

Community as Primal Reality

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Abstract

The author suggests that there may be a primal, underlying reality common to the universe and to its creator, something essential to what is both divinely infinite and creaturely finite. Do the structures of the cosmos suggest that being in all its variety is essentially communal? Astronomy suggests that clustering is a dominant dynamic and form in the universe, while Christian faith believes that the Source of all is not a single entity but a triad of self-giving persons with an infinite and loving wisdom of plans. Are Trinity and stellar clusters both realizations of an ultimate and universal modality? Community seems intrinsic to being.

Keywords

astrophysics, communal format, extraterrestrials, galaxies, structure of universe, Trinity

Religion and science through periods of history and culture have interpreted in various ways the universe in its beginnings, development, and future. At the same time they have pondered the being of God. Men and women have sought the ultimate in the activities of stars and in the words of special revelations. Theories, theologies, and theodicies have looked at both divine power and human limitation. The following pages suggest that there may be a primal, underlying reality common to the universe and to its creator, something essential to what is both divinely infinite and creaturely finite. Previously, words like “being,” “nature,” or “intellect” have linked

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God and creation. Do the structures of the cosmos suggest that being in all its variety is essentially communal?

Vast Universe: Clusters and Emptiness

Each year there are new estimates of how many galaxies exist in what is called the universe. A recent one is that the cosmos, whose radius is 93 billion light-years across, has 100 billion galaxies. The universe is an immensely large realm, and the distances between Earth and stars and galaxies are astonishingly huge.¹

Stars and Voids

The recent estimate of the number of stars in the average galaxy is approaching 200 billion, although some galaxies may have twice that many. Within a hundred million light-years of Earth there are 200 galaxies and further away there are groups of 2,500 large galaxies or 50,000 dwarf galaxies, all holding hundreds of trillions of stars. The sun with planet Earth in its gravitational field is moving within a particular galaxy. That collection of billions of stars has been called for some time and in various languages “The Milky Way.” Earth is found at the edge of the core of a galaxy that is a rotating pinwheel about 60,000 light-years in diameter. A full rotation of the galaxy’s orbit takes about 240 million years, during which material is being born, exists in stellar forms, declines, and dies.

And yet, basic studies of the universe as a whole conclude that “the universe is largely empty.”² All the stars in the cosmos in stellar clusters and in superclusters of galaxies, are occupying only from 1 percent to 2 percent of the volume of space in the universe. Interspersed among clusters of stars or galaxies are immense empty spaces where few burning suns exist. Most of the volume of the plane encompassing all the galaxies is a great quasi-void. “Space is almost empty; galaxies and clusters are found at the boundaries, while particular concentrations of superclusters are found along the lines of intersections between their boundaries.”³ This is not to say that the considerable space without stars and galaxies is completely empty, for atoms and

1. See David Eicher, *The New Cosmos* (New York: Cambridge University, 2015). This is in terms of the observable universe. Low estimates assert that the entire universe is in excess of 250 times larger than the observable universe.

2. Serge Brunier, *The Great Atlas of the Stars* (Buffalo: Firefly, 2001), 96–98.

3. Jean-Pierre Luminet, “Clusters and Superclusters of Galaxies,” *Cambridge Atlas of Astronomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1994), 399. “Voids are surrounded by relatively thick layers in which nearly all galaxies are crowded . . . The large-scale distribution of matter in the universe is somewhat similar to a foam, with the voids being analogs of air-bubbles and the layers with galaxies being analogs of the soap films.” “Voids,” in *Dictionary of Geophysics, Astrophysics, and Astronomy*, ed. Richard A. Matzner (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2001) 505.

subatomic particles, dark matter, gas, and minerals are more or less present. Nonetheless, at present the visible universe brings together hundreds of trillions of stars in a very limited space surrounded by little. Clearly there is a tendency of stars to exist in groups.

Star Clusters

Within each galactic assembly of stars there is a great deal of clustering. A cluster, mini-cluster, or super cluster may have 300 to 300,000 stars as gravity draws stars together, even from one galaxy to another. An open cluster holds from dozens to hundreds of stars, and astronomers have found a thousand of them in the Milky Way, although there may be as many as 100,000. A second kind of cluster, a globular cluster, holds tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions of stars. There are about 150 large clusters in the Milky Way, with more still to be discovered, while the neighboring Andromeda galaxy may have as many as 500 such clusters. Some giant elliptical galaxies have more than 10,000 globular clusters. Eighteen thousand light-years away—but within the Milky Way—there is a remarkable stellar cluster, Omega Centauri (visible to Earth), with 10 million stars. Stars in birth and in existence seek out other stars.

