

PANAPOTHEISM versus PANENTHEISM

On the Spatial Metaphor Problem, Perspectival Asymmetry,

and the Philosophical Necessity of the Distinction

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Abstract

This addendum to Kenotic Effluent Panapothicism (KEP) provides the formal philosophical argument for why the theory's neologism 'panapothicism' is not merely a terminological preference over 'panentheism' but a substantive philosophical necessity. The third edition adds a new opening section — the sharpest and most direct refutation of panentheism available — which precedes and grounds all subsequent arguments: the 'in requires out' argument. In requires out: the preposition 'in' is logically inseparable from the concept of an exterior, and since there can be no exterior of God, the preposition 'in' cannot be applied to the God-world relationship without generating immediate self-contradiction. This argument does not require discussion of spatial metaphors, infinite containers, or perspectival asymmetry. It requires only the definition of the preposition. The remaining sections of the paper develop the fuller account: the container logic and its bidirectional distortions, the infinity objection and its refutation, the perspectival asymmetry argument, and the practical consequences for theodicy and catharturgy.

I. 'In' Requires 'Out': The Simplest Refutation

The refutation of panentheism's central claim can be stated in two sentences before any of the more detailed arguments that follow are needed.

'In' requires 'out.' There can be no 'out' of God. Therefore 'in' cannot apply to the God-world relationship.

This is not a rhetorical flourish. It is a precise logical argument from the definition of a preposition.

The preposition ‘in’ — the ‘en’ of pan-en-theism — is a spatial containment term. Its meaning is constitutively relational: ‘in’ designates an interior, and an interior is defined by its relationship to an exterior. The inside of a room is what it is because of the walls that separate it from the outside. The inside of a body is what it is because of the skin that separates it from the outside. The inside of any container whatsoever is constituted as an inside by the boundary that distinguishes it from what is outside. Remove the outside and the inside collapses as a concept. There is no inside without an outside. The preposition ‘in’ cannot function — cannot mean anything — without the implicit concept of an exterior from which the interior is distinguished.

Now apply this to panentheism’s claim: all things are in God. For this to mean anything, God must have an interior. For God to have an interior, there must be something that is not inside God — an exterior that defines the interior as an interior. But there can be no exterior of God. God as the unlimited ground of all being cannot have something outside it — something that exists independently of God, beyond the reach of God’s being, constituting the outer boundary of the divine interior. To say there is something outside God is to say there is something that is not from God, not sustained by God, not within the scope of divine being — which is simply to deny that God is the unlimited ground of all being.

Panentheism therefore refutes itself at the level of its central preposition. The word ‘in’ requires an ‘out’ that the theology panentheism is trying to describe cannot have. The preposition destroys the claim before the claim can do any philosophical work.

I.1 — The Self-Sealing Character of the Refutation

The refutation is self-sealing: every attempt to escape it generates a further contradiction.

One might attempt: ‘in’ is used metaphorically, not literally. But if ‘in’ is not a spatial containment term in this context, what does it mean? Every available non-spatial meaning of ‘in’ — dependence, derivation, participation, sustenance — is precisely what panapotheism describes using ‘apo’ (from). The non-spatial reading of panentheism’s ‘in’ collapses into panapotheism. The distinctiveness of the panentheist claim depends on ‘in’ meaning something more than mere derivation or dependence — and the only ‘more’ available is the spatial containment that the refutation addresses.

One might attempt: God is infinite, so the ‘out’ that ‘in’ requires would simply be nothing. But this response concedes the point while attempting to dissolve it. If the ‘out’ of God is nothing, then God’s interior has no exterior — which means it has no interior either. An interior defined against nothing is not an interior. It is the total absence of the inside-outside distinction. And the total absence of the inside-outside distinction means ‘in’ has no meaning. The infinite version of the response does not rescue panentheism’s ‘in’; it dissolves it.

One might attempt: the in-out distinction simply does not apply to God. But this is the concession that completes the refutation. If the in-out distinction does not apply to God, then ‘in God’ means nothing. Panentheism’s distinctive claim — that all things are in God rather than merely from God

— rests entirely on ‘in’ meaning something. If ‘in’ cannot apply to God, the claim is empty.

