

---

# Turning the World Inside Out

---

Thomas A. Boogaart

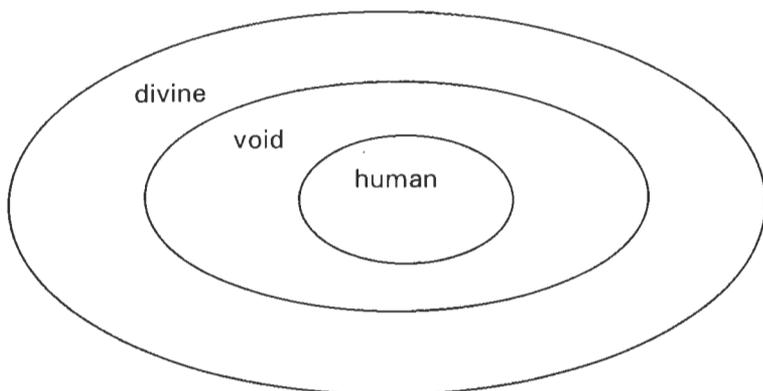
We are all cosmologists. Whether an astrophysicist, teacher, woodworker, or librarian, we are buffeted by chaotic forces in daily living, and we seek some safe haven. We try to discern the underlying patterns of the world and to bring our lives into conformity with them. Through painful experiences, the counsel of others, and sometimes formal education, we form an image in our minds of our place in the world and devise a plan for living. Our survival depends on it. Yet, we are more often than not cosmologists unaware. A cosmology takes shape someplace deep within our being as we attempt to engage successfully the issues of any given day: chairing a board meeting, cooking dinner, building a house, praying to God. It sustains us without our being aware of it. Paul Hiebert says it well when he notes that a cosmology is “what we *think with*, not what we *think about*.”<sup>1</sup>

## The Modern World

We can discover our assumed cosmology when we pause and reflect on our everyday activities. Take the act of praying, for example. Imagine a scene in which a mother is putting her three-year-old daughter to bed. Heads bowed, hands folded, they recite together, “Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take.” What image of the world is in the hearts and minds of the mother and child who engage in this act of devotion? How would they answer these questions? *Who is Lord?* The Lord is the one whom we address in times of uncertainty. Sleep with its loss of consciousness and night with its loss of vision are times in which children and adults feel particularly vulnerable and mortal. At such times we realize our dependence on another and acknowledge the Lord as the keeper of our souls. *Where is the Lord?* The Lord lives in a place somewhere outside of our world. We generally call this place, heaven, and assume it to be high above the earth. We hope that our prayers will rise up to heaven, as will our souls when we die. *How does the Lord relate to the world?* The Lord listens to our prayers and can choose to intervene. Since our world exists apart from God and therefore runs almost clocklike on its own, intervention entails the miraculous, a suspension of the natural order of things.

These same questions could be asked of any prayer and any Christian with much the same results. North American Christians share a cosmology.

They live in a universe divided into three tiers: the human realm, the void, and the divine realm. When considering the relationship of these tiers, we find that believers place the human realm at the center of everything and the divine realm on the periphery with the void between them. This cosmology can be represented by a simple diagram:



### *Anthropocentrism*

The spiritual and moral implications of this cosmology are profound. Consider first the relationship of the human and divine realm. This cosmology encourages Christians to believe that they are at the center of everything. While they sing the doxology every Sunday, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow," most do not picture God as the source of all that exists and therefore the center of reality. God is somewhere out there and our prayers rise from earth to God like satellites probing deep space. While the Bible often depicts God dwelling above the earth, in the biblical scheme of things God is *up and in* not *up and out*.

C. S. Lewis tries to counter the modern, anthropocentric cosmology in his Narnia stories, especially *The Last Battle*.<sup>2</sup> As the world of Narnia comes to a violent end, Aslan leads a contingent of children and animals to the presence of God. He passes through the Doorway between worlds and calls back to the rest, "Come further in! Come further up!"<sup>3</sup> As the strange congregation of creatures moves further up and further in, they discover a land that looks a lot like the Narnia that they have left behind, except "every rock and flower and blade of grass looked as if it meant more."<sup>4</sup> They come to the realization that the old and familiar Narnia "was not the real Narnia. That had a beginning and an end. It was only a shadow or a copy of the real Narnia, . . . All of the old Narnia that mattered, all the dear creatures, have been drawn into the real Narnia through the Door. And of course it is different; as different as a real thing is from a shadow or as waking life is

from a dream.”<sup>5</sup> According to Lewis, ascension is a movement up and in, and heaven is the glorification of every good thing left behind.

