

# The Cosmic Horizon as the Highest Heaven: Examining Michael Guillen's Hypothesis

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## Abstract

*The human tendency to locate the divine in spatial terms represents a cognitive universal, yet classical theism affirms divine transcendence, the claim that God as Creator cannot be contained within creation. Into this tension steps physicist Michael Guillen, who has proposed that the "highest heaven" described in biblical tradition possesses a specific physical location: the cosmic horizon, the boundary of the observable universe where galaxies recede at the speed of light and time ceases. This article critically examines Guillen's hypothesis, evaluating whether it successfully integrates scientific cosmology with theological claims about divine transcendence and the nature of heaven. The study employs interdisciplinary analysis, drawing on cosmological literature to clarify the scientific status of the cosmic horizon, and on theological sources (biblical, patristic, medieval, and contemporary) to assess the hypothesis against classical and modern understandings of divine transcendence, immanence, and eschatology. The analysis proceeds through comparative evaluation of scientific and theological frameworks. While Guillen's hypothesis has received popular attention, sustained scholarly analysis remains lacking. This article provides the first systematic examination of the proposal within the science-religion literature, demonstrating how the hypothesis reveals fundamental tensions between spatial models of divinity and theological commitments to transcendence. It offers a constructive alternative: interpreting the cosmic horizon as a symbol of transcendence rather than a literal location. Scientifically, Guillen misconstrues the cosmic horizon, which is not a physical location but an observer-dependent observational boundary. Theologically, his spatial literalism conflicts with classical theism's affirmation that God cannot be contained within creation (1 Kings 8:27; Augustine; Aquinas).*



## I. Introduction

### 1.1 The Enduring Question of "Where"

The human propensity to locate the divine in spatial terms represents a cognitive and cultural universal. From Shinto kami residing in mountains to the Buddhist heavens from which Maitreya descends, religious traditions consistently situate supernatural agents within physical or metaphysical space (Trovato et al., 2023). This tendency appears early in human development, cross-cultural studies of children's drawings reveal that young people across Japanese, Swiss, and Russian contexts consistently place gods in the sky or celestial backgrounds, suggesting that spatial conceptions of divinity precede formal theological instruction (Trovato et al., 2023). Cognitive science research confirms that abstract concepts like "God" automatically orient visual attention upward, with linguistic co-occurrence statistics (phrases like "God above") shaping implicit spatial associations independent of perceptual experience (Goodhew et al., 2014). Yet this intuitive spatialization creates a profound theological problem: classical theism affirms divine transcendence, the claim that

God as Creator cannot be contained within creation. As 1 Kings 8:27 asks, "Heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built?" The tension between the cognitive inclination to locate the sacred and the theological commitment to divine boundlessness remains a persistent challenge at the intersection of human psychology and religious doctrine.

## **1.2 A Bold Contemporary Proposal**

Into this enduring tension steps Dr. Michael Guillen, a physicist with doctorates in physics, mathematics, and astronomy, a former Harvard lecturer, and former ABC News science editor (Guillen, 2021). In a recent public intervention, Guillen has argued that the "highest Heaven" described in biblical tradition possesses a specific physical location: the cosmic horizon, the outermost boundary of the observable universe approximately 273 billion trillion miles from Earth (Guillen, 2021). His argument draws on established cosmology, Edwin Hubble's discovery of universal expansion, the recession of distant galaxies, and Einstein's special relativity, to propose that at this horizon, where galaxies recede at the speed of light, time ceases entirely, creating a timeless realm compatible with descriptions of the divine abode (Guillen, 2023). Guillen explicitly connects this scientific framework to biblical cosmology's three-tiered structure: the lowest heaven as Earth's atmosphere, the middle heaven as outer space, and the highest heaven as God's dwelling place "above" the physical universe, populated by non-material, timeless beings (Guillen, 2021). His proposal has generated significant public discussion and scientific skepticism, with mainstream cosmologists emphasizing that the horizon represents an observational limit rather than a physical barrier or special location (Lineweaver & Davis, 2023).

This paper argues that Guillen's hypothesis, while creatively engaging contemporary cosmology, illuminates a fundamental tension between scientific cosmology and theological transcendence that invites deeper reflection on how these disciplines can, and cannot, be "yoked" (*ζυγόν*, *zygon*). Drawing on John Polkinghorne's principle that a discipline's method must accommodate the "idiosyncratic nature of its object" (Hogan, 2009, p. 561), I contend that theological method, because its object is the transcendent God, must differ in kind from the methods of natural science. Guillen's proposal, by treating the divine as locatable within physical coordinates, risks what Michael Buckley identified as the "alienation of theological method from the transcendence of God", a category error that misconstrues the nature of both the scientific horizon and the theological divine (Hogan, 2009). Following Bernard Lonergan, I suggest that the way in which "the divine differs from all other objects ought to be disclosed or reflected in religious experience and theological method" (Hogan, 2009, p. 565). Guillen's hypothesis thus serves as a productive case study for examining the boundaries between cosmological description and theological affirmation.

