

## PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS AND THE BIBLICAL SANCTUARY

FERNANDO L. CANALE  
Andrews University  
Berrien Springs, MI 49104

### *1. Introduction*

It is difficult to imagine a less likely subject than the one suggested by the title of this article. On one hand, philosophers may fail to see the connection between philosophical reflection and a building. Not that philosophy, particularly in its existentialist traditions, would shrink from reflecting on a building; after all, buildings are part of the reality philosophy studies. Yet, philosophers are not likely to relate the issue of philosophical foundations to the idea of building or to any concrete building. On the other hand, classical and modern theologians may wonder whether philosophical foundations are involved in the study of the biblical sanctuary. Even theologians studying the biblical text may find it difficult to see how philosophical foundations relate to the sanctuary depicted in the OT and NT. In short, the very connection this title suggests may appear problematic to most theologians and philosophers.

The purpose of this essay is to explore the way in which philosophical foundations relate to the theological interpretation of the biblical sanctuary. Specifically, the connection between philosophical foundations and biblical sanctuary will be explored in order to assess their role in the theological understanding of the biblical sanctuary motif.

I have organized this essay in six sections. Following this (1) introduction, (2) I will identify the connection between sanctuary and philosophical foundations and describe its nature. Immediately thereafter, (3) a brief reference to the nature of philosophical principles, their functions, and their classical and postmodern interpretations will be presented. Then, I will explore the way in which (4) classical and (5) modern foundations relate to the sanctuary. In the final section (6) I will ponder the question of philosophical foundations inherent in the sanctuary.

## 2. *The Nature of the Connection*

The connection between sanctuary and philosophical principles comes into view in Exod 25:8. In this passage God requests the building of the Israelite sanctuary. God tells Moses: "Have them [Israelites] make a sanctuary for me, that I may dwell among them." From the perspective of this pivotal text the sanctuary [*miqdaš*]<sup>1</sup> appears as a building where God plans to dwell [*šakan*] among human beings [*btokam*]. Thus, the idea of sanctuary is not reduced to a building but emerges as a God-building-human-beings structure. This structure brings into view the inner connection that exists between sanctuary and philosophical foundations. The connection takes place through the ideas of God and human nature which are essentially involved in the notion of sanctuary.

Since early times, the study of philosophical foundations has been known under the general label of metaphysics. According to Aristotle, metaphysics studies the meaning of first principles of scientific knowledge.<sup>2</sup> To recognize that among generally accepted philosophical foundations we find the notions of human nature,<sup>3</sup> nature (the world),<sup>4</sup> God,<sup>5</sup> and Being<sup>6</sup> will suffice for the

<sup>1</sup>In his study of sanctuary terms in Exod 25-40, Ralph E. Hendrix reports that "*miqdaš* (holy precinct), and *bayit* (house) in reference to the divine dwelling, each occurs only once, in Exod 25:8 and 34b:26 respectively" ("The Use of *Miškan* and '*Ohel Mo'ed* in Exod 25-40," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 30 [1992]: 5, n. 5). In these chapters two other words are used consistently to refer to the sanctuary. Concluding his word study, Hendrix suggests "that *miškan* is used in constructional contexts, primarily associated with commands to manufacture and assemble the Dwelling Place of YHWH, but secondarily in its generic sense as simply 'dwelling place.' The phrase *ohel mo'ed* appears in literary contexts where the cultic function of the habitation is the concern" (ibid., 13). In a more theological note he adds that "in all contexts within Exod 25-10 the biblical writer has masterfully controlled the use of *miškan* and *ohel mo'ed* in order to clarify the dual nature of YHWH's habitation. That habitation was to be understood as a transient dwelling place, such as was consistent with the dwelling places of nomadic peoples; therefore the choice of *miškan*. But yet, that habitation also had the continuing function of fostering the cultic relationship, and this aspect was best expressed by the choice of *ohel mo'ed*" (ibid.). The variety in the use of words to describe the sanctuary contributes to underline its God-building-beings structure. In this article I am not addressing the complexity of the structure. The purpose of the essay only requires its identification. However, we should notice that the "building" component does not play a mediatorial role between God and human beings, but situates and articulates their relationships in space and time.

<sup>2</sup>Aristotle *Metaphysics* 1. 1-2, 981b26-983a11. Aristotle describes the science we call metaphysics as the study "that investigates the first principles and causes" (ibid., 1. 2, 982b9).

<sup>3</sup>Martin Heidegger underlines the role of human nature as principle of interpretation of reality (ontology) (*Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson [New York: Harper and Collins, 1962], 62).

<sup>4</sup>Aristotle recognized that our understanding of the world is a principle of science. If it were not by the existence of the science of God (theology), the science of the world would

limited purpose of this essay. Among philosophical foundations, Being is the last and grounding one beyond or besides which there is no other. Due to this unsurpassable universality, the notion of Being determines the general nature of reality of which human nature, world, and God are regional aspects. The meaning of Being, then, determines the general meaning of reality to which any specific reality belongs.

Once first principles are interpreted by philosophy, they become grounding hermeneutical principles for any science of reality. In simple words, the meaning of Being provides the hermeneutical principle necessary to interpret human nature, world, and God. Philosophical clarification on the general meaning of these areas, in turn, becomes directly involved as hermeneutical principles for the sciences of human nature (humanities), the world (the so-called factual sciences), and God (theology). Christian theologians should be aware that these principles are scientific in mode; that is to say, they come into play whenever we approach the study of reality technically. The same hermeneutical principles, however, are operative in everyday discourse, though in an implicit prescientific mode.<sup>7</sup>

qualify as first philosophical principle (*Metaphysics*, 6.1, 1026a27-29).

<sup>5</sup>Philosophically speaking, the ideas of God and human nature are subject matters studied by regional ontologies. Thus, the ontological study of God, the world, and human nature qualify as philosophical foundations. Aristotle considered that "if there is an immovable substance [God], the science of this must be prior [to the science of nature] and must be first philosophy, and universal in this way, because it is first" (*Metaphysics*, 6.1, 1026a29).

<sup>6</sup>Regional ontologies are not the first foundation of philosophy. They rest on the overall view of reality interpreted by general ontology. General ontology has traditionally addressed the common characteristics or traits of Being as they refer to beings (*ibid.*, 4.1, 1003a22). Among them, for instance, we find the ideas of matter and form and potency and act (*ibid.*, 5.18, 1022a14-19; 4. 6, 1048a35-1048b9). Finally, regional and general ontologies spring from the discussion of what Martin Heidegger called "foundational ontology." Foundational ontology studies "the question of the meaning of Being in general" (*Being and Time* 31, 61). We should avoid confusing or fusing the God principle with the Being principle. In his later writings Heidegger calls the concept of Being to play the role that is usually played by the concept of God or the concept of the One. This usage not only replaces the God principle but also involves pantheism. For this reason, we should avoid mixing the God principle (the One) with the Being principle (the universal *notion* of Being) as Heidegger seems to do. On the contrary, we should understand the formal definition of the Being principle as playing a role in the epistemological realm as in Aristotle's analogical understanding of Being.

<sup>7</sup>Hans-Georg Gadamer describes the universality of hermeneutics by showing that everyday experience necessarily involves bias or prejudice. He has clearly underlined that our experience in its prescientific mode also involves principles; presuppositions; or, as he points out in the following statement, prejudices: "It can be shown that the concept of prejudice did not originally have the meaning we have attached to it. Prejudices are not

The interpretation of the meaning of the biblical sanctuary as a God-building-human-beings structure directly assumes a previous preunderstanding (philosophical principles or presuppositions) of God, human beings, and the world. Indirectly, however, it also requires a preunderstanding on the meaning of Being. Consequently, any exegesis of the biblical data on the sanctuary and their theological interpretation assumes the foundational hermeneutical role played by these principles.

