritably say that he or she is at least partially participating in Rahner’s theology, perhaps even before he thought of it. Seeing that “*God is a constitutive part of the ontological structure of human existence*” means that our being is *essentially* connected with God’s being. How can that be? Well, let’s let Cooper continue to give us his explanation of Rahner on the subject:

“A second panentheistic implication follows from an axiom in Rahner’s doctrine of the Trinity, the famous ‘Rahner’s Rule’”

“The ‘economic’ Trinity is the ‘immanent’ Trinity and the ‘immanent’ Trinity is the ‘economic’ Trinity.”

“The rule as stated is ambiguous. It might simply mean that the eternal Triune God himself is active in creating and redeeming the world. Another reading of the rule, however, identifies the immanent Trinity and economic Trinity so closely that one cannot be without the other— no Father and Son without the incarnation, no God without the world. If that’s the case, the rule implies what Hegel taught— that it is essential for the immanent Trinity to actualize itself in history as the economic Trinity. The latter reading of strong identity is confirmed by Rahner’s doctrine of the incarnation, as follows.”

“Rahner’s explanation of the incarnation brings his views of humanity and the Trinity together. *Jesus Christ is the “climax” of God’s supernatural-existential self-communication in all humans. He is the God-Man, the dialectical (two way talk) unity and fulfillment both of human nature and of the self communication of God to humanity.* Rahner elaborates the incarnation in terms of a theology of cosmic evolution highly reminiscent of Teilhard de Chardin. *‘The God-Man is the initial beginning and definitive triumph of the movement of the world’s self-transcendence into absolute closeness to the mystery of God.’* Using Teilhardian terminology, Rahner describes the history of the cosmos, aimed at the consummation of humanity, as the evolutionary process through which God ‘becomes its innermost life.’ *The Spirit of God is the animating force (soul) of the world. God as the absolute Ground ‘becomes immediately interior to what is grounded by it [the cosmos].’* Rahner’s cosmic-incarnational panentheism is very similar to Teilhard’s. Rahner affirms a duality (not in the strict sense if the word) in God’s nature and attributes. The finite and the

infinite, for example, are dialectically unified in God.” (I would say somewhat similar rather than “very similar” regarding Cooper’s Teilhardian emphasis.) Cooper continues:

“The finite and the infinite, for example, are dialectically unified in God: ‘The finite is no longer in opposition to the infinite, but is that which the infinite himself has become.’ Similarly, God’s immutability (unchangingness) is a ‘dialectical assertion’ in relation to the incarnation: ‘In and in spite of his immutability he can truly become something: he himself, he in time.’ Thus God is both immutable and changing.”

“Similarly, the divine will is both free and (self-) determined. Rahner frequently emphasizes God’s freedom and grace in creation. God’s becoming something is not ‘a sign that he is in need of something, but rather the height of his perfection.’ But he also emphasizes that God’s self-expression in humanity is in his eternal nature, which implies its necessity: ‘God himself is man and remains so for all eternity. . . . Man, for all eternity is the expression of the mystery of God which participates for all eternity in the mystery of its ground.’ God could not refrain from the incarnation because it is an eternal expression of his nature. In sum, the existence of the cosmos, humanity, and the incarnation are natural and inevitable for God, and they participate in God. This result confirms the strong reading of Rahner’s Rule: the immanent and economic Trinity are essentially and necessarily identical.”

“Rahner’s doctrines of God, the Trinity, the incarnation, and humanity together imply dynamic panentheism.”

While Rahner was not out promoting panentheism it must be said that in his *Dictionary of Theology* he notes that

panentheism is heretical only if it denies creation and the distinction of the world from God. Both he and other theologians involved with Vatican II had to be very much aware of the Magisterium; the teaching authority of the Roman Catholic Church, exercised by the bishops together with the Pope, the Bishop of Rome, the official and authoritative teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. The council was a godsend for new theological dialogue, still many of the bishops who held power were steeped in scholasticism and honestly unwilling to commit to any suggestions that would effect doctrinal matters. Anything that even resembled a new kind of thinking was a priori anathema; but was it a new kind of thinking, a betrayal of Aquinas and Christian doctrine; or was it just a different point of view from what we have always believed– and still do?