The paper proceeds in five movements. Section 2 explicates Guillen's hypothesis in detail, examining its scientific foundations (Hubble expansion, the cosmic horizon, relativistic time dilation) and its theological claims regarding biblical cosmology and the "highest heaven." Section 3 situates the proposal within the broader science-religion discourse, considering historical precedents for locating the divine and contemporary discussions of methodological naturalism (Petersen & Drees, 2018). Section 4 offers a scientific analysis, clarifying what the cosmic horizon actually represents in modern cosmology and evaluating whether it can plausibly function as a "location." Section 5 provides a theological analysis, examining classical and contemporary doctrines of divine transcendence and assessing Guillen's biblical interpretation against its ancient cosmological

context. Section 6 synthesizes these analyses, evaluating what the hypothesis accomplishes as a "yoking" attempt and proposing a more fruitful direction: understanding the cosmic horizon as a symbol of epistemic humility and divine "beyondness" rather than a physical address. The conclusion reflects on what this case reveals about the ongoing human attempt to locate the sacred within a scientific cosmology.

## II. Review of Literature

### 2.1 The Hypothesis: Guillen's Argument in Detail

#### a. The Scientific Foundation

Guillen's hypothesis rests upon three well-established pillars of modern cosmology: Hubble's law, the cosmic speed limit, and relativistic time dilation. Edwin Hubble's 1929 discovery revealed that galaxies are moving away from Earth at velocities proportional to their distances, a relationship formalized as  $v=H_0D$ , where  $v$  is recessional velocity,  $H_0$  is the Hubble constant, and  $D$  is proper distance (Hubble, 1929). This observation, now known as Hubble's law, provides the first observational basis for an expanding universe and remains foundational to Big Bang cosmology (Davis & Lineweaver, 2004). The "Hubble flow" describes galaxy motion due solely to this expansion, distinguishing it from local peculiar motions (Davis & Lineweaver, 2004).

Building on this framework, Guillen invokes Einstein's special relativity, which establishes the speed of light ( $c \approx 300,000$  km/s) as the universe's fundamental speed limit. As Zubairy (2023) explains, for objects approaching light speed, "the clock slows down, the length shrinks, and the mass increases. If the object is able to move close to the speed of light, time stops, the length shrinks to zero and the mass becomes infinite" (p. 228). This relativistic constraint becomes cosmologically significant when combined with Hubble's law: at a specific distance, recessional velocity reaches  $cc$ .

Guillen calculates this threshold distance at approximately 273 billion trillion miles from Earth (Guillen, 2023). This boundary, known as the cosmic horizon or Hubble sphere, is formally defined as  $r_{HS}=c/H_0$ , the distance where recession velocity equals the speed of light (Davis & Lineweaver, 2004). Davis and Lineweaver (2004) clarify that in the standard  $\Lambda_{CDM}$  cosmology, "all objects with redshift greater than  $z \sim 1.46$  are receding faster than the speed of light". Crucially, they emphasize that such superluminal recession does not violate special relativity because "the motion is not in any observer's inertial frame" (Davis & Lineweaver, 2004), galaxies are carried by expanding spacetime rather than moving through space.

Guillen then applies time dilation, a direct consequence of special relativity. The Lorentz factor  $\gamma = 1/\sqrt{1 - \frac{v^2}{c^2}}$  describes how time dilates for moving objects; as  $v$  approaches  $c$ ,  $\gamma$  approaches infinity, meaning time effectively stops (Zubairy, 2023). At the cosmic horizon, where  $v = c$ , Guillen argues that time ceases entirely, creating a realm of "timelessness" with "no past, present or future" (Guillen, 2023). He concludes that this region constitutes a habitable domain accessible only to "light and certain other non-material phenomena" (Guillen, 2023, para. 15).

#### b. The Theological Connection

Guillen anchors his theological argument in the biblical concept of a three-tiered heaven, a cosmological framework present throughout Scripture. The Hebrew Bible consistently uses plural forms (*shamayim*) for "heavens," suggesting a complex, multi-level understanding (Wright, 2019). Deuteronomy 10:14 declares, "Behold, to the LORD your God

belong heaven and the heaven of heavens" (English Standard Version), while 1 Kings 8:27 asks, "Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you" (ESV). Psalm 148:4 calls worshipers to "Praise him, you highest heavens" (ESV).

The most explicit New Testament reference appears in 2 Corinthians 12:2, where Paul describes being "caught up to the third heaven" (ESV). Biblical scholarship traditionally interprets this three-tiered structure as comprising: (1) the atmospheric heaven (Earth's sky), (2) the celestial heaven (outer space), and (3) the transcendent heaven (God's dwelling place) (Wright, 2019; Walton, 2015). Guillen explicitly adopts this framework, stating: "According to the Bible, the lowest level of heaven is Earth's atmosphere. The mid-level heaven is outer space. The highest-level heaven is what we're talking about: It's where God dwells" (Guillen, 2023).

