THE METAPHYSICAL NARRATIVE OF CREATION
IN THE THEOLOGY OF JÜRGEN MOLTMANN
BY
BOB ZURINSKY
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Supervisor: Hans Boersma

Second Reader: John Stackhouse

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Bob Zurinsky
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ABSTRACT

Over the course of his career, Jürgen Moltmann has produced a massive amount of work as his contribution to Christian thought. Moltmann’s work touches on every topic of systematic theology and also engages with a broad array of contemporary global issues. In his individual monographs, Moltmann often deals very specifically with certain issues in life and theology. Only by reading his work together as a whole can we grasp the bigger structures and themes of his theology.

In this paper I trace the metanarrative of creation that Moltmann tells throughout his many works. This is a story of the world that includes a Trinitarian consideration regarding the being of God, a Judeo-Christian philosophical analysis of the nature of the world, and a comprehensive narrative that includes not only the facts of the past but also a certain hope for the future. In the story Moltmann tells, these philosophical and theological elements play off of and add to one another. What emerges is a comprehensive story of the past, present, and future of the universe, reflecting Moltmann’s unique perspective and approach to Christian theology. It is the story of a genuinely free and temporal creation that is allowed to evolve as it will; it is the story of a God who chooses to fill and fulfill this creation through the indwelling of his Spirit. The fundamental tension in this story is the fact that the world evolves freely and yet God chooses to bring it to his own chosen end. For Moltmann, both of these statements can be affirmed through his understanding of the category of the “eschatological future.”
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ABBREVIATIONS

Throughout this thesis articles by Moltmann will be referenced with a shortened title, and a selection of his major works will be noted by the following abbreviations:

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<td><em>The Spirit of Life</em></td>
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<td><em>Science and Wisdom</em></td>
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<td>TH</td>
<td><em>Theology of Hope</em></td>
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<td><em>The Trinity and the Kingdom</em></td>
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<td>WJC</td>
<td><em>The Way of Jesus Christ</em></td>
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Introduction and Thesis

The purpose of this paper is to outline the ‘metaphysical narrative of creation’ implicit in Jürgen Moltmann’s work. The term ‘metaphysical narrative’ is not one that we find in Moltmann’s own writing, but it serves as an accurate description of those particular elements of his theology that will be highlighted in this paper. For the purposes of this paper, the *metaphysical* part of Moltmann’s story of creation consists of his ideas about what *kind of universe* God created. The *narrative* of creation that he tells is intimately related to this metaphysics, but it also transcends this metaphysics of the world in certain critical ways.

It is my contention that Moltmann’s distinctive understanding of the metaphysics of the world plays a key role in the story of creation that he tells. At the same time, the story of creation he tells is designed to surpass this metaphysics and to provide hope beyond the present conditions of the world. By combining these two aspects of Moltmann’s theology we are able to discern a single *metaphysical narrative of creation* that has its beginning and its end in Moltmann’s unique panentheistic understanding of the God-world relationship. This is a story of creation that recognizes this world as genuinely temporal and freely evolving as a ‘world within God.’ But this story also engenders hope for an entirely different kind of future—a hope based not in the time of history but in the *coming of God*, or ‘God in the world.’ By grounding the Christian hope in God’s future Kingdom, Moltmann offers a way for human beings to live out of a reality that is not determined by the metaphysics of the world alone. As we will see in chapters 2 and 3, one of the keys to this ‘birth of hope’ is to be found in Moltmann’s two
different but related ways of understanding time, and especially 'future.' We will call these two different approaches his ‘philosophy of time’ and his ‘theology of time.’

In the telling of this metaphysical narrative of creation, I will not attempt to argue either for or against Moltmann’s proposal, but will trace its outline in a unique way in an attempt to discern connections between his philosophy of the world and his theology of hope. Because of the nature of this project, I will be drawing primarily on Moltmann’s own work, which will include most of his major monographs and many articles. For help in the interpretation of Moltmann at various points I will also consult the work of some of the most prominent Moltmann scholars, including Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz, Miroslav Volf, and especially Richard Bauckham.

**Structure of the Paper**

In Chapter 1 (Moltmann’s Approach to Theology), I will set the context for the study by looking at Moltmann’s own way of doing theology. This is critical to our understanding of Moltmann’s metaphysical narrative, because his assumptions about the purpose of theology and the status of the modern world helps to shape the way he writes his story. I will examine Moltmann’s place as a ‘late modern’ thinker by exploring his approach to modern and postmodern ways of understanding the world. His approach to sourcing, Scripture, and the task of theology itself lays the groundwork for understanding the kind of theological project he is engaged in.

Chapter 2 (The World in God) examines Moltmann’s philosophy of the world—his metaphysics of creation. Beginning with his understanding of the being of God as social Trinity, we will examine the kind of world that this God chose to create. I will
show that Moltmann's distinctive understanding of the time of creation, freedom, and process constructs the first movement of the creation story: the self-limitation and self-differentiation of God and the ensuing 'becoming' of the world within God.

Chapter 3 (The Birth of Hope) begins with the recognition of a fundamental tension in Moltmann's metaphysical narrative: the kind of world that God created, according to Moltmann, is not sufficient to ensure that God's purposes for this creation will be fulfilled. We will see that Moltmann must go beyond his metaphysics of the world in describing the consummation of the world. The end of the story depends not on the present conditions of creation, but on the new work of God that is prefigured in the resurrection of the crucified Christ. Building on his 'philosophy of time,' Moltmann offers also a 'theology of time' that he thinks is capable of maintaining the unity of metaphysics and narrative in the story he tells. For Moltmann, Christian hope arises uniquely from the particularity of God's history in the world, through Israel and primarily through Jesus. As such, it is a hope in God's future and not a hope in possibilities inherent in the 'future' as a mode of historical time.

In Chapter 4 (God in the World), I take up the narrative of God's creation project and see it through to its eschatological completion. As a story of 'God in the world,' this narrative is intimately related to the metaphysics of 'a world in God' that was presented in Chapter 2. These represent the two major movements of Moltmann's panentheistic understanding of the God-world relationship. Moltmann's narrative of the whole creation project is grounded first of all in the kind of world that God created in himself. Additionally, aspects of the narrative provide the basis for a hope that goes beyond the conditions of the world. Because of the resurrection of Jesus, Moltmann assumes that the
future offers something qualitatively distinct from what the world presently has to offer.

Finally, I will close the paper with a short concluding section to summarize my findings.
Chapter 1: Moltmann’s Approach to Theology

1.1 The Kind of Theology Moltmann Writes

In order to understand the story of the world that Moltmann writes—his theology of creation—it is necessary to first investigate the kind of theologizing that he is engaged in. Moltmann’s theological method and understanding of the purpose of theology shapes not only his approach but his set of conclusions as well. Therefore, in this first chapter we will briefly examine the kind of theological inquiry that Moltmann is engaged in by looking at what motivates his work, the theological framework he works within, and the intellectual sources he chooses to draw from.

Moltmann’s theology is written for a purpose. While it is rooted in historical analysis and in the biblical text, for him the study of these is not an end in itself. The purpose of theology is to transform the world, not merely to describe it. It should not be surprising, therefore, that his preferred theological method is chosen with ‘mission’ in mind. As he says in Theology of Hope, “The transforming mission requires in practice a certain Weltanschauung, a confidence in the world and a hope for the world.”

Moltmann’s theological project, viewed in its entirety, is thus seen as the construction of a Weltanschauung, a comprehensive understanding of the world for the sake of God’s coming Kingdom. If the goal of theology is to transform the world, and if transforming

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mission requires a ‘certain worldview,’ then the writing of a universal story—a ‘metaphysical narrative of creation’—seems to be a theological format well-suited to Moltmann’s purposes.

1.1.1 Cosmo-Historico Theology

If Moltmann’s project is to write a ‘world story’ in order to change the world, it matters what kind of theologizing he chooses to engage in. In Moltmann’s analysis, “rational Christian theology can be cosmo-theology or historico-theology, can be ethico-theology or existential theology and can be onto-theology. These are to begin with the three possibilities in terms of which it can make itself and its business intelligible.” Here Moltmann asserts that there are three main ways to do theology in a coherent fashion. They are: telling a universal story (cosmo-historico-theology), distilling moral law from the experience of human subjectivity (ethico-existential theology), and discerning the nature of God and world by reason alone (onto-theology). Each of these approaches, according to Moltmann, is able to produce a coherent self-referential system. And each approach has been employed throughout history. For reasons that will become clear, Moltmann prefers the first option.

The ethico-existential theology that Moltmann has in mind is the kind of program undertaken by some of the great thinkers particularly after the Enlightenment. In the work of theologians like Schleiermacher, von Harnack, and Bultmann, the particularities of concrete historical encounters with God were sifted in the attempt to discover the moral

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2 Note the capitalization of ‘kingdom’ throughout this paper, or lack thereof. The logic behind this will be explained in chapter 4.

3 TH, 273.
truths implicit in the story. But Moltmann, who is self-consciously writing a ‘theology after Auschwitz,’ finds that this existentialist project has failed. It has failed precisely by retreating into the subjectivity of the self at the expense of critique of world systems and the ‘conditions of history.’ The whole modern project, including its liberal theology, has resulted in a world on the brink of self-destruction. Moltmann rejects this approach to theology, in part because he believes that it has failed to create a better world.

Similarly, to start with onto-theology, Moltmann says, “can lead to leveling down the different historic tasks and horizons of Christian mission in the ages of history.” The ‘onto-theology’ that Moltmann refers to is the broad Western tradition of describing the attributes of God by engaging in rational reflection on the ‘idea of God’ and drawing logical conclusions about what any ‘God’ must necessarily be like. According to Moltmann, this approach disconnects the Christian God from God’s own story in creation history, and so this onto-theology strips the story of its transforming potential by turning ‘God’ into a rational principle and humanity into the contemplative ‘thinker.’ Early in his career, Moltmann writes that “someone who thinks of God only as transcendence in relation to a particular immanence, has only thought of God as predicate, not yet as subject. He has thought of God on account of something else, not yet for his own sake.” In Moltmann’s view, this represents a fundamental betrayal of the essential kerygma. For Moltmann, this kind of reasoning about the divine has its proper place—but he believes

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4 TH, 281.

5 This approach to understanding the divine is present throughout the history of Western thought, from the Greeks to the modern period, and in Christian thinking is epitomized by the ‘perfect being theology’ of Anselm of Canterbury. For more on this conclusion, see Thomas Morris, Our Idea of God: An Introduction to Philosophical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), especially the chapter on Perfect Being Theology.

that the order has been inappropriately reversed. “A ‘natural theology’ of this kind...in which God is manifest and demonstrable to every man, is not the presupposition of Christian faith, but the future goal of Christian hope.” Presently we live mid-story, with the promise of God for a new future, and our faith is precisely that we will one day have direct access to the truth through the indwelling of God in creation. But according to Moltmann, that day is not yet.

Throughout his major works, Moltmann makes an intentional break with classical Western (substance) metaphysics and the tradition of onto theology. At every point he will prefer a vision of God drawn from the biblical narrative over against what he sees as ‘the God of the philosophers.’ This choice is made clear with reference to nearly all traditional doctrinal statements about the being of God. The issue of divine impassibility serves as one prominent example, as Richard Bauckham explains: “The metaphysical concept of God which the Fathers took over from Greek philosophy defined the divine nature as the opposite of everything finite and made suffering and death axiomatically impossible for God... In reality, Moltmann claims, the cross as the revelation of God is incompatible with the philosophical concept of the impassible God.” This serves as just one of many possible examples where Moltmann chooses not to follow mainstream Christian tradition in his understanding of God.

By a process of elimination, then, it becomes clear that Moltmann has chosen the first of the three methods outlined above: cosmo-historico-theology. It is important to

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7 TH, 282.

8 Richard Bauckham, _The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann_ (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 48. Bauckham later notes that Moltmann does not dismiss the classical tradition entirely, as a process theologian might: “The contrast with the classical view is not absolute, because Moltmann maintains a strong emphasis on the priority of God’s voluntary love towards the world” (ibid., 58-9).
note that this is not done in disregard of ethics or discussion of the being of God. Instead, a cosmo-historical narrative is constructed that provides a foundation for a lasting ethics and for ‘theology’ proper (defined in Moltmann’s particular way, discussed below).

Moltmann introduces his approach by reminding us that “[God’s] attributes cannot be expressed by negation of the sphere of the earthly, human, mortal and transient, but only in recalling and recounting the history of his promise.”9 The kind of theology Moltmann does is designed to cast an ‘ultimate vision,’ as it is sometimes called. He attempts to see God, humanity, and the whole world as part of a great drama unfolding in time and space. It is sometimes possible to lose sight of this big story when reading Moltmann, simply because of the vastness of his subject matter. But as Bauckham reminds us, “The unity and coherence of Moltmann’s eschatological vision will emerge for most readers only on the far side of strenuous engagement with the detail of each particular aspect. But unity and coherence there certainly are.”10

Moltmann’s chosen framework of ‘cosmo-historico-theology’ is an important key to the metaphysical narrative that he writes, for it serves as the basic premise for the narrative aspect of that project. From this initial vantage point, we begin to see that the bulk of his writings, when viewed together, provide the sketch of a universal story, beginning with God’s decision to become Creator and ending with the complete interpenetration of God and world. That is the ‘narrative’ side of Moltmann’s project. But at the same time, he has provided us with a philosophy of the world, a metaphysics, which goes hand-in-hand with his narrative, and which makes it intelligible. This is why

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9 TH, 141.

we call Moltmann’s story of the universe a ‘metaphysical narrative.’ By combining these
two critical elements of metaphysics and narrative, he seeks to offer the people of God ‘a
certain Weltanschauung’ that sets the conditions for a transforming mission.

1.1.2 Metaphysics for a Modern World

Because Moltmann seeks to write a theology that contains both metaphysical and
narrative aspects, it is necessary for him to ask and answer the question: Is it possible to
write a metaphysical narrative for a world that has supposedly moved beyond
metaphysics altogether, and after so much effort has been expended to ‘overcome
ontotheology’?\footnote{Mary-Jane Rubenstein explains that “the term ‘ontotheology’ was first used by Kant in
reference to the metaphysical deduction of God’s existence with no appeal to experience.” See Mary-Jane
Rubenstein, “Unknow Thyself: Apophaticism, Deconstruction and Theology After Ontotheology,” \textit{Modem
Theology} 19, no. 3 (July 2003): 389. Since that time the term has become even further enmeshed in endless
regressions involving Being and beings, especially since Heidegger (ibid., 387-417). In Jeff Robbins’s
recent dissertation on the status of philosophical theology today, he employs the work of Emmanual
Levinas to argue that the time has come for philosophical theology to re-direct its attention from the
conditions of its own inquiry (and thus the argument over ontotheology) to an engagement with the world.
Although Robbins does not draw the connection, it seems that this is in fact the kind of program Moltmann
is engaged in. See Jeff Robbins, “The Problem of Philosophical Theology” (PhD diss., Syracuse
University, 2001).} In Moltmann’s view, the world has changed and ideas about God and
philosophy have certainly changed—but this does not mean the end of God or the end of
metaphysics. It means only that the time has come for a new understanding of God and
for a new metaphysics for the late-modern world. For Moltmann, this means a return to
what he thinks is a more authentic and primitive Christian worldview.\footnote{In fact, Anthony Godzieba argues that the modern crisis over ‘ontotheology’ and the crisis
regarding God-talk in general can be partially blamed on the late medieval Nominalists’ “insistence upon
God’s omnipotence and transcendence.” See Anthony Godzieba, “Ontotheology to Excess: Imagining God
without Being,” \textit{Theological Studies} 56 (1995): 3. He writes that “the history of modernity and modern
philosophy reflects the progressive simultaneous canonization and rejection of this God” (ibid., 4).} Moltmann reminds us that “it is of course the case that men always have the
feeling that ‘God is dead’ when a familiar idea of God is lost. They are also apt to speak
of the end of metaphysics when they lose the traditional feeling of transcendence.”\(^{13}\) In his view, the modern rejection of the medieval ‘God of the philosophers’ is a welcome event. It may be the case that the kind of God explained through natural theology and in theories about ‘unmoved movers’ and ‘perfect beings’ never existed in the first place. So the rejection of this abstraction of God, the rejection of ‘onto-theology,’ is a helpful clearing of the field to make way for the re-emergence of the God of the Bible, according to Moltmann. It is a mistake to think that the modern world has moved away from metaphysics or from God—it has simply moved away from certain versions of those concepts. In reality, Moltmann says, “the experience of transcendence, the experience of boundary and limit, and religion in the general sense, [is] just as actual as ever. But they are no longer to be found in the same places as they used to be.”\(^{14}\)

Moltmann explains that in the modern era, the advance of technology and a scientific understanding of the world brought with it the illusion of the end of metaphysics. As the external universe became more transparent and more easily defined in terms of ‘natural laws,’ humanity turned its historical sensibility for the transcendent in on itself. The modern person “no longer finds transcendence in the outmost all-inclusive periphery of the cosmos, but in himself.”\(^{15}\) This turn in fundamental sensibilities brought along with it new approaches to theology termed ‘existential.’ Thinking that it had conquered the universe, humanity felt itself freed from the all-encompassing stories of the past, from all natural and supernatural ecologies, and turned inward to the subjectivity of personal experience. But, Moltmann will say, while there is some kernel of truth in this

\(^{13}\) Moltmann, “The Future as a New Paradigm of Transcendence,” 336.

\(^{14}\) Ibid.

\(^{15}\) Ibid.
idea of personal transcendence, its supposed abandonment of metaphysics is in large part an exaggeration.\textsuperscript{16}

In Moltmann's view, metaphysical questions still remain at the end of the modern age. It is only the boundary of metaphysics that has been pushed back—not the matter itself. As humanity has learned to interpret the natural world more precisely, some of the mystery of it has receded into the past. But to think that this spells the end of metaphysics is to greatly overestimate the importance of our scientific ways of learning our world. To understand natural processes better means inevitably to retire some of the ancient mythological ways of understanding nature. But understanding the processes of the world does nothing to remove the more fundamental questions about the existence of the world itself, its nature as an open system and divine project, and the ultimate destiny of creation, including humanity. To make any sense of these questions, a metaphysical approach is not only possible but necessary. For this reason, Moltmann will not hesitate to write a new story, a new Christian metanarrative. This is a story that takes seriously the knowledge gained through the scientific study of the universe—but it is a story that goes beyond that limited approach. By acknowledging the persistent relevance of metaphysics, Moltmann insures a place for a thoroughgoing 'philosophy of the world' in the story of creation that he writes.

1.1.3 Experimental Theology and the Task of the Theologian

The way that Moltmann will go about writing this metaphysical narrative of creation is in large part determined by his own understanding of the 'task of the

\textsuperscript{16} For a description of the sense in which humanity transcends nature, as well as Moltmann's case that metaphysical questions still remain in the modern world, see ibid., 336-7.
theologian’ and the purpose of theology as a discipline. There is a certain speculative element to his work, but this is entirely consistent with his understanding of theology as an experimental kind of endeavor that seeks to change the world. It is not surprising that many have been critical of Moltmann’s approach, but this is a fact he is willing to endure. “What I have written is not safe-guarded from every side. It is sometimes ‘foolhardy,’ as some concerned churchmen have thought. In the business of theology it is hard not to be controversial.”17

Karl Barth was frequently critical of Moltmann’s theological approach. He used the phrase ‘interesting concentrations’ in a disapproving way to indicate just those kinds of experimental theological excursions that Moltmann is known for. Although not specifically talking about Moltmann here, we can understand the spirit of his criticism: “Such interesting concentrations in theology must be completely avoided if we are not to come under the domination of compelling ideas.”18 Although Moltmann’s work does contain the kind of ‘compelling ideas’ referenced by Barth, his actual method of inquiry is not monolithic or dogmatic—he intends for his ideas to be read only as suggestions within a broad conversation. Moltmann has built into the fabric of his thinking a deep respect for conversation and dialogue and a fundamental aversion to ‘systematics.’ He writes:

Every consistent theological summing up, every theological system lays claim to totality, perfect organization, and entire competence for the whole area under survey... Every theoretical system, even a theological one, has therefore an aesthetic charm, at least to some degree. But this allurement can also be a dangerous seduction. Systems save some readers (and their admirers most of all)


18 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, quoted by Timothy Gorrige in Bauckham, *God Will Be*, 100.
from thinking critically for themselves and from arriving at independent and
responsible decisions. For systems do not present themselves for discussion. For
that reason I have resisted the temptation to develop a theological system, even an
‘open’ one.¹⁹

In this passage we get a sense for the approach that Moltmann takes throughout
his theology. He is famous for naming his major works as ‘contributions to theology’
instead of systematic theologies. By this, he means that all of his theses should be read as
suggestions and not as concrete assertions about the truth of the matter. As he says, “they
are not intended to conclude discussions; they are meant to open new conversations.”²⁰
Underlying this statement is a fundamental belief that ‘truth’ on this side of the eschaton
is always provisional and is best approached through unhindered, open dialogue.²¹
Richard Bauckham reminds us that “just as [Moltmann’s] theology develops in open
dialogue, so he expects readers to engage with his thought in a dialogical way.”²²

Moltmann describes his own theological method as ‘experimental.’ He has given
himself freedom to create and to re-imagine theology in order to liberate people to join in
God’s work in the world. As he says, “Theology… ought to be creative imagination for
God’s coming kingdom.”²³ His is a missional theology, driven by a passion for a world
reality that is not yet visible. He is not so concerned with creating a verifiable, scientific
approach in his theology, for that would betray the whole point of creative re-
imagination. “I am often asked about my theological method, and seldom provide an

¹⁹ Moltmann, The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God, trans. Margaret Kohl
(Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), xi. Hereafter TK.

