

Whitehead's Conception of Divine Spatiality

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Any theistic philosophy with a basic cosmological orientation must confront the problem of God's relation to space, and confront it anew, for the tradition offers very few clues as to how one might proceed. We continue to speak of God as "above" or "beyond" the world, knowing these to be mere metaphors, but knowing also that we would be hard pressed to state any literal meaning behind these metaphors. If we say God is the "depth dimension" within reality, we run the risk of pantheism, while the assertion that God is within the self threatens to dissolve the "I-Thou" encounter into sheer subjectivism.

The problem of God's relation to time has been scrutinized more carefully. Boethius achieved a viable solution, but it has been obscured by the bias of classical and medieval philosophy toward an implicit atemporal conception of God. Spurred on by the modern preference for the dynamic, process philosophers such as Charles Hartshorne and Alfred North Whitehead have waged unrelenting war against this atemporalist tendency. This does not mean, however, that God can be conceived as simply temporal. As we have argued in another context, God must be conceived as both temporal and transtemporal (eternal), i.e. as transcending time by including its diversity within a final simplicity.¹

The difficulties involved in working out an appropriate relationship between God and space are well illustrated by

Hartshorne's own position. In responding to William A. Christian's question about any possible experience of contemporaries in the *Philosophical Interrogations*,² Hartshorne accepts God's simultaneous experience of the "creative advance of nature" throughout all space. This divine simultaneity implies a "unique standpoint" for God, which, however, cannot be identified with any "inner-worldly" standpoint, i.e. "some actual perspective in the world." Is God's standpoint then spatial? If so, then finite occasions seem to be incapable of constituting the totality of space. If not, God must be interpreted as aspatial in some sense akin to the way atemporal forms and structures of being are aspatial.

Against this tendency we wish to affirm that God must be conceived as both spatial and transspatial, just as he is both temporal and transtemporal (eternal). Omnipresence is generally adequate to describe this divine spatiality, though its implications must be carefully explored. We lack even an

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¹ See my essay, "Boethius and Whitehead on Time and Eternity," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, March, 1968.

² ed. Sydney and Beatrice Rome (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1964), p. 324f.