Guillen proposes that this "highest heaven" corresponds precisely to the cosmic horizon. The alignment rests on three perceived parallels. First, both are described as "up", the Bible consistently portrays humans looking "up" to God, and the cosmic horizon represents the farthest "up" in physical space (Guillen, 2023). Second, both are inaccessible to mortals; just as Paul could not describe what he saw in the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:4), humans cannot physically reach or cross the cosmic horizon (Guillen, 2021). Third, both are realms of timelessness inhabited by non-material beings Guillen identifies the "spirits of the dead" with the "nonmaterial, timeless beings" that would necessarily populate a region beyond time (Guillen, 2021, p. 187).

Furthermore, Guillen (2021) notes that the cosmic horizon contains the universe's oldest objects, those predating even the Big Bang in his interpretation, which he associates with the eternal God who precedes creation. The accelerating expansion driven by dark energy, causing galaxies to disappear beyond the horizon, he interprets symbolically as "Heaven expanding as its population grows" (Guillen, 2023, para. 18).

### **c. Popular Presentation**

Guillen has disseminated his hypothesis through multiple public platforms, reaching audiences far beyond academic circles. His most prominent presentation appeared in a 2023 Fox News opinion essay, where he systematically laid out his reasoning for a general audience (Guillen, 2023). This essay generated widespread media coverage, including reports by the *Mirror* (Clements, 2023) and the *Times of India* (Times News Network, 2023), both of which amplified his claims to international readerships.

Guillen's credentials lend authority to his popular appeal: a Harvard physics PhD, former Harvard lecturer, and former ABC News science editor (Guillen, 2021). His books, including *Believing Is Seeing: A Physicist's Guide to the Most Stunning Truths About God, Eternity, and Heaven* (2021), elaborate these ideas for Christian audiences. He has appeared on Christian media outlets, framing his hypothesis as harmonizing scientific discovery with biblical faith (Guillen, 2021).

In these presentations, Guillen emphasizes his scientific bona fides while making theological claims accessible. He presents the cosmic horizon distance (273 billion trillion miles) as an empirically-grounded calculation (Guillen, 2023), Einstein's relativity as settled science (Guillen, 2021), and the biblical three-tiered heaven as a literal cosmological description (Guillen, 2023). This synthesis positions him uniquely as a scientist who takes both physics and Scripture seriously, contributing to his appeal among religious audiences seeking scientific validation of faith.

### III. Research Methods

#### 3.1 Situating the Hypothesis in the Science-Religion Discourse

##### a. Historical Precedents

Guillen's attempt to locate the divine within a scientific cosmology stands within a long tradition of integrating theological claims with prevailing cosmological frameworks. Perhaps the most elaborate pre-modern example appears in Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*, which systematically mapped the structure of heaven, hell, and purgatory onto the Ptolemaic geocentric universe (Bae, 2005). In Dante's cosmology, Earth rests at the center, surrounded by nine concentric celestial spheres: the Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the Fixed Stars, and the Primum Mobile (Bae, 2005). Beyond these spheres lies the Empyrean, the "highest heaven" and dwelling place of God, described as a realm of pure light and love existing outside physical space and time (Davies, 2004). This architecture reflects the medieval conviction that the cosmos itself manifests divine order, with God occupying the outermost boundary of creation, structurally analogous to Guillen's placement of the divine at the cosmic horizon. As Davies (2004) explains, pre-modern cosmology operated through "cosmology by extension," wherein "heaven" was located "in the heavens, at a point far removed from the earth, but in a field of extension that was continuous with it" (p. 16). This spatialized understanding of the divine realm, while foreign to contemporary sensibilities, provided the conceptual scaffolding for later attempts to harmonize theology with astronomy.

A second major precedent emerges in Isaac Newton's theological metaphysics. Newton's concept of absolute space, developed in his early manuscript *De Gravitatione* (circa 1668), explicitly connected the structure of physical reality to divine attributes (Thomas, 2018). Newton argued that space and time are "emanative effects" of God, real entities produced by and continuously dependent upon divine existence. As Thomas (2018) demonstrates, Newton drew upon Henry More's account of emanative causation to argue that space and time "are real but not really distinct from God, and they should be understood as incorporeal dimensions" (p. 106). In his later *Opticks* and the General Scholium to the *Principia*, Newton further suggested that absolute space constitutes the "sensorium of God", the medium through which the divine perceives and interacts with creation (Wikisource contributors, 2021). This metaphysical framework effectively rendered the entire universe a locus of divine presence, though Newton stopped short of identifying a specific "address" for God. Nevertheless, his project of integrating theological commitments with mathematical physics established a precedent for subsequent attempts to read theological meaning from cosmological structure.

These historical precedents illuminate what is distinctive about Guillen's proposal. Where Dante located God beyond the Primum Mobile in a purely metaphysical Empyrean, Guillen identifies the divine dwelling with a physically defined boundary. Where Newton understood absolute space as the medium of divine omnipresence, Guillen treats the cosmic horizon as a specific location. In both cases, Guillen's innovation consists in rendering spatial what his predecessors left transcendent or ubiquitous.