²⁰ TK, viii.

²¹ For more on this, see the discussion below on Moltmann’s postmodern epistemological method.


²³ Moltmann in Bauckham, God Will Be, 78.
answer. At a time when so many colleagues are concerned solely with questions of method, what interests me are theological ideas, and their revision and innovation.\textsuperscript{24}

When Moltmann writes about his method as ‘conversational’ and ‘experimental,’ it could be tempting to understand this as a diminished view of theology. After all, if we’re not talking about the truth, what is the point? But to think this would be to miss Moltmann’s point altogether. He believes that this approach is not just acceptable, but is actually superior to other options, in terms of its ability to effect change in the world. “The theologian is not concerned merely to supply a different interpretation of the world, of history and of human nature, but to transform them in expectation of a divine transformation.”\textsuperscript{25} His task and his goal is to change the world, and nothing short of that. This method will fundamentally shape not only the way that he tells the story of the world, but the actual content of the story as well.

In addition to his belief that theology’s proper task is to change the world, Moltmann’s approach is also influenced by his conviction that every theology must be written for a particular time and place. Moltmann is well known for his participation in some of the great movements of the twentieth century, including the Marxist-Christian dialogue and the development of a political and liberation theology in the 1960s. After that period, however, he made a decision to pursue his vision for the future along the path of systematic theology. Moltmann recognized early on his place as a “First World” theologian—the simple fact being that he wasn’t a woman, wasn’t black, and didn’t live in Latin America. Recognizing that one can only write theology from one’s own context,


\textsuperscript{25} TH, 84.
Moltmann set about to re-imagine systematic theology. For some, this earned him the reputation of being a 'conventional theologian' in a pejorative sense, meaning that he had slipped back into 'old-fashioned' (read: meaningless) theology in the face of the great struggles of modern society. But on this point we must hear him clearly: "It may be the case that the changes in theological conceptions that I am suggesting are in the long term more potent and more revolutionary than the 'unconventional' contextual and praxis-oriented theology." Moltmann has taken his 'experiment' into the main stream of theology, and he hopes for this conversation to result in nothing less than a re-ordered world. This kind of world-transformation is the proper goal of theological work, in his mind. For this reason, the metaphysical narrative that he writes will be specifically designed to alter present conditions.

1.1.4 Moltmann: Modern and Postmodern

This discussion of 'universal stories' and 're-ordered worlds' begs the question of Moltmann's relationship to modernity itself. Is he modern, or is he postmodern? People have understood him to be one, the other, or both. The answer to this question is important for the present study, because the possibility of creating a world-encompassing metanarrative lies at the heart of the shift from modern to postmodern ways of thinking. What is Moltmann's relationship to that shift?

Although Moltmann has increasingly criticized modernity since the 1960s, Richard Bauckham writes that "Moltmann's primary concern to restore hope for the future of the world to Christian theology and praxis encouraged something rather like a

[^26]: TK, viii.
critical appreciation of the spirit of modernity.²⁷ Miroslav Volf believes that Moltmann’s relationship to modernity has progressed over the course of his career, with “the early Moltmann close to the center of modernity’s project and the later Moltmann navigating at its edges.”²⁸ In his doctoral dissertation on Moltmann’s understanding of God’s Shekinah, Alan Johnson leads with the assumption that Moltmann is “a postmodern theologian.”²⁹

As always, we must listen to the man himself. In response to Volf’s thesis, Moltmann writes: “I do not believe that I have ‘sailed from the center to the edges of the modern world.’ I have remained—as it seems to me—at the center of the inner contradictions of that world.”³⁰ But what exactly does this mean, and how does it relate to Moltmann’s understanding of his role as a theologian?

Moltmann has been clear that there is no such thing as a disembodied theology, disconnected from its own time and place. “Someone who, ultimately speaking, lives consciously in his own time never does theology in the form of abstractions for all times; he pursues it as a contemporary for contemporaries, specifically, contextually, and in relation to its kairos.”³¹ Moltmann’s own theology is no exception. His theology is self-consciously written from the perspective of a German theologian born in the 1920s, addressing a world that he thinks is in danger of complete self-destruction.

²⁷ Bauckham, God Will Be, 29.

²⁸ Miroslav Volf in Bauckham, God Will Be, 235.


³⁰ Moltmann in Bauckham, God Will Be, 261.

³¹ Ibid., 36.
Moltmann has been somewhat skeptical of the arguments about 'modern' and 'post-modern.' He writes: "So what comes 'after' the modern? We have it: the post-modern. What comes after the post-modern? We have it: the ultra-modern. Or are these merely further installments of modernity, which is always out to outstrip itself—a kind of post-ism?"\textsuperscript{32} And so, without falling into the trap of artificially labeling his own position, he has sought to faithfully observe the current state of the world and has developed his theology as a response to that state of affairs:

'Scientific and technological civilization' is 'the great project of modern time.' It has not yet been realized, but neither has it yet entirely come to grief. Every important present-day decision intervenes in this process of modernity, which is still open and \textit{sub judice}, as it were. Through changes in the horizon of expectation of the project 'modernity' we can make changes in its course.\textsuperscript{33}

On Moltmann's analysis, the outcome of the 'modern project' has not yet been determined. While the philosophical community has been in the process of re-evaluating theories of knowledge for a hundred or more years in ways that might be called 'postmodern,' the majority of the world itself is still ruled by economic and political forces wholly 'modern' in nature. This being the case, Moltmann has chosen to take that reality as he finds it and to address it with the Kingdom of God. Or, as he says, to 'change the horizon of expectation' and so alter the course of the world. In this sense, Moltmann should be seen as working 'within' modernity to change the nature of modernity itself. This choice to work within the modern project, even in its later stages, will help to determine the content and concerns of the world-story that Moltmann writes.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 259.

\textsuperscript{33} CofG, 290.
1.1.5 Doing Universal Eschatology

Given the ‘late modern’ context that Moltmann is operating within, one of the unavoidable questions that he must address with his theology is the question of unity and diversity on a global scale. In a world that is continuing to discover the value of many voices and many stories in conversation with each other, it can be a problematic thing to insist that the time has come for all of humanity to unite in a single story. For many, such a claim would seem too much like the worst of the colonial Western mindset. And yet, this is precisely the conclusion that Moltmann draws. In describing the actual state of affairs in the world today, he writes:

Nor do I believe that diversity, complexity and plurality are in actual fact the marks of the present-day society, desirable though this cultural wealth certainly is. The trend toward globalization of the free market society is reducing the world to uniformity. First China is Coca Cola-ized, then Moscow is Macdonald-ized, and in the end the world everywhere looks just the same as it does in Chicago, London and New York: the same clothes, the same high-rise blocks, the same brand names on what we buy. The cultural multiplicity and diversity of the different peoples which once existed is now processed into folklore, and that is then marketed by the tourist industry.\(^{34}\)

Regardless of what might be an ideal world, the world as we actually find it is caught in the grip of structures and forces that are rapidly creating a one-world economy and culture. With a certain realism, Moltmann reads world history in this way: “Now humanity is already on the way to the age of a single humanity—already in the negative sense and, with first tentative steps, in a positive one too. Now it has a future only in the singular.”\(^{35}\) As he sees it, the world is in the process of inevitable unification in one way or another, and Moltmann has taken it as his project to help shape the terms of that

\(^{34}\) Ibid., 263.

\(^{35}\) Ibid., 264.
unification—to cast a vision of a single humanity pressing forward toward the single
Kingdom of God.

As Moltmann sees it, when we evaluate the world today from a realistic
perspective, peaceful postmodern dreams of independence from one another are not
viable. They will be immediately overwhelmed by market forces and fundamentalist
ideologies. He believes that, in reality, we have only two choices as a human race: we can
seek to shape a unified future together, or we can let current forces flatten out the world,
and in the process destroy the world. To put it more dramatically, either we work together
toward something, or we die. “If we today enter a common world—initially for merely
negative reasons, because of the mutual threat of global annihilation—then we shall
continue to have plural pasts and traditions, but we shall have hope and future only in the
singular. For us human beings, there is only a common future, for we can now only
survive in peace.”

It is important to note that this dire sentiment leaves no room for postmodern
multiculturalism as an ideological program, if we take that concept to mean that each
group is free to choose different and divergent futures. In today’s reality, it will not be
possible for all people to simply live their own unique, isolated stories. Moltmann writes,
“I see little reason to follow Miroslav Volf and to pluralize the concept of history, and
then to talk eschatologically about ‘an eternal home of histories’ and ‘the redemption of
histories.’ I am more convinced by Francis Fukuyama’s modern ‘end of history.’” This
‘end of history’ is the flattening of the world under the current forces of globalization.

Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 136. Hereafter GC.

37 Moltmann in Bauckham, God Will Be, 264.
Since this is the actual world that we have inherited, Moltmann believes that even though communities will always have their traditions and their past stories to make them unique, forging different paths into the future is no longer an option, except in a limited and provisional sense. The ‘ultimate goal’ must be the same for all, if humanity is to survive.\(^{38}\)

All of this means that Moltmann has staked out his place in relation to the modern world and the postmodern response to it. “Perhaps I belong to the people whom my friend Johann Baptist Metz calls ‘the last universalists.’ After that come the ‘post-modern pluralists.’ But I believe that for the sake of the one God and his one, coming kingdom, and his one, single righteousness, I have to try to think universally—to be catholic, in the best sense of the word.”\(^{39}\)

Moltmann understands this position to be necessary for the survival of the earth and the human race. But there is also a religious motivation. What about Christianity itself, and belief in the Christian God? Here he identifies one of the dangers he sees in continuing along Volf’s multi-history path: “If, finally, with ‘post-modern’ sensibility for the many and the different, the modern world is reproached with being a dictatorship of uniformity and a uniform culture, then it would also be logical to pass over from modern monotheism to post-modern polytheism, and in becoming post-modern to become post-Christian too. I cannot see how Miroslav Volf can avoid this. If he surrenders the unity of history, he must surrender the unity of eschatology at the same time.”\(^{40}\)

\(^{38}\) Moltmann has suggested with increasing frequency that the unifying factor must be a care for the natural world of which we find ourselves a part. “If we want to live and survive, we shall turn to earth economics, to earth politics, and to the religion of the earth... The general framework for theology today is the theology of the earth” (ET, 82-3).

\(^{39}\) Moltmann in Bauckham, God Will Be, 264.
Although he may draw some criticism for it, Moltmann has decided to pursue the option of writing a new universal story for all peoples to find themselves part of. The metaphysical narrative of creation that we trace throughout this paper is precisely the universal story that he writes. Moltmann does not intend this to be a story that subjugates peoples, but a story that liberates. It is a message of hope that Moltmann believes to be genuine ‘good news’ to all the nations. It begins with the promise of Revelation 21 where John sees that “God will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and he himself, God with them, will be their God.” About this passage Moltmann writes that it is “nothing less than the succinct summing-up of the biblical writings, extended to all peoples.”\(^41\) For the sake of the whole world’s blessing and indwelling by God, Moltmann writes a totalizing story and invites everyone to find their place in it, with an awareness that this stands in stark contrast to the ‘culture of subjectivity’:

The modern culture of subjectivity has long since been in danger of turning into a ‘culture of narcissism,’ which makes the self its own prisoner and supplies it merely with self-repetitions and self-confirmations. It is therefore time for Christian theology to break out of this prison of narcissism, and for it to present its ‘doctrine of faith’ as a doctrine of the all-embracing ‘history of God.’\(^42\)

1.1.6 A Public Theology

Johnson tells us that “in characterizing his theology, Moltmann said of himself that he was attempting to reflect on a theology which has a biblical foundation, an eschatological orientation, and a political responsibility.”\(^43\) One of the unique aspects of Moltmann’s work, something that sets him apart from many others, is his insistence that

\(^{40}\text{Ibid.}\)

\(^{41}\text{ET, 56.}\)

\(^{42}\text{TK, 5.}\)

\(^{43}\text{Johnson, “Shekinah,” 10.}\)
theology is a public discipline, aimed not primarily toward the stabilizing of the church, but toward the renewing of the world. We may contrast this with others, notably Karl Barth, who have understood their task to be the creation of a ‘church dogmatics’ of one kind or another. Not so for Moltmann. While writing primarily to those who believe, the story he proposes is not designed to internally reinforce Christian doctrine. His theology is written, rather, to *destabilize* existing world structures and to hold out a certain hope to make ready a way for the coming God.44

As we have noted, Moltmann believes that theology must responsibly engage the world as the theologian finds it. The path he takes with his theological project is a direct response to what he understands to be the condition of the world today. “Because of the military, ecological and social dangers in the world, the nations are entering an *age of world-wide humanity* inasmuch as they are realizing that the dangers threatening them all can be contained only by joint efforts.”45 This fundamental conviction about the state of the world helps to shape all aspects of Moltmann’s theological program. John O’Donnell finds in Moltmann’s theology an all-encompassing concern for the injustice of present systems, and he states that “the context of Moltmann’s thought is the suffering of the world.”46 Based on his perception of this suffering, Moltmann writes that “it is time for the traditional church too to enter the ecumenical age, leaving their denominational conflicts behind them. A help here is perception of ‘the fellowship of the Holy Spirit’

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44 For more on Moltmann’s understanding of the public role of theology, see his recent book that deals exclusively with this topic: *God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999). Hereafter GSS.


which crosses frontiers and denominational borders, and a new orientation towards the kingdom of God and the new creation of all things.\textsuperscript{47} It is no coincidence that Moltmann chooses to focus his attention in these places, for these are precisely the theological resources that are available to promote his vision of universal well-being.

Moltmann chooses to emphasize certain Christian doctrines based on their ability to draw people together and to promote a common good. But beyond individual doctrines, he has also taken over some of the larger structures of historical Judeo-Christian thinking in order to continue his program of universal peace. One such structure is the idea of metanarrative itself. "Speculations on world history and discussions about history as a whole, and about the whole of history, first became possible as a result of Christianity's sense of mission, and have therefore not ceased to be possible even when Christianity is no longer the center of this mission."\textsuperscript{48} By this, Moltmann means that the telling of a universal story has positive applications for transforming not only the realm of the sacred, but the secular as well. Even a world quite convinced that it has moved beyond Christianity can still be influenced through the right kind of transforming narrative. By changing the horizons of what we expect from the future, it may be possible to change the way we live in the present.

One of the foundational principles driving Moltmann's work is the deeply-held belief that these kinds of narratives—and really philosophy in general—have the power to change the world. He shares this conviction with the reader in his latest major work:

It is true that Hegel in his later years defined philosophy as 'its own time captured in ideas'; yet he also knew that this means that philosophy is always too late on the scene. But cannot philosophy also intervene in the open process of reality,

\textsuperscript{47} SL, 247.

\textsuperscript{48} TH, 262.
taking sides and ministering to life? Can it not grasp reality together with its better possibilities—the unhappy present together with its redeeming future? It would then not come too late; it would hasten ahead of its time.\textsuperscript{49}

Moltmann has set himself at no small task: writing a philosophy and a theology that is not just contemporary, but futuristic. In response to the present he writes not about the present but about the future—a realm that, by definition (Moltmann’s definition), does not even exist. His hope is that by focusing our attention on what is not yet real, this story, this philosophy, might ‘intervene in the open process of reality.’ This is a large goal, to say the least. But from the beginning, Moltmann intended to engage in epoch-making theology: “At that time [with the publication of \textit{Theology of Hope}] I was trying to find a new fundamental category for theology in general: the theology of love in the middle ages and the theology of faith at the Reformation was to be followed in modern times by the theology of hope.”\textsuperscript{50}

With so vast a project in mind, Moltmann does not believe that he can limit his theology to a ‘church dogmatics.’ From the beginning of his public career he has addressed both the church and secular society, and intends to re-orient both. Such an approach has had several predictable consequences. Bauckham writes that “perhaps Moltmann’s greatest achievement in the earlier works was to open up hermeneutical structures for relating biblical faith to the modern world.”\textsuperscript{51} This is plausible, because Moltmann’s aim was precisely to address the modern world with a revised biblical faith. On the other side of the equation, however, we see that just as Moltmann expects biblical faith to inform the world, he also expects the knowledge of the world to inform biblical

\textsuperscript{49} ET, 54.

\textsuperscript{50} CofG, xii.

faith. Nowhere is this more clear than in his embrace of scientific knowledge and theories. He writes: “We shall therefore deliberately refrain from drawing a dividing line between the theological doctrine of creation and the sciences... What we are seeking is a community of scientific and theological insights.”52 With this project, Moltmann seeks to claim all truth as God’s truth and to understand ‘God and world’ in a holistic way.

1.2 The Sources of Moltmann’s Theology

In order to understand the basis of Moltmann’s metaphysical narrative, we began by looking at his unique vision of the task of theology in the modern world. Now we turn to an equally important consideration, that is, the sources he draws from in constructing his universal story. In evaluating Moltmann’s relationship to modernity and postmodernity, we concluded that his theological endeavor is rooted deeply in the modern project and in his desire to alter the course of that project. Based on this, we may be tempted to label Moltmann a ‘modernist’ or even, to use his own words, an ‘ultramodernist.’ But as we will see below, there are some critical ways that Moltmann’s approach is actually closer to ‘postmodern’—at least in his approach to sourcing and authority. In the end, it is difficult to identify Moltmann as either modern or postmodern; his theological method is simply his own. It is this unique method that makes his synthetic metaphysical narrative possible.

1.2.1 Sources and Authority

The clearly ‘modern’ elements of Moltmann’s approach are to be found in his willingness to write metanarrative and to make universal claims about the content of that

52 GC, 13.
story. But his actual theological method is more in line with an eclectic, postmodern approach. We can see this in his view of knowledge, his understanding of ‘story,’ his use of the Bible, and his approach to the authority of various intellectual resources. To summarize his approach (crudely), we might say that Moltmann is doing theology under the assumption that external sources of authority and justification are deeply suspect, and that the most fruitful way of understanding reality is through the development of a coherent and transforming story. And so this approach might be called postmodern. But it is not postmodern in the popular sense, for the question asked is no longer ‘Is the story true for me?’ but rather ‘Is the story good for the world?’ If this is truly a postmodern approach, then at the very least the goal of the project has been shifted away from subjectivity and toward an objective common good.

As stated above, Moltmann believes that all knowledge of the truth on this side of the eschaton is only provisional. None of us have access to the absolute. From the beginning, Moltmann has sought to clearly identify his position on this topic. “We normally presuppose the absolute nature of our own standpoint in our own context. To abolish this tacit presupposition is the intention behind the phrase ‘contributions to theology.’ Behind all this is the conviction that, humanly speaking, truth is to be found in unhindered dialogue.”53 This understanding of our access to truth has real consequences for the way that Moltmann approaches the task of theology. He says, “For our knowledge and comprehension of reality, and our reflections upon it, that means at least this: that in the medium of hope our theological concepts become not judgments which nail reality down to what it is, but anticipations which show reality its prospects and its future.

53 TK, xii-xiii; also, “No concept within history is ever final and complete” (TK, xiii).
possibilities.\textsuperscript{54} This is a critical point, because it means that, for Moltmann, the theologian is not bound to the task of describing reality. The theologian is free to dream of ‘future possibilities.’

Because Moltmann understands knowledge in this way, the role of the teacher is transformed as well. No longer is the professor charged with having all the right answers. Instead, “in liberating dialogue teachers withdraw into the circle of sisters and brothers.”\textsuperscript{55} For Moltmann, theology is not a science and is not primarily a body of knowledge to be reproduced in the next generation—it is an act of imagination, and that act is only enriched by the active participation of a community. As Moltmann writes in one of his most recent works, “Theology is not an objective science that has to do with facts that can be pinned down, and circumstances that can be proved... Its sphere is the knowledge that sustains existence, that gives us courage to live and comfort in dying.”\textsuperscript{56} As such, the goal of theology is not to perfectly describe the external world, but to speak in such a way that the external world might be changed. In an address at Marquette University on the question ‘Is There Life After Death?’, Moltmann explains that “our answers to this inquiry, it must be said, belong not to the category of objective knowledge” but rather to the category of “knowledge to sustain our existence” and that “we will test concepts of this sort of knowing by their consequences for our life here and now.”\textsuperscript{57}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{54} TH, 35-6.
\item \textsuperscript{55} TK, xiii.
\item \textsuperscript{56} ET, 23.
\item \textsuperscript{57} Moltmann, \textit{Is There Life after Death?} (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1998), 3.
\end{itemize}
Perhaps not surprisingly, Moltmann’s approach has drawn criticism. Bauckham writes that “many critics, especially in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, find Moltmann’s work lacking in philosophical analysis and logical rigor. This is a question of theological style, and Moltmann’s way of doing theology has other merits, such as breadth of vision, which more analytical treatments lack.”58 As Bauckham notes, the question is not Moltmann’s ability to offer logical analysis. It is a question of style and a differing perspective on the task of theology. Moltmann has chosen his particular ‘style’ as a response to the present conditions of the world. Moltmann begins with the assumption that today’s world is in danger of self-destruction, and he has fit his style and his method to confront that assumption. Moltmann’s is a missional theology first and foremost. In terms of creating the conditions for world change, he writes, “Hence it is not our experiences that make faith and hope, but it is faith and hope that make experiences and bring the human spirit to an ever new and restless transcending of itself.”59 And so he sees it as his task to transform hope itself in order to subsequently transform our actions in the present. Moltmann’s proposal to alter faith and hope first in order to subsequently alter life and practice implies that, in good postmodern fashion, he takes the language of faith as a means to a certain end. To start from this vantage point, as he does, means that the task of the theologian is not necessarily to argue for the authority of tradition, but to use tradition(s) for the purposes of the kingdom.60 Underlying this approach to religious


59 TH, 120.

60 This idea is related to Moltmann’s understanding of the distinction between ‘Scripture’ and ‘the matter of Scripture,’ which we will examine below.
authority we must certainly see Moltmann the man, shaped by his own life circumstances. In *God, Hope, and History*, A.J. Conyers presents a critique of Moltmann’s apparent lack of respect for traditional sources of authority. In response to this critique, Moltmann writes: “[Conyers] touches upon a personal problem: I grew up during the German dictatorship and as a young man spent five years in barracks and prison camps (1943-1948). I therefore have personally experienced authority and power as not especially healing—in fact, the reverse.”\(^{61}\) This experience of secular power corresponded also to Moltmann’s experience in theology:

As a theological student, I was hesitant and mistrusting of the then-dominating theological schools of Bultmann and Barth, of Gogarten and Althaus. I felt myself oppressed by the pressure for ideological consent that was placed on one if one wanted to ‘belong.’ I could not march well in step with others, and so I became a divergent thinker, a nonconformist in that theological school to which I owe the most: the Barth school.\(^{62}\)

Moltmann recognizes the so-called postmodern shift and the dislike for traditional authority structures that comes along with it. Perhaps based in part on his own life experience, he recognizes this shift not as an obstacle to faith, but as an opportunity for faith to participate actively in shaping the future of the world.