Galaxies

If many stars are in clusters, almost all stars with their planets and moons are in galaxies. Galaxies are sprawling space collections composed of dust, gas, and countless stars rotating around a galactic center. Some of those are similar to our own Milky Way, while others are smaller or larger. Astrophysicists are divided on just how galaxies first formed: some believe that smaller clusters of about one million stars formed first and later were gathered into the larger galaxies, while others think that galaxies formed first and later some stars within them began to gather into smaller clusters. The number of galaxies cannot be counted—the observable universe alone may contain 100 billion or more. Clusters and galaxies ceaselessly draw stars together.

Galactic Clusters

Galaxies are often moving within larger associations also known as clusters and super-clusters. These may contain a small group or hold up to several thousand members. The Milky Way along with the galaxies Andromeda and Triangulum, the two Magellan clouds in the southern hemisphere, and others form a “local group,” local because it is the context for the Sun and Earth. At first considered holding six galaxies, after 2003 the local group is estimated to have around eighty-five members. Going further, this and other small groups of galaxies are part of a larger cluster, the “Virgo Cluster,” a concentration of well over two thousand galaxies to which the Milky Way’s local group belongs. So, galaxies congregate in groups ranging from a few to tens of thousands, each with billions of stars and planets.

Galactic clustering has yet larger structures. The Virgo Cluster and nearby galaxies belong to a cluster called “the Virgo Supercluster.” The Virgo Supercluster is one of many superclusters in the observable universe, some of which hold ten thousand to possibly one hundred fifty thousand clusters of galaxies.⁴ Superclusters are very large clusters of galactic gatherings with billions of stars. Bruce Dorminey writes: “Enmeshed in this cosmic network are individual galaxies, galaxy clusters, and, even more mystifying, agglomerations of galaxy clusters termed ‘superclusters.’”⁵ The observable universe appears as a collection of giant bubble-like voids separated by thin sheets and filaments composed of galaxies in which superclusters appear as dense nodes.⁶ A dynamic of gathering and clustering reaches through the galaxies.

Recent studies indicate that the Virgo Supercluster is a “lobe” of an even greater supercluster: it has been given the name Laniakea, Hawaiian for “immense heaven.” This special supercluster draws to its center galaxies in a very great number. This very large gravitational format holding many superclusters was defined in 2014 by astronomers in Hawaii and at the University of Lyons, France. The Laniakea Supercluster including 100,000 galaxies is the widest neighborhood for the Milky Way with planet Earth.⁷ This vast galactic assembly is the largest known gravitationally bound object to have arisen thus far in the process of the formation of the cosmos.

Structures from star cluster to galactic supercluster indicate the basic mode of existing in groups. Clusters of stars and gatherings of galaxies with trillions of stars point to the pervasiveness of a plurality, of community.

Extraterrestrial Communities

Planets beyond our solar system were discovered in the early 1990s, and in less than twenty years over 300 such planets have been detected. In 2009, NASA launched a space observatory named Kepler to study 155,000 suns and to search out possible planets. Astronomers know of more than 1,800 planets orbiting more than 1,100 suns. Kepler in its first years has found over a thousand exoplanets and 1,200 further candidates—all in the Milky Way. Experts think that in just one galaxy possibly 20 percent of the stars are like the one at the center of the Earth’s solar system and that there are

4. Steve Gottlieb, “Seeing Triple,” *Sky and Telescope*, May 2015, 59.

5. Bruce Dorminey, “What Galaxy Superclusters Tell Us about the Universe,” *Astronomy*, January, 2010, 28. “Our local group and the Virgo Supercluster are appendages of the Norman-Hydra Centaurus Supercluster, and that in turn is being pulled towards the Shapley concentration, some 600 million light-years away ... roughly four times more massive than the Virgo Supercluster.” “Supercluster,” in *Astronomy Encyclopedia*, ed. P. Moore (Oxford: Oxford University, 2002), 394.