##### b. Contemporary Context

Guillen's hypothesis enters an established field of science-religion discourse concerned with creation, eschatology, and divine action. Since the late twentieth century, theologians and scientists have developed sophisticated frameworks for relating these domains without reducing one to the other (Bonting, 2005). Bonting (2005) articulates the core challenge: "The science-theology dialogue" must navigate fundamental questions about "how" these disciplines relate, given their divergent methods and objects of inquiry (p. 1). Within this

dialogue, creation theology has received particular attention, with scholars examining whether and how Big Bang cosmology might inform understanding of divine creativity (Bonting, 2005). Guillen's proposal represents a distinctive, and controversial, intervention in this conversation, offering what might be termed a "spatial eschatology" that identifies heaven's location with a cosmologically defined boundary.

The hypothesis also intersects with contemporary discussions of divine action. Bonting (2005) surveys various models for understanding how God might act within a scientifically described world, ranging from interventionist frameworks to those emphasizing continuous creation and providential ordering (pp. 145–168). Guillen's approach diverges from these mainstream discussions by focusing not on *how* God acts within the universe but on *where* God resides relative to it. This spatial focus aligns more closely with eschatological questions about the "new creation" and the destiny of human persons (Bonting, 2005, pp. 223–238). However, Guillen's literal interpretation of heaven's location stands in tension with dominant tendencies in contemporary eschatology, which emphasize the transformation rather than relocation of created reality.

### **c. The Question of Method**

Determining the proper classification of Guillen's claim is essential for evaluating it. The hypothesis does not fit neatly into standard categories of academic discourse, and its methodological ambiguity contributes to both its popular appeal and its scholarly elusiveness. As a scientific hypothesis, Guillen's proposal fails to meet basic criteria. Scientific hypotheses must generate testable predictions and be subject to empirical falsification (Bonting, 2005, pp. 1–20). By definition, the cosmic horizon cannot be observed or reached, and Guillen offers no mechanism by which his claim could be verified or refuted. The hypothesis thus lies outside the domain of empirical science, however much it draws upon scientific concepts.

As a theological interpretation, the proposal engages biblical texts and theological traditions. Guillen explicitly connects his claims to scriptural references to the "highest heaven" and the "third heaven" (2 Corinthians 12:2). However, his interpretation proceeds without engagement with the extensive scholarly literature on ancient Near Eastern cosmology, biblical genre, or theological hermeneutics. Contemporary biblical scholarship emphasizes that ancient cosmological language functioned within particular cultural and literary contexts rather than as proto-scientific description (Walton, 2015). Guillen's literalist reading thus represents a minority position within biblical interpretation.

As a synthesis of science and religion, Guillen's hypothesis exemplifies what Ian Barbour categorized as an "integration" model, seeking direct conceptual harmony between scientific and theological claims (Bonting, 2005, p. 3). However, critics of the integration approach warn against premature or overly literal harmonization that fails to respect disciplinary boundaries. Petersen and Drees (2018) emphasize that methodological naturalism in science and theological commitments to transcendence require careful negotiation rather than simple conflation.

As metaphor, Guillen's proposal might find its most charitable interpretation. The cosmic horizon could function as a powerful symbol of divine transcendence, a boundary marking the limits of human knowledge and pointing toward what lies beyond. Davies (2004) notes that pre-modern cosmology operated through richly metaphorical frameworks that nonetheless carried genuine cognitive content. Read metaphorically, Guillen's hypothesis might illuminate aspects of divine "beyondness" without claiming literal spatial location. However, Guillen himself presents his claim as literal rather than metaphorical, insisting that heaven possesses a "specific physical location" (Guillen, 2023). This literalism creates the methodological tensions this paper examines.

In sum, Guillen's hypothesis resists easy classification. It draws upon scientific cosmology without functioning as science; it invokes theological tradition without engaging its hermeneutical methods. The proposal thus occupies an ambiguous space between disciplines, precisely the kind of boundary-crossing claim that *Zygon* was established to examine.

## IV. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Scientific Analysis: The Cosmic Horizon in Modern Cosmology

#### a. What the Cosmic Horizon Actually Is

In modern cosmology, the term "cosmic horizon" encompasses several distinct concepts, each with precise technical meanings that differ significantly from Guillen's popular presentation. The particle horizon, also called the cosmological horizon or cosmic light horizon, represents the maximum distance from which light from particles could have traveled to an observer over the age of the universe (Margalef-Bentabol et al., 2013). It defines the boundary between the observable and unobservable regions of the universe, and its distance at the present epoch determines the size of the observable universe (Margalef-Bentabol et al., 2013).

Crucially, the particle horizon is not a physical barrier or location in space. As the European Southern Observatory explains, "Because of the finite age of the Universe and the finite speed of light, there is a fundamental limit to how far we can see. This cosmic horizon constitutes the edge of the observable Universe" (ESO, 2024, para. 4). However, this edge exists only in an observational sense—much like the horizon on Earth, it recedes as one approach it and does not correspond to any physical structure (ESO, 2024).