The demolition of the absolute claims of tradition and the abolition of the absolute claims of those living in the present do not end in a general skeptical relativism. They lead to a living relationalism in an intricate fabric of interconnections. The concern that determines these relationships will undoubtedly be stamped by the hopes and fears, the purposes and tasks of the present future.\(^{63}\)

Positivism has given way to relationalism, and to Moltmann’s mind this may provide a more suitable foundation for a world-transforming hope than what we had before.


\(^{62}\) Ibid.

\(^{63}\) GC, 132.
Moltmann understands that this shift in sensibilities has opened the door for faith to offer a rather different kind of knowledge—a way of knowing that is rooted in the future and not so much in the past and present. This is a kind of knowledge that only faith can offer, and so it represents Christianity’s unique contribution to the common good. “Our knowledge, as a knowledge of hope, has a transcendent and provisional character marked by promise and expectation, in virtue of which it recognizes the open horizon of the future of reality and thus preserves the finitude of human experience... Christian theology will thus not be able to come to terms with, but will have to free itself from, the cosmodologico-mechanistic way of thinking such as is found in the positivistic sciences...”

In his earlier work in particular, Moltmann devotes a significant amount of energy to showing the failure of modern conceptions of history, time, and space. Now he believes that the ‘mechanistic’ understanding of the universe is giving way to a more process/relational understanding, and this should be seen as good news. “Finally, theology has the possibility of constructing its own concept of history and its own view of the tale of history on the basis of a theological and eschatological understanding of the reality of the resurrection.” Disillusionment with aspects of modernity has opened the door for a truly faith-based approach to world history. But for Moltmann, it is not only the failure of the scientific approach to the world that should be seen as good news—it is also the failure of traditional religious categories. In this era of deep questioning and skepticism, Moltmann seizes the opportunity to re-imagine the foundations of religious

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64 TH, 93.

65 Ibid., 180.
belief itself. He writes: “In order to grasp the fullness of God, we are at liberty to leave moral and ontological concepts behind, and to avail ourselves of aesthetic dimensions.”66

What this means for Moltmann is that his theological task is no longer bound to external ‘proofs’—neither scientific nor ontological. These new intellectual conditions have opened the way for a narrative-based approach to theology, for which the primary task is the telling of a story that is faithful to the past and which opens up creative possibilities for the common good in the present and future. For Moltmann and others of his generation, this theological task was best understood as a uniquely eschatological project. “Whereas Schweitzer, Dodd, Bultmann and many others had thought biblical eschatology unacceptable to the modern mind unless stripped of its reference to the real temporal future of the world, Moltmann... saw in future eschatology precisely the way to make Christian faith credible and relevant in the modern world.”67

The story that Moltmann has set out to write, based on the above epistemological presuppositions, is a story that is centered on the death and resurrection of Jesus as a template for the whole universe. To use the death and resurrection of Jesus as the basis for a world history requires a move away from the positivism of the past, which is exactly what we see in Moltmann. “The raising of Christ is then to be called ‘historic,’ not because it took place in the history to which other categories of some sort provide a key, but it is to be called historic because, by pointing the way for future events, it makes history in which we can and must live.”68 We will return to the idea of cross and resurrection below, but for now the essential point is that Moltmann writes his version of

67 Bauckham, Theology of Moltmann, 8.
68 TH, 181.
the Christian story not to describe the past but to open up possibilities for the future. This understanding of the function of story is derived from his understanding of knowledge and the human ability to know what is true. He is convinced that it is the story which creates meaning for the individual person, and not vice versa. “The individual self will be discovered in the over-riding history of God, and only finds its meaning in that context.”

1.2.2 Relationship to the Bible

Every Christian theologian has some relationship with the Christian scriptures. That relationship can no doubt take on a variety of shapes—and all options are bound to be controversial in one setting or another. Moltmann’s theology is certainly related to the scriptures—but the way he has used biblical stories and terms to explain his theology has caused no small amount of frustration for some of his readers. Regarding some of the biblical texts cited by Moltmann in his understanding of time and eternity, Richard Bauckham writes that “what little exegesis he offers tends to be remarkably ignorant and incompetent” and that his interpretation “requires an exegesis that no hermeneutic, however pre-modern or post-modern, could conceivably support.” A harsh judgment from arguably the foremost interpreter of Moltmann’s work. Because of the central role of the scriptures for any Christian theology, including the metaphysical narrative that we find in Moltmann’s work, we must inquire about his relationship with the biblical text.

69 TK, 5.

70 Bauckham, God Will Be, 179-80.
In response to Bauckham, Moltmann writes, "My relationship to the Bible and to professional exegesis has been subjected to critical questions by other people too." With this observation, he begins an illuminating explanation of his own relationship to the biblical text. Moltmann begins by drawing a sharp distinction between the tasks of 'exegesis' and 'theology.' In his mind, these are two very different activities. Exegesis is inextricably bound to the text, such that its task is to explain what is actually happening in the text and presumably in the mind of its author. Theology, however, is something different. "[Bauckham] is bound to literal exegesis and committed to the colleagues in his particular field. This I neither was nor am, by reason of my own position and field. Taking account of exegetical discipline, I can develop my own theological relationship to the biblical texts; for theology is not a commentary on the biblical writings, and commentaries on the biblical writings are not a substitute for theological reflection." 

For Moltmann, the biblical text does not exist only to be interpreted. It also exists as a creative resource for the constructive imagination. In this way he places greater emphasis on the subjectivity of the reader—the theologian—and on the determining nature of the reader's contemporary context. The Bible and its authors become dialogue partners in a community that includes the theologian herself. Here Moltmann lays out the process by which he interacts with the Bible:

I enter into a factual discussion with the text, with its author, its Sitz im Leben, its influence in subsequent history, and so on. From this a thematic criticism of the texts emerges which is committed to their concern. In this circle joining the text, the author and myself, I then develop my theological viewpoint...Theology is not subject to the dictation of the texts, or to the dictatorship of the exegetes.

71 Moltmann in Bauckham, God Will Be, 229.
72 Ibid., 230.
73 Ibid., 230.
This understanding and approach is understandably disturbing to others who are committed to what Moltmann has called ‘literal exegesis.’ This may represent another aspect of Moltmann’s postmodern epistemological method, since the Bible itself functions here as a dialogue partner and not as an absolute authority external to the reader.

Bauckham has commented that “Moltmann too often falls back on the mere citation of texts in a pre-critical manner.” This could be understood as a criticism of Moltmann’s exegetical competency, except that immediately prior to this Bauckham recognized that Moltmann’s earlier work demonstrated a much more nuanced use of current studies in exegesis. What, then, has changed? Why does Moltmann appear to be moving increasingly toward this ‘creative’ use of the Bible? The answer comes in his latest systematic study of the nature of theology itself. In Experiences in Theology, he writes that the recent growth of theological exegesis at the expense of historical criticism at first left him hazy and confused: “Finding myself at a loss, I then doubtless developed my own post-critical and ‘naïve’ relationship to the biblical writings, and tried to find my own way through the texts. As I did so, I discovered how much at home I felt in the Bible, and how gladly I let myself be stimulated to my own thinking by different texts.”

It has been said that Moltmann’s theology has become increasingly pneumatological. This has certainly affected his approach to the work of the Holy Spirit in the task of biblical interpretation and even constructive theological work. He writes:

74 Note that ‘literal’ in this sense does not refer to the interpretation of the scriptures — that is another question altogether. In this case, ‘literal’ speaks of the function of the scriptures themselves. The basic question is thus: is the task of the theologian primarily to explain the scriptures or to use them? While recognizing the importance of the former, Moltmann seems to be arguing here for the latter.

75 Bauckham, Theology of Moltmann, 167.

76 ET, xxi.
“To see the Spirit at work only in the verbal inspiration of scripture is a reduction of the mighty efficacy of God the Spirit which does not accord with ‘the matter of scripture.’”\(^77\)

By this Moltmann means that the scriptures themselves attest to a reality where God’s Spirit is at work in the world, moving the creation in certain directions.\(^78\) It is thus unbiblical to assume that something like the Bible is the final word on anything. The same Spirit at work in the writing of the scriptures is similarly employed in creative action now. It is the Spirit that deserves our allegiance, and not the particular form of the ancient witnesses to the work of the Spirit.

“I take Scripture as a stimulus to my own theological thinking, not as an authoritative blueprint and confining boundary. It is the ‘matter of Scripture’ that is important, not the scriptural form of the matter, even if it is only through that form that we arrive at the substance.”\(^79\) This understanding of the ‘matter of Scripture’ frees Moltmann from taking too seriously any particular element within the Bible that he deems destructive to life in our contemporary context. He believes that this approach is true to God’s purposes in the world, although this understanding will clearly be a ‘difficult teaching’ for many in the church today. “[The Bible] comes close to all who read it and who can form their own judgment. But does that make it a kind of Protestant pocket-pope, infallible and inerrant?”\(^80\) For Moltmann, the answer is ‘no.’ The truth of

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\(^77\) Ibid., 136.

\(^78\) Moltmann frequently cites ‘the matter of scripture,’ that is, the reality described by the scriptures. He sees this ‘matter of scripture’ as more authoritative than the scriptures themselves, which are only one historical method of communicating that ‘matter.’

\(^79\) ET, xxii.

\(^80\) Ibid., 129.
reality is too complicated to fall back into simple ‘proof-texting.’ Thus, ‘A quotation from the Bible is not enough to guarantee the truth of what is said.’

Based on this understanding of the situation, Moltmann does not hesitate in calling for selective use of the scriptures in certain situations, and even outright transformation of various original teachings:

There is no need to sanitize the Bible, but in a contemporary situation in which Jews are being persecuted… we must express ‘the cause of Christ’ in a way that is expedient and helpful… The androcentric and patriarchalistic texts in the Bible, which are humiliating to women, are a further example… In cases such as these the appropriate translation process does not just interpret a historical form; it also transforms it.

What, then, is our standard for belief? If the Bible itself is to be used in a fashion that is explicitly not ‘literal,’ what are Christians to believe? The answer, for Moltmann, comes from the ‘matter of scripture’—what he sees to be the underlying proclamation of God’s work in the world. Put simply: “What does this mean for a hermeneutics of the biblical writings in the coming of the Spirit who is ‘the giver of life,’ and in the context of our own life stories? We shall take our bearings from the following guideline. We shall work out what in the text furthers life, and we shall subject to criticism whatever is hostile to life.” Although Moltmann does not provide any additional examples or concrete applications of this particular principle, his overall approach to the authority of the Bible is clear enough. Moltmann’s approach to scripture is important for the present study because it dictates the way that he will select and transform biblical themes and images in the writing of his metaphysical narrative of creation.

81 Ibid., 139.
82 Ibid., 125.
83 Ibid., 149.
1.2.3 Other Sources: Marxist and Jewish

As we have seen, Moltmann has a unique way of appropriating sources in the construction of his theology, with his use of the Bible serving as a notable example. But the Bible is not the only resource employed by Moltmann. He has also been inspired by a number of other traditions, and he freely utilizes different insights from those traditions throughout his work. While many sources could be explored, here we will mention only two: Marxism and Jewish theology, both of which emerge in prominent roles in the universal story that he writes. As Bauckham notes, ever since the publication of *Theology of Hope*, "the most important subsequent influences on Moltmann’s thought from outside Christian theology were Marxist and Jewish."84

The Marxist influence in Moltmann’s work comes primarily through the work of Ernst Bloch. As Shin notes, “In his first major book, *Theology of Hope*, Moltmann explains that the eschatological orientation of his theology is largely indebted to the thought of Ernst Bloch.”85 Johnson tells the story of Moltmann’s first encounter with this philosopher, a thinker who would become pivotal for Moltmann’s project:

As a young theologian, Moltmann encountered Bloch’s work, *The Principle of Hope*, on a vacation to Switzerland. Bloch’s work mesmerized him and became the spark that ignited the fuel of his previous studies blazing forth in the *Theology of Hope*. As an atheistic Jewish Marxist, Bloch combined the Marxist utopian strain with Jewish biblical insights to posit that humanity needs to be understood as having a future thrust and orientation.86

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Bloch’s thesis in *The Principle of Hope* first pointed Moltmann in the direction of the future—an aspect of Moltmann’s theology that has since become one of its defining characteristics. Moltmann points out, however, that he lays more emphasis on the Jewish elements of Bloch’s thinking as opposed to the Marxist elements.\(^{87}\) For example, Moltmann notes a 1963 postscript written by Bloch: “The world is not true, but through human beings and through truth it strives to arrive at its homecoming.”\(^{88}\) Beyond simple utopian dreams, here we see the important Jewish twist: the homecoming of the world; the return from exile. It is this theological interpretation of the priority of the future that captured Moltmann’s imagination and set him free to follow up along the same lines with his own creative theology. Moltmann’s own life experience of war and hopelessness had left him disillusioned with overly-realized theologies in which God was wholly accessible in the present. But in Bloch’s conception of hope, Moltmann discerned a new way forward for Christian theology—one that recognized the ‘godforsakenness’ of the present while affirming a hope beyond the present. While Bloch was certainly the most important Marxist influence in Moltmann’s early career, it is also relevant to note that the Marxist influence did not stop there. As Johnson reminds us, “Moltmann engaged in extensive dialogue as a Christian theologian with Marxists and his later works especially were influenced by the insights of the Frankfurt school.”\(^{89}\)

The explicitly Jewish influence in Moltmann’s thought no doubt comes from many sources, including Bloch, as noted above. But one other aspect of Jewish thought has been central to Moltmann’s project, as we will see in the following chapter. Here we

\(^{87}\) Cf. CoFG, 30-3.

\(^{88}\) Ernst Bloch, quoted in ibid., 33.

\(^{89}\) Johnson, “Shekinah,” 32.
are speaking about the Kabbalah—the Jewish mystical tradition that has developed over the course of the last millennium. In the Kabbalah, and especially in the doctrines of the sixteenth-century Jewish mystical theologian and metaphysician Isaac Luria, Moltmann has found a wealth of creative resources for his own theology. Luria described the new doctrine of ‘zimzum,’ and this as well as Luria’s conception of the Shekinah have done much to shape the course of Moltmann’s thinking in the last few decades.

The adoption of kabbalistic ideas could be seen as random and questionable, but in fact it fits Moltmann’s method quite well. It is important to keep in mind Moltmann’s understanding of the ‘task of the theologian.’ That task is not to describe the absolute truth of the matter, but to experiment and to create new ways of thinking that help to further the mission of the Spirit in the world. Thus Moltmann is free to pick and choose ideas from a variety of resources in his creative work. The adoption of certain aspects of mystical Judaism may be quite random, but Moltmann has deemed it useful to his task. Here the words of Gorringe are also instructive: “Of course, kabbalistic Judaism could be speculative, and Moltmann has often enough been criticized for borrowing the idea of the tsimtsum, but by and large it has always been much more down to earth than Christian theology.”

1.2.4 Dialectic of Cross and Resurrection

The final shaping influence on Moltmann’s metaphysical narrative that we will examine here takes the form of a basic hermeneutical assumption about what is central to the Christian story. In this matter, Moltmann’s theology has been shaped to a large extent by his interaction with one of his first major influences, Karl Barth. Although his own

90 Timothy Gorringe in Bauckham, God Will Be, 110.
theological approach gradually diverged from Barth's, he has maintained one of the central features of Barth's thinking, that is, a strong christological focus. This systematic emphasis, combined with his own intuition based on his personal experiences of desolation and hope, has led him to develop a hopeful hermeneutic founded on the cross and resurrection of Jesus. The impulse for this move is expressed well in his small book, *Experiences of God*: "Why am I a Christian?...In the end, let me stand aside from all the arguments and all the telling. Let me say what I have to say very simply: I am a Christian for Christ's sake. I found my desolation in him, and found God in my desolation. In him I found the power of a hope which I can believe, live and die with."\(^{91}\)

It may be true, as some have argued, that 'cross and resurrection' form the center of all of Moltmann's theology. Richard Bauckham claims that "a particular interpretation of the cross and resurrection together—Moltmann's dialectic of cross and resurrection—lies at the heart of Moltmann's theology."\(^{92}\) A typical example of this is the complementarity of Moltmann's first two major works: *The Theology of Hope* and *The Crucified God*. For the present study, the illumination of Moltmann's metaphysical narrative of creation, this dialectic of cross and resurrection appears to be an important contributing factor in Moltmann's worldview. In the telling of the story of the universe, the combined events of the crucifixion of Jesus and the resurrection of his body can be understood *pars pro toto* as a picture of the whole world. It seems that 'cross and resurrection' serves as the lens through which Moltmann views the history of the whole creation project. He writes that "the history of Christ's sufferings belongs to the history


\(^{92}\) Bauckham, *Theology of Moltmann*, 82.
of the sufferings of mankind."93 In the same way then, the resurrection of Christ belongs to the general future of the world.

"The dialectic of cross and resurrection gives Moltmann’s theology a strongly christological center in the particular history of Jesus and at the same time a universal direction."94 Although the specific details of the history of the universe will not be examined fully until chapters 2 and 4 of this paper, at this point we can observe that, for Moltmann, the events surrounding the death and subsequent risen life of Jesus help to define the current nature of the universe while at the same time defining the future of new creation—universal resurrection. The power we see manifested in the raising of Jesus is the same power that we wait for. It is that power that we believe in, coming from God’s future, which will bring to life all that is dead. Moltmann writes that “the divine righteousness which is latent in the event of Christ has an inner trend towards a totality of new being.”95

As we have seen, Moltmann’s theology must be understood as missional at its core. He is writing for the purpose of change in the world. And so it is not surprising that this central hermeneutic of ‘cross and resurrection’ is also designed to serve the life of action. He writes, “The question, ‘What can I know of the historical facts?’ cannot here be separated from the ethical and existential question, ‘What am I to do?’ and from the eschatological question, ‘What may I hope for?’—just as the other questions in turn cannot be isolated. Only when concerted attention is given to these three questions does

93 TK, 52.
94 Ibid., 5.
95 TH, 207.
the reality of the resurrection disclose itself.” In other words, a firm intellectual grounding in the death and resurrection of Jesus should immediately direct our minds to the end of things that these events foretell—universal resurrection. And given this end, our immediate response must be the question ‘How do I live for this end?’

In Moltmann’s understanding, the extra-ordinary raising of Jesus is absolutely necessary for a healthy understanding of the future, and therefore a healthy foundation for praxis. It is precisely the strangeness of the resurrection that gives us true hope for the future—an idea that will be explained more fully in chapter 3 of this paper. A hope based merely on normal historical processes is a weak hope. History has failed time and again, and for Moltmann the progress of natural history is no longer a viable faith. But the resurrection of Jesus opens up a new faith—a faith beyond observable progress. In Moltmann’s understanding, the modern myth of progress has failed the world, and this fact requires a new eschatological understanding of the future. “The concept of the historical, of the historically possible and the historically probable, has been developed in the modern age on the basis of experiences of history other than the experience of the raising of Jesus from the dead.”

While we will save a full exploration of Moltmann’s understanding of hope and eschatology for a later chapter, for now we must at least mention the way that his use of the resurrection as a new lens for theology does in fact require a new understanding of history itself. Speaking of the ‘modern’ conception of history, Moltmann writes: “Historic events become understandable when they are conceived as ‘manifestations’ of [a] common core of similarity. This, however, is to put an end to their nature as events

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96 Ibid., 166.
97 Ibid., 174.
and to abandon the historic character of history in favor of a metaphysics which sees all historical things in terms of substance.”98 This ‘flattening’ of history is a major mistake, according to Moltmann. By understanding the world only as a closed system of natural cause and effect, hope is destroyed unless it is a hope that is derived strictly from natural processes. But this is a failure of vision. “A one-sided interest in the similar, ever-recurring, typical and regular, would level down the really historic element, which lies in the contingent and new, and would thus end up by losing the feeling for history altogether.”99

On this point, Moltmann notes that it is not enough for Christian views of history to merely accept the idea of contingency and newness, for that would just provide a variant to the dominant historical view. What is necessary is the absolute leap to the “exceptional category of the eschatologically new.”100 This leap is necessary for hope, but is possible only because of the raising of Christ—the foundation of all truly eschatological thinking. “Only if the whole historical picture, contingency and continuity and all, could be shown to be in itself not necessary but contingent, should we come within sight of that which can be called the eschatologically new fact of the resurrection of Christ.”101 This shift in thinking from ‘merely contingent’ to ‘eschatologically new’ will be the partial focus of the following chapters.