I.2 — The Dimensional Limitation Argument Completes the Picture

The dimensional limitation argument developed in ‘Nothing Can Limit God But Itself’ (v3) completes the philosophical picture. God creates dimensionality — the very structure that makes ‘in’ and ‘out’ possible. Therefore the spatial prepositions ‘in’ and ‘out’ apply within the dimensional structure that the kenotic act produced. They cannot be applied to the unlimited ground that produced that structure, because the unlimited ground is dimensionless — prior to and productive of the dimensional order, not located within it.

Panentheism’s ‘in’ attempts to apply a dimensional-order preposition to the unlimited ground that produced the dimensional order. This is not merely a metaphor that needs qualification — it is a category error. The ‘in’ and ‘out’ of spatial containment are features of the created dimensional structure. God is not inside, outside, or alongside the dimensional structure. God produced it through the kenotic creative act. The relationship between God and the dimensional order is not spatial at all — it is the relationship between the limiting act and what the limiting act produced.

Panentheism uses a preposition that requires what God cannot have. ‘In’ requires ‘out.’ God has no ‘out.’ Therefore the universe is not ‘in’ God. The universe is ‘from’ God — genuinely other, genuinely derived, genuinely sustained by the unlimited ground from which it proceeds. Panapotheism names this correctly. Panentheism uses the wrong preposition for a reason that cannot be fixed by qualification, because the problem is not the metaphor’s imprecision but the preposition’s logical structure.

II. The Spatial Metaphor Problem in Panentheism

The term panentheism was coined by the philosopher Karl Krause in 1828 and means, literally, ‘all-in-God’ — pan (all) + en (in) + theos (God). It was designed to occupy a middle position between classical theism’s transcendence and pantheism’s identification of God with the universe, affirming both that God is more than the universe (against pantheism) and that the universe is somehow within or part of God (against classical theism’s sharp Creator-creature separation).

The tradition of panentheism is philosophically distinguished. Whitehead’s process theology, Hartshorne’s dipolar theism, Philip Clayton’s emergent panentheism, Jürgen Moltmann’s trinitarian panentheism, and Paul Tillich’s Ground of Being theology all operate within this framework. Each affirms the basic panentheist intuition: the universe is in some meaningful sense inside, within, or part of God, while God is also more than the universe.

But this intuition, however well-intentioned, encodes a spatial metaphor that generates systematic philosophical distortions. Section 0 above has shown that these distortions begin at the level of the preposition itself. The remaining sections develop the fuller account of what the spatial metaphor problem entails once one has granted that ‘in’ is to be used in some qualified sense.

II.1 — The Container Logic

When we say the universe is ‘in’ God, we invoke, unavoidably, the logic of containment. Containment is a spatial relationship. For X to be in Y, Y must have an interior — a bounded region that constitutes Y’s inside as distinct from Y’s outside. A cup contains water. A room contains furniture. A galaxy contains stars. In each case, the containing entity has a spatial structure that makes containment possible: an interior, a boundary, and an exterior.

Panentheism applies this containment structure to the God-world relationship. The universe is in God. God contains the universe. This immediately generates a problem that the panentheist literature has never fully resolved: what does it mean for an entity described as infinite, unlimited, and transcendent — as every major panentheist affirms God to be — to have an interior? An interior presupposes a boundary. A boundary presupposes a geometry. A geometry presupposes dimensionality.

An infinite container is not the solution to the dimensionality problem. It is the most ambitious possible extension of the dimensionality problem, scaled up to the size of God.

Hartshorne was admirably frank about this: he described God as having a ‘body’ (the universe) and a ‘soul’ (the divine mind), deploying explicitly the organism metaphor that makes the containment relationship vivid. But an organism that contains a body is a spatial entity, even if the organism is of infinite extent. Philip Clayton, one of the most rigorous contemporary defenders of panentheism, acknowledges that the ‘in’ language is metaphorical and requires careful qualification. But the problem is that every qualification that makes the metaphor philosophically respectable simultaneously drains it of its distinctive content. If ‘in’ does not mean spatial containment, what does it mean? Clayton and others answer with terms like ‘participation,’ ‘dependence,’ or ‘being sustained by’ — but these are precisely the terms that panapotheism uses, without the container metaphor and its associated distortions.

II.2 — The Bidirectional Distortion

What is philosophically remarkable about the panentheist spatial metaphor is that it distorts both terms of the God-world relationship simultaneously, in a single move.