While surfing for books I haven't read by Fr. Rahner, Conger, von Balthasar, Kung, de Lubac et al, I bumped into an individual named Steven Buller, graduated summa cum laude in English from Cal State University Northridge and wrote a book titled: *The Theology of Karl Rahner; a Restatement of Foundations of Christian Faith*, which I bought on Kindle for \$00.00, yes, free. His real love is religious studies, especially theology, similar to my interests. He is a convert to the Catholic faith and is working on another book intended to give readers more access to the thought of Karl Rahner titled, *Theological Investigations of Karl Rahner*. Primarily, his “Restatement” is a series of gips from Fr. Rahner’s original volume which I have had the pleasure of reading quite a few years ago. His book doesn’t deal with panentheism as Cooper does but did have a few sentences which I thought were relevant to it. I will gip them here, before I conclude with my own personal thoughts about this unique and interesting theological concept.

Buller opens with:

“According to Rahner, whether a person has an explicit faith or not, he is inherently related to God. This relatedness is so substantial as to be interwoven into the fabric of our being. In our everyday consciousness, in the encounters of our finite existence, we are experiencing God. Everything that we do somehow relates to God. This is true even when we are not aware of it. According to Rahner, although we are somewhat dependent on and determined by time, space, history, and culture, God has bestowed on us the characteristic of reaching out beyond ourselves. That is to say, we are transcendent beings. The reason for our transcendence is not simply to be more than the sum total of our parts, but also, in our transcendence, to have the capacity in us to experience God. In our transcendental experience, we encounter the infinite.”

“Our transcendental experience of God can also be personal. We feel a certain familiarity with it. We cannot control the infinite. The infinite controls and completely encompasses us. As Rahner says, it is not at our disposal, but we are at its disposal.”

“It is the Infinite that makes it possible for us to experience the finite objects and events in our world. Conversely, it is the concrete material world through which we gain access to the Infinite.”

“So, at some fundamental level of ourselves, we transcend the finite world and experience an awareness of this infinite horizon. This is a transcendental experience because in it we reach out beyond ourselves and encounter the unlimited possibilities of God.”

“For the Christian, the ultimate concrete and historical expression of our experience of the Infinite is found in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Karl Rahner speaks of this infinite horizon as a holy mystery. The nature of our experience of the infinite can be thought of as a ‘pre-apprehension.’ It precedes our own conceptualizing. So, our experience informs our concept of God. Our concrete expression of it— i.e. our faith and belief in Christ— must agree with what our experience is. In this sense, when we practice prayer or engage in the symbols of our faith (such as the Sacraments), we are participating in what we already know at some level.”

“According to Rahner, God’s grace is his self-communication to us. Grace is the gratuitous gift from God. We are created with the potential ability to recognize and perceive God’s grace. We are oriented to reach out towards God. Rahner calls this orientation the ‘*supernatural existential*.’ The supernatural existential is bestowed on us by God at our creation. It brings about a ‘modification of our transcendence’ so that we are better able to recognize grace and make an affirmative response to God. The supernatural existential is not a part of our natural human nature; otherwise it would not be gratuitous. The supernatural existential elevates our spiritual relatedness to God. But this supernatural grace does not add an elevated order of grace, according to M. Edmund Hussey (*The Idea of Christianity: A Brief Introduction to the Theology of Karl Rahner*), such that grace in us exists at two levels (duplex ordo). Otherwise, we are not aware of grace during our lives. Rahner says that supernatural grace is a fulfillment of our orientation towards God; it enables the completion of our supernatural destiny. Furthermore, *grace can be experienced*, according to Rahner.”

“Rahner’s view of grace is not localized to any particular time or event. Of course, grace reaches its ultimate expression in Jesus Christ, but even the Christ-event is a moment in God’s scheme of universal grace— albeit the fullest expression of God’s self-communication to us. Grace has been present throughout history and since the beginning. Grace did not come about as a result of sin. Grace has been present since the beginning. It was present prior to sin, so that we can speak of primordial grace. Grace is all-pervasive throughout time, such that we can speak of salvation through grace being available at any time in history and to everyone. This is why people who are not explicitly Christian can also experience grace. Grace is everywhere present.”