This understanding of history represents a radical re-orientation of our experiences in time. It is not a position that could be accepted on the basis of any kind of

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98 Ibid., 176.
99 Ibid., 178.
100 Ibid., 179.
101 Ibid.
'natural theology,' because these truths are not self-evident. This is a perspective based on trust in a particular story. It is only faith in the 'metaphysical narrative' of Christianity that can justify this strange hope for the eschatologically new. Moltmann understands this kind of trust to be at the center of the Christian story. It is exactly this faith that God has asked for throughout history, especially in the individual biblical narratives that describe God's specific interactions with people. "It will sound strange to all the people who have based their hope on experience, or on being able to calculate what is going to happen in history. What I myself have learnt from my own experience of hope is this. Hope is more than a feeling. Hope is more than experience. Hope is more than foresight. Hope is a command."102

For Moltmann, much of the biblical narrative is encapsulated in the microcosm of the cross and resurrection of Christ. These paint a new portrait of reality, and they re-define what we may expect from the future. As Christian believers in this new kind of story, we expect more than this world has to offer. We expect something so new that it can only be understood as an entirely new creation. "It is not objective time that brings the progress. It is not human activity that makes the future. It is the inner necessity of the Christ event itself, the tendency of which is finally to bring out in all things the eternal life latent in him and the justice of God latent in him."103 Understanding the hermeneutical centrality of the resurrection for Moltmann's thinking is necessary for our understanding of the story he writes.

102 EG, 19-20.

103 TH, 216.
Chapter 2: A World in God

Thus we can speak of a real ‘eschatology’ only at the points where, in the limitations and perspectives of history, the horizon of the promised future embraces in the eschaton the proton of the whole creation, where the horizon of the God who announces himself and is on his way extends to all peoples, for there is nothing that can be conceived as wider in extent than that.¹

In this important passage, Moltmann explains the connection between the end and the beginning. He says, in essence, that we can only understand the end of all things in a comprehensive way when our field of vision extends at the same time to the beginning of all things. A real eschatology, and in our case a real ‘metaphysical narrative of the universe,’ must embrace in its ultimate vision not only the direction of the creation but also its beginning. An examination of this beginning will reveal not only the sequence of historical or pre-historical events, but also the underlying metaphysics of the world. The beginning tells the story of what kind of creation we are part of. In this chapter, we will focus on the metaphysical part of Moltmann’s ‘metaphysical narrative,’ recognizing that in this case there is not a hard distinction between the two concepts—for the metaphysical description of the beginning of a ‘world within God’ is at the same time both a philosophy of the world and the first chapter of the ‘story of creation.’ In this chapter we will explore the question: what kind of thing does Moltmann think this creation is? For the metaphysical narrative that Moltmann writes, the kind of universe we are part of is one determining factor for the story of the universe—where we’ve been and where we’re going.

¹ TH, 130.
2.1 The Trinity

The beginning of the story of creation, and the foundation for this metaphysics, is to be found not in creation itself but in the being of God. Moltmann’s metaphysics of the world is derived primarily from his understanding of what kind of thing the Trinity is, and the patterns of relationship that he discerns between the divine persons. Already in *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, Moltmann was asking the question of “whether the doctrine of the Trinity itself [can] provide us with the matrix for a new kind of thinking about God, the world and man.”² In this first part of our chapter on the metaphysics of the world, we will examine the trinitarian basis for Moltmann’s general philosophy of creation. As he says, “It is [at one point] that the fundamental decisions that precede every eschatology are made: and that point is the relationship between Trinity and eschatology.”³

Central to Moltmann’s view of God is the rejection of philosophically constructed definitions of God’s being that do not match up with the God experienced in history. He writes that “in trinitarian thinking we do not reduce God to a concept. We tell his eternal history.”⁴ By this he means that our primary understanding of who or what God is must be derived from the story he is engaged in—the story of creation. This is how we know God, for this is how God has made himself known. Therefore, it is preferable to understand God based on his interactions with the world rather than to speculate about what God might be like ‘in himself.’ He writes that “natural theology’s definitions of the

² TK, 16.
⁴ ET, 309.
nature of the deity quite obviously become a prison for the statements made by the theology of revelation." This line of thinking has implications for the discussion of the so-called immanent and economic Trinities. John O'Donnell tells us that "Moltmann's account of the immanent Trinity makes minimal assertions about God in himself, but all that he says he can anchor firmly in the experience of salvation history." Bauckham explains that "Moltmann therefore follows Rahner in rejecting the distinction between the immanent and the economic Trinities, but his meaning is more radical than Rahner's. He is attributing to God a real experience of historical becoming in which his trinitarian relationships change as they encompass, experience and affect human history." O'Donnell concludes that "this means that it is impossible to conceive of God apart from his history. For Moltmann, God is literally unthinkable apart from his relationship to his creation."

Consistent with this emphasis on our experience of God as opposed to speculation about God, Moltmann writes that "the doctrine of the Trinity has a doxological form, since it expresses the experience of God in the apprehension of Christ and in the fellowship of the Spirit. This means that in this doctrine no definitions are permissible which simply pin something down, as a way of 'mastering' it." Moltmann continues by expressing the conviction that trinitarian thinking and talking only works as a form of worship and wonderment at the mystery of God. To speak of the Trinity is to express awe

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5 TK, 17.
7 Bauckham, *Theology of Moltmann*, 156.
9 SL, 73.
in the face of the unfathomable, and only in this kind of doxological context can true trinitarian thought emerge. He explains that the Trinity is not subject to definitions or critical analysis—this doctrine exists as a pathway into and out of an experience of God. This, Moltmann claims, is a deeper way of knowing than mere intellectual comprehension.

Understanding Moltmann’s concept of the doxological function of trinitarian language is an important prerequisite to further study of his teaching on the tri-unity of God. He starts with the recognition that all our metaphors are only pictures we paint in response to the wonder of the experienced deity. Given this understanding, Moltmann famously places a heavy emphasis on the three-ness of God as opposed to the one-ness of God. This is a calculated choice that clears the way for his holistic understanding of the world-in-God. He writes, “The Trinity which opens itself and goes out of itself can be termed the threefold God. The threefold God is open for human beings, open for the world, and open for time.”

By emphasizing the ‘threefold God,’ Moltmann posits a divine community, a perichoresis of persons, that has the inherent capacity to open itself for the inclusion of others. The inclusion of creation in the community of Godself is a major key to the story Moltmann writes.

Moltmann’s emphasis on the threefold God, what he calls the social Trinity, has prompted some critics to label him as a tritheist. O’Donnell explains the difference between Moltmann’s view of the Trinity and that of the classical tradition: “Classical trinitarian theology vigorously maintained that in God there is only one center of consciousness and will. Moltmann implies that there are three. The ontological unity of

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10 Ibid., 294.
one substance or subject seems to be replaced by a volitional unity of three subjects."\(^{11}\)

While Moltmann certainly does not consider himself to be a tritheist, he is nonetheless loath to move away from the language of three-ness that has prompted so much criticism. The ‘community that is God’ is absolutely central to Moltmann’s theological project, not only because of the biblical witness but also because of its implications for our mission in the world.

Moltmann understands that our vision of God has everything to do with the way we operate in the world. Allegiance to God as the ‘absolute monarch of the universe’ has, in Moltmann’s opinion, led to great human suffering throughout the millennia, since the monarchial rule of various dictators has often derived legitimacy from the supposed monarchy of God. But ‘God as community’ engenders a radically different response. In Bauckham’s analysis of the situation, one of the motivating factors in Moltmann’s account of the Trinity is the question of the ‘sovereignty of God’ vis-à-vis the world:

What Moltmann opposes comes to classic expression in his account of Barth’s trinitarian doctrine, making his disagreement with Barth pivotal for his whole argument. In Barth... inevitably the Trinity is collapsed into a threefold repetition of a single subject... By contrast, Moltmann wants to give priority to the Trinity and to understand the rule of God differently in its light. Social trinitarianism will then entail something other than divine monarchy.\(^{12}\)

Moltmann maintains the three-ness of God for these and other reasons. This being the case, he does not hesitate to speak of the differences between the divine persons and their work in the world. For instance: “The Father is the creating origin of creation, the Son its shaping origin, and the Spirit its life-giving origin.”\(^ {13}\) But it is also important to

\(^{11}\) O’Donnell, _Trinity and Temporality_, 150.

\(^{12}\) Bauckham, _Theology of Moltmann_, 173.

\(^{13}\) GC, 98.
not read too much into these distinctions between the persons of God. Remembering that Moltmann understands trinitarian language to be doxological by nature, we should hesitate to conclude that Moltmann has come close to ‘pinning down’ the definite characteristics of the Three. In fact, there are some good reasons for rejecting the notion that Moltmann’s thought is tritheistic, although not all readers will find them convincing.\(^\text{14}\) One such reason is his relational definition of divine personhood.

According to O’Donnell, one of Moltmann’s most frequent responses to the charge of tritheism is that the common idea of ‘personhood’ itself is wrong. Moltmann “argues that tritheism could only arise if one brings an individualistic understanding of ‘person’ to theology.”\(^\text{15}\)

Interpreters of Moltmann’s social Trinity must keep in mind the dismissal of ‘substance philosophy’ throughout his work. Moltmann tells us that in his inquiry into the nature of the Trinity, “we shall presuppose the unity of God neither as homogenous substance nor as identical subject. Here we shall inquire about that unity in the light of this trinitarian history.”\(^\text{16}\) As previously noted, Moltmann believes that much of Western philosophy has been mistaken in its uncritical acceptance of certain kinds of Hellenistic metaphysics. One of the ideas that Moltmann disapproves of is the concept that a ‘person’ is the kind of thing that can be thought of in isolation from other persons or from its environment. Moltmann does not understand ‘personhood’ in this way—not even divine personhood. In one of his most creative assertions, Moltmann posits that the

\(^{14}\) Whether or not Moltmann’s theology can actually stand up to the charge of tritheism is a matter of much debate that we won’t try to settle here. For our purposes, the relevant question is: how does Moltmann understand his own theology on this issue? The point of this section on Moltmann’s understanding of the Trinity is to show how his metaphysics of creation relates to his own ideas about God.

\(^{15}\) O’Donnell, *Trinity and Temporality*, 151.

\(^{16}\) TK, 19.
"persons" of the Trinity exist *ex-statically*. This means that the essence of their being is not to be found in their own individual personhood, but rather their actual *being* exists outside of 'themselves' and within one another. In this way, it is strictly impossible to imagine one person of the Trinity in isolation from the others. We should understand this not only as an epistemological statement (concerning our access to the divine personhood) but as an ontological statement as well (concerning the process-relational nature of reality itself). This represents a fundamentally different metaphysics when compared with the dominant historical Christian tradition.

Although we will examine Moltmann's 'Spirit christology' more fully in chapter 4, here it serves as a good example of his way of thinking about the trinitarian persons. Moltmann writes that "the Spirit is inconceivable without the Son, and the Son is inconceivable without the Spirit." As we have mentioned, this does not mean that it is merely 'difficult' to think about the two without each other—it is impossible because of the level of inter-relatedness exhibited within the Trinity. Elsewhere Moltmann writes that the *Spirit-history of Christ* and the *Christ-history of the Spirit* are two aspects of the same overall movement of God. Each connotes something unique, but the two are indivisible, like two sides of the same coin. He further explains that "we shall be talking about the Spirit if we talk about the eternal birth of the Son from the Father. We shall be talking about the Son if we think of the 'procession' of the Spirit from his Father." So the doxological language of 'Son' and 'Spirit' should be understood as a reference to

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17 ET, 318-9.
18 SL, 72.
19 Ibid., 308.
20 Ibid., 72.
particular relationships—relationships within Godself and relationships extending toward creation. But lest we be tempted to read this as a modal vision of the Trinity, we must keep in mind that the re-definition of personhood as relationship allows these Three to exist as three. This version of the Trinity is not modal but tri-personal, precisely because of the definition of divine ex-static personhood. Therefore, “the eternal birth of the Son from the Father and the eternal issuing of the Spirit from the Father are, in spite of all the differences, so much one that the Son and the Spirit must be seen, not as parallel or successive to one another, but in one another.” 21 This understanding of trinitarian persons that exists in one another serves as a key not only for Moltmann’s vision of God but for his philosophy of the world as well. He writes that “we shall try to think ecologically about God, man and the world in their relationships and indwellings.” 22 The panentheistic metaphysics that follows from this trinitarian starting point is the result of Moltmann’s attempt to think ecologically about the God-world relationship in the broadest terms possible. 23

One of the intended results of Moltmann’s teaching on the Trinity is the elevated place of the Holy Spirit in the life of God and the world. In his recent doctoral dissertation, John David Jaeger chronicled the gradual rise of the Spirit in the course of

21 Ibid.

22 TK, 19.

23 It is important to define what Moltmann means by ecological in this context, because this proves to be one of the central and unifying features of his theology, especially for his metaphysical narrative of creation. The popular use of ‘ecological’ as synonymous with ‘environmental’ must be overcome here. For Moltmann, an ‘ecological’ understanding of God and world means a broad worldview that sees all parts in their relationship to the whole. The implications of this for his theology are far-reaching. For the Trinity, it means that the trinitarian persons cannot be isolated from one another in abstraction, but their very being must be understood ex-statically. For creation, this means that Moltmann’s primary concern will be for the system of creation instead of the individuals within it, as well as for the general relationship between God and his creation. This kind of ecological thinking means, for Moltmann, the development of a new fundamental perspective that is ‘cosmo-theocentric.’
Moltmann’s career, and found that, by the end of the systematic contributions, it had become clear that the work of the Holy Spirit was central to the whole project of creation.24 The personhood of the Spirit still remains a mystery, as Moltmann notes: “It is of course true that only the Father knows the Spirit whom he breathes out, and only the Son knows the Spirit whom he receives. But in the efficacies experienced and in the energies perceived, this primal personhood of the Spirit is concealed from us, and we paraphrase the mystery of his life with many metaphors.”25 Nevertheless, the Spirit still occupies an extremely important place in Moltmann’s ‘ultimate vision’ of God and the world—the story he writes. As will become clear in the fourth chapter of this paper, it is the Spirit of God that is at work in the initial creation, in the history of Jesus and the church, and ultimately in the consummation of the world. It is the Spirit that unites this as a single divine creation project. The importance of the Spirit for Moltmann’s thinking warrants a brief examination of the place of the Spirit in the Trinity, for this Spirit plays an active role in Moltmann’s metaphysics of creation.

Employing what he calls a ‘trinitarian analysis’ of the Spirit, Moltmann writes that

the nature of the Holy Spirit is perceived only in his relationships to the other persons of the Trinity, who are “of like nature.” His trinitarian inter-subjectivity illuminates his subjectivity, because his subjectivity is constituted by his inter-subjectivity...With this we enter a different level from the level of experience, efficacy, and the inference about the primordial Trinity drawn from the economic Trinity in its work for salvation.26

26 Ibid., 289-90.
The statement that the Spirit’s ‘subjectivity is constituted by his inter-subjectivity’ serves as a further example of the way that Moltmann’s concept of ex-static personhood can, to his mind, preserve the unity of the social Trinity.

Moltmann chooses to draw on trinitarian thought from both the Eastern and the Western traditions. This is consistent with his general approach to sourcing as described above. Rather than accept either Western or Eastern historical statements about the Trinity as dogma, he approaches both as “flexible conceptual frameworks.” When it comes to the Spirit, he has chosen to side with the traditional Orthodox statements about the procession of the Spirit, based on his reading of the biblical narrative. “[We] discover that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and determines the Son, rests on the Son and shines through him… [this] remodeling will only be possible, however, if we once again remove the filioque from the Western creed, leaving it that the Spirit proceeds from the Father alone.” By adopting this understanding, Moltmann elevates the place of the Spirit in such a way that the action of the Spirit in the world is no longer subjected to or determined by the action and work of the Son in the historical events surrounding Jesus. Our understanding of the Spirit is thereby de-limited and universalized.

The universal efficacy of the Spirit is central to the story of creation that Moltmann has discerned. “The Spirit of the Father and the Son is the divine quickening power of the new creation of all things, the power empowering the rebirth of everything that lives.” No longer understood as working only within the confines of the church,

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27 Ibid.

28 Ibid., 71.

29 Ibid., 94-95. Note that Moltmann is here able to name this as the Spirit ‘of the Father and the Son.’ This is not to indicate that the Spirit proceeds from both, but should be read as saying that the Spirit of the Father is the same Spirit at work in the Son.
this Spirit is seen as the very life essence of the world—now, but especially in the eschatological new creation. The Spirit of God is the primary ‘mode’ of God’s relationship with the world. The Spirit sustains life and opens up ways to new life. And for Moltmann, it is important to know that this Spirit is the selfsame Spirit at work in all these aspects of creation and new creation. “For if we wish to comprehend the liberating experience of the Spirit, it is important for us to understand the Spirit both as ‘the Spirit of Christ’ and ‘the Spirit of God’... The ‘Spirit of Christ’ effects in us the raising of new energies through the word of the gospel. The ‘Spirit of God’ opens new possibilities round about us through the circumstances of history.”

All of this is important for the way that Moltmann’s social Trinity opens itself and reaches out to its creation. In Moltmann’s view, the social understanding of God provides the key to understanding creation’s participation in God. In this trinitarian structure, the three persons of the Trinity are relationally open to one another in a way that is not unlike their openness to creation. As Moltmann notes, “trinitarian theology is baptismal theology,” for in the act of baptism we are openly welcomed into the inner-trinitarian relationships—we join the community that is God. The assumption that the Trinity exists as three subjects is central to Moltmann’s understanding of God’s inherent relationality and communitarian way of being. This has special implications for God’s relationship with the world. He tells us that “the union of the divine Trinity is open for

30 Ibid., 102-3.

31 TK, 90. See also ibid., 95, for the statement that “baptism is the practice of the doctrine of the Trinity.”
the uniting of the whole creation with itself and in itself. So the unity of the Trinity is not merely a theological term; at heart it is a soteriological one as well.\textsuperscript{32}

In Moltmann’s view, this understanding of God lays a solid foundation for understanding ideal structures and tendencies within creation. This God is not only a pattern for the community of creation, but this God goes outside of himself for the purpose of drawing creation into himself. This is the specific task and mission of the Spirit within creation.

The Spirit does not merely bring about fellowship with himself. He himself issues from his fellowship with the Father and the Son, and the fellowship into which he enters with believers corresponds to his fellowship with the Father and the Son, and is therefore a \textit{trinitarian fellowship}. In the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the triune God himself is an open, inviting fellowship in which the whole creation finds room.\textsuperscript{33}

This vision of the God-world relationship forms the basis for Moltmann’s story of creation as well as a vision for the purpose of creation itself. If this is the nature of God, and if God has created a universe capable of partaking in this nature, then it would seem that the goal of the creation project is to form ever broader community within the universe and between the universe and God. This is the heartbeat of reality itself. “Total lack of relationship is total death. So ‘the fellowship of the Holy Spirit’ is simply another way of describing ‘the life-giving Spirit’ … \textit{The creation of community} is evidently the goal of God’s life-giving Spirit in the world of nature and human beings.”\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 96.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 218.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 219.
2.2 Panentheism

In describing Moltmann’s metaphysical narrative of the universe, we began with an examination of some relevant aspects of his view of God. In this section we go one step further as we explore the particular way that Moltmann has imagined the God-world relationship. In the last section we were introduced to the kind of God Moltmann describes—a social God whose inner relationships are open to include the world. This kind of God is necessary for his project. Similarly, a particularly open view of the world is also necessary. This must be the kind of world that is inherently open to the divine. Moltmann writes that “an ecological doctrine of creation implies a new kind of thinking about God. The center of this thinking is no longer the distinction between God and the world. The center is the recognition of the presence of God in the world and the presence of the world in God.” This concept is generally called panentheism.

The metaphysics of panentheism sets the stage for the drama that will unfold: the history of God in the world. This understanding of the God-world relationship is critical to the overall success of Moltmann’s narrative, because it provides not only the philosophical foundation for the project but also the narrative fulfillment of the project. The complete interpenetration of God and world is seen as the eschatological end-point.

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35 GC, 13. As we have noted in the section on the Trinity, the phrase ‘ecological doctrine of creation’ should be read as something like ‘a theology of the relatedness of things.’

36 There is a wealth of new information available about the emergence of panentheism in modern theology and science. For a description of panentheism that is close to Moltmann’s own view, see Denis Edwards, “A Relational and Evolving Universe Unfolding within the Dynamism of the Divine Communion,” in In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being: Panentheistic Reflections on God’s Presence in a Scientific World, ed. Clayton and Peacocke (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 199-221.
of the creation project. Shin declares that "the panentheistic vision of God’s being and activities encapsulates the theology of Jürgen Moltmann."³⁷

What we have here called panentheism, Moltmann himself sometimes refers to simply as the ‘trinitarian concept of creation.’ He explains that what sets this idea apart from the Neoplatonic emanation-from and remanation-into the All-One is precisely the community of Godself.³⁸ In Moltmann’s panentheistic vision, God’s community is opened up to make space for the creation, and in the end the creation is not simply re-absorbed but is welcomed into community with all its particularity intact. Moltmann believes that this strikes a perfect balance between two traditionally competing views. “The trinitarian concept of creation integrates the elements of truth in monotheism and pantheism.”³⁹

Shin further defines Moltmann’s position compared to other contemporary options and finds that “Moltmann seems to take a middle way between classical theism and process panentheism. Compared with the ontological panentheism of process theology, his panentheistic vision is to be characterized as trinitarian, voluntary, and eschatological.”⁴⁰ As opposed to process theism, whose God must create and exist in a certain relationship to creation, Moltmann’s panentheism is marked by an elevated understanding of God’s freedom in the matter. God creates because God determines himself to be the creator. By defining Moltmann’s view as an eschatological

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³⁸ In SL, 212, Moltmann describes the connection to this Neoplatonic thought and also asserts that a significant part of early and medieval Christian mysticism bore a striking resemblance to this idea, citing language such as ‘dissolving into God,’ etc.