### 3. *Classical versus Postmodern Understanding of Being*

Within the scientific mode of reflection, philosophical presuppositions stem from the interpretation of the first principle or ultimate presupposition, namely, the implicit or explicit meaning of Being. A cursory description of the two meanings in which the concept of Being has been understood in Western thought will suffice to our purpose.<sup>8</sup>

Aristotle understood the science of Being as the science of the universal which lays the ground and unity for all other sciences, including theology.<sup>9</sup> Aristotle did not explicitly reflect on Being per se. He assumed the epoch-making view of Parmenides, who advanced a timeless interpretation.<sup>10</sup> Plato, embracing Parmenides' view that Being—reality as such—was of a timeless nonhistorical nature, conceived a bipolar interpretation of beings as a whole (metaphysics). This bipolar interpretation of reality is known as the two-world theory,

---

necessarily unjustified and erroneous, so that they inevitably distort the truth. In fact, the historicity of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience. Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world. They are simply conditions whereby we experience something—whereby what we encounter says something to us" ("The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem," in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, ed. and trans. David E. Linge [Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976], 9). Bias and prejudice include all our accumulated personal experiences. The first principles of philosophy are biases or prejudices we implicitly assume in everyday discourse regarding Being, God, world, and human nature. Philosophical principles are the explicit and sophisticated definition of the meaning of Being, God, world, and human nature that determine the task of interpretation in all scientific enterprise.

<sup>8</sup>For a detailed description of these two interpretations of Being, see my *A Criticism of Theological Reason: Time and Timelessness as Primordial Presuppositions* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1987), 66-130.

<sup>9</sup>*Metaphysics* 11. 1, 3, 7.

<sup>10</sup>"Being has no coming-into-being and no destruction, for it is whole of limb, without motion, and without end. And it never Was, nor Will Be, because it Is now, a Whole all together, One, continuous" (Parmenides, *Fragments* 6, 7, in Kathleen Freeman, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers: A Complete Translation of the Fragments in Diels, Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1948], 43).

which involves the intelligible and visible orders.<sup>11</sup> The heavenly-intelligible order is timeless and eternal, while the earthly-sensible order is temporal and moving.<sup>12</sup>

From Parmenides' intuition of the meaning of Being (foundational ontology), the interpretation of general ontology implicit in bipolar metaphysics, and Aristotle's conception of the science of first principles, the universality and absolute certainty that characterized the classical and modern minds came to shape the destiny of Western civilization. This frame of mind decided the scientific structure of Christian theology soon after the NT was written and has continued to be the foundation on which it is still constructed. As we will see later, the Platonic-Aristotelian understanding of the first philosophical principles has played a foundational hermeneutical role in the theological interpretation of the biblical sanctuary.

The relentless criticism of tradition that characterizes the postmodern mind has made possible an epochal change in the interpretation of the general nature of ultimate reality. I am referring to the switch from the classical and modern understanding of Being as timeless (as, for instance, in Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Whitehead, Barth, and Pannenberg) to its temporal interpretation in postmodernism. This change was anticipated by Nietzsche and articulated later in technical detail by Heidegger. In his opening statements in *Being and Time*, Heidegger gave explicit expression to this new understanding of reality: "Our aim in the following treatise is to work out the question of the meaning of *Being* and to do so concretely. Our provisional aim is the Interpretation of *time* as the possible horizon for any understanding whatsoever of Being."<sup>13</sup> The postmodern search for truth, therefore, presupposes a radically different concept of the ground on which reality as a whole is understood. This primordial presupposition affects not only philosophy, but also the whole scientific enterprise, including, of course, Christian theology. As a matter of fact, Heidegger's interpretation of the Being principle as temporality has already unleashed

<sup>11</sup>Plato summarizes his "two worlds" theory in his *Republic* 6, 509d-511e.

<sup>12</sup>*Timaeus* 37d-38c.

<sup>13</sup>Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Collins, 1962), 1. In the same general line of thought, Jean-Paul Sartre affirmed the "monism of the phenomenon," which departs from the classical and modern dualism between appearance and reality. According to Sartre, then, "the dualism of being and appearance is no longer entitled to any legal status within philosophy. The appearance refers to the total series of appearances and not to a hidden reality which would drain to itself all the *being* of the existent. This appearance, for its part, is not an inconsistent manifestation of this being" (*Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. with introduction by Hazel E. Barnes [New York: Philosophical Library, 1956], xlv).

a theological revisionism of the God principle.<sup>14</sup>

Early in the third millennium Christian theologians will face the fact that during the twentieth century Western philosophy made the most radical turnabout since the days of Parmenides, Plato, and Aristotle. Some sectors of Christianity, building their theological perspectives on the philosophical foundations of classical and modern philosophy, will have a harder time dealing with this foundational intellectual change than Christian theologians attempting to develop Christian theology based on the Protestant *sola Scriptura* principle. In other words, the temporal understanding of Being calls for a deconstruction of Christian theology and its timeless conception of Being and God. The corresponding constructive phase and its repercussion in the task of doing Christian theology must wait for a more propitious time. Here we need only to show some examples of the way in which the classical and modern understandings of philosophical principles relate to the biblical sanctuary and what new ways the temporal-historical understanding of Being opens for the interpretation of the biblical sanctuary.

#### 4. Sanctuary and Classical Foundations

In this section, my purpose is to show how classical interpretations of the sanctuary result from either explicitly or implicitly acquiescing to Platonic and/or Aristotelian philosophical foundations. As described in section 2, first philosophical principles include the Being, God, human nature, and world principles. For the purpose of this essay I will concentrate on the God principle, which in turn assumes the Being principle and the nature (world) principle.<sup>15</sup> In the God-building-beings structure of the sanctuary, the former relates to God and the latter to the building. In short, I will concentrate on the notions of God and/or nature (world) and their influence on the theological interpretation of the biblical sanctuary. For my purpose, I have surveyed

<sup>14</sup>Among these attempts we find John Macquarrie's identification of the God and Being principles (*Principles of Christian Theology* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966], 115-122). Thus God becomes assimilated to the generality proper to Being and therefore is depersonalized. McQuarrie explains: "If we understand god as being, the relation is that of being to the beings rather than [sic] one being to another" (*ibid.*, 121). Schubert Ogden has proposed a temporal understanding of God based on an analogy with Heidegger's notion of human temporality (*The Reality of God and Other Essays* [New York: Harper and Row, 1966], 144-163). For a summary of these and other ways of dealing with God's temporality stemming from Process Philosophy, see William J. Hill, *Search for the Absent God: Tradition and Modernity in Religious Understanding* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 80-91.

<sup>15</sup>Throughout most of the history of Western philosophy and Christian theology, the question of the meaning of Being has remained implicit in the interpretation of the God principle. Explicit inquiry into the meaning of Being has taken place only recently in the writings of Heidegger.

the way Philo, Aquinas, and Calvin deal with the biblical sanctuary motif because they are influential representatives of the classical approach.

*Philo of Alexandria (40/30B.C. - A.D. 40/50)*

Philo is the most notable philosopher of Alexandrian Judaism. His syncretic approach juxtaposed Platonic, Stoic, Pythagorean, and Aristotelian elements. His reinterpretation of Platonism provided a metaphysical framework that, with few variations, was adopted by all forms of Neoplatonism and became influential until Scholasticism.<sup>16</sup> Regarding the God principle, Philo follows classical Greek philosophy by adopting the timelessness interpretation of God's being.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, God relates to creation timelessly.<sup>18</sup> The nature (world) principle unfolds in harmony with the God principle. Philo interprets the nature principle as following the two orders or levels of Platonic ontology. In creation (the nature principle), Philo sees two orders or realms: the intelligible and sensible universes.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, he places the intelligible universe in the Logos, a subalternate duplication of God.<sup>20</sup> The intelligible world, then, is not only timeless but also spaceless.