The depiction of God dwelling on the periphery of the human world legitimizes the inclination of our age to promote human ingenuity and personal satisfaction as ultimate concerns. Our accomplishments and our desires occupy our attention, as we pursue an ideal of human autonomy. A recent, two-page advertisement placed by the Boeing Corporation in *The Atlantic Monthly* explains this inclination better than I am able to do. Perhaps playing on the popularity of Kathleen Norris’s novel *Dakota*, Boeing depicts three children sitting under the big sky of the plains. In the midst of prairie grass, they look pensively upward, one of them fingering a wooden model airplane. The golden expanse above them is empty except for a text placed carefully in the billowing clouds: “Where the secrets to the universe are kept.” Below this affirmation, we read in letters so small that we must draw closer to the page: “The answers do not lie in technology. Technology is but a stepping-stone to the next question. We are fueled by a restless imagination; an endless sense of wonder that has brought our world closer together and led us ever deeper into space. What we’ve discovered along the way is that all the secrets to the universe are contained in the boundless reaches of the human mind.” Through this advertisement, Boeing is playing with the readers’ sense of grandeur. The magnificent sky that dominates two full pages is not the real expanse and therefore not worthy of our awe and curiosity. The real expanse is in the minds of those three small children looking pensively upward. They hold all the secrets of the universe.

Many poets and prophets, none more eloquent than Flannery O’Connor, have told the sad story of this brand of optimistic humanism and its indifference to suffering and systemic evil. In her story, “The Lame Shall Enter First,” O’Connor creates the character, Sheppard, who lives out the failure of the humanistic ideal. Sheppard is a city recreational director who counsels on Saturdays at the reformatory. Believing in the saving power of education and intelligence, he takes on the religious superstitions of his day. He encounters these in two boys: his young son, Norton, who grieves the death of his mother and wonders whether she continues to exist in either heaven or hell; and the delinquent, Rufus Johnson, who believes he is under the power of Satan.

As the story unfolds, we learn that Sheppard is disappointed with his listless and supposedly selfish son. Enamored with Rufus because of his high I.Q., he takes him into his home both to reform him and to teach Norton a lesson in selflessness. Sheppard heroically refuses the temptation to tell the grieving Norton that he will someday see his mother again in heaven. Instead he offers the boy a hard truth about death. He explains that his mother “isn’t anywhere. She’s not unhappy. She just isn’t.” He tells him

that his "mother's spirit lives on in other people" and that it will live on in him, if he is "good and generous like she was."<sup>6</sup> In the case of Rufus Johnson, he puts a telescope in his hands. Sheppard wants him to "see the universe, to see that the darkest parts of it could be penetrated."<sup>7</sup> He believes that scientific observation will explain his devil to him.

Both boys reject the teachings of Sheppard, who becomes full of rage at their resistance and finally full of self-loathing. His complete frustration at the end of the story leads to the painful revelation that he is not the good person he thinks himself to be, but self-glorifying and indifferent to the people he is trying to help, especially his own son. He realizes that he has elevated himself to the role of savior of the world just as his accuser Rufus Johnson had said. This revelation, however, comes too late. Racing upstairs to tell Norton that he will make everything up to him, he discovers that his son has hanged himself in order to fly to heaven and be with his mother.

### *The Void*

Consider not only the relationship of the divine and human realm in our diagram but also the void between them. Paul Hiebert explains how he came to recognize this void in his world through an encounter with Yellayya, a man who interrupted him one day while he was teaching in a Bible school in Shamshabad, India. Yellayya had walked many miles from his village, Muchintala, to seek Hiebert's help. His village had suffered an outbreak of smallpox, and his fellow Christians were suffering the wrath of the village elders. They had refused to pay the village diviner for the costs of an expensive water buffalo sacrifice, deemed necessary to appease Maisamma, the goddess of smallpox. They had put their trust in the power of the Lord, and now one of their number was sick with the disease. Hiebert describes his response to Yellayya's request that he pray for healing: "As I knelt, my mind was in turmoil. I had learned to pray as a child, studied prayer in seminary and preached it as a pastor. But now I was to pray for a sick child as all the village watched to see if the Christian God was able to heal."<sup>8</sup>

Hiebert discovered that he had no way of comprehending how the Spirit of God might manifest itself in the natural world and bring healing. "As a scientist I had been trained to deal with the empirical world in naturalistic terms. As a theologian, I was taught to answer ultimate questions in theistic terms. For me the middle zone did not really exist."<sup>9</sup>