³⁹ GC, 98.

panentheism, Shin indicates that Moltmann's panentheism is to be seen as the goal of creation and not necessarily the full present reality. According to Moltmann, we do not now live in a world completely filled by the unveiled presence of God, but one day we will. The ultimate end of things is the full life of God within creation and the full life of creation within God. Bauckham explains that, for Moltmann, "the goal of the trinitarian history of God is the uniting of all things with God and in God."

The overall pattern is therefore this: from eternity the Trinity in the origin [in itself; immanent] is open in love for the world and its history. God's being trinitarian means that he is open in love for the union of creation with himself. In the missions of the Son and the Spirit God opens himself in seeking love and then in gathering love gathers creation into union with himself. His final unity is then one which includes the whole of his creation in an eschatological, trinitarian 'panentheism.'

2.3 Zimzum and Original Kenosis

In the universal story that Moltmann tells, in the beginning there is God, and only God. Having not yet created, God is All in All and his being is everything, everywhere. "The primordial moment is to be found before the creation of world and time, in God's designation of himself to be Creator. Out of the self-restriction of God's eternity there emerges the time of creation." There must be a self-restriction in God, because unless God were to place a limit on his omnipresence, he would fill everything without space left for an extra Deum. Similarly, Moltmann will argue, if God were not to limit his own

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41 Bauckham, *Theology of Moltmann*, 17.
42 Ibid., 158.
43 CofG, 282.
omniscience and omnipotence, a free creation would not be possible. Shin calls this the necessary “divine ontological shrinkage for the existence of the other.”

As noted above, “in comparison to the panentheism of process theology, Moltmann’s modified version is ‘voluntary’ panentheism.” This means that the creation of this world within God is not necessary. But for Moltmann, this does not mean that God is absolutely free in the sense that some have posited. In fact, Moltmann believes that while God is free to become creator, once he has made that decision he is limited in a variety of ways. This is a self-chosen limitation, for the sake of a greater good. In Moltmann’s view, it is impossible to conceptualize a non-divine world unless we first accept a certain self-limitation by God. “There is in fact one possible way of conceiving an extra Deum. But it is only the assumption of a self-limitation by God himself preceding his creation which can be reconciled with God’s divinity without contradiction.”

The character of this initial movement within God is described by the sixteenth-century kabbalistic theologian, Isaac Luria, who gave it the name zimzum. Before the creation of the world, there must be a contraction in the very being of God. God must contract into himself in order to create an empty place, the nihil. Without this initial

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45 Ibid., 11.
46 Moltmann does say, however, that it is part of ‘God’s nature as love’ to designate himself as creator. This may mean that it is strictly inconceivable for God to not become the creator – that there are no counterfactual histories where God does not create. Nevertheless, Moltmann maintains that in this matter God is not compelled by anything outside of his own character in his decision to create the universe.
47 GC, 86.
48 Lurianic doctrines are frequently employed in Moltmann’s scheme. For more on Isaac Luria and the concept of zimzum within the Kabbalah, see Gershom Sholem, Kabbalah: A Definitive History of the Evolution, Ideas, Leading Figures and Extraordinary Influence of Jewish Mysticism (New York: Meridian/Penguin, 1978), especially 128-35.
nothingness there can be no ontic ‘space’ for that which is not God. Following Luria, Moltmann writes that “the space which comes into being and is set free by God’s self-limitation is a literally God-forsaken space. The *nihil* in which God creates his creation is God-forsakenness, hell, absolute death; and it is against the threat of this that he maintains his creation in life.”\(^\text{49}\) It is into this empty space—this ‘womb’ within him—that God places his creation. In the following sections our task will be to understand exactly what kind of creation it is that God spoke into the space he opened up.

Regarding the self-limitation of God in creation, Moltmann is clear that this requires a certain self-emptying, or *kenosis*, on God’s part. Shin declares that Moltmann “is an enormous advocate of the theology of kenotic creation.”\(^\text{50}\) It is an act of loss that makes room for greater gain. In Moltmann’s view this does not represent a diminished view of God, but rather a much elevated view. God is not one to preserve his own bliss; ours is the God whose nature is to descend into the nothingness to breathe life into all that exists, as we have seen epitomized in the incarnation and death of the Son. All of this is for the purpose of much greater glory in the end, and this kenotic vision is essential to Moltmann’s understanding of creation.

The key promise for the development of my eschatological vision is to be found in Isaiah’s vision: “The whole earth is full of his glory” (6:3). From that I concluded that this is the goal of creation from the beginning, and that with the creation of a world differentiated from himself and non-divine, God undertook a first kenosis: God involved himself in this endangered creation, and entered into it through his Word and Wisdom.\(^\text{51}\)

\(^{49}\) GC, 87-8.

\(^{50}\) Shin, “Panentheistic Vision,” 244.

This risky, kenotic action on God's part is necessary, in Moltmann's view, if God is to create the kind of world we find ourselves in. This is a world that appears to be genuinely temporal and genuinely free in many respects—it is a world in the process of becoming. "God restricts his omniscience in order to give what he has created freedom. These primordial self-restrictions of God's precede his creation. In Act One God acts on himself, inwards, before in Act Two he goes out of himself and creates something other than himself." In what follows we will outline the kind of world God did create in 'act two.'

2.4 The Time of Creation

'Time' represents one of the greatest mysteries of existence, and as such has been a major discussion point in philosophy throughout human history, from Plato and Augustine to Kant and Heidegger. With a subject matter so ephemeral, it is not surprising that we find in the literature a variety of opinions strongly expressed about the nature of time—often pulling in quite opposite directions. The story of creation that Moltmann writes necessarily takes sides in this debate, for no comprehensive metaphysical narrative of creation could ignore what is arguably the most distinctive characteristic of created reality. A decision regarding the nature of 'time' is synonymous with a decision regarding the nature of 'creation.' Moltmann has made his decision, and in what follows we will see how his approach to time gives form to his story of creation.

52 CofG, 282.
2.4.1 The Distinction between Philosophy of Time and Theology of Time

To avoid any confusion about the discussion of time below, we must understand the parameters that we’re working within in the various chapters of this paper. Of critical importance here is the difference between what we will call the ‘philosophy of time’ and the ‘theology of time’ in Moltmann’s work. As we have seen, ever since his first interaction with Bloch’s *Principle of Hope*, the topic of the ‘future’ has played a critical role in Moltmann’s theology. It is time now to expose an important distinction that arises in Moltmann’s use of the idea of time and especially ‘future.’ This distinction is critical not only for understanding the detailed discussion that will follow, but it also provides a major key to the relationship between metaphysics and the narrative of creation in Moltmann’s theology.

In Moltmann’s work, we can detect a clear distinction between his *theological* understanding of the future as it pertains to eschatology and his *philosophical* understanding of future as it pertains to the kind of world that God created. This distinction is to be found in his various discussions of ‘future’ as a *modality of being* over against his discussions of ‘future’ as *futurum* or *adventus.* These represent two different discussions and conversations altogether, but it is sometimes difficult to discern the distinction because many of the terms are the same. However, if we can separate the two in our minds, we can begin to find the points at which they interact and work together in Moltmann’s metaphysical narrative of creation.

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53 Making the semantic issue here even more complicated, it seems that Moltmann has occasionally used an entirely different set of terms for the basic distinction we are highlighting. In his important article “What is time? And how do we experience it?” *dialog: A Journal of Theology* 39, no. 1 (2000): 27-34, Moltmann talks about the ‘historical or temporal concept of time’ which is the same as what we are calling his ‘philosophy of time.’ What we are calling his ‘theology of time’ he refers to as the ‘theological concept of time’ or the ‘temporal concept of eternity.’ For the sake of clarity, in this paper we will refer to this distinction in terms of Moltmann’s philosophy/theology, but readers of Moltmann should keep in mind that all of these designations do appear in the primary literature.
For what we are calling Moltmann’s ‘philosophy of time,’ the discussion centers on a general metaphysics of the created world. The question here is ‘What kind of world are we living in?’ Moltmann answers this question by saying that, when we think of time, we must transpose the modes of time into modalities of being. In other words, the ‘past, present, future’ of creation are not just ‘modes’ of the one thing called ‘time’—they represent qualitatively distinct ‘kinds of being.’ In this chapter, our discussion is based on Moltmann’s philosophy of time in this sense. The scope is therefore limited to a discussion of the kind of world we live in—the kind of world God created.

We also find in Moltmann’s work another discussion that involves many of the same terms, that is, his theology of time. In that discussion, he is concerned primarily with the matter of eschatology and the in-breaking kingdom of God. There his concern is to assert the pre-eminence of God’s future over the whole sphere of created time and reality. This involves reorienting our theological understanding of the future away from a sense of futurum, the natural ‘unfolding’ of history, toward an expectation of the future as adventus, or the coming of God’s Kingdom. We will deal with this aspect of ‘future’ in the next chapter.

To be sure, Moltmann’s philosophy of time and his theology of time are connected. But the real distinction between the two must not be neglected. In fact, it is precisely this distinction that forms one of the central links between metaphysics and narrative in Moltmann’s theology. In the following sections of this chapter, we turn our attention to Moltmann’s understanding of the philosophy of time, or the ‘time of creation,’ so that in the next chapter we can show the ways in which his narrative of creation is partially determined by this general metaphysics.
2.4.2 Introduction to the Philosophy of Time

Before examining Moltmann's own approach to the philosophy of time, let us find our place in the debate by briefly outlining two major and differing understandings about the nature of time and creation. Following from the work of the early twentieth-century metaphysician J. M. E. McTaggert, two general camps have emerged in the philosophical conversation: those who hold to the 'B-theory' and those who prefer the 'A-theory.'\(^{54}\) Associated with each of these ontological positions is a particular way of understanding events in time and their relation to each other.

Before attempting to characterize the ontological claims of these theories about reality, let us step back and examine what McTaggert called the 'A-series' and the 'B-series.' When we think of a temporal process, we can describe it in two basic ways: as an A-series or as a B-series. An A-series description of a process would assume that one can be located in time. Suppose I said, "Yesterday the stock market gained 20 points, but tomorrow it will fall 30 points." A statement like this assumes that the speaker or hearer is located in a particular place in time: 'today.' This is a statement about what lies ahead—that which is future. It is also a statement about what lies in the past. This kind of talk only makes sense if there is also a 'today,' but having a 'today' implies that the 'present' is a real phenomenon and that it is possible for a person to experience it. To describe a series of events in terms of what is past, present or future (or 'yesterday, today, tomorrow') is to describe an A-series of events. This is also to make a 'tensed' statement.

\(^{54}\) These categorizations are based on John Ellis McTaggert, *The Nature of Existence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927). Our adoption of these categories is not arbitrary. Not only do these represent the standard terms of discussion in modern philosophy of time, but Moltmann himself has also located part of his view in relation to the A- and B-theories. See Moltmann, "What is time?" 29 n. 5.
But exactly the same series of events could also be described in a more objective way, as a B-series. Suppose that in the previous paragraph my ‘today’ was June 4. We could express the same series of events by saying: “On June 3, the stock market gains 20 points. Two days later, the stock market falls 30 points.” To describe the series in this way does not assume anything like the existence of a ‘today’ or a ‘present.’ In this case the narrator of the series is uninvolved in any temporal process—she takes a so-called God’s-eye-view of the whole timeline, and is merely relating two objective points on that timeline. In this method of description, we can use terms like ‘before’ and ‘after’—these are objective ways of relating one event to another, without locating the events in relation to the thinker’s place in time. To describe the series of events in this way is to describe them as a B-series. This is also called a ‘tenseless’ statement.

Any series of events can be described in B-series or A-series terms. These simply represent different ways of describing a series, but so far we have not connected these descriptions to any metaphysical claims about reality. However, when we use the terms ‘B-theory’ and ‘A-theory,’ we are going beyond semantics and making a statement about what kind of world we live in. Those who hold to the B-theory believe that only B-series statements are descriptive of reality. In other words, ideas like past, present, and future are merely illusions and are strictly false ways of describing the universe. There is no objective ‘today’—there are only events that are ‘before’ or ‘after’ or ‘simultaneous-with.’ When humans experience what we think is ‘present’ it is simply an artifact of the structure of our consciousness. But ontologically speaking, there is no ‘now’ in reality. This is called a ‘tenseless’ view of reality. On this view, words like ‘past’ and ‘future’ are
colloquialisms in the sense that they refer to our temporally provincial perception of reality, but not to reality itself.

The A-theory, on the other hand, asserts that when we use concepts like past, present, and future we are describing the universe as it really is. There really is a today, and that which is yesterday is not merely ‘before’ but is genuinely past—a category that is, in a real way, qualitatively distinct from either present or future. This is a fundamentally ‘tensed’ view of reality. It says that in our real universe, ‘future’ is something ontologically distinct from ‘past’ and ‘present.’ In the A-theory of reality, both A-series and B-series statements accurately describe the nature of our universe. The A-theory paints the picture of a genuinely temporal process of becoming within reality, whereas the B-Theory contends that the past, present, and future of our universe are all equally real at any given time.

2.4.3 B-Theory in the Christian Tradition

Christians throughout the centuries have held a variety of opinions about the nature of time and what it means for our understanding of creation. It seems that Christians have taken a particular interest in this debate because our understanding of the time of creation also has implications for God’s experience of time and creation. The debate continues today, as evidenced by a number of recent publications including God and Time: Four Views.55 Today we find a substantial number of Christian authors on both sides of the fence, although this is a more recent phenomenon. The most influential thinkers from the main part of Christian history have probably held to something like the B-theory of time, if only implicitly. Not often do we find explicit discussion in classical

Christian literature of the philosophy of time *per se*, but the implicit views of many authors can be observed through their treatment of peripheral topics, such as God's relationship to time and creation.\(^{56}\)

Probably the most prominent of these writers is Saint Augustine, who serves as a representative of the historical mainstream of Christian thinking in this matter. While Augustine never did formulate a formal theory of time using the kind of categories we are accustomed to today, he wrote extensively about God and time in book eleven of his *Confessions*.\(^{57}\) A close reading of his arguments in this book shows that his theory of time is most closely aligned with the modern B-theory, and as such he serves as a major Christian counter-example to compare with Moltmann's A-theory perspective. Here we will look briefly at some of Augustine's statements in the *Confessions* to better understand his view of time.

Augustine opens book eleven with the question, "Is it possible, O Lord, that, since Thou art in eternity, Thou art ignorant of what I am saying to Thee?"\(^{58}\) This opening question proves to be on-target for our inquiry about Augustine's view of time. In this insightful question he assumes that God experiences the time of creation in a block fashion—that is, that God does not exist at any one particular 'now' within time, but rather outside of the whole process, looking in from an atemporal perspective that perceives everything at once. This provides our first clue about what Augustine thinks

\(^{56}\) Paul Helm, who is a major contemporary advocate of the B-theory, notes that classical Christian thinkers understood the timelessness of God to be axiomatic to Christian theology, although in current philosophy of religion circles the consensus seems to be that God and creation both exist in time. See Helm, *Eternal God: A Study of God without Time* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), xi-xv.


\(^{58}\) Ibid., XI.1.
time itself is, for if God does perceive all times simultaneously and in the same way, it indicates that the past, present, and future of the world does in fact exist all at once, even though as creatures we are unable to perceive that reality.

Later in the book, Augustine concludes that although time may be experienced by creation as past, present, and future, the reality of the matter must be that, although we do not see them now, times past and future must somewhere exist as present. Today we might call this a tenseless view of time, the idea that all events past and future now exist but we experience only time present. Finally, we read Augustine's conclusion that “the past increases by the diminution of the future until by the consumption of all the future all is past.” In other words, the parameters of time are fixed. There now exists a kind of eternal timeline, and the point termed ‘present’ is consistently moving along this timeline. Augustine’s statement implies that the future is the same kind of thing as time past and present, the only difference being that the ‘present’ has not yet reached those times called ‘future.’ Also implied by Augustine’s statement is the assumption that the times called ‘future’ will eventually run out as they are overtaken first by present and then by past. When this point is reached, the end of time will occur. Since the timeline itself is fixed in reality beyond our experience of time, and although humanity inhabits only a moment of the whole, God knows the whole of past, present, and future as a simultaneous present. As we will see, Moltmann’s vision of the creation story involves a very different metaphysics, one that helps to shape the purpose and the outcome of the story itself.

59 Ibid., XI.35-38.

60 Ibid., XI.60.
2.4.4 A-Theory in Moltmann

"Time and space should be treated as struggling forces," writes Paul Tillich. By this, Tillich means that much of the history of thought can be characterized as either space-based or time-based. Pagan cultures and even the Greek worldview were ruled by a spatial understanding of the world, at the expense of time, according to Tillich. This means that historical novelty was down-played and the fulfillment and eternalization of spaces was sought in religious ceremony and architecture. Tillich also believes that in modern times the mathematics of physics has further reduced the importance of time and favored a spatial understanding of the world by treating time itself as only a fourth spatial dimension. For Tillich, all of this represents a major mistake, a "cosmological tragedy," that misses the whole point of the nature of the world. Moltmann agrees.

Following Tillich's reading of the historical triumph of space over time, Moltmann extends this explanation to show that even when some Christian thinkers of the past have spoken about time itself, they have chosen an understanding of time that essentially nullifies its essence. Speaking of the ancient understanding of time as a 'repetition of eternity,' Moltmann writes, "If we were to put the matter in slightly exaggerated form, we might in this context define the nature of religion as myth and ritual, and see its function as the abolition of history. Myth eradicates the experiences of history, and ritual blots out history's decision." It is interesting to note that Moltmann places the ritual function of the church calendar in this category as well, noting that it

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62 Ibid., 34.

63 GC, 107.
“has a similar character in its neutralization of history.”64 By treating time as in some way circular, historical understanding and a sense of movement toward the future is wiped out.

Even in some recent theology, and notably in Barth, there has been a tendency to de-temporalize the world by locating eternity in the transcendence of the present. Moltmann also finds this idea of the ‘eternal present’ unsatisfactory. He writes, “But does it make sense to measure future and past being only against present being, and to define them as being-that-is-not-yet or being-that-is-no-longer? Is not future being also potential being, and a being-that-can-exist? Is not past being also real being—being which, since it is being that has once truly come into existence, is also being that abides?”65 In what should be seen as one of the most important philosophical choices in Moltmann’s theology, he abandons these understandings of time and eternity that serve to down-play the ontological differences between past, present, and future. He chooses instead another version of temporal reality, one stretching back to Heraclitus and often championed in twentieth-century philosophy. His thesis is simply: the past and the future are different kinds of things. In other words, the A-theory.

“[The] world exists, not in the great equilibrium of mutually harmonizing forces, as in the world of the Tao, but in a disequilibrium of future and past, because it is aligned towards future. This has nothing to do with a modern, linear concept of time, for future and past are not the same in quality.”66 Moltmann says that “we have to differentiate

64 Ibid., 106. However, Moltmann does not believe that the church calendar is a complete waste. In his article “Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and the Future World,” Anvil 16, no. 4 (1999): 247-53, he also offers some suggestions for a new order to the liturgical year to better highlight the Christian hope.

65 GC, 111.

66 ET, 31-2.
within the concept of history itself, and have to try to integrate that concept into the wider concept of nature. I shall try to do the first by way of a complex modalization of the tenses: past, present and future.\footnote{GC, 125.}

The 'modalization' of time that Moltmann describes lies at the heart of the A-theory perspective, and it begins with our own experience of reality. At one point he says, “[As] everyone knows, and as Heraclitus said, no one enters the same river twice.”\footnote{ET, 113.} This is important because he is implicitly giving weight to what we know intuitively about our world. And that is, that it changes and grows into a future over which we have some control. This kind of insight tells us that the future must be a different kind of thing than the past and the present. One important aspect of this difference is that the future is the kind of thing that can be altered, while the past cannot. This leads Moltmann to ask: “Are the modes of time the same in kind ontologically? Is time a category of eternity, or is it constituted through particular happenings and processes?”\footnote{GC, 112.}

This kind of questioning from Moltmann comes close to the line of questioning we’ve seen in Augustine. And at some points Moltmann is addressing exactly the same issues that Augustine was working with. Take, for example, this statement: “Time is perceived from changes in Being. Changeable Being is temporal Being.”\footnote{CofG, 280.} Here Moltmann uses the same language as the classical thinkers, but he is subtly shifting the focus of inquiry. He chooses to reinterpret the concepts of both God and world from a perspective that values change and genuine temporality. Shin explains, “Unlike classical
theism that affirms atemporality in God heavily influenced by Plato, Moltmann reinterprets the concept of time and eternity in terms of the kenotic idea.\textsuperscript{71} The temporal structure of creation Moltmann describes is actually quite different from that described by Augustine.