The nature principle causes Philo to understand the sanctuary as a symbolic representation of the intelligible and sensible orders.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the God

<sup>16</sup>Guillermo Fraile, *Historia de la Filosofía*, 3 vols. (Madrid: B.A.C., 1965, 1966), 1:697.

<sup>17</sup>"But God is the maker of time also, for He is the father of time's father, that is of the universe, and has caused the movements of the one to be the source of the generation of the other. Thus time stands to God in the relation of a grandson. For this universe, since we perceive it by our senses, is the younger son of God. To the elder son, I mean the intelligible universe, He assigned the place of firstborn, and purposed that it should remain in His own keeping. So this younger son, the world of our sense, when set in motion, brought that entity we call time to the brightness of its rising. And thus with God there is no future, since He has made the boundaries of the ages subject to Himself. For God's life is not a time, but eternity, which is the archetype and pattern of time; and in eternity there is no past nor future, but only present existence" (Philo *Quod Deus immutabilis sit*, LCL, 31-32).

<sup>18</sup>"So shall they [those prone to follow old fables] be schooled to understand that with Him nothing is ancient, nothing at all past, but all is in its birth and existence timeless (*achronōs*)" (Philo *De Sacrificiis Abelis et Caini*, LCL, 76).

<sup>19</sup>"When He [God] willed to create this visible world He first fully formed the intelligible world, in order that He might have the use of a pattern wholly God-like and incorporeal in producing the material world, as a later creation, the very image of an earlier, to embrace in itself objects of perception of as many kinds as the other contained objects of intelligence" (*De Opificio Mundi*, LCL, 4. 16). See also, *Quod Deus immutabilis sit*, 31-32.

<sup>20</sup>Philo explicitly underlines that "to speak of or conceive that world which consists of ideas as being in some place is illegitimate" (*De opificio mundi*, 4. 17). Because of its nature "the universe that consisted of ideas would have no other location than the Divine Reason, which was the Author of the ordered frame" (*ibid.*, 5. 20).

<sup>21</sup>It seems that Philo understands the most holy place as including symbols of the

principle leads him to an allegorical interpretation of Exod 25:8. What is the meaning of God's intention to dwell in the tabernacle? Philo dismisses the literal meaning in favor of a "deeper" one; that is, he interprets the text as talking about God's dwelling in the sensible world.<sup>22</sup> Specifically, Philo says that God dwells in the world when the soul<sup>23</sup> has an intellectual glimpse of his intellectual manifestations.<sup>24</sup> According to the philosophical interpretation of the God principle Philo adopts, God cannot dwell in the space-temporal continuum of the OT tent. The allegorical interpretation is the process through which the literal meaning of the text is deconstructed and reconstructed in harmony with the dictates of the God principle. In Philo's allegorical interpretation, the God-building-being sanctuary structure is translated into a God-being structure taking place within the intellectual, nonhistorical side of reality. The philosophical principles Philo embraces call for a hermeneutical, deconstructive dismissal of the literal historical sense of sanctuary texts in favor of an imaginative speculative construction of an alleged "deeper" intellectual nonhistorical allegorical meaning.

#### *Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)*

Aquinas follows the same overall interpretation of Philo's God principle.

---

intelligible world, while the holy place refers symbolically to the sensible order. Commenting on Exod 25:22, Philo opens his interpretation of the table in the holy place by noticing that "having spoken symbolically of incorporeal things, when He was discoursing divinely about the ark in the inner sanctuary, He now begins to speak of those things which are in sense-perception, rightly and appropriately beginning with the table" (*Questions et Solutions in Exodus*, LCL, 2. 69). In more detail, Philo explains that "the highest, and in the truest sense the holy, temple of God is, as we must believe, the whole universe, having for its sanctuary the most sacred part of all existence, even heaven, for its votive ornaments the stars, for its priests the angels who are servitors to His powers, unbodied souls, not compounds of rational and irrational nature, as we are, but with the irrational eliminated, all mind through and through, pure intelligences, in the likeness of the monad. There is also the temple made by hands; for it was right that no check should be given to the forwardness of those who pay their tribute to piety and desire by means of sacrifices either to give thanks for the blessings that befall them or to ask for pardon and forgiveness for their sins" (*De Specialibus Legibus*, LCL, 1. 66).

<sup>22</sup>Ibid. 2. 51; cf. *De Plantatione* 12.50.

<sup>23</sup>Here Philo brings the anthropological principle to play a significant role in the interpretation of the sanctuary.

<sup>24</sup>"Then will appear to thee that manifest One, Who causes incorporeal rays to shine for thee and grants visions of the unambiguous and indescribable things of nature and the abundant sources of other good things. For the beginning and end of happiness is to be able to see God. But this cannot happen to him who has not made his soul, as I said before, a sanctuary and altogether a shrine of God" (*Questions et Solutions in Exodus* 2.51).



According to Aquinas, God is eternal,<sup>25</sup> and eternity is timeless because in it there is no temporal succession.<sup>26</sup> Regarding the nature (world) principle, Aquinas abandons the Neoplatonic tradition in favor of a modified Aristotelian understanding. However, Plato's two-world theory is still operative in Aquinas' view, not as separate universes, but as always present components of the unified hierarchical universal order of reality (nature/world).<sup>27</sup> The nature (world) principle finds its ontological ground in the intellectual component of reality that Aquinas conceives in analogy to the timelessness of the God principle. In other words, Aquinas still conceives the real reality of the world as belonging to the invisible nature of the intellect. Despite Aristotle's and Aquinas' attempts at overcoming Platonic dualism, the visible historical side of reality remains a lesser and dependent level of reality.

The great systematizer of Roman Catholic theology provides, as usual, a clear synthesis of the general way in which theologians understood the biblical sanctuary until the thirteenth century. Because God is incorporeal while humans are corporeal (principle of nature), God cannot dwell in the sanctuary, as Exod 25:8 clearly states.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, the God-building-beings structure is deconstructed and reconstructed as a God-beings intellectual relation of spiritual worship. God did not need the sanctuary for himself or for his work of salvation. God willed the OT sanctuary for two reasons that relate to humans. On the practical side, the sanctuary was needed for worship and, on the theological side, for the prefiguration of Christ.<sup>29</sup>

Aquinas also has a metaphorical understanding of biblical language on

<sup>25</sup>*Summa Theologiae* 1.10. 2.

<sup>26</sup>*Summa Theologiae* 1.10.1 and 4.

<sup>27</sup>Aquinas developed his understanding of this principle in the brief booklet *On Being and Essence*, trans. and notes, Armand Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1949).

<sup>28</sup>"From this [1 Kgs 8: 27, 29, 30] it is evident that the house of the sanctuary was set up, not in order to contain God, as abiding therein locally, but that God's name might dwell there, i.e., that God might be made known there by means of things done and said there; and that those who prayed there might, through reverence for the place, pray more devoutly, so as to be heard more readily" (*Summa Theologiae* 1a-1ae. 102. 4. obj. 1).