Having lived among the Tzotzil tribes of the central highlands of Chiapas, Mexico, Vern and Carla Sterk tell how they also had been taught to ignore the middle zone and how it worked to the detriment of their efforts to witness to Christ. The Tzotzils believe that all people have a *ch'ulel* (inner soul) composed of thirteen temporarily divisible parts. Invisible powers such as *Yajval balamil* (Earth Lord), *pucujetic* (evil spirits), and *ac'bil chamel*

(curse) roam the earth and can take parts of the soul. The result is *chamel* (sickness), which has both spiritual and physical symptoms. Healing for the Tzotzil is a form of spiritual warfare in that other spiritual powers must be invoked to liberate the captured parts of the soul.

Having been trained in North America to ignore spiritual beings and to think of illness only in materialistic terms, the Sterks diagnosed the physical symptoms of their Tzotzil patients and offered modern medicines. Carla writes, "When a Tzotzil woman came with her baby who had dysentery and asked: 'Do you have medicine for *balamil* (soul loss)?' my mind quickly reviewed all the possible parasites and bacteria that could cause her baby to have dysentery. I asked her to tell me more of the baby's symptoms before prescribing some worm medicine." Yet she was puzzled when this woman and others went to the shaman after having received medicine. The explanation finally came from a Tzotzil Indian who had been to a government clinic and had thrown away his ampicillin capsules: "The doctor only laughed when I told him that my sickness started with a curse that caused me to lose a part of my soul. He paid no attention to the fact that I had seen evil spirits come and occupy my house just before my cough started. All he did was to tell me that these shots and pills would take care of the cough."

The Tzotzils wanted the Sterks to pray so that their God would show his power over the evil spirits and help them restore their souls. To them, the reluctance of the Sterks to pray was a sign of the Christian God's weakness. "How embarrassing," writes Carla, "that the Tzotzils had to ask us if our God was more powerful than the *Yajval balamil*, the *pucujetic*, and *ac'bil chamel*, and if he was, why we weren't asking him to intervene in their world, especially since we had told them that he had come to help."

When the Sterks learned to take the spirits seriously, to read the Bible from the Tzotzil perspective, and to call upon God, their experience of the power of God's healing became the key to their Christian witness among the Tzotzil. Vern adds, "Most Tzotzils who are struggling with serious illness are mainly concerned with who has the power to help them. For years they have trusted tribal shamans to make healing power accessible to them when they needed it. Christianity now presents a demonstration of the works of God that is more powerful and more accessible than anything they had ever known. Even though persecution has placed a monumental obstacle in the path of evangelization, the Tzotzils are willing to give up all their material possessions (including land and homes) in order to have access to God's healing power."

## The Biblical World

Whether we are so-called liberals or conservatives, our shared assumptions about the nature of reality function as a gatekeeper. This gatekeeper allows those pieces of the Bible that are amenable to modern social and economic arrangements to pass through but holds at the door those which are not. This gatekeeper confiscates anything having to do with the middle zone. For many of us, so much of the biblical witness has been left at the door that the Bible has lost its integrity and influence over both church and world. If our Holy Book is to recover this loss, we have to engage seriously its cosmology. We must use our God-given powers of reason and imagination to enter what has become the strange world of the Bible. We have to ask ourselves how its cosmology relates to the established and emerging cosmologies of the modern world.

Perhaps the most important statement for understanding the biblical portrayal of the world is the song of the seraphs in Isaiah: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory" (6:3). The Hebrew word, glory, (*kabod*) designates something dense, rich, heavy, overflowing. God is neither self-contained nor static. God is love, and love by its very nature expands. The expansion of God's love is what makes life possible. God is the source, the one from whom all blessings flow. Israel bore witness to God's glory in a number of ways. Glory was the water flowing from the spring, or the tiny mustard seed growing into a great tree. Perhaps the most frequent portrait of glory in the Bible is that of the *Lord of the Estate*.