The distortion of the divine: by making God a container, panentheism gives God a spatial structure — an interiority, a boundary condition, a relationship to the universe that is geometrically specifiable. Even if this geometry is declared to be infinite, the declaration does not dissolve the spatial structure; it merely makes it very large. An infinite container is not categorically different from a finite container — it is the same kind of thing at a different scale. But KEP’s governing principle requires categorical difference, not scalar difference.

The distortion of the universe: by making the universe a region within God, panentheism bounds the universe from the outside by the divine nature. The universe becomes a bounded region within

the divine container — not free to be genuinely other than God because it is, definitionally, inside God. Genuine creaturely otherness requires genuine ontological distinction, and genuine ontological distinction requires that the universe not be a spatial region within the divine nature.

These two distortions are not independent — they are two faces of the same error. The single mistake of applying spatial containment to the God-world relationship simultaneously compromises divine transcendence (by giving God a geometry) and creaturely independence (by making the creature a region within the geometry).

II.3 — Why Infinity Does Not Save Panentheism

The most common panentheist response to the spatial metaphor objection is to insist that God's infinity makes the container logic inapplicable in any problematic sense. This response fails for a precise reason: it confuses infinite extension with categorical transcendence of dimensionality.

Infinite extension means: the entity extends without limit along the relevant dimensional axes. An infinite space is still a space — it has geometric structure, directions, distances, simply without the boundary that would make it finite. Categorical transcendence of dimensionality means something entirely different: the entity has no dimensional determination whatsoever. Not infinite extension along dimensional axes — no dimensional axes at all.

To put the point precisely: an infinite space is the limit of finite spaces as their boundaries are progressively removed. The unlimited divine ground is not a space of any kind — finite or infinite — because it precedes and produces the dimensional order rather than being a member of it. The difference between a very large number and the concept of number itself is not a difference of degree but a difference of logical type. The difference between an infinitely extended space and the non-dimensional unlimited ground is the same kind of difference.

III. Perspectival Asymmetry: The View From Each Side

Beyond the spatial metaphor problem, there is a second and philosophically distinct reason why panapotheism is more adequate than panentheism: it describes the God-world relationship from the correct perspective.

III.1 — The Problem of Describing God from God's Side

Panentheism attempts to describe the God-world relationship from God's side: God contains the universe, God's being includes creaturely being. But this perspective is, strictly speaking, unavailable to any finite knower. No finite entity has access to the view from the unlimited ground looking toward its creation. Every attempt to describe the God-world relationship from God's side

imports dimensional categories into a register where they do not apply. The result is not a description of the unlimited ground but a description of the unlimited ground as it would appear if it were a very large dimensional entity.

The God's-eye view is not available to creatures. Every attempt to describe it imports the creature's own spatial and dimensional categories into a register where they do not apply.

III.2 — The Creation Side as the Epistemically Available Perspective

Panapotheism describes the God-world relationship from the creation's side: the universe issues from God through the kenotic creative act, continues to be sustained by the unlimited ground, and participates in the divine being not because it is spatially inside God but because its existence is continuously derived from and dependent upon the divine ground that produces it. This perspective is available to creatures because it is the perspective of creatures. We cannot see from God's side. But we can accurately describe what we are — beings who have issued from the unlimited ground through the kenotic creative act — and the term panapotheism names this accurately.

The 'apo' — from, out from — encodes the directionality correctly. It describes an asymmetric relationship: the universe depends on God in a way God does not depend on the universe. The creation proceeds from the unlimited ground; the unlimited ground does not proceed from the creation. The directionality is one-way, and 'apo' encodes this one-way directionality precisely. 'En,' by contrast, is a symmetrical spatial preposition: if X is in Y, Y contains X, and the relationship is a mutual spatial determination. The asymmetry of the God-world relationship requires an asymmetric preposition.

III.3 — Withdrawal as a Description from the Unavailable Side

The argument of II.1 has a target beyond panentheism, and it is time to name it. The doctrine of tzimtzum — the divine contraction by which the unlimited ground is said to withdraw from a region, vacating a space in which creation may then occur — is the most influential account of the creative act in the Kabbalistic tradition, and this system stands in the closest possible relation to that tradition. It must therefore be said plainly why creation is not described here as withdrawal. The reason is not that the doctrine is unserious. The reason is that withdrawal is a description from precisely the side that II.1 has shown to be unavailable.