6. Margaret Geller and John Huchra, “Mapping the Universe,” *Science* 17 (1989): 897–903, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.246.4932.897>.

7. “Break Through,” *Astronomy*, March, 2016, 74. “Clusters of galaxies trace cosmic clumpiness over time. Clusters, having masses of up to 1,000 trillion ... times the mass of the sun, are the largest traditionally bound objects in the universe.” Joshua Frieman, “Seeing in the Dark,” *Scientific American*, October 20, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.1038/scientificamerican1115-40>.

as many planets in a galaxy as stars. On other worlds, fish and mammals or intense points of life or light may be evolving into higher forms and preparing for the arrival of intelligence. It is not that somewhere in space one strange-looking race of intelligent creatures might exist, but that in so many galaxies and over billions of years there would be numerous civilizations of intelligence. Those planets of cultures are not all existing now: some have come and gone, fading away into the vast expanse of time hundreds of millions of years ago, while others will begin to exist far in the future. Thousands of such cultural worlds might live just in the Milky Way and in our temporal zone of a million years of terrestrial history.

Do some of these planets with their suns exist in communities, that is, in fields of shared communication? That is likely. There is no reason to presume (as much of science fiction does) that extraterrestrial civilizations, if they exist, are by nature or culture hostile to other societies. In a universe of communities and communication, each mode of intelligence would have its own gifts. Evil and violence would be exceptions. Is it not possible that a civilization finds star-companions in space and time through technologically complicated dialogues, even over great distances of space and time?

Communal Being, Infinite and Finite

Observations that the cosmos (from the point of view of astrophysics) and the divine (from the point of view of faith) are communal is not a proof for any religious aspect. They do not make the created necessarily being formed according to a divine modality, or vice versa. Both only point to similar realities.

Community in Cosmos

Some theologians have noticed ways in which being unfolds community. Gisbert Greshake writes: "Creation is determined through relationality and complementarity, plurality and communality."⁸ Contrary to what religion often projects, contact between God and intelligent creatures is not a mechanics of activities (an exchange of religious actions and rewards) but living communion. The analogous meanings of "being" lead to a shift from understanding God as a lofty being to viewing the divine as an all-encompassing ocean of reality.⁹ This moves away from picturing the Ultimate as the top of a hierarchy or the cause of mechanical fields of forces. There are today philosophies and theologies seeking process and relationship within being. Joseph Bracken

8. Greshake, *Der dreieine Gott. Eine trinitarische Theologie* (Freiburg: Herder, 1997), 248. Theologians like Greshake and Jürgen Moltmann draw Trinitarian theology into "the communality of creation" (ibid., 248–52). The Trinity in the being of the universe and in the history of salvation is one. Ted Peters observes: "We ought not be thinking about two separate trinities that somehow need to be reconciled. There is but one Trinity." Ted Peters, *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in the Divine Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 177.

9. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1, q. 13, a. 11.

pursues a theology of universal inter-subjectivity relating God to the cosmos, and seeks a world view that will be an ontology or metaphysics with emphasis on the interconnectedness and interdependence of everything. Science and religion need new ways of reflecting on divine activity amid diversity and unity on Earth and within the universe of stars and planets. “If one understands the world of creation as the *imago Dei*, then creation should be seen as constituted not by individual entities in varying relations to one another but by dynamically interrelated and hierarchically ordered corporate entities.”¹⁰ Being could hold within itself a dynamic, tendency, or format of community. This perspective is not so much a theology of the human being in God but of the divine in creatures.

The Christian God is not a monarch but a trinity, a tri-unity of activities. As Leonardo Boff sums it up: “God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in reciprocal communion. They coexist from all eternity; none is before or after, superior or inferior, to the other. Each person enwraps the others; all permeate one another and live in one another. This is the reality of Trinitarian communion . . . In the beginning is not the solitude of a One, of an eternal being, alone and infinite. Rather in the beginning is the communion of the three unique Ones.”¹¹ God is a communion in which three divine persons know, love, and realize each other. Werner Eizinger interprets primal, eternal unfolding as communion. “The Godly – what we Christians mean with ‘God’ – is Origin. From it and through it the cosmos unfolds. But this God is—definitively and in itself—a fullness containing variously everything, eternity and its unfolding.”¹² Fullness here means not the material content of the universe but the plan and productive power for that content, potential and real. Clusters of stars do not exist alone and for themselves but for the good and life of others, and their artist-creator imparts to them its ideas and actualities. The identity of God, moreover, is not solitary transcendence but community.