<sup>29</sup>*Summa Theologiae*, 1a-2ae. 102.3. "The divine worship regards two things: namely, God Who is worshiped; and men, who worship Him. Accordingly God, Who is worshiped, is confined to no bodily place: wherefore there was no need, on His part, for a tabernacle or temple to be set up. But men, who worship Him, are corporeal beings: and for their sake there was need for a special tabernacle or temple to be set up for the worship of God, for two reasons. First, that through coming together with the thought that the place was set aside for the worship of God, they might approach thither with greater reverence. Secondly, that certain things relating to the excellence of Christ's Divine or human nature might be signified by the arrangement of various details in such temple or tabernacle" (*Summa Theologiae* 1a-2ae. 102. 4 obj. 1).

heavenly sanctuary texts.<sup>30</sup> The reason for the metaphorical understanding of the heavenly sanctuary is the consistent application of the God and nature principles. Since Christ (simultaneously being God and glorified human nature) ascended above all corporeal heavens,<sup>31</sup> where there is no place, biblical statements placing God in a heavenly sanctuary must be read metaphorically.<sup>32</sup> Conversely, texts placing God above the heavens (where there is neither time nor place) can be interpreted literally.<sup>33</sup> Heavenly sanctuary (priesthood) language is a metaphor pointing to divine being and action. For instance, Christ's sitting at the right hand of the Father "in the heavenly realms" (Eph 1:20) metaphorically signifies (1) the glory of the Godhead, (2) the beatitude of the Father, and

<sup>30</sup>The study of the nature and function of metaphor in human discourse and theology is very complex. For the limited purposes of this article I will use the notion of metaphor as those utterances functioning "in two referential fields at once. This duality explains how two levels of meaning are linked together in the symbol. The first meaning relates to a known field of reference, that is to the sphere of entities to which the predicates considered in their established meaning can be attached. The second meaning, the one that is to be made apparent, relates to a referential field for which there is no direct characterization, for which we consequently are unable to make identifying descriptions by means of appropriate predicates" (Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977], 299). "Most simply, Sallie McFague explains: a metaphor is seeing one thing as something else, pretending 'this' is 'that' as a way of saying something about it. Thinking metaphorically means spotting a thread of similarity between two dissimilar objects, events, or whatever, one of which is better known than the other, and using the better-known one as a way of speaking about the lesser known" (*Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982], 15). In this broad sense, the notion of metaphor overlaps the ideas of symbol and figurative language (cf. Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* [Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976], 45-69; McFague, 10-14). From these descriptions, it follows that when we read a text metaphorically, we assume the meaning of its subject-matter or referent. As I will argue in the following pages, Christian interpretations of OT and NT sanctuaries usually flow from the philosophical interpretation of the God principle used to decide the metaphorical nature of the texts, thereby opening the meaning of the texts to the free play of the creative imagination of the reader. Of course, metaphors do not require timeless transcendence as referent. Metaphors do play a cognitive illuminative role in common discourse referring to the *Lebenswelt* (cf. Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992], 351-358).

<sup>31</sup>Aquinas recognizes the existence of seven corporeal heavens. However, when applied to God, he understands heaven metaphorically (*Summa Theologiae* 1.68.4).

<sup>32</sup>As, for instance, "The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord is on his heavenly throne" (Ps 11:4); cf. *Summa Theologiae* 3.57.4.

<sup>33</sup>For instance, "He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens in order to fill the whole universe" (Eph 4:10 and Ps 8:2). Cf. *Summa Theologiae* 3.57. 4, and obj. 1-2.

(3) judiciary power.<sup>34</sup> Here the biblical notion of sanctuary and its God-building-beings structure is deconstructed to a God-only referent.

*John Calvin (1509-1564)*

Protestantism made Scripture play a greater role in its theological formulations<sup>35</sup> than Roman Catholicism had during the scholastic period. Even though Calvin's theological synthesis closely follows biblical language, the God and nature principles still rest on the classical understanding of God's timeless eternity<sup>36</sup> and spacial ubiquitousness.<sup>37</sup> The latter involves the notions that "no place can be assigned to God" and that "his presence, not confined to any region, is diffused over all space."<sup>38</sup> Heaven, therefore, is not a place where God lives, acts, and enters into relationship with his creatures, but is a metaphor for God's ineffable glory.<sup>39</sup>

Following in Philo's and Aquinas' paths, Calvin understood the OT sanctuary as a twofold metaphor facilitating real worship<sup>40</sup> and pointing

<sup>34</sup>*Summa Theologiae* 3.58.2..

<sup>35</sup>Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971-1989), 4:118-119.

<sup>36</sup>*Institutes of the Christian Religion* 1.13.7-8; 14.3.

<sup>37</sup>*Institutes* 1. 11. 2.

<sup>38</sup>Commenting on the Lord's Prayer statement, "Our Father which art in heaven," Calvin asserts, on the basis of 1 Kgs 8:27 and Isa 66:1, "that his [God's] presence, not confined to any region, is diffused over all space." From this basis Calvin immediately asserts that "as our gross minds are unable to conceive of his ineffable glory, it is designated to us by *heaven*, nothing which our eyes can behold being so full of splendor and majesty. While, then, we are accustomed to regard every object as confined to the place where our senses discern it, no place can be assigned to God; and hence, if we would seek him, we must rise higher than all corporeal or mental discernment. Again, this form of expression reminds us that he is far beyond the reach of change or corruption, that he holds the whole universe in his grasp, and rules it by his power." On this ground, Calvin interprets the Lord's prayer statement "Our Father which art in heaven" metaphorically because the God principle, not allowing God the ontological capacity of being in time or a place, demands a metaphorical, figurative sense. Thus, the text cannot mean what it says regarding place. Calvin assures us that the meaning of the text is "the same as if it had been said, that he is of infinite majesty, incomprehensible essence, boundless power, and eternal duration. When we thus speak of God, our thoughts must be raised to hear the highest pitch, we must not measure him by our little standards, or suppose his will to be like ours" (*Institutes* 3.20. 40).

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup>Commenting on God's command, "let them make me a sanctuary," Calvin warns that "we must beware of imagining anything inconsistent with the nature of God [the God principle], for He who sits above the heavens, and whose footstool is the earth, could not be enclosed in the tabernacle; but, because in His indulgence for the infirmities of an ignorant people, He desired to testify the presence of His grace and help by a visible symbol,

to Christ.<sup>41</sup> The heavenly sanctuary, likewise, becomes a metaphor for the spiritual efficacy that emanates from Christ's spiritual body (the real sanctuary) to us.<sup>42</sup>

Calvin's hermeneutical principles (God and nature principles) demand that sanctuary texts be understood as metaphors for true worship and the eternal efficacy of Christ's salvation for us. By the application of philosophical principles originating in classical Greek philosophy, the God-building-beings sanctuary structure of the biblical texts becomes reconstructed as the God [Christ]-beings pattern of theological discourse.

The cases included in this section have been few and cursorily addressed. However, they may help us to see how the philosophical foundations of theology become hermeneutical principles guiding the interpretation of the biblical sanctuary motif. Philo, Aquinas, and Calvin, belonging to widely diverse theological traditions, yet work within the same Platonic-Aristotelian interpretation of the God and nature principles. These principles have hermeneutically determined their reading of the OT and NT texts on the sanctuary. The timeless, spaceless interpretation of the God principle, unable to fit the temporal spatial meaning of the texts, calls for allegorical,

---

the earthly sanctuary is called His dwelling amongst men, inasmuch as there He was not worshiped in vain. And we must bear in memory what we have lately seen, that it was not the infinite essence of God, but His name, or the record of His name, that dwelt there" (*Commentaries on the Four Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, trans. C. William Bingham [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950], 4:150).

<sup>41</sup>"When we would seek the body or substance of the ancient shadows, and the truth of the figures, we may learn them, not only from the Apostle, but also from the Prophets, who everywhere draw the attention of believers to the kingdom of Christ; yet their clearer explanation must be sought in the Gospel, where Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, shining forth, shows that their fulfilment exists in Himself alone. But, although by His coming He abolished these typical ceremonies as regards their use, yet at the same time He established the reverence justly due to them; since they have no claim to be held in esteem on any other ground, except that their completion is found in Him; for, if they are separated from Him, it is plain that they are mere farces" (*ibid.*, 154).