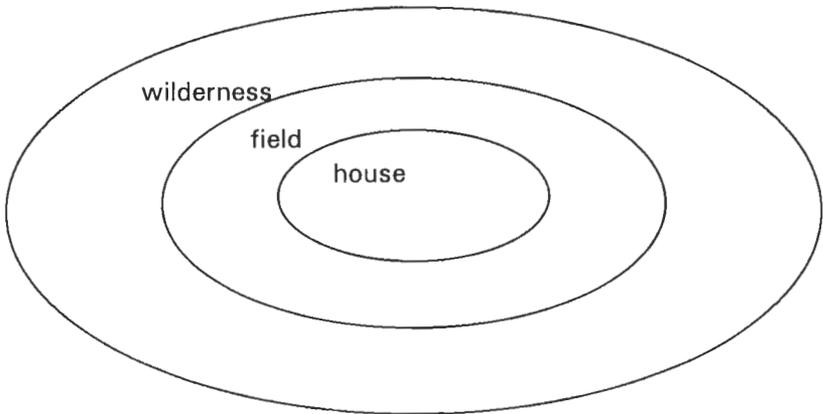
Drawn from the agrarian society of the ancient Middle East, this portrait of the universe is patriarchal. Men are landowners and decision-makers. Upon closer examination, however, we discover that the establishment of the superiority of men over women is not the emphasis of the estate tradition. Instead, it emphasizes God's desire for intimate communion with all people and challenges the popular notion of an aloof and distant Lord, a notion that has caused severe spiritual damage to men and women.

In both Testaments, heaven is portrayed as the spacious house of the Lord, and earth as the arable land surrounding it. Israel attempted to replicate this heavenly house when building the temple, and Jesus referred to the same in John 14:2, "In my Father's house there are many dwellings places." The Lord is the gracious and hospitable master of house and land. His wise decrees bring prosperity to the estate (cf. Ps. 33:1-9) and his potent love fills the house with sons. Brought into being by the Spirit of the Lord, these sons are also magnificent and prodigious. They banquet at the table of their Lord and Father, praising and toasting him: "Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name; worship the Lord in holy splendor" (Ps. 29:1-2). At this table they also deliberate with him over the affairs of the estate, and from

it the Father commissions them to carry his decisions to the surrounding fields. These sons are his messengers, or angels.

The Lord creates not only angels but also a "living being" (*nephesh chayyah*). He sculpts the ground into what we have come to know as human form and breathes into its nostrils. This man and the woman later drawn from his body bear children who become the tenants of the estate. Being part Spirit and part dust, human beings are particularly suited to work the ground. In exchange for the support and protection of their Lord, they pledge their loyalty and service. They live under the law of this covenant, honor the Lord's sons, and become his servants. These are the same tenants to whom Jesus so often refers in the parables; the same servants to whom Paul often refers in his letters as living under the law (cf. Gal. 4:4-7). Beyond the fields is the wilderness, a dark and dangerous place where hostile powers wreak havoc beyond the protective arm of the Lord.

The estate tradition suggests that the cosmos has three tiers: house, field, and wilderness. The quality of life in each tier differs according to the degree to which the glory of the Lord is present. The very being of the Lord fills the house, and it is the place of intimate communion, especially around the banquet table. The words of the Lord are carried to the field by his sons, and the Spirit of these words sustains life among the tenants. Beyond the house and the field is the wilderness where the Lord's words have not arrived.



In the biblical cosmology, there is no void between the divine realm and human realm. In fact, there is a well-traveled gate between house and field. The sons of God cross over it bearing the words of their Lord, and the tenants gather before it seeking his presence. The two realms are intertwined. Throughout Israel's history, the temple in Jerusalem was the visible manifestation of the invisible house, and its gate was the gate of heaven. Isaiah has a vision of a time when the earthly temple and the heavenly temple would become one. Notice the twofold movement in this vision. All the peoples of the earth gather at the house of the God of Jacob, and the words of the Lord go forth from there and create the infrastructure of peace.

*In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house  
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,  
and shall be raised above the hills;  
all the nations shall stream to it.  
Many peoples shall come and say,  
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,  
to the house of the God of Jacob;  
that he may teach us his ways  
and that we may walk in his paths.  
For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,  
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."  
He shall judge between the nations,  
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;  
they shall beat their swords into plowshares,  
and their spears into pruning hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war any more (Isa. 2:2-4).*

### *Sons and Grandsons of God*

Many texts in the Bible portray God as the Lord of the estate, some obvious to the modern-day reader and some perhaps not. In what follows attention is drawn to an important group of texts in which the estate tradition may not be so obvious. My intent is to show how an awareness of this tradition both enhances the understanding of these texts and suggests a fruitful way to engage the anthropocentric cosmology of the modern world.