A Triune God

According to Christian revelation, the depth of the one, absolute God holds a plurality. That plurality born of a kind of ontological communication is eternally innate to God. The New Testament says that those eternal, diverse powers in God become active missions to Earth and to people.

God as Triune

Faith in the Trinity brought about a revolution in the image and concept of God. A new direction is being given to humanity even as the universe is newly understood in terms of breadth and interconnectedness.

10. Joseph Bracken, “Being: An Entity, an Activity, or Both an Entity and an Activity?” *Journal of Religion* 96 (2016): 77–93 at 93, <https://doi.org/10.1086/683793>.

11. Leonardo Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000), 3.

12. Werner Eizinger, *Dreifaltigkeit – ein ewiges Mysterium? Den Gott der Christen verstehen* (Regensburg: Pustet, 2013), 93.

Three personal points enact the infinitely divine. Christian theologies, East and West, have oscillated between an emphasis on one God and a contemplation of three distinct persons. Greek and Syriac theologies focused on a community of persons grounding the unfolding of being and the unfolding of salvation history.¹³ In medieval Paris, Thomas Aquinas saw God not as a being, even a supreme being, but as an infinite actualization of reality in a living realm where three activities were eternal metaphysical persons. Aquinas's explanation through activity, relation, and person expresses not an order of emergence but a varied simultaneity. "Since the three processions in God are occurring in the identity of nature, it is necessary that those relations that are considered as divine processions are real relations."¹⁴ Processions, relations, and agents present the activities of one divine life in a variety of persons. Aquinas continues: "A divine person signifies a relation as subsistent. And this is to signify a relation in the mode of a substance that is a hypostasis subsisting in the divine nature (although subsisting in the divine nature is nothing other than the divine nature)."¹⁵

Western Christianity, however, increasingly accepted the tendency to begin and end faith and theology with the one God; moreover, the one God is at times identified with the first person, "the Father." That underlying being can seem to be almost more divine than the Trinity. From the medieval to the modern era for European philosophies and theologies the one God is dominant.¹⁶ For instance, Meister Eckhart in the fourteenth century placed the persons of the Trinity on the surface of God: beneath them is a somewhat inaccessible godhead. Four hundred years later, Friedrich Schelling established three divine powers whose interplay in cosmology, history, art, and religion is a theogony, a birth of God. God becomes the one God, the full divine reality through the cosmos and then through human consciousness in knowing and history. "History as a whole is a progressive, gradually self-disclosing revelation of the absolute."¹⁷ God becomes God. Emilio Brito writes: "With the three persons another world opens up, the world of the divine as such. Although among them there is tension, the powers

13. See Christoph Bruns, *Trinität und Kosmos: Zur Gotteslehre des Origenes* (Münster: Aschendorf, 2013).

14. Aquinas, *ST* 1, q. 28, a. 1.

15. Aquinas, *ST* 1, q. 29, a. 4. "Thomas Aquinas expresses a thought of defining importance for the following era ... when he says that in God the persons are constituted by the divine relations themselves: personhood in God is a subsistent relation and thus communication ... The one divine substance is the one ongoing communication of different persons." Gisbert Greshake, "Trinity as 'Communio,'" in *Rethinking Trinitarian Theology: Disputed Questions and Contemporary Issues in Trinitarian Theology*, ed. Robert J. Wozniak and Giulio Maspero (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 331–45 at 337.

16. On the unfortunate history of Christian theologies sustaining the theory that creation is attributed to the one God and not to any person of the Trinity, see Gisbert Greshake, *Der dreieine Gott*, 32–39.

17. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, trans. Peter Heath (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 2, "Furthermore, the total evolution of the absolute synthesis is also an infinite process, and history itself is a never wholly completed revelation of that absolute." *Ibid.*, 211.

express the natural side, the course of the process where the persons appear in an ongoing representation. Schelling wants to show how the Trinitarian processions realize themselves in creation and manifest fully the relations eternally posited in divinity."¹⁸ This interpretation of the Trinity from romantic idealism asserts a Trinitarian dynamic present in both deity and creation, although it compromises the original divinity of God and the identity of the persons.¹⁹ Greshake concludes: "All modes of reality are in their simplest form characterized by threefoldness."²⁰

The Divine as Community

Is the universe's tendency to community related to the divine plurality? For traditional Christianity, a Trinitarian God is not a curious logical aspect of the deity or a paradoxical church dogma. While Christian revelation presents the Trinity in sparse, anthropomorphic ways, that teaching about God being somehow pluriform is not asserted as one possible mode for a supreme being or a religious symbol. Community is the ultimate reality of God, the necessary mode of being-God. The being that is divine can only be communal. Absolute reality is triadic life not as a mental theological framework but as an ontic necessity: God can only be triune.

A new interest in various forms of panentheism sees a triad in the cosmos of "immanence, emergence, and transcendence"²¹ Bracken writes of "a corporate reality of the divine community as a socially organized process."²² "The three divine persons are at work in the cosmos to achieve their own designs without interfering with the freedom of intelligent being or with the laws governing the evolution of the cosmos."²³ Within

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18. Emilio Brito, *La Création selon Schelling. Universum* (Leuven: University Press, 1987), 419f. Marc Maesschalck observes that "in the area explained by theologians, contemporary research has moved in a direction anticipated by the great thinkers of idealist philosophy during the nineteenth century. Here Schelling is very much an initiator. In his system, trinity and creation are found organically tied to each other." Marc Maesschalck, *Philosophie et révélation dans l'itinéraire de Schelling* (Paris: Vrin, 1989), 521; see T. F. O'Meara, "Process and God in Schelling's Early Thought," *Listening* 14 (1979): 223–36. Walter Kasper wrote: "Neither the 'substance' of the ancients nor the 'person' of the moderns is ultimate, but rather relation is the primordial category of reality." Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 290.
19. Schelling's "eternal Christianity" is a Trinitarian revelation of God in the diversity of history. Maesschalck observes that in Schelling's system the three persons are in the primal godhead incomplete, while in human history they are too immanent in creatures. Maesschalck, *Philosophie et révélation*, 18–22.
20. Greshake, *Der dreieine Gott*, 179.
21. Philip Clayton and A. R. Peacocke, eds., *In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being: Pantheistic Reflections on God's Presence in a Scientific World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004).
22. Bracken, "Being: An Entity, an Activity, or Both an Entity and an Activity?," 92f.
23. Joseph Bracken, "Panentheism from a Process Perspective," in *Trinity in Process: A Relational Theology of God*, ed. Joseph Bracken and Marjorie Hewitt Suchoki (London: Continuum, 1997), 95–113 at 109; see also Joseph Bracken, *God: Three Who Are One* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2008).

created force fields of an ever-expanding cosmic society the world is a structured society of subsocieties, whereas the divine society is God as community in action. “The three divine persons can be regarded as personally ordered societies of actual occasions which co-create a common structured field of activity for their dynamic interrelation, and all created societies will fit into an inter-subjective world that is already constituted by the dynamic interrelation of the divine persons.”²⁴ The Trinity and their creatures co-constitute a common world even as each possesses an independence of one another in fields of activity, created and uncreated. Although God is necessarily plural and communal, the persons are not separate beings or gods and are not fully defined through specific activities in the universe. “The activity of the Trinity vis-à-vis the world of creation is always trifold or triune, not because the divine persons have freely decided to work together on the project of creation, redemption, and sanctification of the world of creation, but because otherwise they could not be one God. Their unity with one another is the unity of a higher-order corporate process that integrates the activity of the lower-order processes proper to each of the divine persons within itself so as to function as a corporate entity or system, a transcendent interpersonal community.”²⁵

The fields of activity proper to the divine persons extend through the cosmos, drawing in analogous ways all beings to some form of society. This Christian theology, stimulated by process thinking past and present, sketches an evolving physical universe and a history of intelligence as coming from the divine community.

The Trinitarian understanding of God leads to the principle of the existence and activity of all creatures as an ongoing event from the “energy resources proper to the divine persons in their ongoing collective field of existence and activity, an emergence from the divine energy field that reaches from the prior eternity of God to the future eternities of a vast variety of creatures.”²⁶ The Trinity’s life is foundational activity. The divine persons determine the basic pattern of the format of the universe. The Trinity’s work becomes quite nuanced because of the presence of created finite entities and even free persons within the structured society which is a part of the divine life.²⁷ “Each of the divine persons is a personally ordered society of actual entities and presides over a field of activity proper to its own existence and activity. Three fields of divine activity are fully integrated into a collective field of activity proper to themselves as one God, a divine communion. Finally, within this all-embracing divine field of activity proper to the three divine persons, the world of creation has slowly taken

24. Bracken, “Panentheism: A Field-Oriented Approach,” in Clayton and Peacocke, eds., *In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being*, 211–21 at 217.