Consider what withdrawal requires. To withdraw is to vacate — to leave a place one formerly occupied. A vacated place is a place with an outside, since what has been vacated must be bounded by what has not. And to report a withdrawal is to speak from a standpoint from which both the occupied and the vacated can be surveyed — that is, from outside the vacated region, watching. Each of these is a spatial and dimensional category. Tzimtzum is therefore a container-picture in the same sense that panentheism is a container-picture, merely inverted: panentheism places the world inside God, while tzimtzum makes room for the world by God's stepping out of a region.

Both require an interior and an exterior. Both require a vantage from which the arrangement is seen. And the refutation of Section O applies to both with equal force — for if God can have no exterior, then God has no region to vacate, and there is nowhere from which the vacating could be witnessed.

It should be added, in fairness to the tradition, that the tradition itself has long disputed whether the *tzimtzum* is to be read literally, as an actual withdrawal, or non-literally, as a concealment of the divine light relative to the creature rather than any real removal. The argument here bears on the literal reading. To the extent that *tzimtzum* is read non-literally — as concealment relative to us — it has already become a description from the creation's side, and to that extent it has conceded the perspectival point and stands in no conflict with what is argued here. The disagreement is with the literal form of the doctrine, not with what the doctrine was reaching for.

III.4 — The Expansion Without an Outside

The perspectival argument to this point has been conducted a priori. It receives a further and independent support from the structure of the world as we actually find it, and this support is worth stating, because it converts a philosophical stipulation into an observation.

The cosmology available to us describes an expanding universe, and it is essential to state precisely what that expansion is — because the popular picture of it is mistaken in exactly the way that matters here. The expansion is not the dispersal of matter through a pre-existing void, and the universe is not a content expanding within a container. The expansion is intrinsic to the metric itself: the separation between things grows because the geometry between them dilates, not because things travel through a space that was already there to be travelled through. In consequence there is no centre from which the expansion proceeds, no edge at which it terminates, and — the point that matters — nothing into which it expands. If the spatial geometry is flat and unbounded, it was always unbounded and merely becomes less dense; if it is closed, it is a manifold without boundary. On either reading, there is no exterior.

The consequence is direct. A withdrawal-model requires an exterior: a region vacated, bounded by what was not vacated, surveyed from without. But the creation we actually inhabit exhibits no exterior of any kind. There is no outside of the expansion, and therefore no standpoint from which that expansion could be seen as the filling of a room that had first been emptied. The world's own structure forbids the vantage the withdrawal-model presupposes. What the world presents instead, from the only side available, is expansion — being extending, dimension unfolding, a register growing without growing into anything. Described from within, which is the only place from which description occurs, this is outpouring. Effluence is therefore not a metaphor preferred over withdrawal. It is what the creative act is, seen from the side from which it can be seen.

III.5 — What Remains of the Kenosis

It may be objected that the foregoing dissolves the kenosis along with the withdrawal. If God empties no region, in what sense is the creative act a self-emptying at all? The objection is fair, and the answer to it is the crux of this system.

The kenosis is retained — but as an entailment, not as an event witnessed. Two claims already established produce it. The first is the governing axiom: nothing can limit God but itself. The second is the dimensional thesis of Section 0.2: to be dimensional is to be limited, since dimension is precisely the structure of determination, and extension along an axis is limitation along that axis. Now observe what follows. There exists a dimensional register — an extended, expanding, determinate world — and we are within it. This register is limited, because dimension is limitation. But nothing can limit God except God. Therefore the existence of the dimensional register is itself the divine self-limitation: not a prior act that made room for the register, but the very register it is. God does not withdraw in order to dimension. The dimensioning is the self-limiting. And since the word withdrawal imports a spatial picture already refuted, the proper word is the one this system uses — kenosis: the self-giving, the pouring-out that consists in the giving of a determinate register which is not the giver.

The three terms may now be distinguished exactly. Effluence is the phenomenon: what the creative act is, as given from the creation's side. It alone of the three is observed — we see a world proceeding, extending, expanding. Kenosis is the metaphysical implication: what that phenomenon entails about its source, given the axiom. It is not observed and could not be, since to observe it would require the God's-side view that II.1 forbids; it is inferred from the sheer existence of a dimensional register. Withdrawal is neither observed nor entailed. It is an attempted description of the act from within the divine interior — a report from a standpoint that neither the metaphysics of Section 0 nor the cosmology of II.4 permits to exist.