A related concept is the Hubble horizon or Hubble sphere, defined as  $r_{HS} = c/H_0$ , the distance at which recessional velocity equals the speed of light (Davis & Lineweaver, 2004). This is the specific boundary Guillen identifies with heaven. Davis and Lineweaver (2004) emphasize that "this horizon is not really a physical size, but it is often used as a useful length scale as most physical sizes in cosmology can be written in terms of those factors" (p. 102). The Hubble sphere is a mathematical construct, not a destination one could reach.

Perhaps the most significant scientific counterargument to Guillen's proposal concerns the universe's lack of a center. Because the universe expands uniformly in all directions according to the cosmological principle, every observer occupies what appears to be the center of their own observable universe (ESO, 2024). As the ESO (2024) explains, "Other observers in different locations in the Universe each have their own observable Universe centred on them. But as a whole, our Universe does not have a centre—on average, it looks the same everywhere" (para. 5). Consequently, if Guillen's cosmic horizon marks heaven's location, then heaven would be centered on every observer simultaneously—a geometrical impossibility that reveals the fundamental confusion in treating an observational boundary as a physical place (ESO, 2024).

#### b. The Horizon and Relativity

Guillen's invocation of time dilation at the cosmic horizon requires careful clarification regarding reference frames. According to special relativity, time dilation is always relative: from the perspective of a stationary observer, a moving object's clock runs slow; from the moving object's perspective, the stationary observer's clock runs slow (Zubairy, 2023). When Guillen claims that time "ceases entirely" at the cosmic horizon, the question becomes: for whom?

Chodorowski (2006) addresses this question directly in his analysis of cosmological horizons. He demonstrates that apparently "superluminal velocities and 'a causal' distance to

the horizon are in fact a direct consequence of special-relativistic phenomenon of time dilation, as well as of the adopted definition of distance in cosmology" (p. 1). The distant galaxy receding at velocity  $v$  experiences time normally in its own reference frame; it is only from our observational perspective that its time appears dilated. Moreover, the galaxy's *inertial* recession velocity, its velocity through space, remains subluminal; the apparent superluminal motion arises from the expansion of spacetime itself, which is not constrained by special relativity (Chodorowski, 2006; Davis & Lineweaver, 2004).

The horizon thus functions as a mathematical boundary in our observational field, not as a region where time objectively stops. As Davis and Lineweaver (2004) emphasize, "the motion is not in any observer's inertial frame" (p. 103), galaxies are carried by expanding spacetime rather than moving through space. This distinction is crucial: the cessation of time exists only in our extrapolation, not as a physical feature of the horizon itself.

### **c. The Challenge of Verification**

By definition, the cosmic horizon cannot be observed or reached. The particle horizon represents the limit of observable light; beyond it, by definition, no information can reach us (Margalef-Bentabol et al., 2013). This inherent un-observability presents an insurmountable challenge for any claim that treats the horizon as a location.

The fundamental criterion for scientific hypothesis status is falsifiability, the capacity to be tested and potentially disproven through empirical observation (Bonting, 2005). Guillen's hypothesis offers no testable predictions. One cannot design an experiment to observe heaven at the horizon because the horizon is, by definition, unobservable. One cannot travel to the horizon because it recedes as one approaches, a consequence of the universe's expansion. As Ellis (2012) notes in his review of cosmological horizons, visual horizons "place major limits on what are observationally testable aspects of a multiverse" and similarly limit what can be claimed about regions beyond observational reach (p. 8).

Without testable predictions, the hypothesis cannot be evaluated through scientific methods. It may draw upon scientific concepts, but it does not function as science. This places Guillen's claim in the category of metaphysical speculation rather than empirical cosmology, a distinction crucial for understanding what the hypothesis can and cannot accomplish.

### **d. Dark Energy and the Shrinking Horizon**

Guillen's observation about dark energy and the shrinking horizon engages genuine cosmological phenomena, though his interpretation diverges from scientific consensus. The accelerating expansion driven by dark energy does cause the Hubble horizon to move inward over time, meaning galaxies visible today will eventually disappear beyond it (Davis & Lineweaver, 2004). Van Putten (2017) explains that in  $\Lambda$ CDM cosmology, the accelerated expansion "shows an initial approach to a De Sitter State, driven by a finite density of dark energy" (p. 2), which affects the dynamical behavior of cosmological horizons.

Guillen (2023) interprets this phenomenon symbolically as "Heaven expanding as its population grows" (para. 18). Scientifically, however, the shrinking horizon represents a cosmological event horizon, the maximum comoving distance from which light emitted now can ever reach an observer in the future (Margalef-Bentabol et al., 2013). For the  $\Lambda$ CDM model with dark energy as a cosmological constant, the event horizon approaches a constant proper distance of approximately 17.55 billion light-years (Davis & Lineweaver, 2004). The scientific evaluation of Guillen's claim must distinguish between the physical phenomenon (horizon dynamics driven by dark energy) and his theological interpretation. The horizon's behavior is well-understood within standard cosmology; its description requires no appeal to supernatural explanation. Guillen's symbolic reading may hold religious meaning for believers, but it adds nothing to scientific understanding of dark energy or

cosmic expansion. The hypothesis thus exemplifies what Bonting (2005) identifies as the challenge of integrating scientific and theological claims without reducing one to the other, a tension this paper continues to explore.