<sup>42</sup>Commenting on Heb 9:11, Calvin assures us that he has no doubt that in this passage the author "means the body of Christ; for as there was formerly an access for the Levitical high priest to the holy of holies through the sanctuary, so Christ through his own body entered into the glory of heaven" (*Commentaries on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, trans. John Owen [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948], 202). Moreover, Calvin argues that "the word sanctuary is fitly and suitably applied to the body of Christ, for it is the temple in which the whole majesty of God dwells" (*ibid.*). In the following paragraph Calvin, rigorously applying the God principle to the interpretation of the text, explicitly explains that it does not refer to Christ's "material body, or of what belongs to the body as such, but of the spiritual efficacy which emanates from it to us. For as far as Christ's flesh is quickening, and is a heavenly food to nourish souls, as far as his blood is a spiritual drink and has a cleansing power, we are not to imagine anything earthly or material as being in them" (*ibid.*, 203).

figurative, or metaphorical interpretations.

Thus, the philosophical interpretation of God, working as hermeneutical principle, requires the deconstruction of the literal meaning of the text. Specifically, the God and nature principles cannot accommodate the reality of the God-building-beings structure characteristic of sanctuary passages. Classical theology achieves this theological deconstruction of the biblical text by way of a metaphorical, figurative, or allegorical reconstruction beyond the meaning of the text itself. One end result of this process is the replacement of the God-building-beings structure of biblical texts with either a God or God-beings pattern akin to the spacelessness and timelessness of the God principle.

### 5. *Sanctuary and Modern Foundations*

Can we modify the philosophical foundations of Christian theology? Of course, we can. Not infrequently, new theological trends can be traced back to alterations in the understanding of philosophical foundations. In a very real sense modern theology results from Kant's adjustment of reason's role to the limits of space and time.<sup>43</sup> It can be argued that Kant's epistemological position is only a modification by limitation of the classical interpretation of the principle of reason<sup>44</sup> which leaves the classical timeless interpretation of God unchallenged.<sup>45</sup>

Almost a century before Kant, we can find some traits of what will become the modern approach to theology in Baruch Spinoza. Spinoza's panen-

<sup>43</sup>Kant concludes: "It is therefore not merely possible or probable, but indubitably certain, that Space and Time, as the necessary conditions of all our external and internal experience, are merely subjective conditions of all our intuitions, in relation to which all objects are therefore mere phenomena, and not things in themselves, presented to us in this particular manner. And for this reason, in respect to the form of phenomena, much may be said *à priori*, while of the thing in itself, which may lie at the foundation of these phenomena, it is impossible to say anything" (Critique of Pure Reason, tr. J.M.D. Meiklejohn [Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1990], 39). Thus, Kant rejected the Aristotelic-Thomistic understanding of reason as "active intellect," able to reach timeless objects, and replaced it with his "transcendental reason" capable of reaching only spatio-temporal objects.

<sup>44</sup>The principle of reason is another philosophical foundation of theology. In the classical tradition it was subsumed, as theory of knowledge, under the human nature principle. Modern philosophy, under Kantian leadership, addressed it as "criticism." In more recent times theologians have come to address the same philosophical issue under varied headings: for instance, epistemology and hermeneutics.

<sup>45</sup>After careful analysis Kant feels that we may "determine our notion of the Supreme Being by means of the mere conception of the highest reality, as one, simple, all-sufficient, eternal, and so on—in one word, to determine it in its unconditioned completeness by the aid of every possible predicate. The conception of such a being is the conception of *God* in its transcendental sense, and thus the ideal of pure reason is the object-matter of a transcendental theology" (ibid., 325).

theistic interpretation of the God principle<sup>46</sup> leads him to review the classical concept of revelation and inspiration of Scripture. Since all human beings know God directly through reason,<sup>47</sup> and the necessary order of nature<sup>48</sup> (God principle and Nature principle are identical), Spinoza believes that the activity of the prophet takes place in his imagination.<sup>49</sup> Thus, the human locus of revelation-inspiration switches from reason to imagination. This momentous turn will become instrumental in the theological adoption of the historical-critical method of Bible interpretation, where miracle becomes a general term designating “any work whose cause is generally unknown,”<sup>50</sup> and historical narratives do not reveal God but “are very profitable in the matter of social relations.”<sup>51</sup> Not surprisingly, Spinoza interprets the ceremonial observances of the OT as referring to the historical-social reality of the commonwealth of Israel.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, the very content of biblical language on cultic ceremonies originates “only from contemporary custom.”<sup>53</sup>

With time, the modern trend foreshadowed by Spinoza came to classify biblical thought under the category of myth. Early in the nineteenth century Ernst Cassirer described the nature of “myth” from a Kantian perspective as a consciousness that “knows nothing of certain distinctions which seem absolutely necessary to empirical-scientific thinking.”<sup>54</sup> According to Cassirer, mythical thinking confuses “representation” with “real” perception, wish

<sup>46</sup>*Ethics* 1.16 3; 2.3. 4. 8.

<sup>47</sup>*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, trans., by Samuel Shirley with intro. by Brad Gregory (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 70.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>49</sup>“God’s revelations were received only with the aid of the imaginative faculty, to wit, with the aid of words or images, hence it was not a more perfect mind that was needed for the gift of prophecy, but a more lively imaginative faculty” (*ibid.*, 65).

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 124, 130.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>52</sup>Due to his panentheism and revisionism of revelation and inspiration, Spinoza believed that “ceremonial observances served to strengthen and preserve the Jewish state” (*ibid.*, 112).

<sup>53</sup>“Thus the Patriarchs sacrificed to God not through some command imposed on them by God, nor because they were instructed by the universal principles of the Divine Law, but only from contemporary custom. And if they did so by anyone’s command, that command was simply the existing law of the commonwealth in which they were dwelling, by which they, too, were bound” (*ibid.*, 116).

<sup>54</sup>*The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 2, *Mythical Thought*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), 36.

with fulfillment, and images with things.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, mythical thought “does not begin when the intuition of the universe and its parts and forces are merely formed into definite images, into the figures of demons and gods; *it begins only when a genesis, a becoming, a life in time, is attributed to these figures.*”<sup>56</sup> Thus, myth, thinking of God in time and space, becomes another specific way to describe metaphorical thought.

We have seen how the classical interpretation of the God principle rules out the notion that God may directly relate with space and time. Modern theology has not introduced significant changes in this regard. However, the decisive tilt toward historicity that, since the Enlightenment, has been taking place in some philosophical quarters (notably in historicism and phenomenology) has moved philosophers and theologians to question the classical notion of God’s absolute timelessness. Process Philosophy is a notable exponent of this trend.

Process Philosophy has not only criticized the notion of timelessness but has proposed a new view of God, according to which time and space become part of God’s dipolar nature.<sup>57</sup> However, this introduction takes place at the expense of replacing the personal notion of God’s nature with a panentheistic one. How does the reinterpretation of the God principle proposed by Process Philosophy play when applied to the biblical sanctuary? Specifically, does the introduction of time in God’s nature as proposed by Process Philosophy, recognize the God-building-beings structure of sanctuary texts? Not at all. Although Process Philosophy’s revision of the God principle calls for the reinterpretation of major Christian doctrines,<sup>58</sup> its application to the sanctuary requires the same metaphorical understanding required by the classical view. One reason for this similarity is that in a panentheistic view of God, God becomes the place where beings exist.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, God

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 104 (emphasis mine). Cassirer continues, “Only where man ceases to content himself with a static contemplation of the divine, where the divine explicates its existence and nature in time, where the human consciousness takes the step forward from the figure of the gods to the history, the narrative, of the gods—only then have we to do with ‘myths’ in the restricted, specific meaning of the word” (ibid).

<sup>57</sup>Alfred N. Whitehead affirms that “the consequent nature of God is conscious; and it is the realization of the actual world in the unity of his nature” (*Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* [New York: Macmillan, 1929], 524).

<sup>58</sup>Notably, the doctrine of God (cf. John J. O’Donnell, *Trinity and Temporality: The Christian Doctrine of God in the Light of Process Theology and the Theology of Hope* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983], 53-107).

