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A short novel I would recommend to anyone who is interested in pondering the mysteries of theology and spirituality is *Flatland* by Edwin A. Abbot, an English schoolteacher, theologian, and priest, which was first published in 1884.

Flatland is set in a two-dimensional universe, where everyone and everything are geometric shapes. The main character, who narrates the story, is a square, whose world is changed forever when he meets a sphere, a three dimensional being, who tells the square about the third dimension, then takes him out of his two dimensional world and shows it to him. After his discovery of the third dimension, the square contemplates the possibility of there being even higher dimensions.

Unlike the square and the other inhabitants of *Flatland*, we can perceive three physical dimensions, and we can think of time as being a fourth. And without directly saying so, *Flatland* implies there could there be higher dimensions in our existence we cannot directly experience.

In the late Nineteenth Century, physics was an assortment of different fields that had little - if anything - in common with each other. But all that changed in 1919, when German mathematician Theodor Kaluza wrote a letter to Albert Einstein that would change physics forever. Kaluza had been playing around with a physics equation, and incorporated an extra dimension into his calculations. And in doing so, he unwittingly managed to unite the previously

unrelated theories of gravity and light. The 'Holy Grail' of physics is to unify and explain all physical phenomena in one single theory. Physicists haven't quite got there yet, but Kaluza's work showed that bringing theoretical higher dimensions we cannot directly experience into consideration can have some surprising implications.

Now I am not going to suggest the obvious and say higher dimensions that have been proposed in theory can explain heaven or any other spiritual place. But I will say though is that if science can propose the existence of higher dimensions we cannot directly perceive, it would not be unreasonable for science to accept the possibility of there being a spiritual realm that is distinct from our physical world.

Throughout the Bible there are many distinctions between the spiritual realm and our physical world, or in other words, between heaven and earth. The first verse in the Bible, which introduces the first creation story in Genesis, starts with the words:

¹In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth,"¹

And tonight's reading from the second to last chapter of Revelation, the final book in the Bible, tells us:

²Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.²

Revelation is arguably the most puzzling book in the Bible, so it's probably not really surprising that some unsound exegesis around some of its fantastic content has led to the development of some really bad theology. But I digress. Its relatively sedate introduction of seven letters to seven churches in Asia to deal with local issues of the day soon gives rise to a hallucinatory nightmare peppered with images of multi-headed creatures, locusts with tails like scorpions, dragons, and various personifications of evil. Finally, after much toil and tribulation, Revelation concludes with the revelation of a new heaven and a new earth.

It took the sphere in *Flatland* to show the humble square his existence was more than two-dimensional. It took Theodor Kaluza's bold calculations to awaken science to the possibility of higher dimensions. And it took Jesus the Christ bring heaven to earth.

Heaven and earth met when God came in to earth in human form. Humankind was estranged from God, but we were given a way to be reconciled. And that was for God to become fully human in Jesus, experiencing the joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, and high hopes and broken dreams that are part of human life. Including death. Jesus triumphed over death and sin with his resurrection, and we can be confident that we too can share in his risen life.

And theologians like the former Bishop of Durham NT Wright have proposed that heaven is actually akin to God's control room, and that we will spend our post-resurrection eternity here on earth. Which is certainly something to think about. According to Wright, "... heaven is the control room for earth. Heaven is the CEO's office from which

earth is run – or it's supposed to be, which is why we're told to pray for that to become a reality".³

You will all be familiar with the prayer Jesus taught us. We have said forms of it tonight, twice in fact, but I would like to remind us of the opening lines, as they were written in the Gospel according to St Matthew.

⁹ 'Pray then in this way:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.

¹⁰ Your kingdom come.

Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.⁴

On earth as it is in heaven. We pray for the coming of God's kingdom, and that will be when God's will is being done here on earth as it is in heaven.

When we give food to the hungry, refresh the thirsty, welcome strangers, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and visit people in prison, we help bring about the realisation of God's kingdom. When we show compassion to the last, the lost, and the least, when we fulfil our obligations to care for God's creation, and we make an effort to deal with the suffering of children who live in poverty, we help bring about the realisation of God's kingdom.

And it's not just about what we do for others. It's what we do for each other. We can disagree on matters that are really quite trivial, and these can drive a wedge between us. But by one Spirit we are

baptised into one body. And when we put our differences aside, remember we are family, and treat each other as brothers and sisters, we help bring about the realisation of God's kingdom.

While history was changed forever by the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus two thousand years ago, when we consider the state of the world today, it is clear that God's involvement with the world is not yet over. And I believe it is our calling to work toward the realisation of God's reign of justice and peace here on earth. God may be transforming the world, but is doing so through us, and we are privileged to play our part in the coming of the kingdom.

'See, the home of God is among mortals.
He will dwell with them;
they will be his peoples,
and God himself will be with them;
⁴ he will wipe every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away.'⁵

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<http://theword.tk>

¹ Genesis 1:1

² Revelation 21:1

³ Wright, N.T. (2007). 'On Earth as in Heaven'.

<http://ntwrightpage.com/2016/03/30/on-earth-as-in-heaven/>

⁴ Matthew 6:9-10

⁵ Revelation 21:3b-4