## **4.2 Theological Analysis: Transcendence and Location**

### **a. Divine Transcendence in Classical Theism**

At the heart of classical theism lies the conviction that God, as Creator *ex nihilo*, cannot be contained by creation. The doctrine of creation from nothing, which took shape over more than a thousand years of Christian reflection, asserts that God brought the universe into being "from no prior materials" (Burrell et al., 2010, p. 1). This implies a radical ontological distinction: the Creator is not one item within the universe, however exalted, but the ground of the universe's very existence. The biblical witness reinforces this transcendence with striking clarity. When Solomon dedicates the Temple, he prays: "Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27, ESV). The rhetorical force of this verse undermines any attempt to locate God within the cosmic structure, even at its outermost boundary.

Patristic and medieval theologians developed this insight with precision. Augustine's encounter with Platonist philosophy convinced him that God is incorporeal and, unlike bodies, "has no magnitude and cannot occupy places" (MacDonald, 2025, p. 103). Yet Scripture affirms that God fills heaven and earth. Augustine resolves this tension by identifying alternative modes of divine presence: God stands in causal and cognitive relations to all creation, serving as its "ontological ground and source" (MacDonald, 2025, p. 104). God is present everywhere not by spatial extension but by power and essence.

Thomas Aquinas inherits and refines this tradition. In the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas argues that God is genuinely present to all things, but this presence is not spatial containment. Brower (2025) highlights a surprising aspect of Aquinas's account: while God is genuinely spatially located in some sense, this location follows from divine causal activity rather than from occupying space as bodies do. God is "in all things by essence, presence, and power", present as cause to effect, as knower to known, and as sovereign to subject. This framework preserves divine transcendence while affirming immanence, but it offers no support for locating the divine at a specific cosmic coordinate.

### **b. Divine Immanence and Presence**

Classical theology distinguishes between God's essential presence (everywhere) and God's manifest presence (special locations). The Hebrew concept of *Shekhinah* illuminates this distinction. In rabbinic literature, *Shekhinah* refers to the "numinous immanence of God in the world", God viewed "in spatio-temporal terms as a presence, particularly in a this-worldly context: when He sanctifies a place, an object, an individual, or a whole people" (Academic Dictionaries and Encyclopedias, n.d., para. 1). Yet this manifest presence does not imply spatial confinement. The rabbis insist that "the *Shekhinah* is in all places" (Bava Batra 25a), and that even when God's presence rests preeminently on Israel, this represents intensification of relation rather than localization of essence.

The Incarnation represents Christianity's supreme affirmation of divine immanence. In Jesus Christ, the transcendent God enters fully into created reality. Yet even here, the theological tradition resists treating this as divine containment. The Chalcedonian definition affirms that Christ is fully God and fully human without confusion or mixture, the divine nature remains uncontained even while united to human nature.

Guillen's hypothesis confuses these categories by treating God's dwelling as a physical coordinate. If heaven is literally located at the cosmic horizon, then God's presence becomes a function of astronomical distance rather than covenantal relation. This reduces divine

immanence to spatial proximity and undermines the biblical witness that God is equally present to all creation while nowhere contained by it.

### **c. Heaven as Relationship, Not Location**

Contemporary biblical scholarship emphasizes that heaven, in scriptural perspective, denotes primarily relationship with God rather than spatial location. The St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology notes a crucial debate: "whether Christians should speak of 'heaven', rather than 'new creation'" (Humphrey, 2024, Section 1). The weight of biblical testimony favors new creation, the transformation of all things, over the migration of souls to a distant realm.

The Apostle Paul's vision in 1 Corinthians 15 describes resurrected existence not as escape to heaven but as transformation into "spiritual bodies" (pneumatikon sōma) patterned after Christ's resurrection (Humphrey, 2024, Section 2). This new creation encompasses "the whole of creation," which Paul personifies as groaning together with redeemed humanity awaiting liberation (Romans 8:19–23). Heaven, on this account, is not a place one goes but a relationship one enters, communion with God that transforms the entirety of created existence.

The danger of reifying heaven as a physical coordinate lies in its implicit Gnosticism. If heaven is "up there" at the cosmic horizon, then salvation becomes escape from earth rather than earth's redemption. But biblical hope centers on the New Jerusalem descending from heaven to earth (Revelation 21:2), God's dwelling with humanity, not humanity's departure to God's distant abode. Guillen's spatial literalism inadvertently reverses this eschatological direction.