In Augustine, we read about the differences in past, present, and future that are experienced by human subjects. But for Augustine, this is a matter of subjective and limited experience—it is not an ontological statement about the actual facts of the world. Moltmann is going much further than this. He is making a statement about the actual structures of reality. Things don’t just \textit{appear} to change—they \textit{do} change in a genuinely temporal way. In this way Moltmann has embraced the modern world’s movement away from the B-theory view of the world and the atemporality of God that we find in Augustine and other traditional thinkers. “The temporal creation is by definition a creation subject to change. It resembles an open, a-symmetrical, imbalanced system which is aligned towards its future.”\textsuperscript{72} This is our experience of the world, and it is also God’s experience of the world. Unlike Augustine’s understanding of God and creation, in Moltmann’s vision, creation is such that future events are not just ‘not yet’—they are ‘not real.’ Bauckham says that “for Moltmann, the future is not the prolongation of the past, but the sphere of indefinite possibilities which may or may not be realized in the present and become past. On this view, historical time is certainly irreversible: once the potential

\textsuperscript{71} Shin, “Panentheistic Vision,” 118.

\textsuperscript{72} CofG, 283.
has become actual as past it cannot again become unrealized potential."\textsuperscript{73} In Moltmann's words, "all temporal happening is irreversible, unrepeatable and inexorable."\textsuperscript{74}

It is essential for understanding Moltmann's view of creation that we grasp this major difference between the past and the future. Past is actual history, because it has been determined. But there is nothing actual about the future except its future-ness. No event is real until it occurs, so there is presently nothing concrete in the future of history. From this perspective, the ontology of the 'present' is also a critical point, because the present is not just the gradual progression along a timeline—it is the horizon between two radically different kinds of things, past and future.

In characterizing the nature of the present, Moltmann says, "We then understand the present as a \textit{point in time} on a temporal line, which both distinguishes past and future and links them together. This point in time is not a 'space of time' and has no temporal extension. It is a \textit{punctum mathematicum}, a mathematical point."\textsuperscript{75} So the 'present' is not a period of time, but is more like a boundary, or a division between the categories of past and future. In this way, Moltmann visualizes the 'present' as the ever-advancing edge of reality past. As he says in \textit{Theology of Hope}, "That is why the present itself, too, is not the present of the Absolute—a present with which and in which we could abide—but is, so to speak, the advancing front line of time as directed purposefully towards its goal in the moving horizon of promise."\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{73} Bauckham, \textit{God Will Be}, 162.
\textsuperscript{74} CofG, 286.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 284.
\textsuperscript{76} TH, 109. Richard Swinburne characterizes the 'present' in much the same way. See Swinburne, \textit{The Christian God} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 74. See also Robin Le Poidevin, "The
Moltmann’s effort to transpose the ‘modes of time’ into ‘modalities of being’ paints a picture of a temporal creation that is moving forward into the future—a future that exists only as pure possibility. This means that the past is concrete, but at every moment called ‘present’ the whole of creation is faced with a wide range of new possibilities, new pathways, any of which might be actualized and made concrete in the march forward. One way to visualize this is with the ‘tree model,’ where we can see the ‘modalization’ of the categories of time that Moltmann describes:

![Figure 1: The Tree Model](image)

Future = possibility
Present = boundary
Past = real being

As Moltmann explains it, what we call ‘past’ is what is actual. In this figure the past is therefore represented as an actualized timeline. What we call ‘future’ does not have anything like the topology of a timeline but exists as an amorphous realm of possibility. That durationless moment called ‘present’ is itself pure process—a decision point at which creation grows out of possibility into realized history. So, for Moltmann, the three modes of time represent modalities of being that are radically different in kind, creating what he calls a ‘disequilibrium between past and future.’ This disequilibrium is

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at the heart of his understanding of the metaphysics of creation, and if we try to visualize this fundamental difference in terms of the whole universe it might look like this:

Figure 2: An Ontological Map of the Universe

To summarize Moltmann’s philosophy of time as it relates to the world, we can say that the three modes of time represent modalities of being that are radically different in kind. Past is what has really happened. It is real in that it can not be changed and positive knowledge of its definite timeline is possible. The past is an actualized timeline, but the future is in no way a timeline. It is many timelines, or an infinite number of possible timelines. The future is composed of possibilities precisely because nature is fundamentally indeterminate. The future is not real, not simply because it hasn’t happened yet, but because it has not been caused. The present is no period at all, but the boundary and decision point between the times and the leading edge of a growing reality. Based on his understanding of this basic metaphysics of the world, Moltmann can say that “there is what Whitehead called ‘an objective immortality of the dead.’” I should like
to take up his idea and modify it in our present context by saying that we can be robbed of our future, but not of our past.\textsuperscript{77}

2.5 Creation: Evolution of an Open System

Because the forward direction allows us to perceive the time element—the irretrievability of every event, the irreversibility of future and past, and the partial indeterminacy of that sphere of possibility which we call future—we can grasp the temporal rhythms of life, which vibrate between transcendence and immanence, and fan out the network of life's relationships into the spheres of the possible.\textsuperscript{78}

Starting from Moltmann's basic theory about the temporality of this universe, it is not difficult to understand how the ideas of evolution and open systems would play a critical role in this story. Moltmann develops the story of a world that is in process, one that is moving outwards into the future. In his social theory of God's Trinity, he has explained the mandate that creation be a place of ever-increasing complexity of community, patterned after God's own life. Here we will begin to explore what that looks like in the communities of creation.

If this creation is not static in God's eyes, if it is genuinely in the process of becoming, then we begin to develop some kind of understanding of this creation as God's project. It is not a once-for-all kind of creation, but an ongoing experiment that God is intimately involved with. Moltmann gives us an image of God's purposes in initiating this kind of experiment: "Inappropriate though human analogy is bound to be, in thinking of the fullness of God we can best talk about the inexhaustibly rich fantasy of God, meaning by that his creative imagination. From that imagination life upon life proceeds in

\textsuperscript{77} GC, 138-9.

\textsuperscript{78} SL, 227.
protean abundance... It is like a great song or a splendid poem or a wonderful dance of his fantasy, the communication of his divine plenitude. It is the universal Easter laughter."\textsuperscript{79}

For Moltmann, it is central not only to our experience of the world but also to our understanding of God, that this creation is the kind of thing which is open in many ways. There are no fixed end points in place, but rather an open field of possibilities, and the world is free to move into that field. God's presence in this project is the presence of the Spirit that shapes and molds conditions for life that move it into deeper and deeper experiences of community, with the ultimate goal being the absolute community of all creatures with each other and with God.\textsuperscript{80} Moltmann writes that "the open system of creation is aligned towards God's creative activity in history, in which both the trend of creation and its future find their realization."\textsuperscript{81} That trend is precisely the formation of life-giving communities.

All of this means that creation is necessarily an ongoing project. It is not finished. As long as the process continues, there will always be the possibility for new forms of life and fellowship. For as long as God wills this process to continue, creation itself remains incomplete, because the horizon of the future always offers the chance for something more and something better. Moltmann explains, "As long as our reality has not yet 'completed' itself and not yet become a rounded whole, a metaphysic of the historical universe in the sense of the Greek \textit{logos} is impossible... Thus there exist only histories on the way to world history, but there is not yet a world history. The lines on

\textsuperscript{79} CofG, 338-9.

\textsuperscript{80} Cf. SL, 227.

\textsuperscript{81} GC, 210.
which these histories are on their way towards world history are all maintained by the consciousness of having a mission towards world history."\(^8^2\)

This kind of openness to the future is in the very DNA of the world. It is the kind of world God imagined in the beginning. We are created for self-transcending process. Moltmann writes, "Because of this openness for its own history, we have to view even creation in the beginning as an 'open system,' which has neither its foundation, nor its goal, nor its equilibrium, within itself, but which is from the very outset ec-centrically designed, and aligned in the direction of the future."\(^8^3\) Gorringe believes that such an outlook is not only one possible way of understanding the world, but is probably the best way given our current context. "A theology of open process is not only the necessary non-fundamentalist response to the situation of postmodernity, but it reads the whole of creation, including human nature, in terms of possibility."\(^8^4\)

Naturally, this understanding of creation as an open system and a self-transcending process flows easily into the idea of universal evolution. Bauckham writes that "Moltmann’s treatment of scientific theories of evolution is in line with this program [of ecological thinking—seeing all things in relationship to the whole]. He seeks a broad interpretation of the whole history of nature as an evolutionary process."\(^8^5\) Moltmann’s understanding of the evolution of the world is not the same thing as belief in the modern myth of gradual progress. He does not believe that the world is evolving toward any specific outcomes—just that it is evolving. While he believes that ultimately the work of

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\(^8^2\) TH, 270-1.

\(^8^3\) GC, 207.

\(^8^4\) Gorringe in Bauckham, *God Will Be*, 112.

\(^8^5\) Bauckham, *Theology of Moltmann*, 191.
the Spirit will bring about a new creation that is wholly good, the immediate results of evolution and change are not always good. The present transience of the world carries with it the potential for both good and evil. "Temporality (meaning the time of this creation, as distinct from the eternal time of the new creation) is, in Moltmann’s view, ambiguous. It is what makes creation subject to change. The temporal creation is therefore open to both constructive possibilities and destructive possibilities."86

In Moltmann’s view, God has not foreordained particular outcomes for the evolutionary process. It is the process itself and the tendency toward interconnectedness that he has ordained. He writes, "The evolution process is not a linear progression. It would be better to compare it with a tree, whose branches fan out in the air in which it lives, or a forest which spreads out into its environment. The goal is neither unity nor difference, but the differentiated community which liberates the individual members belonging to it."87

For many Christian believers, the theory of evolution is difficult in part because it appears to diminish the ultimate significance of humanity as a species. But for Moltmann, this is actually a good thing. He believes that the place of humanity in the grand scheme of creation has been at times terribly exaggerated, and as a result humans have taken the liberty to destroy other parts of the ecosystem. So the theory of evolution, including the evolution of the human species, is actually a helpful corrective in Moltmann’s mind. Bauckham explains that Moltmann “finds the evolutionary origins of humanity entirely appropriate to his understanding of creation. They highlight the extent to which human beings, as in the first place a product of nature, are members of the community of

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86 Bauckham, God Will Be, 18.
87 SL, 228.
Moltmann describes the problem of an overly anthropocentric view as follows:

History became the paradigm of modern theology in the age in which the anthropocentric view of the world prevailed. Human beings were supposed to be the ‘crown of creation’ and the center of the world... We shall only be able to reduce history to human and natural dimensions if this anthropocentrism is replaced by a new cosmological theocentrism... The ‘crown of history’ is the sabbath. 89

For Moltmann, the shift to a ‘cosmological theocentrism’ is essential to understanding this creation project and our place in it. Instead of making humanity either the goal or the ‘crown’ of creation, the focus is shifted back onto God—thus, theocentrism. No longer are we to read the history of the universe only as it pertains to our own condition. The proper way of approaching the universe is to ask not what it means to us, but what it means to God. By using the term ‘cosmological,’ Moltmann also encourages us to think not only in terms of nations or families or even our own planet. In his metaphysical narrative the proper concern is the universe and God’s relationship to it.

Bauckham writes, “Moreover, the understanding of the world as theocentric frees us from the need either to understand the whole evolutionary process as having its goal in humanity, or to understand humanity as purely a means to some further goal of the process. Every product of evolution has its own meaning with reference to God.” 90

For Moltmann, God’s Spirit is active in all things of this universe, and so all things have meaning for God. His Spirit has a certain relationship with rocks and tress and galaxies. He writes that “God’s Spirit is life’s vibrating, vitalizing field of energy: we

88 Bauckham, Theology of Mol/mann, 193.

89 GC, 139. We will return to the idea of the Sabbath as the crown of creation in the final chapter.

90 Bauckham, Theology of Mol/mann, 193.
are in God, and God is in us. Our stirrings towards life are experienced by God, and we experience God’s living energies. In the open air of the eternal Spirit, the new life unfurls.”

But this understanding of God’s relationship to all things is not meant to down-play the significance of humanity or of humanity’s relationship to God. There is something about us that is different from the world we see around us, and that is our consciousness of the world and of God. In our ability to think of God, Moltmann says, we reflect the Spirit of God back to God in a unique way. Maybe this is one sense in which we are imago Dei. “The human being does not merely live in the world like other living beings. He does not merely dominate the world and use it. He is also able to discern the world in full awareness as God’s creation, to understand it as a sacrament of God’s hidden presence, and to apprehend it as a communication of God’s fellowship.”

Moltmann also indicates that our unique human ability to recognize God in the world goes beyond our recognition of God as Other. It may also be the case that in humanity, God’s Spirit in some way becomes conscious of itself:

Whereas the creative and life-giving Spirit moulds all material structures and all systems of life, the human consciousness is the Spirit that reflects and is reflected. The creative and life-giving Spirit therefore arrives at consciousness of itself in the human consciousness. If consciousness is reflected Spirit, then wide realms of the Spirit are already given beforehand to this reflection, and remain unconscious… Consciousness of the Spirit in the human being should not be understood as an act of human domination over life. It should rather be seen as the beginning of a new organization of the Spirit of life.

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91 SL, 161.
92 GC, 70.
93 SL, 228-9.
2.6 Physicalism and the Process-Relational Nature of Reality

Moltmann’s understanding of an evolving universe, and God’s relationship to it, also has implications for our understanding of creation as a physical reality. When it comes to issues of ‘body and soul’ Moltmann falls into the camp of physicalism, or a non-dualist understanding of humans and the other parts of reality. In his mind, we are created as process-oriented, physical beings, and that is enough. It is not necessary or helpful to posit the existence of a ghostly ‘soul’ or ‘spirit’ in humanity. Those words have meaning as aspects of our physical reality, but they do not describe separate parts of our being. In what follows we will look at Moltmann’s understanding of humans and all things as physical beings, and then look at the emphasis he places on process and interconnection between parts of our physical world.

As we might expect, here also Moltmann’s approach displays a conscious effort to reverse what he considers the harmful effects of previous theologies. In particular, he believes that an over-emphasis on the importance of a non-bodily human soul has allowed many to disregard concerns for the body and for other parts of creation. He says that “the elevation of the soul above nature and the body has induced human beings to seize power over nature and progressively to destroy her. Since this is the outcome of these ideas, a revision of anthropocentric pneumatology is also required.”

Looking back to the sources of Christian thinking, and particularly looking to Christianity’s Jewish context, Moltmann finds support for a physicalist view of human beings. He writes, “The body is meant for the Lord, and the Lord for the body,” proclaimed Paul (1 Cor. 6:13). ‘Glorify God in your body,’ he demanded. It wasn’t Paul who talked about ‘God and the soul.’ It was Augustine; and he did so in order to leave the

\[94\] Ibid., 37.
body, nature, and society behind him so that he could ‘separate himself from this world.’"\(^{95}\) Moltmann perceives this as a major mistake in Augustine and in subsequent Christian thinking. In Moltmann’s opinion, by thinking of redemption in terms of non-bodily souls, thinkers inadvertently dissociated the human condition from the condition of the universe, and made a coherent universal eschatology increasingly difficult to imagine. Instead, Moltmann finds the authentic Christian proclamation to be one of bodily redemption. “The hope of the redemption of the body and the hope of the redemption of all creation from vanity are one. Hence it is on this hope of the redemption of the body that the universality which belongs to Christian hope depends.”\(^{96}\)

The physical resurrection of the dead is the Christian hope, according to Moltmann. He writes that “eternal life can only be bodily life; if it is not that it is not life at all.”\(^{97}\) He goes on in this same chapter to find support for this position by looking at the testimony of the Apostles’ Creed and the expectation of the resurrection of the body we find there. He also points out that, compared to the English translation, the German version of the Creed puts the matter even more bluntly as ‘the resurrection of the flesh,’ leaving no room to doubt the intention of this statement of hope.\(^{98}\)

The idea of a bodily resurrection has raised certain questions among thinkers throughout the ages. Is it really the same person who is raised? What happens when

\(^{95}\) Ibid., 84.  
\(^{96}\) TH, 214.  
\(^{98}\) For more on Moltmann’s understanding of the creeds on this point, see Moltmann, “Hope Beyond Time,” The Duke Divinity School Review 33 (1968), especially 109-13. On pp. 110-11 in particular, Moltmann lays out an argument for this perspective based on what he understands to be the Old Testament understanding of death, citing a lament of King Hezekiah as evidence: “Lo, Sheol cannot praise thee, and those who go down to the pit cannot hope for thy faithfulness, but all those who are living praise thee. Lord, help me” (Isa. 38:18-19).
bodies are destroyed? Moltmann answers these questions by referring to God. In relationship with God, no part of a person is lost. They remain fixed in God, and by virtue of this, God is more than capable of putting the necessary pieces back together again. Moltmann tells us that “what endures in the transitions from life to death, and from death to resurrection, is the identity of the person in the mutual relationship with God. Is this a somatic identity as well? Because personal identity is found in a person’s life history, it is inconceivable without somatic identity too.”

Moltmann’s understanding of the physical nature of humanity carries with it important consequences for our understanding of sin and death. If it is true that we are part of a certain natural order that is characterized by transience, process, and death—how are we to understand this fact theologically? Is there no connection between our sin and our death? Bauckham understands Moltmann’s position as saying that “sin and evil have spoiled God’s original creation, but transience and death belong to the created nature of this temporal creation. Moltmann rejects the view that they are the consequence of sin, regarding them rather as intrinsic to the temporal character of this creation.”

Moltmann himself confirms this: “We do not die as a punishment either for our sin or Adam’s. Nor do we die in the personal judgment of God. We do in fact die a ‘natural’ death, just as everything that is born someday dies.”

That being said, Moltmann still argues that there is “a certain relationship between what we call sin and what we call death.” That relationship, however, is

99 WJC, 261-2.

100 Bauckham, God Will Be, 17.

101 CofG, 91.

102 Ibid.
exactly the opposite of what many have thought. We do not die because we sin—we sin because we die. Our sin is, in essence, a response to the existential angst caused by the knowledge of our own mortality. According to Moltmann, “the frailty of the temporal creation of human beings is like a detonator for the sin of wanting to be equal to God and to overcome this frailty. Death is only a consequence of sin inasmuch as sin exists because of death: we cannot endure mortality, and by killing we can make other people die.”

In this sense, sin is the opposite of hope, and these two represent the only options for dealing with the fact of death. On the one hand, we lash out in anger and desperation, and destroy others in the process. But the faithful response, the hope response, is to look past the present conditions of transience and to seek the Kingdom of God on the horizon of the eschaton. As Moltmann says, “the death of all the living is neither due to sin nor is it natural. It is a fact that evokes grief and longing for the future world and eternal life.” To hope is to turn our chaotic rage into an aching desire for something new. And the forming of this hope is the creative work of the Spirit among us.

By picturing created reality in terms of a physical process, Moltmann has shut the door on past dualisms. He thinks that separating out souls from bodies and minds from brains does not do justice to the complexity and inter-connectedness of reality that we continue to discover through scientific research. The picture of the world that is emerging looks more like a web of relationality on every level. Moltmann says that “we are living in a pluralistic, polycentric world of many dimensions, and if we are to participate in reality we need a many-dimensional concept of experience.” He goes on to suggest

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103 Ibid.
104 Ibid., 92.
that a non-subjectivist, relativist metaphysics like that of A. N. Whitehead seems to offer a good program for fitting human experience into its proper place in the whole ecology of created reality.

This movement away from a metaphysics of substance and toward a relational and process-oriented understanding of the world has consequences for our understanding of the spiritual significance of humanity. No longer is our identity before God to be found in a detached soul, but our souls are to be understood as functional descriptions of the whole complex of our lives. "The 'human spirit' does not mean some higher spiritual principle, or some mystical summit of the soul. It means the center of the whole personal, bodily and spiritual being—the psychosomatic totality of the person."106 For Moltmann, it also includes the relational aspects of human being. He explains that according to biblical ideas, it is not the soul of the individual person, detached from the body, which is _imago Dei_, God’s image. _Imago Dei_ are men and women in their wholeness, in their full, sexually specific community with one another, for ‘male and female he created them’... And if this is so, then the place for the experience of God is not the mystical experience of the self; it is _the social experience of the self_ and _the personal experience of sociality._107

Human beings, along with all other parts of the universe, are intrinsically relational. This is also the level at which God operates in our midst: in the promotion of webs of connectedness that bring life. "All creatures are aligned towards community and are created in the form of communities. To form community is the life principle of created beings... Creation itself lives in the complexity of ever-richer communal relationships. That is why it is appropriate to talk about _the community of creation_, and to

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105 SL, 34.

106 GC, 101. Also see Moltmann, "Hope Beyond Time," 114, where he writes that "this spirit is no substance in man, but an act of the whole spiritual and physical life."

107 SL, 94.
recognize the operation of the life-giving Spirit of God in the trend to relationship in created things.\textsuperscript{108} On this view, God’s Spirit is the condition for the formation of community. So to locate the work of God in the world, we should look first to the relationships between things themselves. “The existence, the life, and the warp and weft of interrelationships subsist in the Spirit: ‘In him we live and move and have our being’ (Acts 17:28). But that means the interrelations of the world cannot be traced back to any components, or universal foundations… in reality relationships are just as primal as the things themselves.”\textsuperscript{109} Elsewhere Moltmann wonders if this does not in fact imply “a synthesis between the eastern conception of humanity as a ‘part of nature’ and the western conception of the human as a ‘person before God.’”\textsuperscript{110}

To say that ‘in him we live and move,’ as Moltmann does, indicates first that God is found in the processes and transcendent conditions for living and moving. The Spirit is the active environment for processes themselves. But this is not all Moltmann means to say. In his understanding, God’s Spirit does not only facilitate process and relationship, but is also present in the concrete things themselves. “Through his Spirit God is also present in the very structures of matter. Creation contains neither spirit-less matter nor non-material spirit; there is only informed matter. But the different kinds of information which determine the systems of life and matter must be given the name ‘spirit.’ In human beings they arrive at consciousness in a creaturely way.”\textsuperscript{111} He will also say that “life is

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 225.
\textsuperscript{109} GC, 11.
\textsuperscript{110} Moltmann, \textit{Is There Life}, 33.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 212.
energy, and the energies flow from the body. Are they not the energies of the creative Spirit of God?"\textsuperscript{112}

Moltmann's proposal here is a tricky one, because it locates the presence of God's Spirit both in the physical matter of creation and in the transformations and relationships that take place between material structures. This could make it difficult to discern the extent to which humans possess freedom of choice and will. To what extent does this presence of the Spirit determine the structures of reality? We will turn to Moltmann's understanding of creaturely freedom in the next section.