25. Bracken, *The World in the Trinity. Open-Ended Systems in Science and Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 142.

26. Joseph Bracken, *Does God Roll Dice?: Divine Providence for a World in the Making* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2012), 144.

27. See Joseph Bracken, *The One in the Many: A Contemporary Reconstruction of the God-World Relationship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 215–17; Marc A. Pugliese, *The One, the Many, and the Trinity: Joseph A. Bracken and the Challenge of Process Metaphysics* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2011).

shape beginning with the big bang fourteen billion years ago.”²⁸ To sustain deeper kinds of cooperation between the universe and its creator, the Trinity touches constellations of beings and communities of intelligence.

Traces

Christianity holds that the ultimate creator of all is one and three. Long ago, Christian thinkers and mystics spoke of “traces” (*vestigia*) of the triune God in the physical reality of the universe. In the clover leaf or in the activities of the human mind they saw reflections of what was threefold. The psychological theory of Augustine, developing a parallel between three activities of the human mind—memory, word, and love—and the three divine processions, was particularly influential. Gregory of Nyssa saw the divine image in the soul’s memory, understanding, and will, but also in social engagements with other people and the world.²⁹ Jean Daniélou points out that these varied analogies are inadequate: all words and even the number three do not come close to the truly divine.³⁰ Each was a natural or aesthetic symbol and little more. As we saw, Schelling and other thinkers in the nineteenth century like Rossini, Hermes, Frohschammer, and Günther saw parallels between the divine persons and creation and history.³¹ While the Christian Trinity revealed life in celestial community, that philosophical trinity disclosed tension in human history. Regardless, structures of reality recalling a triad are not a religious proof but a metaphysical or mystical observation.

Communities of Life

Human beings on Earth are individuals in the service of a self and a species, even as each life is involved with others through social relations. Relationships pursued for years in personal experience and social contacts fashion the trajectory of each life.

Communal Religion

Family groups, ethnic peoples, democracy and other political forms are not personal options but inevitable relational bonds between people. In the modern sense of the word, a

28. Bracken, *Does God Roll Dice?*, 143f. 182–90; see Bracken, *Christianity and Process Thought. Spirituality for a Changing World* (Philadelphia: Templeton, 2006), 7–13, 107–15.

29. David Bentley Hart, “The Mirror of the Infinite,” in *Re-thinking Gregory of Nyssa*, ed. Sarah Coakley (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 111–32 at 117.

30. Jean Daniélou, *God and the Ways of Knowing* (New York: Meridian, 1957), 210f.

31. Anton Michel, “Trinité. “Semirationalisme catholique,” *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* 15:2 (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1950), 1792–98; see M. Schmaus, *Die psychologische Trinitätslehre des hl. Augustinus* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1967); J. Lebreton, *L’Histoire du dogme de la Trinité. Des origines au concile du Nicé*, 2 vols. (Paris: Beauchesne, 1927–28).

world fashions a person, and a person creates a world. Religion is involved with community. Although some religions, e.g., schools in Buddhism, and transcendental sects, proclaim that they are not communal, religion largely flows into and out of communities.

There are two great plans for Earth in the divine wisdom, creation, and revelation. The universe is an event of God bestowing being, whereas grace and revelation are gifts of a special life, and both—existence and the life called grace—come from the inner life of a divine community. The Spirit of God aids each person to find a fuller realization in life with others. The Christian faith has a social fulfillment, pneumatic and yet ordinary: the *ekklesia*, “the called gathering,” where the social nature of religion receives a further emphasis: ministry for others. In terrestrial history people receive something of the life of the God who is essentially community and communication. For Bracken, “Jesus consciously established a new corporate field of activity which he referred to as the kingdom of God. Thereby he was adding to the structure of the already existing divine-human field of activity that the three divine persons shared with all their creatures as a result of the initial act of creation, the beginning of the cosmic process.”³² The Trinity’s life opens to others a pluriform structure of reality, divine and created.