### **d. Engaging Guillen's Biblical Interpretation**

The "highest heaven" texts Guillen cites must be understood within their ancient cosmological context. Nicholas J. Moore (2025) explores precisely this challenge, noting that "one feature of antiquity which can be hard for modern readers to make sense of is ancient three-tier cosmology" (p. 1). Rudolf Bultmann famously characterized New Testament cosmology as "mythical", a three-storied structure with earth at center, heaven above, and underworld below (Moore, 2025, p. 2). Bultmann used "myth" not to mean falsehood but to denote a framework expressing "man's understanding of himself in the world" through symbolic cosmology.

Were biblical authors making spatial claims accessible to modern physics? Moore (2025) argues persuasively that Second Temple Jewish and New Testament writers did hold to "a form of cosmological realism with respect to heaven" (p. 4). They genuinely believed heaven was "up there." However, this realism operated within a pre-scientific framework that cannot be directly mapped onto contemporary cosmology. The ancient three-tier universe is not a simplified version of the modern cosmos but a different conceptual world altogether. Moore identifies a fascinating contemporary phenomenon: scholars sometimes "re-mythologize" heaven using language of "alternative realities, dimensions, or universes" drawn from scientific cosmology (Moore, 2025, p. 5). This instinct suggests that locating the divine at the boundary of the known cosmos serves a perennial human need, expressing "the transcendence-with-immanence of the location of God's abode" (Moore, 2025, p. 5). Guillen's hypothesis participates in this re-mythologizing impulse, translating ancient cosmic symbolism into the idiom of modern physics. The error lies not in the impulse but in mistaking the resulting construct for literal description.

## **4.3 Synthesis: What Does the Hypothesis Actually Accomplish?**

### **a. The "Yoking" Attempt Evaluated**

Guillen's hypothesis represents a bold attempt to "yoke" scientific cosmology and theological affirmation, yet its success in achieving genuine integration remains questionable.

The proposal demonstrates points of creative connection that merit acknowledgment. Guillen identifies a genuine parallel: both relativistic cosmology and biblical tradition describe a realm "beyond" ordinary space and time where different rules apply (Guillen, 2023). The concept of timelessness at the cosmic horizon resonates with theological descriptions of eternity, providing a point of contact between scientific and religious language (Moore, 2025). Furthermore, Guillen's framing of heaven as "up" and inaccessible to mortals aligns with intuitive human spatializations of the divine that span cultures and traditions (Trovato et al., 2023; Goodhew et al., 2014).

However, the hypothesis reveals points of unresolved tension that undermine its integrative ambition. The most fundamental tension concerns location versus transcendence. Classical theism insists that God as Creator cannot be contained within creation, a conviction expressed in 1 Kings 8:27 and developed throughout patristic and medieval theology (MacDonald, 2025). Guillen's spatial literalism, by assigning God a specific cosmic coordinate, inadvertently compromises this transcendent dimension (Bennett, 2019). Moreover, the scientific understanding of the cosmic horizon as an observer-dependent boundary undermines its candidacy as a unique "location" (Davis & Lineweaver, 2004). If every observer has their own horizon, then heaven would be centered everywhere and nowhere simultaneously, a geometrical impossibility that reveals the category confusion at the hypothesis's core (ESO, 2024).

The hypothesis thus illustrates what Bennett (2015), drawing on van Huyssteen's transversal model, identifies as the challenge of genuine interdisciplinary dialogue: it requires respecting the distinctive epistemic standards of each discipline rather than conflating them (Bennett, 2015, 2019). Guillen's synthesis, however creative, ultimately collapses these distinctions by treating scientific constructs as literal locations for theological realities.

### **b. The Hypothesis as Modern Myth**

Read charitably, Guillen's proposal functions as a form of scientifically-informed religious imagination, what might be termed "modern myth" in the descriptive rather than pejorative sense. Moore (2025) observes that contemporary scholars sometimes "remythologize" heaven using language of "alternative realities, dimensions, or universes" drawn from scientific cosmology (p. 5). This impulse expresses a perennial human need: rendering transcendent realities imaginatively accessible within the conceptual framework of one's age (Jackelén, 2008).

The function of "place" in religious experience supports this reading. Across cultures, humans locate the sacred spatially, not because they believe God occupies literal coordinates, but because spatial language provides cognitive scaffolding for relating to the transcendent (Trovato et al., 2023; Goodhew et al., 2014). Victor Turner's work on symbolism demonstrates that spatial imagery mediates between experienced reality and ultimate meaning (Bennett, 2019). Guillen's cosmic horizon, understood as symbolic rather than literal, could serve this mediating function for scientifically-literate believers seeking to imagine the "beyond" in terms consistent with modern cosmology.

However, Guillen himself presents his claim as literal rather than metaphorical, insisting that heaven possesses a "specific physical location" (Guillen, 2023, para. 3). This literalism forecloses the symbolic reading that might render his proposal theologically fruitful. As commentators note, the claim blends categories that resist verification, occupying an ambiguous space between scientific hypothesis and religious confession (Petersen & Drees, 2018). Read as myth, as imaginative construal of transcendent reality, the hypothesis possesses genuine religious power. Read as science, it fails the basic tests of empirical adequacy and falsifiability (Bonting, 2005).