2.7 The Freedom of Creation and the Suffering Presence of God

To understand Moltmann's position on the freedom of creation, one must start with his understanding of the freedom of God. As we know from our exploration of zimzum and God's initial act of creation, Moltmann believes that before the creation of the world God was all that was. In this state he had the freedom to act as he would choose, including his choice to become the creator. But only in his relationship with his created universe can we understand what God's freedom and power look like when they encounter the existence of other beings. Shin writes that "according to Moltmann, God's freedom is not arbitrary or capricious. He reinterprets divine freedom as the creative love of God, not as the almighty power or the absolute sovereignty of God as held by classical theism. For him, creation is not an expression of his unlimited power, but rather the communication of his free love as seen in the perichoresis of the triune divine life."\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{112} WJC, 261.

\textsuperscript{113} Shin, "Panentheistic Vision," 110.
Unlike the God of process theism (or classical theism, in a sense), Moltmann's God is not bound by metaphysical restraints that limit his ability to act in creation. Instead, Moltmann's understanding is that God possesses all the qualities of true agency. He acts and speaks, and is even free to change his mind. As we read in *Theology of Hope*, "[The prophets] see judgment and history in the light of the freedom of Yahweh, not as immutable fate. Hence the plans of Yahweh can be ‘repented of’ by Yahweh, and the proclamation of them leads the present into decisions which have an influence on the future of the divine action also."\(^{114}\) So we are to understand God vis-à-vis creation as a determining, efficacious subject in his own right. But Moltmann believes that we must also understand that God has chosen a certain relationship with his creation—a relationship that empowers and does not overpower.

Moltmann writes that “through the space conceded by God, creation is given detachment from God and freedom of movement over against him.”\(^{115}\) This creation is given freedom over against God in two important ways. First, it is given freedom to exist, and that freedom is a gift from God alone. Second, this creation is given freedom to live and move and evolve without coercion. God’s Spirit keeps open the ontological space of possibility, and the creation is invited to move into that space in its own way. Both of these freedoms of creation correspond to a certain *kenosis* of God, as we have noted. Moltmann asks, “If the Spirit is God’s immanent presence in the world, do we not then also have to talk about a *kenosis* of the Spirit?”\(^{116}\) And because the answer to that question for Moltmann is ‘yes,’ he concludes that “the history of the world is the history

\(^{114}\) TH, 133.

\(^{115}\) CofG, 306.

\(^{116}\) GC, 102.
of God’s suffering.” Shin summarizes this choice of God’s by saying that “according to Moltmann, through his voluntary love, God enters into a close relationship with creation in such a way that God freely accepts the vulnerability and limitation of such relationship.”

For Moltmann, God’s unrestricted freedom is best observed in his creation of the world. And since the initial creation, God’s activity in the world is best understood as his rest (although not yet his final rest). He writes that “in God’s work, he was free for his works. In God’s Sabbath rest, he becomes free from his works.” This freedom of God from the world corresponds to the freedom of the world itself. In God’s creation project, the evolution of a truly free creation requires that God would step back and allow it time and space to become what it will be. Moltmann compares this to the freedom that parents must grant to their children eventually: “Parents must also learn to pull back when it is time for their children to become independent: to let go, to let loose, to release them.” And so we are to understand the story of creation in the beginning as a description both of God’s activity in the world and also God’s freedom from activity in the world. “The finishing of creation [on the seventh day] consists in the creator’s rest. God ‘finishes’ his creation by ‘resting.’ God breathes a sigh of relief. God pulls back. God is freed from his work. God lets his creatures repose in freedom.”

117 TK, 4. This is a critical point for Moltmann, because, as he says elsewhere: “Without perception of the suffering of God’s inexhaustible love, no pantheism and no panentheism can endure in this world of death. They would very soon end up in pan-nihilism” (SL, 213).


120 Ibid.

121 Ibid., 38.
In Moltmann’s worldview, then, freedom for both God and creation means that God’s sovereignty does not include the management of world affairs. In Moltmann’s view, God is currently ‘experiencing’ the world, but is not actively involved in ordering the details. He says, “God no longer influences [his creatures], no longer intrudes, works no more on them. Yet he is wholly open toward them and perceives each creature’s happiness and suffering.”\(^\text{122}\) Instead of God’s overbearing control of the universe, Moltmann will understand sovereignty to mean that God’s final plan will be accomplished—the reconciliation of all things. But at the present time, God is satisfied to simply co-exist with the world, to love it and to call forth love from it. This, Moltmann thinks, provides the basis for a healthy understanding of our relationship to the divine. “If the world is emancipated from God, God too is freed from his functions as helper in need, and becomes free for himself, so that he is thought of and loved for his own sake.”\(^\text{123}\)

And so, in Moltmann’s theology, we are to understand that both God and creation are genuinely free. God, as God, is free to do what he will, but in his freedom has chosen a particular relationship to his creation. That choice by God has opened up genuine freedom for creation, so that the whole cosmos (including humanity) is able to develop along its own course. It is in the relationship between these two free partners (God and creation) that we glimpse part of God’s purpose for the creation. And that purpose is that the two might work together toward a common goal, a common future. Moltmann writes that, “We discover in freedom the relationship of determining subjects to the project they share. Without this dimension freedom has not been fully understood. In the relationship

\(^{122}\) Ibid., 39.

to a shared project, freedom is a creative movement.”  

Although humans and all of creation now live in a certain state of independence from God, God’s presence is still felt and is still at work—especially in the transcendent experience of the future. Moltmann tells us that “transcendence is experienced… where a future of reconciliation and change gains control over this state of affairs.”  

Thus the apparent absence of Christ in the world is transformed into an active hope—a hope that in itself contains the work of the Spirit of God.

For Moltmann, the Spirit of Christ is constantly calling us outside of our own small circles, urging us to seek a new order of being, a new Kingdom, in the future. As we join in that quest we sense the Spirit at work in us. This is the same Spirit that has made the journey possible in the first place. Moltmann tells us that “God’s activity in history consists essentially in opening up systems which are closed in on themselves; and he does this by way of suffering communication.”  

In the relationship he has established with the world, God does not override the freedom of his creation, but fills it with new energies to move in his desired directions. The Spirit is at the same time the one who keeps the realm of possibility open and the one who calls us toward it. “Christ’s Spirit is our immanent power to live—God’s Spirit is our transcendent space for living.”

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126 GC, 211.

127 SL, 179.
2.8 Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter has been to describe the kind of ‘world in God’ that this universe is, according to Moltmann. Taken together, the sections of this chapter represent a broad metaphysics of created reality that begins with the nature of the Trinity and moves outward into the basic structures of reality that God has set in motion, patterned after his own divine inner-relationality. The portrait that emerges from Moltmann’s work is of a world that is growing and evolving into a future of undetermined possibilities. This world has been given a certain autonomy over against God, so that it can grow and evolve freely. God risks the ambiguity of this ‘project’ for the sake of love and for the sake of having a non-divine ‘other’ to welcome into his own divine fellowship. The goal of creation is community, both within created reality and between God and the universe.

The purpose of this paper is to trace the metaphysical narrative of this creation project. In this first chapter we have examined the underlying philosophy of the world that Moltmann brings to the table. In Chapter 4 of this paper we will examine the way the story unfolds and reaches forward to its eschatological completion. The ultimate goal of the whole story of creation is already implicit in the metaphysics of the world as we have outlined them, for as Moltmann has said, “we can speak of a real ‘eschatology’ only at the points where, in the limitations and perspectives of history, the horizon of the promised future embraces in the eschaton the proton of the whole creation.”128 The ‘proton of the whole creation’ for Moltmann, as we have seen, is the creation of this world within God and the panentheistic relationship that follows from that formula. So the end of the story is to be seen as the fulfillment of that promise implicit in the original

128 TH, 130.
creation: the promise that God will one day be ‘all in all’ when the God-world communion is fully realized. In the next chapter, we will bridge the gap between this metaphysics and that eschatological future by showing how Moltmann is able to understand the future in a theological way based on the experience of God in the world.
3.1 The Tension

In the last chapter, we examined the kind of universe we live in, according to Moltmann. It is a universe that possesses genuine freedom of movement 'over against God,' which means that the universe is given freedom to evolve into an open future in an un-coerced way. This universe is genuinely temporal, which means that while the past is settled, the future is not. God created this kind of world in order to enter into a loving relationship with it, and God's ultimate intention is to be in total relationship with the world—a kind of eschatological panentheism wherein God and world completely interpenetrate each other.

But there is a fundamental tension inherent in this story. We can identify a potential problem that stands between the metaphysics of the world on one hand and the ultimate intentions of God on the other. The problem is this: God saw fit to create a free and temporal world so that he might enter into relationship with it. But God also created this world in himself with the intention of having this world open itself in love toward God just as he is open to it, with the ultimate goal being absolute participation in the lives of one another. If the world is completely free to follow its own chosen course, how can God ever expect to reach that eschatological state of communion? How can we say anything at all about the future of this 'metaphysical narrative of creation'?
The solution to this tension in Moltmann's theology comes from his two different understandings of 'time' that we introduced in the last chapter. His 'philosophy of time' serves as one of the key aspects of his metaphysical understanding of the world, but it also provides one of the key obstacles to God's purposes in the world. It is at this point that his theology of time, in which the nature of the future is understood as adventus, provides the bridge to the consummation of this world-project in God.¹ In this chapter we will examine the ways that Moltmann's philosophy of time anticipates his theology of time, and the way that his theology of time provides the foundation for a hopeful end to the metaphysical narrative of creation that he writes.

3.2 From Philosophy to Theology

In an interview with Meeks, Ernst Bloch once commented that "Heraclitus is the real origin of the theology of hope."² Heraclitus, of course, is famous for the declaration that 'you never put your foot in the same river twice'—a basic affirmation of the process-oriented nature of reality. In the mind of Bloch, this affirmation of process and becoming is the foundation for hope in a different kind of future. But for the atheist Bloch, the power of the future was to be found in the 'future as possibility' that we have described as Moltmann's philosophy of time. But Moltmann himself is not so confident in the power of the historical future to provide a foundation for hope. He writes, "Futurist eschatology is a contradiction in terms, because the future (in the static sense of Futur)

¹ In CofG, 25f, Moltmann explains the distinction between future as futurum and future as adventus. The former he thinks to be a tool of oppression because it understands the future as 'what will be.' Adventus, on the other hand, means 'what is coming' and can therefore be a symbol of hope — for 'what will be' is the status quo, but 'what is coming' might just be something wholly different.

cannot be an eschatological category. An eschatology of the eternal present is a contradiction in terms, because it abolishes time. Only the idea of the coming of God, and the advent concept of time which is in accord with it, opens up categories for eschatology.\(^3\) For Moltmann, we cannot expect that time will gradually produce our utopias anymore than we can hope to live forever by living deeply. Our hope is built on God’s promise that he will come to us in the future.

Early in his career Moltmann asked the question, "Where is there a transcendence which does not alienate man but sets him free?\(^4\) The kind of transcendence he seeks is one which takes seriously the present conditions of the world. This is necessary because, as William Placher explains, "Moltmann also concedes that the world in which we live is not one in which Christ seems to be present."\(^5\) It is precisely this ‘present absence’ of Christ that has called into question the legitimacy of the modernist Christian worldview. If Christianity has a true story to tell about the world, why can’t we find God in the present? This is the question Moltmann seeks to answer in the form of a re-directed Christian hope. "Moltmann turns to the future suggesting that, since the present does not unambiguously manifest Christ, our faith must take the form of hope in Christ’s future presence."\(^6\)

The hope that lasts comes from the particular conviction that we cannot assume that we know what the future holds based on past experience, but it requires even more than that. To speak philosophically, if future events genuinely do not exist then the future

\(^3\) CofG, 26.

\(^4\) Moltmann, “The Future as a New Paradigm of Transcendence,” 337.


\(^6\) Ibid., 169 (italics mine).
itself exists as near-boundless possibility. But to speak theologically, if God keeps the ontological space of the future open for reality, then God is Lord of the future. As such, it is not beyond hope to believe that God is able to raise up this creation as he raised Jesus—an event entirely unprecedented in history outside of the resurrection of Christ. This is the foundation of hope, precisely because the future is ultimately no longer in our hands, except in a provisional and temporary sense.

The understanding of the world that Moltmann constructs is process-based and genuinely open. As such, it is also a fragile world, always on the edge of nothingness except for the grace of God and the activity of God's Spirit within the structures of creation. This is not a world that exists in correspondence with Platonic forms—this is a world that is as it appears, contingent and physical. As we have seen, this means that our own immortality is also in danger—we do not exist eternally by right, but only by grace. All in all, this is a worldview that must truly rely on this thing called 'hope'—for hope is all we have when we recognize what it means to really be a 'creature.' Moltmann expresses this in terms of the afterlife: "The immortality of the soul is an opinion—the resurrection of the dead is a hope. The first is something immortal in the human being, the second is a trust in the God who calls into being the things that are not, and makes the dead live."7

3.3 'The future of time itself': The Transcendence of Eternity and the Novum

Moltmann's theology of time is a part of his philosophy of time, and yet conceptually distinct. His philosophy is essentially the A-theory of time. But in speaking theologically about the nature of creation, he goes beyond the typical philosophical

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7 CofG, 65.
debate. We might say that he speaks of things more "ultimate." What transcends his understanding of the historical time of creation is his theological understanding of the future of all times: "The subject of eschatology is the future, and more than the future. Eschatology talks about God's future, and this is more than future time. It is the future of time itself—time past, present, and time to come." By speaking of God's future in this way, Moltmann attempts to bring together his eschatology and his philosophy of time.

Bauckham writes that "[Moltmann] does not merely add eternity to time as we all understand it. For there is no 'time as we all understand it.' The understanding of time is itself in the issue of the eternal future of time." When we start to think about theological concepts like 'eternity' we are speaking of matters that go beyond the scope of either the A-theory or the B-theory. Those two are ontological notions about the way the world works. But to bring in the category of 'eternity,' for Moltmann, is to speak about the 'source of time' and the future of time. On this point, Moltmann's view is made most clear by understanding what ideas he intends to overcome.

Because Moltmann's theological task is to change the conditions of the world, even his theories about time are related to real-world issues and situations of injustice. His theology of time is developed as a rebuke to what he sees as the 'modern' or scientific theory of time, which limits the hope of humanity for a radically different future. Bauckham explains Moltmann's issue with this theory: "More consistently and fully, Moltmann now sees the 'progress' of the modern world as the project of the powerful to control and to create the future, and the time myth of the modern world as the

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8 Moltmann in Bauckham, God Will Be, 265.
9 Bauckham, God Will Be, 158.
ideology of this project of domination.”

In Bauckham’s reading, it appears that one of Moltmann’s great concerns is that the powerful keep others under control precisely by instilling in them a sense that the future is pre-determined and will unfold as it must. By portraying history past, present, and future as a homogenous timeline, those in power defuse any hope for a radically different world.

“By postulating endless time the modern myth of progress has propagated an illusory sense of eternity, but in reality endless historical time, endless transient time, cannot lead to true eternity, the transcendence of transience, but only to universal death.” Moltmann addresses this perceived problem on two levels. First, his acceptance of something like an A-theory of time opens up the possibility for real change in the future, because the future exists only as possibility. This is step one. But Moltmann understands that this is not enough. The future as a mode of time is able to spark some hope in the oppressed, because things may change and human action can change them. But the only permanent solution to the injustice of the world is the postulate of a ‘future of the future’—a new category that transcends all three modes of time—an eschatological future that serves as the true horizon of expectation. “Once transience and tragedy are allowed full recognition, only transcendence can give meaning to history.”

In Moltmann’s view, the ‘future of the future,’ or the eschatological future, is the true source of the three modes of historical time—past, present, and future. If the historical mode of time called future is itself the realm of possibility in history, then this transcendent, eschatological future exists as the possibility for all possibilities—the

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10 Ibid., 171.
11 Ibid., 172.
12 Ibid., 173.
ground of history itself. God makes history and historical time possible by opening up a space—ultimate possibility—that serves as the horizon of created existence. The hope-inspiring aspect of this ultimate future is that it is different from our historical experience of future. It comes from God, and it does not depend on historical conditions or causative factors. It represents a ‘hope beyond history,’ and as such it allows us to trust God for the fulfillment of promises that do not seem possible in our world today. The eschatological future is the horizon beyond which all things are possible, and it produces a lived hope that, for Moltmann, is synonymous with the presence of God. In a sense, to experience eternity now means to live in the reality of a hope beyond history. “Historical present is comprehended as a path determined by remembrances which leads towards a goal. But as the present of the eternal God it is so profound that both beginning and goal are also contemporary and immediate.”

The term often used by Moltmann to describe that eschatological reality on the horizon of history is the novum—the new. For Moltmann, a faithful reading of the Christian hope is to understand that something new is on the way, and this world will be changed. This project of history will be brought to completion, in surprising and unprecedented ways. Miroslav Volf explains the significance of the novum for our understanding of present realities: “What does novum as completion mean concretely? For Moltmann, the world never was and is not now what it is meant to be.” It is precisely because we cannot hope in historical time itself that we can find a living hope at all. This is the experience of God in the present, and it provides a key for understanding

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13 SL, 39.

14 Volf in Bauckham, God Will Be, 245.
Moltmann when he writes that, “Eternity is found in the depths of the experienced moment, not in the extension of time.”

All of this has led Moltmann to declare that the future is ‘the new paradigm of transcendence.’ He writes, “But if ‘future’ is thought of theologically, it acquires a continual transcendence compared with every present, and makes every present a provisional transcendence. In this way the future becomes the paradigm of transcendence.”

We can understand by this that Moltmann believes that both kinds of ‘future’ are transcendent in their own ways, both the historical future and the eschatological future. And so he refers to his view as one which comprehends the “ontological priority of the future.” While the eschatological future is the ground of history itself, Moltmann believes that the future as a phenomenal mode of time also takes ontological precedence over the other two modes:

According to the theories of time I have mentioned [those of Picht and von Weizsäcker], it is justifiable to take ‘future’ as the transcendental condition for the possibility of time in general, and to distinguish between that and the phenomenal times of future, present and past time. If, as Kierkegaard and Heidegger have shown, possibility occupies a higher position ontologically than reality, then the future enjoys priority in the modes of time too.

In Moltmann’s reflections on time and futurity we find the link between philosophy and eschatology that makes the unity of his metaphysical narrative possible. On the philosophical side, the future is open. This is the shape of the universe, metaphysically speaking. Moltmann combines this fundamental assumption about creation with a theology of the future that makes eschatology the primary category for

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15 SL, 40.
16 GC, 134.
17 Bauckham, God Will Be, 166.
18 Moltmann in Bauckham, God Will Be, 228.
understanding the creation project, and which understands the eschatological future as the source of historical time itself. By grounding the narrative of creation in the eschatological future, Moltmann seeks to instill hope and transcendent purpose in that series of events that constitutes the ‘story of creation.’

3.4 Eschatology and Hope

It is said that the development of Moltmann’s theology over time has exhibited a tendency to move away from a one-sided focus on history and the future toward a theology of God’s immanence via the Holy Spirit. While this is certainly true, it doesn’t mean that Moltmann has changed his mind about the importance of a time-based approach like the one he develops in his *Theology of Hope*. Although Moltmann’s thought is always expanding, it is expanding from and building on this central thesis. Eschatology and hope for a new kind of future still forms the heart of Moltmann’s proclamation. Hart explains that “for Moltmann the Christian gospel is precisely about something surprisingly new, something which is not rooted in and does not rest upon the inherent potentialities and possibilities of the actual present, but upon the capacities of the God of creation and resurrection who has promised to make all things new.”

Moltmann’s understanding of the future of this world drives his whole theological project. In his quest to illuminate the future and to hold it together with his general metaphysics of the world, Moltmann has made space in modern theology for an eschatology that takes temporality seriously. Miroslav Volf explains that, although eschatology was certainly a major concern of Barth’s, the great achievement of Moltmann, contra Barth, has been that he “freed eschatology from the stranglehold of

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timeless eternity." That is, Moltmann developed an understanding of the universe that allowed future to really be future, and in so doing gave credibility to a hope for something more than our present experience. In the early years of his public career, Moltmann’s work was focused on laying the groundwork for eschatology, and in his more recent publications he has sought to apply content to that basic structure. The future-orientation itself is not the goal of the project, but is the necessary starting-point. As Gorringe reminds us, “Barth noted that Theology of Hope was not so much an eschatology as prolegomena to an eschatology and an eschatological ethic.”