*When people began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that they were fair; and they took wives for themselves of all that they chose. Then the Lord said, "My spirit shall not abide in mortals forever, for they are flesh; their days shall be one hundred twenty years." The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went in to the daughters of humans,*

who bore children to them. These were the heroes that were of old, warriors of renown. (Gen. 6:1-4)

My students squirm when I focus their attention on the Nephilim. They react as if they had unexpectedly discovered a pagan monolith in the tell of Christianity. They and their church have ignored this passage for years. It is too primitive to handle. Sons of God having sexual relations with the daughters of humans? What does this have to do with the good news of Christ's coming that we are to bring to the world?

The estate tradition is a key to understand this awkward text. Carrying the words of the Lord from the house to the field, the spirited sons of God come into contact with the tenants and their beautiful daughters. These sons fall in love with them and take them as wives, as many as they desire. They have sexual intercourse, and these unions of heaven and earth produce children. The Lord of the estate is now a *grandfather* and is confronted with grandchildren of mixed descent. These grandchildren possess not only a portion of his wise and powerful Spirit but also a claim to the eternal rights and privileges of sonship, that is, a claim to a place at the table of the Lord. Given their unique pedigree, they tower above the rest of the people in the Lord's service and become heroes and warriors of renown, or Nephilim.

In the future, these grandchildren of the Lord will choose wives for themselves and have children of their own. When this happens, the distinction between Lord and tenant will become completely blurred and the question of inheritance hopelessly complicated. To preserve the integrity of the estate, the ambiguous status of these Nephilim demands clarification. The Lord calls a meeting with his sons to resolve the matter of inheritance. He decides that his grandchildren will not enjoy the privilege of eternal sonship: "Then the Lord said, 'My spirit shall not abide in mortals forever, for they are flesh; their days shall be one hundred twenty years'" (6:3).

The rationale given for this decision is that human beings are "flesh" (*basar*), which is a cryptic reference when read from such a cultural distance. When taken together, however, the stories in Genesis 1-11 tell us something about the meaning of the word flesh, and the significance of the Lord's decision.

As mentioned earlier, human beings are a mixture of dust and Spirit. The dust is that part which draws them down, that part which decomposes. The Spirit is that part which draws them up, that part which composes. This mixture is unstable and weighted downward. Therefore, humans require a spiritual transfusion to sustain their existence. In the garden they could eat from the tree of life. But after having been disobedient tenants of Eden and driven from the garden, they face their mortality. Even though the power of the life-giving fruit continues to course through the generations and people

live to a very great age, in the end, all succumb to the power of decomposition, even Methuselah after 969 years.

Barred from the tree of life by the cherubim and a flaming sword, humans strive to overcome their mortality by uniting together and building a stairway to the house in heaven (Gen. 11). They have eaten from the tree of knowledge and become very capable and ingenious. But God confuses them, saying to his sons that "this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech" (11:6,7). To reach heaven is to reach immortality, and God is fearful of what humans will do if they regain it. As flesh, they have proven themselves unstable and prone to disobedience and evil. God fears that humans will multiply evil by the factor of immortality.

God's fear in the story of Babel helps us to understand God's fear in the earlier story of the Nephilim. The Lord's grandchildren bear his Spirit in a way humans do not. They carry within them the lineage of heaven and thus immortality. God decides that the time for the outpouring of God's Spirit through procreation has not yet come. Fearing once again the multiplication of evil and an upheaval in the present arrangements, the Lord limits their life span to one hundred twenty years. As in Jesus' parable of the ten bridesmaids, the Lord shuts the gate on them (Matt. 25:10) and they eventually die outside the house. Later generations remembered these Nephilim as men who did not rise to a place in heaven but did stand well above those on earth. They remembered them as giants.

### *Jesus, Son of God*

My reaction to this portrait of intercourse between heaven and earth is, of course, very similar to that of my students. I, too, have grown up in a world with no middle zone. Genesis 6:1-4 offends my modern sensibilities and triggers within me a demythologizing reflex that I thought I had overcome long ago. I, too, am tempted in the spirit of Marcion to dismiss this as a story from an inferior book and time. I can perhaps handle the notion of humans eating from the tree of knowledge, organizing their lives, standardizing their language, and building a structure that would threaten the Lord in heaven. After all, the success of genetic research in my day is based on a culture of specialization and standardization. This focusing of human intelligence and energy has led to astounding advances in our understanding of human beings and has built a stairway to the very source of life itself, or so some scientists claim. Dr. Leland Kaiser, a noted futurist and health educator, argues that there are no limits on the future advances in medicine. He says that technology will one day allow for the atomic reconstruction of the human body. "Health care will become the largest business and industry in this

country, because people will pay, one way or another, for their lives. The average life-span will soon be 100 years old in this country—and at high quality.” Obviously, people paying for their own lives will eliminate the need for the sacrifice of Jesus. They will have built a stairway to heaven and become angels, if not gods.