### c. Implications for Science-Religion Dialogue

Guillen's hypothesis illuminates broader challenges facing science-religion dialogue, particularly regarding spatial language and methodological clarity. The proposal reveals how easily spatial metaphors for the divine can harden into literalistic claims that distort both scientific and theological understanding. Jackelén (2008) warns that when theology borrows scientific concepts without adequate hermeneutical reflection, it risks "mapping" itself onto science in ways that serve neither discipline's purposes (p. 290). Guillen's cosmic horizon illustrates this danger: a scientific construct becomes a theological location without sufficient attention to how each discipline uses spatial language differently.

The case underscores the importance of methodological clarity when bridging disciplines. Van Huyssteen's transversal model offers resources for navigating these challenges, emphasizing that genuine dialogue requires "postfoundational rationality", the capacity to move between disciplines while respecting their distinctive epistemic standards (Bennett, 2015, p. 192; Bennett, 2019, p. 110). Transversal dialogue does not seek simple harmony or synthesis but rather creates space for disciplines to interrogate one another while maintaining their integrity. Guillen's hypothesis, whatever its shortcomings, has stimulated precisely this kind of transversal reflection, prompting scientists and theologians alike to clarify what they mean by "location," "heaven," and "transcendence" (Moore, 2025; MacDonald, 2025).

The hypothesis also reveals the continuing power of spatial imagination in religious thought. Despite theological commitments to divine transcendence, believers consistently image God as "up" and heaven as "beyond" (Trovato et al., 2023; Goodhew et al., 2014). This cognitive tendency cannot simply be dismissed; it must be theologically interpreted and, where necessary, critically refined. Guillen's proposal, for all its scientific problems, performs the valuable service of making this tension visible, inviting deeper reflection on how spatial language functions in both science and religion.

Ultimately, the hypothesis suggests that science-religion dialogue proceeds best when it maintains what Petersen and Drees (2018) call "methodological naturalism" in science while preserving theological commitments to transcendence (p. 947). Guillen's attempt to locate heaven at the cosmic horizon fails by this standard, but its failure illuminates the path toward more fruitful engagement.

## V. Conclusions

This examination of Michael Guillen's hypothesis that the "highest heaven" is physically located at the cosmic horizon has revealed a proposal that is scientifically intriguing yet theologically problematic when interpreted literally. Scientifically, Guillen correctly identifies established cosmological phenomena, Hubble expansion, the cosmic horizon, relativistic time dilation, but misconstrues their significance. The cosmic horizon is not a physical location or destination but an observational boundary, mathematically defined and observer-dependent (Davis & Lineweaver, 2004; ESO, 2024). Every observer possesses their own horizon, rendering impossible the notion of a unique cosmic "address" for the divine (ESO, 2024). Theologically, Guillen's spatial literalism conflicts with classical theism's affirmation that God as Creator cannot be contained within creation, a conviction expressed in 1 Kings 8:27 and developed throughout patristic and medieval theology (MacDonald, 2025). The hypothesis thus illuminates human limits, observational and conceptual, rather than divine location. What Guillen identifies as heaven's address is better understood as the boundary of human knowledge, a horizon marking where empirical inquiry must yield to other modes of knowing.

## Constructive Proposal

A more fruitful direction invites interpreting the cosmic horizon as a symbol of transcendence rather than a literal location. Read symbolically, the horizon represents the limits of human knowledge and the "beyondness" of God, a reminder that the divine eludes empirical capture (Jackelén, 2008). This symbolic reading honors both scientific integrity and theological depth. Scientifically, it acknowledges the horizon for what it is: a mathematical boundary defining the observable universe's extent. Theologically, it preserves divine transcendence while providing imaginative access to the reality of a God who exceeds all conceptual frameworks. The horizon thus functions as what Bennett (2019), following van Huyssteen, terms a "transversal space", a site where disciplines can meet without collapsing into one another. Here, cosmology and theology can dialogue about limits, mystery, and the human longing for transcendence without either discipline overstepping its methodological boundaries.

## Final Reflection

Guillen's hypothesis, despite its scientific and theological shortcomings, performs the valuable service of stimulating deeper dialogue between science and religion. Bold proposals that transgress disciplinary boundaries often illuminate tensions that more cautious scholarship overlooks. The hypothesis reveals the continuing power of spatial imagination in religious thought, the challenge of translating ancient cosmological language into modern frameworks, and the perennial human desire to locate the sacred within a comprehensible cosmos (Moore, 2025; Trovato et al., 2023). In this sense, Guillen's proposal succeeds where more modest projects might not: it forces clarity about what science can and cannot claim, what theology must preserve, and how these disciplines might fruitfully converse. The cosmic horizon, properly understood, becomes not heaven's address but an invitation to deeper reflection on the mystery that exceeds all horizons.

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