<sup>59</sup>Whitehead writes, “The actuality of God must also be understood as a multiplicity of actual components in process of creation. This is God in his function of kingdom of

cannot relate to beings from their outside but from their inside. God is the place of beings. Consequently, the God-building-beings structure essential to the biblical sanctuary must be taken to be God-beings. Specifically, the sanctuary as a building and the divine activities associated with it must be read metaphorically.<sup>60</sup>

From the perspective of the new historical-exegetical approach to Biblical Studies originating in modern times, biblical literature on the sanctuary sheds some light on our understanding of OT and NT cultus and rituals because the sanctuary was obviously central to Israel's cultus. However, from the theological perspective of Christian dogmatics, the sanctuary continues to play no role. Theologically, the sanctuary becomes a myth because the biblical writings on the sanctuary attribute to God a life in time and space. Therefore, the sanctuary probably refers to human religious experience in the context of a panentheistic understanding of reality.

Nevertheless, one should not forget that during the modern period the classical approach to the interpretation of the sanctuary continues exercising its influence not only on dogmatic interpretations but, at times, also on exegetical ones.<sup>61</sup> Some exegetes, however, have begun to convey the meaning of sanctuary

---

heaven. Each actuality in the temporal world has its reception into God's nature" (ibid., 531).

<sup>60</sup>In the next to the last paragraph of his *Process and Reality* Whitehead uses the word "heaven" as a metaphor for God's primordial nature: "What is done in the world is transformed into a reality in heaven, and the reality in heaven passes back into the world. By reason of this reciprocal relation, the love in the world passes into the love in heaven, and floods back again into the world" (ibid., 532).

<sup>61</sup>Within the Protestant tradition, for instance, F. F. Bruce tells us that the heavenly sanctuary, the "real sanctuary" belongs to the same order of being as the saint's everlasting rest of [Hebrews] chs. 3 and 4" (*The Epistle to the Hebrews* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964], 163). Since, according to Bruce, the order of being of the saint's everlasting rest is the immortality of the soul (ibid., 78-79), Platonic ontology still shows up playing its hermeneutical role. In my opinion, the same classical interpretation of the God principle is operative in his rejection of the historical understanding of the Atonement and the typological interpretation of the sanctuary (ibid., 200-201; fn. 82). From the Roman Catholic tradition, Aelred Cody goes a step further when he sees the Platonic interpretation of the God and nature principles working not from the reader's hermeneutic assumptions but from the author's: "The theology of the economy of salvation in Christ is presented by the Epistle's author in the form of a symbolic parable using the categories of Alexandrian dualism" (*Heavenly Sanctuary and Liturgy in the Epistle to the Hebrews: The Achievement of Salvation in the Epistle's Perspectives* [St. Meinrad, IN: Grail, 1960], 155). Norbert Huguédé warns us against "une interprétation simpliste, qui ferait se figurer un Christ matériellement assis à droite de Dieu le Père, sur un trône d'or, comme on l'a vu, hélas, par des représentations pieuses, coiffé d'une couronne et revêtu d'un manteau d'apparat" (*Le Sacerdoce du Fils: Commentaire de l'épître aux Hébreux* [Paris: Fischbacher, 1983], 237-238). To help us avoid a naive reading of "Christ sitting at the right hand of God" (Heb 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; and 12:2), Huguédé quotes directly, in an authoritative manner, from the metaphorical



texts without calling on philosophical categories to interpret their referents.<sup>62</sup> Tacitly, these exegetes replace the notion of a timeless-spaceless God with the biblical notion that the reality of God is free to relate personally and directly with time, history, and space.<sup>63</sup> In so doing they implicitly point

---

interpretations of Augustine and Aquinas (*ibid.*, 238).

<sup>62</sup>Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., understands the OT tabernacle as primarily embodying the theology of worship. The sanctuary “assumes that God is the Great King who reigns and is therefore worthy of our praise and adoration. Even more specifically, the meaning of the tabernacle is that God has come ‘to dwell,’ ‘to tabernacle’ in the midst of Israel, as he would one day come in the Incarnation (John 1:14) and will come in the Second Advent (Rev 21:3). The Lord who dwelt in his visible glory in his sanctuary among his people (Exod 25:8) will one day come and dwell in all his glory among his saints forever” (“Exodus,” *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan: 1973], 2:452). William L. Lane recognizes that the word *skēnē* is used in Heb 8:9:10 “consistently in a local sense to designate the heavenly sanctuary (8:2) or the desert sanctuary (8:5), or to denote the front or rear compartments of the tabernacle (9:2, 3, 6, 8). The thrust of the argument is that the tabernacle with its division into two chambers was constructed according to the pattern or model shown to Moses on Mount Sinai (see on 8:5). The writer appears to have held a realistic understanding of Exod 25:40 and related texts, according to which a spatially conceived sanctuary consisting of two compartments existed in heaven and had provided the pattern for the desert sanctuary” (*Hebrews 9-13*, WBC, 47b [Dallas: Word, 1991], 237-238).

<sup>63</sup>Exegetical interpretations, however, do not, *per se*, inform theological discourse. Frequently, theologians summarily dismiss them as amusing possibilities that they, of course, cannot take seriously in the realm of dogmatic discourse. Biblical exegesis, after all, is supposed to fit the system dictated by the philosophical interpretation of theological principles. However, some less recognized and studied traditions seem to have entertained a more literal reading of the biblical sanctuary motif. For instance, according to Bryan W. Ball, seventeenth-century Puritan theology follows Aquinas’ and Calvin’s views regarding the interpretation of the OT sanctuary as a metaphor of Christ’s work (*The English Connection: The Puritan Roots of Seventh-day Adventist Belief* [Cambridge: James Clarke, 1981], 107-109). At the same time, however, his study seems to imply that, regarding the understanding of the heavenly sanctuary and Christ’s ministry, an incipient departure from tradition begins to take place in some Puritan writers. On the one hand, Puritan theology seems to follow the classical approach. Ball summarizes his findings regarding the Puritan interpretation of the biblical heavenly sanctuary texts by saying that “it is only necessary to open the relevant literature at the appropriate pages to discover that Puritan writers saw no valid reason to depart from a literal interpretation of those passages of Scripture which referred to the existence of a sanctuary in heaven” (*The English Connection*, 110). Although some Puritan writers recognize that the “form and matter” of the heavenly sanctuary are “of a different kind than the “form and matter” of the earthly sanctuary, they still understand heavenly sanctuary texts as disclosing the reality of a building in heaven where Christ performs His ministry. Ball describes the Puritan view of the reality of the heavenly sanctuary by saying that for Puritan writers “the heavenly sanctuary, real as it undoubtedly is, according to the clear testimony of Scripture, is of a far more excellent nature than its copy constructed on earth by men” (*ibid.*). The “matter and form” of the heavenly sanctuary “is of another kind, far more fair, pure, sublime, and stable than this which we see. And to this building pertains that heavenly tabernacle of Christ our high priest, which is the temple and residence of the Most High God” ([Thomas Lushington], *The Expiation of a Sinner: In*

to the need of deconstructing the philosophical interpretation of God and its role as hermeneutical principle of theological discourse.

Changes in the interpretation of the God principle necessarily involve substantial modifications in the understanding of the Being principle. What is the significance of this incipient and seemingly inconsequential departure from theological tradition?

### 6. *Sanctuary and Biblical Foundations*

Classical and modern philosophical foundations have consistently required a metaphorical interpretation of the God-building-beings structure present in the biblical texts that unveil the reality and meaning of the sanctuary. Working as hermeneutical principles, they have set the ontological stage to which the sanctuary refers. Apparently, the meaning of the God-building-beings sanctuary structure depends on the nature of its central component, God. The understanding of the God principle, then, determines the ontological referent of sanctuary language.