These gips are only from the beginning of Steven’s book. He has eight expository chapters: 1. The Person, Transcendence, and Mystery, 2. Guilt, 3. God’s Self-Communication, 4. Salvation History and Revelation, 5. Jesus, 6. Church, 7. Christian Life, and 8. Eschatology. They all contain rich notes from Fr. Rahner’s 470 page original volume. Steven did a good job simplifying the great theologian’s thoughts for himself and for others, surely, the price of his book is right.

For serious-minded people who care to encounter a broad spectrum of analysis on the philosophy of religion nothing is as good as Hartshorne and Reese’s *Philosophers Speak of God*, (yr. 2000). It covers much of ancient quasi-pantheism as well as modern pantheism starting with Schelling to Watts, and limited pantheism after that. The reason I chose Dr. Cooper’s book is simply because I could gip his book for you on Kindle. HB Humanity Books did not digitize Hartshorne and Reese’s work. Besides, there was no reference to Karl Rahner who is key to our understanding.

Our: *Putting the Puzzle Together*, gave you at least an inkling of my theological preferences, if you have had the chance to read it. I am convinced that neither you nor I can think of a good reason why anybody would be the least bit interested in my theological preferences, but being a “creative type” I found a means of expression with the computer keyboard rather than with paint and canvass. I must say it takes a bit of hutzpah to share my personal interests in religious matters with erudite people like you; but then again I have never been too cautious. I have also never known a cautious “art type” who ever turned out anything worth observable or readable. You are definitely worth the risk out of love. So, there you are, my apologia.

I have known many people who have concluded that religion is a giant fraud on humanity, that God is a chimera; and that all clergy are either pedophiles or hypocrites, perhaps with the exception of St. Teresa of Calcutta— without giving a thought to why she was so charitable and loving of the “refuse” of society, or why she would even befriend a man occupying the “chair of Peter”; the rich Pole who prayed a lot to salve his conscience. These are the folks who have been given to believe that the Catholic Church is the worst enemy of society and is claimed to be the antichrist by the purest of the protestant reformers. The church which still claims they may have had a point, and doesn’t hate them for it; and even today confesses her institutional faults and failures over the centuries to a world who hates her, but she remembers the Lord’s comment: *“If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world—therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘Servants are not greater than their master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. But they will do all*

*these things to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.*”

St. Teresa had the answer. Speaking of her sisters she said: *“Many people mistake our work for our vocation. Our vocation is the love of Jesus.”* This small passionate woman was able to provide an answer for the mission of the Universal Church, the church that is the Body of Christ. What does the Body of Christ mean?

“Jesus said: *‘Abide in me, and I in you. . . . I am the vine, you are the branches.’* With this and other definitive statements he proclaimed the mysterious and real communion between his own body and ours: *‘He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.’*” (Catechism of the Catholic Church.) Teresa heard the words of Jesus: *“Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me”* from Matthew’s gospel. When Teresa recognized the grace of God as the will of the Father in Christ, every destitute and sick man, woman and child in Calcutta became Jesus; thence, from there to the rest of the world. Who else would legitimately proclaim her a saint but the Body of Christ of which she was an exemplary part.

The world, just for the average person, has become a very complicated place. How is it possible for one to have the enthusiasm expressed as the love of Jesus, similar to these gentle women in the Body of Christ? One can begin to un-complicate his or her life by living as near the Word of God in the gospels as possible, to know what Jesus taught. The Word of God’s *real* presence is the Body of Christ herself, the Church. To think of this in a more panentheistic way is to understand that the grace of God is “sharing in the *life* of God” primarily through Christ in the Spirit, and that the life of God is

the ground and source of all being everywhere. When God is reported to have said to Moses: I AM WHO I AM, God essentially IS...*everywhere*. In this sense one cannot separate God from creation since God is cosmically everywhere.