This is why the system holds that creation is outpouring and not withdrawal, and the claim should be understood as made for a reason rather than by preference. It is not the claim that God poured rather than withdrew, as though the divine interior had been inspected and found to contain the one act rather than the other. It is the claim that outpouring is what the act is from the only side on which anything is ever said — and that withdrawal describes it from a side that does not exist.

III.6 — The Kenosis Is Ongoing, and What Follows for the Soul

One qualification to II.5 must now be added, and it changes the shape of the entailment rather than merely extending it. The kenosis was there derived from a static fact: a dimensional register exists, and its existence entails the self-limitation. But the register in question is not a fact settled once and closed. It is expanding. The dilation described in II.4 is not a past event whose product now simply sits there; it is a continuing process, occurring now, in every moment this sentence is read. If the existence of dimensional limitation is the kenosis, and the dimensional register is not static but continually enlarging, then the kenosis is not a completed act inferred from a finished

product. It is ongoing, in the strict sense that the self-limitation it names is being enacted now and has not ceased to be enacted. God is not the subject of a single past self-gift whose evidence happens to persist. God is, at this moment, still pouring forth the dimensional register whose expansion is the pouring.

A further inference follows from the same premises, and it does not stop at the kenosis. If God actively sustains a created order that is itself demarcated by axes of dimensional limitation — if the giving of dimension is not a one-time boundary-setting but an ongoing act — then God, as the one continually giving that order, cannot be exhausted by it or coextensive with it. A giver is not identical to the gift. It follows, on this system's own axiom, that God must be greater than the limitations of the created dimensions God is at this moment giving; were God merely coextensive with them, there would be no giver distinct from the given, and the ongoing character of the gift would be unintelligible. This is not a new premise. It is the same axiom — nothing can limit God but itself — applied to the case of a limitation that is still being given rather than merely a limitation given once.

This bears directly on the soul. This Corpus holds, as a matter of faith rather than of the present argument, that the soul is spiritually connected to God — not merely caused by God in the manner of any created effect, but united to God in the way the tradition means when it speaks of the soul's proper end and its capacity for union. But God, on the inference just given, is dimensionally incommensurable with the physical register — greater than its axes, not merely prior to them in time. A connection to what is dimensionally incommensurable with the physical cannot itself be secured by physical means, since the physical register, on its own resources, reaches only what shares its dimensional order. If the soul is genuinely so connected, the soul cannot itself be simply a function or arrangement of the physical order it is connected through. It must be of a higher dimensional order than the physical register — extra-dimensional relative to it, in the precise sense this Corpus gives that term elsewhere: a register that intersects the physical without being consubstantial with it, meeting it at the person as at a point of intersection rather than being reducible to it or continuous with it by degrees.

This is a further and independent route to a conclusion this Corpus already holds on other grounds: perpendicular ontology, and specifically its master paradigm, the relation of body and soul, treated at length in Perpendicular Ontology. That treatise derives perpendicularity from the structure of the outpouring itself — a creation that gives forth distinct registers rather than grading them off by degree. The present argument arrives at the same place from the side of the soul's own connection to God: if the soul is united to a God dimensionally incommensurable with the physical, the soul must itself be dimensionally other than the physical, on pain of the union being either impossible or merely physical, which the tradition does not hold it to be. Two arguments meeting at one conclusion from different premises is not a coincidence to be noted in passing; it is what this Corpus calls a soft proof — not a demonstration in the manner of Section O's refutation, but a convergence substantial enough to count as real support, where independent lines of reasoning arrive at the same structural claim without having been constructed to do so.