In sections 4 and 5 we have seen that when theologians embrace the timeless interpretation of the God principle, an unbridgeable incompatibility between the building (world principle) and the God components of the sanctuary structure takes place. The plain literal sense of sanctuary texts cannot be incorporated into theological discourse because God is assumed to exist in timelessness while the notion of building stands in time and space. Consequently, a metaphorical-figurative reading becomes imperative. The metaphorical sense applies, primarily, not to God or humans but to the sanctuary as building. By extension, however, the metaphorical sense reaches the whole God-building-beings structure of sanctuary texts both in OT and NT. Metaphorical approaches

---

*a Commentary upon the Epistle to the Hebrews* (1646), 167; this work appears to be largely a translation from a Latin commentary on Hebrews by Johannes Crellius (1590-1633), quoted in Ball, *The English Connection*, 110). On the other hand, if Ball's assessment of Puritan theology is correct, some Puritan writers' views of Christ's postresurrection priestly ministry are closely related to their recognition of the God-building-beings structure of the sanctuary as a literal reality in heaven. For some Puritan writers Christ's heavenly ministry is no longer a metaphor pointing to his eternal salvific grace (Aquinas), or the spiritual efficacy of Christ's spiritual body (Calvin). Instead, they conceive Christ's postresurrection heavenly ministry as a necessary continuation of his salvific activities initiated at the cross. Cross and heavenly ministries are consecutive, complementary salvific acts of Christ without which our salvation cannot be accomplished. "The death and blood of Christ is [sic] not enough to the cleansing of our souls, unless the blood be sprinkled, the death of Christ applied to us. There must be a work of application as well as of redemption. All the precious blood that Christ hath shed will not save a sinner, unless this blood be effectually applied and sprinkled on the soul. Application is a great and necessary part of our recovery and salvation, as well as the blood of Christ itself" (Samuel Mather, *Figures or Types*, 318; quoted in Ball, 104). For further discussion and sources see Ball, 103-107.

to the sanctuary texts require a transposition<sup>64</sup> of the building notion from its immediate spatio-temporal setting to the realm of divine timeless eternity. Unfortunately, this transposition alters the God-building-beings structure to a buildingless God-beings relation. This way of interpreting sanctuary texts has the advantage of producing a coherent understanding, yet theological consistency is attained at the expense of dismissing substantial facets of the texts and the realities they illumine.

Classical and modern theologies are right in insisting that our reading of the sanctuary texts be consistent and that consistency assumes that the subject matter about which the texts speak (the God-building-beings structure) stands on a unified understanding of reality. Theological interpretations of biblical texts, then, always assume a philosophical understanding of reality that they leave unthought and unsaid. Precisely because Scripture does not explicitly address the interpretation of Being, God, human nature, and nature principles, theologians have consistently drawn their understanding of them from philosophy.

Modernism and postmodernism have increasingly questioned the timeless view of classical theology. However, they have come short of abandoning the timelessness of God. They see classical timelessness as lacking proper balance as it relates to temporal historical realities. Consequently, modern and postmodern views are inclined to correct this imbalance by introducing time into the notion of God.<sup>65</sup> Methodologically, new interpretations are usually constructed by the free play of philosophical speculation and imagination.

Is it possible to reach a theological understanding of the biblical sanctuary that, while mindful of conceptual consistency, may preserve the God-building-beings structure essential to the subject matter uncovered by the texts? I think it is. I would like to suggest an alternate way to reach a consistent theological interpretation of the sanctuary, probably in harmony with some Puritan and some Biblical Theology readings of the sanctuary. A consistent theological interpretation of the sanctuary that does not require the metaphorical translation of its God-building-beings structure starts with the reinterpretation of the God principle. Such an alternate view requires two basic steps: the deconstruction of the classical and modern interpretations of the God principle and the selection of a starting point from which to think anew and formulate a reconstruction of the God principle in harmony with the biblical text.

### *The starting point*

Is there another way to reinterpret the meaning of the God principle

<sup>64</sup>Ricoeur, 17-18.

<sup>65</sup>Hegel takes the lead in this regard. Process philosophy is another example of this trend (see section 5).

besides the free play of philosophical speculation and imagination? Regarding the understanding of God, are we bound by the imagination (reason)-silence alternative? Contrary to the opinion of most philosophers and theologians, Heidegger believed that on the question of God, philosophy must keep silent while nursing an expectant mood waiting for the revelation of God within the horizon of Being.<sup>66</sup> In short, it seems that Heidegger thought that God should reveal himself just as Being does in the experience of *Dasein* (concrete human existence). Theologians are supposed to wait for God to present himself against the background provided by the general principle of Being and then be prepared to attune themselves to it. We may speculate why Heidegger did not develop a philosophical reflection on God.<sup>67</sup> It seems reasonable to suspect that Heidegger did not develop an explicit philosophy on the being of God because he was unable to find a starting point where the being of God would present itself within the realm of *Dasein*.

I have argued elsewhere that the starting point for the Christian interpretation of the God principle is Scripture.<sup>68</sup> Throughout the history of Christian thinking, Exod 3:14-15 has been recognized as the *locus classicus* where the being of God is brought into language. After changes in interpretation, biblical exegesis has come to recognize that this text speaks of the presence of God in history

<sup>66</sup>James L. Perotti's study on Heidegger's notion of the divine reports that Heidegger recognizes the existence of past disclosures of God but, since in the present time God does not reveal himself, philosophers must keep silence and an attitude of expectation for the future revelation of God. "In the essay, *Das Ding*, Heidegger cites three past manifestations of the divine: in the gods of ancient Greece, in the Jewish prophets, and in the sayings of Jesus. But these manifestations are no longer present to man; they are no longer meaningful to us, no longer capable of religious influence. Therefore, Heidegger is silent about these past manifestations; his thinking takes no account of them, i.e., is god-less" (*Heidegger on the Divine: The Thinker, The Poet, and God* [Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1974], 95). It is interesting to notice that Heidegger did not choose to seek the knowledge of God by way of analogy but through the more biblical revelatory approach. Unfortunately, his philosophical method required him to start from the revelation of God. Although God did not reveal himself to Heidegger, or for that matter to other humans in his time, he chose not to deny the possibility of the existence of God. On the contrary, he decided to wait for his revelation in the future. In an arbitrary way Heidegger thought some poets were closer to the divine or Holy than the philosophers. He himself speculated on the area of disclosure of the Holy by way of commenting on some poems written by Hölderin. I see no intellectual hindrance to replacing the writings of poets with the writings of OT and NT writers. Of course, I am willing to recognize the obvious limits of philosophy on the question of God.

<sup>67</sup>A detailed study of the question of God in Heidegger's work has been produced by George Kovacs, *The Question of God in Heidegger's Phenomenology* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1990).

<sup>68</sup>*A Criticism of Theological Reason*, 285-387.

but does not address the issue of his being.<sup>69</sup> Yet, if we recognize that the text is disclosing in words the presence of God, we have found the necessary starting point for a philosophical reconstruction of the God principle. This starting point is, in the realm of theology, analogous to *Dasein* as a philosophical starting point in Heidegger's philosophy.<sup>70</sup> Biblical texts bring to light the revelation of God's being in his historical presence.<sup>71</sup> As biblical texts on

<sup>69</sup>The tendency to disassociate God's presence from his Being shows up, for instance, when Th. C. Vriezen comments on Exod 3:14-15. "In this name Yahweh reveals His Being only in its 'formal aspect' by speaking of His actual presence. This is not a real qualification of Yahweh's Being, for *Yahweh does not mention His name*; but at the same time He does more than this: He gives man the most solemn assurance of his presence. For him who understands this there is no more need to ask about His name. Taken in this way this word of God to Moses typifies as shortly and essentially as possible all that Israel believes and knows concerning God. This name Yahweh, thus taken to mean 'He who is' without any further qualification of His Being, is therefore of fundamental importance. God can only be denoted as the Real One according to the functional character of His Being, not in His Being itself" (*An Outline of Old Testament Theology* [Oxford: Basil, 1958], 236).