At Christmas every Christian celebrates the birth of God-in-Jesus on earth. Would Almighty GOD, whose presence man has always perceived as a spiritual, transcendental, infinite-horizon; worshiped in the first covenant as the monotheistic God of the Jews arrive as an infant through a virgin in Bethlehem? Well, in fact it was prophesied in the “first testament” scriptures. Those prophesies became a reality in “*Emmanuel*,” God with us through the virgin birth. The infinite became finite without changing, God became man without changing, so that God becomes one with man through the works and promises of the expected Messiah:

*“The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.”* (Matthew 11:5)

God is love in Jesus; we know that by the words of Christ as he speaks about his Father while referring to himself:

*“For God (the Father) so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”* (John 3:16)

“Rahner says that supernatural grace is a fulfillment of our orientation towards God; it enables the completion of our supernatural destiny. Furthermore, *grace can be experienced*,”

“Thomas Aquinas, had said that God has infinite knowledge. He definitely did not mean *potentially* infinite knowledge. The

technical definition of actual infinity might be useful here. If God is infinitely knowledgeable, this can be understood as meaning that God knows the truth-values of all declarative sentences and that the set of these sentences is actually infinite.” (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

“The multiverse theories of cosmology in the early 21st century allow there to be an uncountable infinity of universes within a background space whose volume is actually infinite. The universe created by our Big Bang is just one of these many universes. Christian theologians balk at the notion of God choosing to create this multiverse because the theory implies that, although there are so many universes radically different from ours, there also are an actually infinite number of copies of ours, (parallel universes) which implies there are an infinite number of Jesus’ who have been crucified. The removal of the uniqueness of Jesus would be a removal of his dignity. Augustine had this worry when considering infinite universes and he responded that ‘Christ died once for sinners.’”(Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

I have copied these last two inserts because they deal with the incomprehensible idea of infinity, i.e. “the quality of having no limits or boundaries in time or space or extent or magnitude.” (Web word.) One might also say no beginning or cause. In that respect we can say that God is infinite. In the Ontological Argument, (the argument about being,) “St. Anselm defined God as ‘that than which nothing greater can be conceived’, and argued that this being must exist in the mind; even in the mind of the person who denies the existence of God. He suggested that, if the greatest possible being exists in the mind, it must also exist in reality. If it only exists in the mind, then an even greater being must be possible — one which exists both in the mind *and* in reality. Therefore, this greatest possible being must

exist in reality.” (Wikipedia) In our *Putting the Puzzle Together* we traced this concept all the way back to its meagre beginnings in Greek Philosophy. Anselm’s ontological argument is still philosophy, it is a logical reason to believe in God. However, a mental concept is a personal, sensual experience that would bring on a convincing physical and psychological “conversion” by expressing a hint of the presence of the Infinite God in our reality. Isn’t it *experiencing* the infinite as Fr. Rahner suggests? In our opinion St. Paul, the original Christian theologian, suggests that possibility; in First Corinthians 13: 12 Paul says:

*“For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.”*

Now we live in faith, hope and love through the supernatural grace of God in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who is Love as a person, and present to us in the Eucharist. Fr. Rahner was interested in understanding more fully what we might “see in a mirror dimly,” and what we may “know only in part,” by engaging in his theological investigations.

When Anselm defined God as “*that than which nothing greater can be conceived, and argued that this being must exist in the mind,*” mind (psyche) is a finite structure together with the body thought to be the seat of the faculty of reason, the unity of which is a self, a person, equipped with the capability of transcendence. For Rahner it is within that transcendental capacity that we can experience the *infinite* as the ultimate ground of being, the reality that is God. Is that what Paul saw in a mirror dimly, or knew only partly? Was that what Anselm touched-on in the reality of his mind? These experiences are

not at all a disconnect with reality or the self as with some mystics, but a share in God's self communication even in our daily lives— an accessible supernatural horizon since God is everywhere. Perhaps a communion in the Spirit, or Sanctifying Grace, i.e., participation in the life of God with us.

St. Paul tells us:

*“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own”?*

Aquinas maintains the spirit (or soul) is the life of the body because Jesus said:

*“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing.”*

One could safely say that since the Spirit of God is within us, and that we have our existence in the life of the Infinite God—this could very well be defined as a form of pantheism in perfect harmony with Baltimore #1, with St. Anselm, with St. Thomas Aquinas, and with Fr. Rahner. God being everywhere. Humanity would never have known this were it not for the Incarnation of Christ.