One boundary must be stated as firmly as the inference itself, and it is the same boundary II.1 already drew. None of this permits speculation about what the giving of dimension is like from a

vantage prior to or outside dimension. The physical register's own predicates — three-dimensional extension, substance, location — are meaningful only within that register and do not survive export to whatever is not dimensioned at all. It is not merely that we lack the data; the categories themselves fail to refer. A three-dimensional solid regarded from a fourth spatial dimension is not diminished but flattened — it becomes a cross-section, a shadow of what it is within its own register — and this is offered only as an illustration of the general point: each dimensional step outward renders the register below it partial in a way internal to that lower register's own terms. What holds between the third dimension and a fourth extends without limit as the incommensurability increases; the physical universe regarded from wherever God properly is would not merely look strange but would fail to be picked out by any predicate that presupposes extension at all. This is why the question of whether soul and body are consubstantial cannot be settled by appeal to what precedes the dimensional register, and does not need to be. The two registers are given as intersecting, not as one substance viewed at two removes; they meet at the person, and the meeting is what perpendicular ontology has always named. What cannot be said is what the giving looks like from outside dimension altogether — and the argument of this section does not require saying it. It requires only that the giving be ongoing, that the giver exceed the given, and that a soul united to such a giver be dimensionally other than what it is given into. All three follow from premises already established, without a single step taken into the space this system has, from its first section, held to be unavailable.

IV. The Practical Consequences

IV.1 — Theodicy

KEP's structural dissolution of the Problem of Evil — the argument that God's non-intervention within the dimensional order is a structural consequence of the dimensional relation rather than a divine choice — requires that the dimensional order be genuinely distinct from the unlimited ground. If the universe is inside God, God is the locus of all events within the universe, including all suffering. Divine non-intervention then becomes structurally inexplicable: if suffering occurs inside God, God is not other than the dimensional order at all. Panapotheism avoids this: suffering occurs within the created order, which is genuinely distinct in its register from the unlimited ground. The relation between them is the perpendicular, dimensionally-indexed relation the system develops elsewhere — the registers are substantially distinct yet continuous at their intersection, not severed by a gap nor identical in substance. The unlimited ground does not act coercively within the dimensional register from outside it, not because God is unconcerned and not because God is sealed away behind a gap, but because substance does not cross the perpendicular: the ground is continuous with the created order at the intersection while remaining dimensionally other, and a direct entry of the unlimited into the dimensional register as an agent within it is itself a further kenotic act (the Incarnation).

IV.2 — Catharturgy as Real Work

KEP's account of catharturgy — the active work of purification that restores being to the privated regions of the soul — requires that the spiritual journey be a genuine directional movement toward the source rather than a realisation of unity always already complete. If the universe is inside God (panentheism), the soul is always already inside God, and the spiritual journey is the recognition of this always-already condition. Catharturgy in this framework tends toward pure contemplative recognition — the revelation of what was always the case — rather than genuine ontological restoration.

If the universe proceeds from God (panapotheism) but is genuinely distinct from God, the soul's privated condition is a genuine ontological condition requiring genuine work to address. The return is real because the departure was real. The soul is constituted by co-eternal forms in the divine mind — the eternal template of Adam Kadmon, the ten Monads in eternal divine potentiality — which the kenotic creative act actualised as genuine creaturely existence. Its return is a genuine anagogic movement toward the eternal source from which it was freely called. Panapotheism makes this journey intelligible in a way that panentheism cannot.

V. A Final Formulation

Panentheism and panapotheism are not two names for the same relationship viewed from different angles. They are descriptions of two structurally different relationships — one of containment, one of derivation — and the difference between them is not terminological but philosophical.

Panentheism sees the God-world relationship from above — from the perspective of a God who contains the universe within the divine nature. In doing so it gives God a dimensional structure (an interior capable of containing the universe), compromises creaturely independence (by making the creature a region within the divine), and uses a preposition that requires an exterior of God that God cannot have.

Panapotheism sees the God-world relationship from below — from the perspective of creation looking back toward the unlimited ground from which it was poured forth. In doing so it preserves the categorical distinctness of the unlimited ground's register, preserves genuine creaturely reality, and uses a preposition — 'apo,' from — that accurately describes what we know from where we stand: that we are of the divine outpouring, continuous from the ground at the intersection and distinct as the register we have become, without importing the spatial categories of containment that generate the distortion.

We are not inside God. We are from God. The difference between these two descriptions is the difference between a spatial metaphor that distorts both terms of the relationship and a directional one that accurately describes what we know from where we stand. And the spatial metaphor does not merely distort — it self-destructs. In requires out. There is no out of God.

Therefore in cannot apply.

ADONAI HA-ARETZ.

The Kingdom is the floor of the House of God.

Not a room inside God.

The house that God built, from which God's creative act never departs.

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