I can also handle the notion of angels walking the earth, although I cannot imagine how they were created by God or what they look like. I have occasionally watched the popular television program, “Touched by an Angel,” and I realize that programs like this one are a form of remythologizing that makes the existence of angels more plausible to everyone in the culture. But angelic beings having sexual relations with human beings? And the fruit of these unions, these Nephilim? What kind of chromosomal makeup were they supposed to have? This is the kind of story I expect to find in lurid tabloids beckoning to me from checkout lanes in the local supermarket: “Woman abducted; has alien baby.”

*“Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you . . . You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God” (Luke 1:28-35).*

Despite my discomfort with angels having sexual intercourse with humans, I cannot easily dismiss Genesis 6:1-4 because it is an essential part of the biblical story of salvation. It and Luke 1 are inextricably linked in the Bible. Two things came to an end in the first story and begin again in the second one.

First, the marriage of heaven and earth. Behind all the familiarity and sentimentalization of Christmas is a culturally subversive story of intercourse between heaven and earth. The Lord of heaven chooses a human daughter and impregnates her. Mary’s womb brings forth the Son of God. Unlike his “half-brothers,” the angels, Jesus has God as Father and Mary as mother; he is fully God and fully human. Unlike his “nephews,” the Nephilim, Jesus is a Son of God and not a grandson. This portrait of the heavenly family complete with divine Father, human mother, sons, stepsons, and grandsons is more than the modern imagination can handle. All of us are quick to reduce it to doctrines that we can systematize according to the principles of logic. Seen in this light, systematizing is a form of sentimentalizing. We are slow to appropriate this portrait of the divine house as a key to the spiritual

infrastructure of reality and reluctant to use it as a means of discerning the elemental powers of the universe.

Second, the inheritance of heaven. Jesus, the Son of God, was sent to the earth in the fullness of time to offer the tenants the inheritance of heaven that was denied them in Genesis 6:1-4. John puts it this way:

*But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become [sons] children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God (1:12,13).*

Paul drew his notions of adoption and ascension from the story of the Nephilim in particular and from the estate tradition in general. In the light of the motifs of the estate tradition, read these words from Galatians:

*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as [sons] children. And because you are [sons] children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a [son] child, and if a [son] child then also an heir, through God (Gal. 4:4-7).*

We are just starting to appreciate how central the ideal of ascension is in the theology of Paul. Having cast him as the first systematic theologian, we have overlooked the significance of his mystical ascent. His Damascus road experience was formative, as is clear from his reference to it in 2 Corinthians 12: 2-4.

*I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. And I know that such a person—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows—was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat.*

Jesus appeared to Paul on the road as Lord and drew him from the field to the house, from the realm that was under the law to that of intimate communion. Paul had a foretaste of a glorified bodily existence, and sought to express the meaning of it in his preaching and his letters to the churches. Formed of dust and breath, a denizen of the field, Paul had been adopted as a son of God and knew in his very being that the rest of the believers would be adopted as well. Having been taken up into the house of heaven, he knew that the seemingly harsh decision of God recorded in Genesis 6:1-4 had been overturned. In the theology of Paul, ascension is adoption.

*For all who are led by the Spirit of God are [sons] children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him (Rom. 8:14-16).*

## Conclusion

In his article on the lost middle zone, Paul Hiebert attests how our witness to Jesus is weakened when we frame it on modern assumptions about the nature of reality. God becomes remote, and humans spiritually lonely. Jesus becomes the name that offers people some future place in heaven, rather than the name that dispels the spiritual powers who presently diminish them. Hiebert calls on the church to recover a theology of the middle zone, "a theology of divine guidance, provision and healing; of ancestors, spirits and invisible powers of this world; and of suffering, misfortune and death".<sup>10</sup> This essay is a modest attempt to write such a theology. The biblical understanding of the world turns the modern one inside out. The estate tradition is first and foremost theocentric. The house of the Lord stands at the center of all that exists. There the Lord deliberates over the affairs of the estate and commissions his sons to carry his words to the surrounding fields. The servants in the fields live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> *The Church Between Gospel and Culture*, ed. by George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 142.

<sup>2</sup> New York: Macmillan, 1956.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 161f.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 160f.

<sup>6</sup> Flannery O'Connor, *The Complete Stories* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1985), 461.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 451.

<sup>8</sup> "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle," *Missiology: An International Review* 10 (1982), 36.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.