*“No one comes to the Father except through me.”* (John 14:6)

It's hard to see how anyone could strip reality from God since God chose to take on humanity in Jesus and express the will of the Father as one of us. *“My Father is still working, and I also am working.”* (John 5:17) *“Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.”* (Matthew 12:30) With Three Persons in the One God, where there is One there are the Others too. If you are a believer in the Incarnation,

you will unequivocally accept the Word of God when he says: “*On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.*” (John 14:20) With that, God is accessible in the Spirit wherever we are at any given time. Even closer, with the Eucharist in any Catholic church— as seen by the grace of God with our sense perception, through the eyes of faith. This alone does not give panentheism viability as a theological concept. However, that wasn’t exactly what Fr. Rahner was after. He was theologically reaching out for the very source of grace by engaging the transcendental nature of human beings to essentially experience *infinity* and thereby, mysteriously, a sense of God himself.

Since young Rahner was a student of Martin Heidegger, “One can draw a parallel between Heidegger and Rahner, as when Heidegger speaks about a *pre-reactive* sense of being, (Rahner uses the word pre-apprehension,) Heidegger claimed that since man is able to raise the question about being he is thus open to being, Rahner goes further and says that man is not only open to being, but to God as well. Later Heidegger was inclined to say that as man is open to being, similarly, being is open to God, that is, man is transparent to being, and being is transparent to God.” (*Karl Rahner’s Notion of Vorgriff*, Bulcsú Kál Hoppál Internationale Akademie für Philosophie im Fürstentum Liechtenstein)

This pre-apprehension (Vorgriff) from Heidegger may have been the notion that got Rahner started on the idea of “infinite horizon”; as Buller put it: “The reason for our transcendence is not simply to be more than the sum total of our parts, but also, in our transcendence, to have the capacity in us to experience God. In our transcendental experience, we encounter the infinite.”

The claim is, as transcendental creatures we can, and are all capable of sensing the “infinite horizon,” participating, so to speak, in something we already know. “Preceding our own conceptualization” For a nonbeliever this whole rigamarole is useless speculation, or at best philosophical nonsense. For the determinist, we cannot know what we have not experienced. For me, I must confess I have had that experience, and wouldn’t be at all surprised if most people have had it and didn’t quite know what to make of it. For a pragmatic believer it very well could be a conversionary experience; an inspirational moment in time where the human spirit moved beyond all practicality to a “noosphere” where the presence of the infinite God became wholly and joyously palpable. For a sensitive determinist or physicalist it could be an unexplained brain-state, the sense of a comprehensive unity of consciousness not brought about by any positive remembrance. For as many different people there are, these experiences would most likely mean something different to each one, recognized and then rationalized in totally different ways— never having read Rahner. I believe these events cannot be confined to the realm of the human imagination. You can’t think it up. In my experience it is an exterior not an interior event. You find yourself in it. I am willing to call it “experiencing Rahner’s infinite horizon,” where there is a perfectly clear physical consciousness that everything existing— exists in it, and nothing exists outside it. From the very Cosmos itself to a glorious earthworm in a garden, all are in it and sustained by it. It is what it is.

I’m sure any good psychologist could come up with a hundred-psycho-physiological reasons for such experiences. No one will argue the point; but it also is a well known fact that certain unexplained, metaphysical phenomena occur in our world that seem only acceptable in a spiritual context.

No good psychologist would deny that either. Certainly Jung and James didn't.

Be that as it may, I will close this essay with a quote from Yves Conger OP (1905-1995), theologian, friend of Fr. Rahner and a Cardinal of the Catholic Church (1994): from his book: *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, Crossroad Herder 2000.

*“Christ is similarly in me and in my life, but he remains himself and I continue to be myself. This indwelling or immanence is expressed in the depths of its intimacy by the fact that the Spirit is said to have been sent into our hearts”*

I suppose we could say, ambiguously of course, that we are born with the knowledge of God whether we know it or not, and we can sense it even if we can't put a name to it.

26 Sunday of the year:

Gospel acclamation:

*“Though our Lord Jesus Christ was rich, he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.”*(2 Corinthians 8:9)