<sup>70</sup>The main difference between the approach I am suggesting and Heidegger's relates to the selection of the starting point for phenomenological reflection. Heidegger starts from *Dasein* as appearance; from *Dasein* he goes to the interpretation of the ground of Being; and from the ground of Being he interprets God. The movement of biblical intelligibility, which I suggest Christian theology should follow, is different. The starting point is not the appearance of *Dasein* but the appearance of God. It is only from the appearance of God that we can settle the issue of the Being principle and the interpretation of all philosophical foundations.

<sup>71</sup>This starting point comes to light only when we place the traditional philosophical understanding of "appearance" in phenomenological *epoche* (see below, nn. 72 and 73). Heidegger provides a summary description of the traditional meaning of "appearance" we should discard by way of phenomenological bracketing. "At first sight [explains Heidegger], the distinction seems clear. Being and appearance means: the real in contradistinction to the unreal; the authentic over against the inauthentic" (*An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987], 98). This understanding originates with the Sophists and Plato, who declared appearance "to be mere appearance and thus degraded. At the same time, being as *idea* was exalted to a suprasensory realm. A chasm, *chorismos*, was created between the merely apparent essence here below and the real being, somewhere on high. In that chasm Christianity settled down, at the same time reinterpreting the lower as the created and the higher as the creator (ibid., 106). This notion of "appearance" was adopted by Christianity as a result of the classical interpretation of the God principle I described in sections 3 and 4. Heidegger has shown how, on the basis of early "Greek interpretation of being as *physic*, and only on this basis, both *truth* in the sense of unconcealment and *appearance* as a definite mode of emerging self-manifestation belong necessarily to being" (ibid., 109). Appearance, then, is the manifestation of being. This manifestation becomes the source of what shows itself in the phenomenon. Heidegger summarizes his view by concluding that '*phenomenon*, the showing-itself-in-itself, signifies a distinctive way in which something can be encountered. '*Appearance*, on the other hand, means a reference-relationship which is an entity in itself, and which is such that what *does the referring* (or the announcing) can fulfil its possible function only if it shows itself in itself and is thus a '*phenomenon*'" (*Being and Time*, 54).

God articulate the meaning of his past, present, and future presence, the being of God is brought into the clearing of consciousness by way of thought and words. The real ontic presence of God in space and time becomes the ground for biblical reflection on his being and actions. Consequently, biblical texts open a new way from which to search for the meaning of the God principle. This way does not stand on the basis of philosophical speculation or imagination, but rather on the recognition that our own access to the Christian understanding of any being, including God, is a careful listening to the way in which they present themselves to us through the linguistic mediation of biblical writers.

### *Deconstruction-reconstruction*

Once we come to the point of recognizing the philosophical import of biblical text, we are in a position to assess classical interpretations of the God principle. To do that we need to place all previous scientific interpretations of the God principle under Husserlian *epoche*,<sup>72</sup> that is, in methodological brackets. In other words, we should explicitly and systematically avoid using them while reflecting on the meaning of God opened before us by the original reflection on the Christian God.<sup>73</sup> As we do that, we will discover that biblical texts on God and on the sanctuary reveal that the God principle is compatible with our space, time, and history. On this basis, we should deconstruct the classical and modern understandings of the God principle and replace them

<sup>72</sup>In search of the scientific foundations of philosophy in the tradition of Descartes, Husserl introduces the phenomenological methodology which includes *epoche* as the methodological "bracketing," or "disconnecting," of traditionally received teachings of sciences (*Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. W. R. Boyce Gibson [London: George Allen & Unwin, 1952], 109). Thus, he writes that "*all sciences which relate to this natural world, though they stand ever so firm to me, though they fill me with wondering admiration, though I am far from any thought of objecting to them in the least degree, I disconnect them all, I make absolutely no use of their standards, I do not appropriate a single one of the propositions that enter into their systems, even though their evidential value is perfect, I take none of them, no one of them serves me for a foundation—so long, that is, as it is understood, in the way these sciences themselves understand it as a truth concerning the realities of this world. I may accept it only after I have placed it in the bracket.* That means: only in the modified consciousness of the judgment as it appears in disconnection, and *not as it figures within the science as its proposition, a proposition which claims to be valid and whose validity I recognize and make use of*" (ibid., 111). According to Husserl, "the phenomenological *epoche* includes *all the sciences natural and mental*, with the entire knowledge they have accumulated" (ibid., 171). See also Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 135-137. Emphasis original.

<sup>73</sup>This is a methodological procedure similar to the one Heidegger's investigation of the meaning of the Being principle applied to the ontological tradition. Heidegger used a modified version of Husserl's phenomenological *epoche* not only to suspend judgment, but also to destroy (deconstruct) traditional ontology (*Being and Time*, 44, 49).

with a technical formulation of the biblical understanding of God. We should deal with the other philosophical principles in the same manner.

The critical analysis of the theological understanding of philosophical principles I have briefly sketched becomes the methodological condition for overcoming the metaphorical interpretation of the sanctuary in Christian theology.<sup>74</sup> As we recognize the hermeneutical role of philosophical principles in Christian theology, and interpret them on the basis of biblical reflection, a consistent theological interpretation of the sanctuary that preserves its God-building-beings structure becomes possible.

### *7. Summary and Conclusion*

Philosophical foundations relate to the biblical sanctuary motif because they play the role of hermeneutical principles operative in its theological interpretation. Among the philosophical principles called to play a foundational role in Christian theology we identified the Being, God, human nature, and nature (the world) principles. Because in the biblical texts the sanctuary consistently reveals a God-building-beings structure, the God principle (in close relation to the nature [world] principle) directly conditions its theological interpretation. Philosophical principles work, for instance, by determining the nature of the reality to which the biblical texts refer, thereby determining whether the passage addresses its subject matter in a plain literal or in a more imaginative metaphorical sense. In theology, metaphorical discourse is usually called to fit the parameters of reality dictated by the philosophical interpretation of its subject matter.

Classical and modern theological traditions, usually embracing the timeless view of the God principle originated by Parmenides and Plato, interpret the sanctuary metaphorically. The timelessness of God, which makes no room for the notion of building or the notion of a succession of divine actions, requires a metaphorical interpretation. Consequently, sanctuary texts cannot speak of God directly but only metaphorically. Thus, the metaphorical interpretation of the sanctuary involves a transposition of the historical and spatial preunderstanding of the biblical texts to the timeless understanding dictated by the God principle. In the process, theologians are forced to achieve consistency by reducing the God-building-beings structure of the biblical texts to either a God-beings or a God structure of which the sanctuary texts can only speak metaphorically.

I have argued that a critical approach to the interpretation of traditional philosophical principles may open an alternate way to interpret the biblical

<sup>74</sup>Apparently, sanctuary texts assume that God is capable of relating directly to humans in a building. Specifically, the idea of God does not rule out his direct relational involvement with created beings within the limitations of space and time.

sanctuary, to help us overcome the metaphorical approach. A theological view of the sanctuary texts that, while preserving theological consistency, will not be compelled to deny the God-building-beings structure of biblical thinking requires a reinterpretation of philosophical principles, particularly of the God principle. The possibility of reinterpreting the philosophical understanding of the God principle hinges on the existence and identification of a starting point for reflection. The starting point, fortunately, is given to us in the prescientific understanding of God's presence expressed in biblical thinking. When we recognize that biblical reflection on God simultaneously reveals not only his historical presence but also his being, a view of the God principle compatible with our space and time comes into view. We need only formulate that view in technical categories and use it as hermeneutical principle for the interpretation of the biblical sanctuary. This interpretation of the God principle eliminates what has forced classical and modern theologies to various metaphorical interpretations.