Some modern Catholic pieties from 1860 to 1960 and certain Protestant churches fashioned Christian faith and community in individualistic ways: there a personal faith focuses on influencing the will of the transcendent or seeks laboriously the redemption of a struggling or defeated self. Jesus’s movement emerged in order to bring people and peoples together. Thomas Rausch joins contemporary theologians in reacting against “the individualism of modern thought and finding in faith a deeper, social dimension. Salvation is about more than confessing Jesus and getting ‘saved.’”³³ While religion flourishes in a communion of beliefs and rituals and people, in the present and out of the past, today “the church is itself an eschatological reality, a pilgrim church journeying through time toward a fulfillment that is at once historical, social and cosmic. It sees history as moving towards a goal: the fullness of the kingdom that has already been revealed in the resurrection of one.”³⁴ Today the church is seeking to represent God’s special presence in a global reality, to be a community of communities.

Cosmic Society

As the divine being is plural, the graced life of each man and woman is communal. Life after death, religious faiths held, is a gift of God. There, too, the resurrection from the dead is eminently social, holding varied forms of renewal and transfiguration.

32. Bracken, *Does God Roll Dice?*, 133. “It is of the essence of the good to communicate itself ... It therefore belongs to the eminent good to communicate itself eminently to the creature.” Aquinas, *ST* 3, q. 1, a. 1.

33. Thomas Rausch, *Eschatology, Liturgy, and Christology* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2012), 98.

34. *Ibid.*, 157. For aspects of the divine communion in society and church see John J. Markey, *Creating Communion: The Theology of the Constitutions of the Church* (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2003).

Aquinas had observed: “Beatitude is one society ... a society which belongs to God by essence and to angels and humans by participation.”³⁵ Grace after death personalizes a man or a woman to a high degree, as, at the same time, the individual person is social in wider and more eminent ways. The eschaton is an atmosphere that draws groups and families, societies and civilizations into life together. A human being in future life, eternal life, finds identity within her personality and through relationships with other people. The procession of those who have died does not enter an empty heaven but meets the billions who have gone ahead, “the great cloud of witnesses” (Heb 12:1, NRSV). Brian Robinette explains how beyond death the corporeal nature of being-human-in-history is followed by an enhanced and expansive social life.³⁶ Collective eschatology is dominant and not an appendage to individual eschatology. The depth and variety of societies only expand. A place of happiness in the future includes unfolding worlds.

Today, men and women on Earth are living in a global world of cultures that no longer have a purely solitary economic and political life. Beyond Earth, however, there may be further horizons of communicating. The number of galaxies with their stars and planets argues for other intelligent civilizations where there would be communication and scientific sharing among the stars’ planets. What is living and intelligent and what is personal and social with myriads of technologies could draw together communities of billions of persons on distant planets, even in other galaxies, with their own spiritualities and salvation histories, their own sciences and arts. As God’s being and inner life is plural, so the graced life of each intelligent creature is social and communal.

Conclusion

Astronomy suggests that clustering is a dominant dynamic and form in the universe, while Christian faith believes that the Source of all is not a single entity but a triad of self-giving persons with an infinite and loving wisdom of plans. Are Trinity and stellar clusters both realizations of an ultimate and universal modality? Community seems intrinsic to being. This is not a deductive proof of astrophysics or of faith but an intimation linking being to community. In all directions reality often seems to be communal.

Author biography

Thomas F. O’Meara, OP, received his doctorate from the Ludwig-Maximilian University. He is the William K. Warren Professor of Theology Emeritus at the University of Notre Dame. Recently he has been a visiting professor at Boston College, and St. Michael’s College, University of Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Among his books are: *Theology of Ministry* (Paulist Press, 1999), *Vast Universe: Extraterrestrials and Christian Revelation* (Michael Glazier, 2012), and *God in the World: A Guide to Karl Rahner’s Theology* (Michael Glazier, 2017).

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35. The sermon “Beati qui habitant” in T. Kaeppli, “Una raccolta di prediche attribuite a S. Tommaso d’Aquino,” *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 13 (1943): 88f.
36. Brian Robinette, *Grammars of Resurrection: A Christian Theology of Presence and Absence* (New York: Crossroad, 2009), esp. 164–69.