This foundational ethic begins with the metaphysical conviction that the future is unsettled. This is a fundamental stance toward reality that prepares the way for hope, but does not yet contain in itself the content of that hope. Moltmann writes:

The Greek term *logos* refers to a reality which is there, now and always, and is given true expression in the word appropriate to it. In this sense there can be no *logos* of the future, unless the future is the continuation or regular recurrence of the present. If, however, the future were to bring something startlingly new, we have nothing to say of that, and nothing meaningful can be said of it either, for it is not in what is new and accidental, but only in things of an abiding and regularly recurring character that there can be logical truth.

This is the beginning of the story, not the end. But the beginning is important, because it makes the end possible. Here Moltmann’s point is that this world is such that what is past is real, but future events do not exist in a settled form. Therefore, it is metaphysically impossible to have a complete ‘world history’ as he says elsewhere—or ‘*logos* of the future’ as he says here. The future is the kind of the thing that allows for events that are ‘startlingly new,’ and so on the basis of natural theology or human reason alone, nothing

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20 Volf in Bauckham, *God Will Be*, 234.
22 TH, 17.
can be said about the content of the future. As we will see, this is precisely the point at which revelation and imagination steps in.

What makes Moltmann’s vision unique in contemporary theology is its insistence on the importance of a hope for God’s future, or the eschatological future. This serves as an important corrective to at least two other major streams of thinking in modern theology. Bauckham writes that “we might say that over against all forms of historical progressivism that collapse eschatology into history, Moltmann insists on the transcendence of the eschatological future over history, whereas, against the early Barth, the early Althaus and Bultmann, he insists on the transcendence of the eschatological future over history.”23 This means that Moltmann will not accept the prevailing spirit of ‘progress’ alive in the Enlightenment world. Progress is not enough to bring the Kingdom of God. At the same time, he strongly resists any attempt to spiritualize or present-ize the promises of Christian eschatology; our experience of God in the present is also not sufficient—we wait for a new world order that still exists as future to us. And so we wait, not just for God in the present (the eternal) or for the natural progression of history (futurum), but for God’s future.

The purpose of eschatological thinking, then, is to imagine God’s future. Moltmann believes that theology truly comes into its own when it is taken to be ‘imagination for the Kingdom of God.’ For Moltmann, the task of theology is to provide the hope-content to stand alongside a metaphysical understanding of future as possibility. “Hope’s statements of promise, however, must stand in contradiction to the reality which at present can be experienced. They do not result from experiences, but are the condition for the possibility of new experiences. They do not seek to illuminate the reality which

23 Bauckham, God Will Be, 157.
exists, but the reality which is coming.”²⁴ For Moltmann, this kind of theology is not just an academic pursuit, although it is surely speculative. This kind of theological task has at its heart the impulse to change the present conditions of the world. How is this possible? Moltmann explains that “people do not live merely from traditions. They live from expectations too.”²⁵ Hope does not only change our minds—it changes our lives. Our individual lives and our societies have the capacity to expand in response to an altered and expanded horizon of expectation. This is the method by which Moltmann seeks to change the world.

Moltmann recognizes that a generalized principle of hope is not sufficient for the needs of the world or for the requirements of a Christian theology. Hope requires certain content—something that is hoped-for. For Moltmann, what is hoped for is the Kingdom of God that is announced in the Christian scriptures. We hope not just for the future in general, but for the specific fulfillment of the promises God has made. He writes, “Promise announces the coming of a not yet existing reality from the future of the truth... On the other hand, it does not merely anticipate and clarify the realm of coming history and the realistic possibilities it contains. Rather, ‘the possible,’ and therewith ‘the future,’ arises entirely from God’s word of promise and therefore goes beyond what is possible and impossible in the realistic sense.”²⁶

To hope for God’s future, as outlined in God’s promises, is not just an option for the people of God. It is also a command of God that his people should trust his promise. So to hope is to respond faithfully to the call of God. Moltmann writes, “Men and women

²⁴ TH, 18.
²⁵ WJC, 340.
²⁶ TH, 85.
are called to enduring hope. True hope is not based on the ebb and flow of our feelings. Nor does it come from success in life. True hope—which means the hope that endures and sustains us—is based on God’s call and command.\textsuperscript{27} To hope in this way requires the stubborn resolve to trust God’s promise in the midst of life. For the suffering or oppressed person, this represents both a challenge and an opportunity for life. Johnson says that “Moltmann seeks to ensure that his readers know that what is hoped for must be in radical contradiction to what is presently experienced.”\textsuperscript{28} To see God’s future beyond present circumstances may be difficult, but Moltmann believes that it provides the basis for joy in sorrow.

So what is the content of the Christian hope? This is one of the difficult questions any interpreter of Moltmann must wrestle with. As should be clear by this point, this is a difficult question to answer because any talk about the future is speculative (by metaphysical necessity). And yet the promises of God exist regarding this future, albeit not always stated as explicitly as we might like. The way forward, then, seems to be a humble and critical approach that takes into account the scriptural texts as well as the realities of the world around us. Bauckham writes, “The genuine openness of this future ensures that theology does not already know all the answers but can learn from other approaches to reality. At the same time the christological starting-point, in the light of which the future is the future of Jesus Christ, keeps Christian theology faithful to its own truth and so allows it to question other approaches and enter into critical dialogue with them.”\textsuperscript{29} Central to this statement for the Christian is, of course, what Bauckham refers to

\textsuperscript{27} EG, 19.

\textsuperscript{28} Johnson, “Shekinah,” 183.
as 'the future of Jesus Christ.' For Moltmann, our primary understanding of the content of this hope comes from the events surrounding Jesus two thousand years ago.

3.5 The Christological Foundation of Hope

The Christian hope for the future comes of observing a specific, unique event—that of the resurrection and appearing of Jesus Christ. The hopeful theological mind, however, can observe this event only in seeking to span the future horizon projected by this event. Hence to recognize the resurrection of Christ means to recognize in this event the future of God for the world and the future which man finds in this God and his acts.\(^{30}\)

Moltmann recognizes that a particular philosophy of time cannot provide the hope that we seek. But the raising of the dead Jesus can. Moltmann writes that “the difference between past and future emerges for the Spirit of faith not in the \textit{punctum mathematicum} of the present, and not in the airy \textit{nunc aeternum}, but in that historic event of the raising of the crucified Christ in which the power of transience and the deadliness of death are conquered and the future of life is opened once and for all.”\(^{31}\) Starting from the foundation of an open future of history, and compounding that even further with an open eschatological future, this philosophy truly becomes Christian theology with the historical remembrance of Christ. “Christian eschatology is the remembered hope of the raising of the crucified Christ, so that it talks about beginning afresh in the deadly end.”\(^{32}\)

This singular event is the prototype for the future of all things, in Moltmann’s thinking. Thus, it is not just one historical event among many, but it is the \textit{proton} of the \textit{new} creation. It is the definition of a new history. It is this event that inspires hope in the

\(^{29}\) Bauckham, \textit{Theology of Moltmann}, 7.

\(^{30}\) TH, 194.

\(^{31}\) Ibid., 212.

\(^{32}\) CofG, xi.
community of the faithful, and this hope becomes the fruits of righteousness and the active anticipation of the Kingdom of God. "The raising of Christ is then to be called 'historic,' not because it took place in the history to which other categories of some sort provide a key, but it is to be called historic because, by pointing the way for future events, it makes history in which we can and must live."

In Moltmann's view, this is the meaning of the Spirit of the Resurrection in the writings of Paul. This hope for the future of Jesus Christ is the "Spirit which blows out of the resurrection of Christ as a strong, irresistible wind through the life of the believing and hoping ones."

For the community of God's people, the hope defined by this event provides the impetus for a new order to life. The Spirit of God that is given to believers is precisely the "Spirit of the Resurrection"—the sign of a new future. "Believers are possessed by the Spirit of the resurrection, and through it are born again to a well-founded hope for eternal life." It is in the power of this hope/Spirit that we seek to change the world as we find it, transforming our communities more and more into the image of the risen Christ, until the time when we will see that new world with our eyes. This sets the believer apart for those who have no hope, by way of a re-definition of our place in life. Moltmann explains that the believer is not set at the high noon of life, but at the dawn of a new day at the point where night and day, things passing and things to come, grapple with each other. Hence the believer does not simply take the day as it comes, but looks beyond the day to the things which according to the promise of him who is the creator ex nihilo and raiser of the dead are still to come.
This is not a trust in our innate immortality, for, as Moltmann says, “To be sure, [we] also will die. Body and soul, the whole man sinks into the grave.” But even now this Spirit of Christ’s resurrection “bestows on life a direction and an openness forward which extends beyond death into a life which overcomes death.”

With eyes fixed on the empty tomb of Jesus, the believer, the carrier of this hope, can affirm that “the utopias are coming—the apocalypses are going: this hope remains.” And in so believing, the one who hopes also lives in such a way that their actions are in line with this coming reality. On an individual level, with reference to our own mortality, this fixation on the death and new life of Jesus is the reason why Moltmann says: “I shall live wholly here, and die wholly, and rise wholly there.” This is not a confidence in his own immortality. Rather, this is a full recognition of complete mortality—and complete trust in the God who raised Christ. Moltmann summarizes this hope profoundly:

Thus the believer becomes essentially one who hopes. He is still future to ‘himself’ and is promised to himself. His future depends utterly and entirely on the outcome of the risen Lord’s course, for he has staked his future on the future of Christ. Thus he comes into harmony with himself in spe, but into disharmony with himself in re.

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37 Moltmann, “Hope Beyond Time,” 114.
38 Ibid.
39 Moltmann in Bauckham, God Will Be, 121.
40 CofG, 67.
41 TH, 91.
Chapter 4: God in the World

We have seen that the metaphysical narrative of creation that Moltmann writes is first grounded in a general philosophy of the world. God’s creation exhibits particular characteristics that include genuine temporality and the ability to evolve freely. The kind of universe that God created is rooted in the kind of God he is, and for Moltmann, God is to be understood as social Trinity. As we have also seen, the freedom of the world represents an obstacle that must be overcome in order for God’s final purposes in creation to be realized. In the last chapter we examined the ways that Moltmann’s theology of the future as adventus augments his general philosophy of the time of creation in such a way that God’s future might be hoped for. The purpose of this chapter, then, is to outline the story of creation, the story of ‘God in the world,’ in a way that takes into consideration both the nature of created reality and the nature of God’s kingdom that ‘is coming.’ This chapter combines the insights of the previous two chapters in order to demonstrate how this philosophy and theology becomes a narrative of the world in Moltmann’s work.

“Beneath the star of the promise of God it becomes possible to experience reality as history.”¹ For Moltmann, this means that our focus on the future of the world, based on God’s promise for that future, transforms our understanding of the world in such a way that random events become part of a larger story. The universe has a direction. One of the achievements of Moltmann’s theology has been its ability to read not only human events

¹ TH, 106.
into God’s history, but also to expand our horizons to include all of creation. As he points out, “The universal concept for which theology, philosophy and politics are looking today is undoubtedly the universe.” Moltmann’s theology, taken together as a whole, is to be seen as the writing of a universal story that gives direction and meaning to seemingly disconnected events in human lives, nations, natural ecologies, and galaxies. As we will see, that story is rooted in both the metaphysics of the world and the promise that God will bring something new.

### 4.1 Eschatological Panentheism

Just as Moltmann’s metaphysics of the world begins with the panentheistic vision of a creation ‘in God,’ so too does his story of God in the world. Moltmann frequently cites a Jewish midrash that says, “We do not know whether God is the place of his world, or whether his world is his place.” This question is critical for Moltmann’s story, and he chooses to answer it with a double affirmation. In the idea of universal panentheism, the world is indeed located within the being of God. And so ‘God is the place of his world.’ And in Moltmann’s eschatological panentheism, we are also to understand ‘the world as his place’—but in this latter aspect, we cannot eternalize the principle. The world is not yet fully God’s place, but things are going in that direction. In the eschaton, God will fill and fulfill his creation, at which point the full panentheistic vision will be realized.

Shin writes that “in Moltmann’s panentheistic proposal, the inner-trinitarian perichoresis is the pattern for the relation between God and the world.” Just as the

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2 ET, 82.

3 Quoted, for example, in CofG, 299.
persons of the Trinity exist in mutual interpenetration, so the goal of the creation project itself is that it will one day experience the same kind of full participation in the divine life. From the beginning, it is God’s purpose to be united with the work of his hands. As Johnson notes, “The essential aim of God in creation is that in the eschatological consummation, God will be all in all.”5 In trinitarian terms, this means that God’s Trinity is opened to include creation, which will evermore exist in full communion with God. God’s ex-static personhood will be realized in his full penetration of the universe, and vice versa. In this final state, both God and creation retain their unique identities as such, but creation attains to the ideal of fully relational being that is eternally modeled in the Trinity.

A fuller exploration of this theme has developed over time in Moltmann’s theology. It involves a newfound exploration of the category of space in addition to the category of time, but this does not represent a contradiction of Moltmann’s earlier focus. Instead, it is an expansion and filling-out of his vision. He explains the process: “In those years [the 1950s and 1960s] there was a great deal of talk about the presence of God in the dynamic of history, and about God’s acts in history… It was only slowly, at the beginning of the 1970s, that we became conscious of the simple fact that human history is located within the ecological limits of this planet earth, and that human civilization can only survive if it respects these limits, and the laws, cycles, and rhythms of the earth.”6 Since this time, and in response to the perceived ecological crisis, Moltmann’s theology

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6 ET, 313-4.
has reached more fully into space and so has focused more consistently on the idea of
panentheism and God\'s filling of space.

This newer focus on the ecologies and spaces of creation has allowed Moltmann
to develop some content to add to his story of creation. By addressing not only future as a
category, but also the spatial implications and content involved in that future, he has
developed a theological vision of the consummation of creation in more concrete terms.
He has done this by exploring \"concepts of space and \'home,\' the Shekinah and the
perichoresis, reciprocal indwelling and the coming to rest in one another.\" As we look at
the whole story of creation in this chapter, we will see how Moltmann is able to blend
these categories of space and time and produce a coherent metaphysical narrative for the
world to live into.

4.2 Creation and the Spirit of God

The opening chapter of the story of creation begins with the initial creation of the
world. For Moltmann, this event is itself a \textit{trinitarian} event, because it involves a process
in and among members of the Trinity. Important for Moltmann\'s later work is the role
that the Holy Spirit plays in this initial and ongoing creation. Especially in his major
work on pneumatology, \textit{The Spirit of Life}, Moltmann seeks to correct an historical under­
emphasis on the person and work of the Spirit. He writes, \"In both Protestant and
Catholic theology and devotion, there is a tendency to view the Holy Spirit solely as the
Spirit of redemption.\" While the Spirit is certainly active in redemption, this is not the

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item\footnotesize{7 Ibid., 314.}
\item\footnotesize{8 SL, 8.}
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whole story. Moltmann has come to understand the Spirit as central to all aspects of created reality. He writes:

The new approaches to ‘ecological theology,’ ‘cosmic christology,’ and the rediscovery of the body, start from the Hebrew understanding of the divine Spirit and presuppose that the redeeming Spirit of Christ and the creative and life-giving Spirit of God are one and the same. So experience of the life-giving Spirit in the faith of the heart and in the sociality of love leads of itself beyond the limits of the church to the rediscovery of the same Spirit in nature, in plants, in animals, and in the ecosystems of the earth.9

To understand the fullness of Moltmann’s story of the universe, it is essential to begin with the proposition that the Spirit of God is active everywhere, in everything. The Spirit is not restricted to the church, just as the Spirit is not restricted to the realm of human affairs. The Spirit is, in fact, the ‘Spirit of Life’ and is the breath of all that breathes and is the possibility for newness into which creation grows. By universalizing the presence and efficacy of the Spirit, Moltmann does not intend to diminish the role of the church and all things ‘sacred,’ but he does insist that we must understand these spheres differently. He says, “Given the premise that God is experienced in experience of the world and life, it once again becomes possible to talk about special experiences of God in the contingent and exceptional phenomena which are called ‘holy’ without having to declare everything else profane.”10 We will explore the unique role of the church later in this chapter.

At this point it is helpful to understand something more of Moltmann’s thought about the essence of ‘spirit,’ since this is a critical category for our discussion of both God and creation. In The Spirit of Life, Moltmann describes the great difficulty in properly translating the Hebrew ruach, or spirit. He points out that ‘spirit’ is a concept

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9 Ibid., 9-10.
10 Ibid., 35.
that, in the Western tradition (from the Greeks to the present), cannot really capture the meaning of *ruach*. In Western traditions the concept of 'spirit' has tended toward an understanding of something immaterial or ghostly. "But when we talk in Hebrew about Yahweh's *ruach*, we are saying: God is a tempest, a storm, a force in body and soul, humanity and nature."  

By describing God's Spirit in these terms, we are actually moving further away from a concrete understanding of what the Spirit *is* in favor of descriptions of the Spirit's activity. But this is not a problem for Moltmann—it is actually to be preferred. Recall the discussion of the Trinity in the second chapter of this paper, where we read of Moltmann's insistence that the Trinity be understood as a doxological concept, and his warning that we must not try to 'pin down' the definitions of the persons of God. This approach allows Moltmann to engage in theological reflection on the Spirit without ever defining the Spirit too concretely. He also explains that developing a concrete definition of the Spirit is especially challenging because of the particular nature and work of the Spirit: "We know so little about the Holy Spirit because he is too close, not because he is so far away from us... We perceive Christ and we expect the kingdom of God, but the Spirit in which we perceive and expect is something we cannot perceive, because he is directly in us and we in him."  

In the end, we read Moltmann as saying that the Spirit is our transcendent space for living and the tendency toward life and community in all that lives. And this is the same Spirit that will bring about the radical transformation of the world at the dawning of

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11 Ibid., 40.

12 Ibid., 157.
the eschaton, for "the powers of the Spirit are the powers of the new creation." In Moltmann’s thinking, this is not a subtle form of pantheism. He consistently tries to maintain the ontological difference between creation and God. He will also say that God’s Spirit is not equally poured out on the creation—there also exists in this scenario the possibility that God’s Spirit may be especially present in certain times and places, as we will see below. Nevertheless, there is an important aspect of the God-world relationship that remains constant. Creation subsists in that field of possibility that is opened up for it by the Spirit of God, and new life in accordance with God’s kingdom rule possesses an especially intimate relationship with the Spirit. “If the new life is experienced and lived in the Spirit, then the Spirit is not itself the object of experience; it is the medium and space for experience. It is therefore not objective, and we cannot talk about the Spirit. We can only talk out of the Spirit.” In his understanding of the work of the Spirit in creation and redemption, Moltmann creates a bridge between his metaphysics and his eschatology: the Spirit of God that maintains the temporality of the world by opening up the ontological space that is ‘future’ is the same Spirit of God that will take this creation beyond the present boundaries of temporality. For this is also the Spirit of the new creation.

4.3 Israel’s Experience of God

The story of the universe and God’s relationship with it must include the people of Israel as a prominent feature of the story. As Moltmann says, "When the church talks

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13 GC, 96.
about hope, it is talking about the future of Israel.” By this he means that the story of creation that we discern from a specifically Christian perspective is continuous with the story of ‘God in the world’ experienced by Israel. It appears that Yahweh’s ruach had a special relationship with the people called Israel, as the Spirit of God was regularly poured out upon and active in the work of judges, prophets, and kings. Israel perceived this relationship to such an extent that in Psalm 51 we find the expectation that people should even experience the ruach of God on a personal level: “Create in me a clean heart... and take not thy Spirit from me.”

Beginning with the call of Abram in Genesis 12, God took for himself a people on earth to serve as his ambassadors and to be the vehicle of God’s blessing for the whole earth. Israel’s experience of God was both national and personal. Moltmann explains that, in Israel’s experience, “the gift of the Spirit comes from the countenance of God when it is turned towards human beings and shines on them. It is a gift that brings inward assurance in living, and new vital energies.” Israel’s experience of God was recorded throughout the Hebrew Bible and extra-canonical literature, and Moltmann uses both kinds of sources in the construction of his metaphysical narrative. For example, we read that “what the psalms have to say about the presence of the Spirit in the depths of the human heart is developed by Wisdom literature in the wider context of the natural cosmos. In the three great didactic poems (Proverbs 8, Job 28, Ecclesiasticus 24) the


16 Moltmann notes that the plea and expectation of Psalm 51 is understood to apply not just to the king or psalmist, but to the whole people Israel. He cites Ezekiel 36:26f as one indication of this: the expectation that God will provide a ‘new heart’ and ‘new spirit’ for his people. Cf. SL, 45.

17 SL, 45.
Wisdom of God is presented as an ordering power immanent in the world.” Moltmann further notes that in the Wisdom literature the Spirit and Wisdom are essentially interchangeable concepts.

The particular relationship between Israel and Yahweh could be read in terms of exclusivity, but Moltmann reads it differently. As he understands it, the whole purpose of Israel’s election is their new vocation to bear witness among the nations. In Moltmann’s thinking, the Christian church and the people of Israel are given the task of bearing witness to “the still unfulfilled hope of the messianic kingdom.” If God were only the provincial deity of the Hebrew people, that would short-circuit any attempt to write a universal history based on God’s relationship with Israel. But in Israel’s own experience with her God, we see that this is no provincial deity, and God’s purposes extend beyond the borders of Israel to touch every part of the world. From the beginning of the universe, God intends to communicate his being to all of creation, and the election of Israel does not contradict this intention. On the contrary, the election of Israel would prove to be one of God’s concrete methods for including creation in his own community of being. For Moltmann, the vocational election of the church and Israel are closely related, for together we “wait for the coming of God and his redeeming kingdom.”

By choosing Israel, God enters into a relationship through which his purposes for the earth can be visualized for all to see. Moltmann writes that “in the calling of the patriarchs, in the people of the covenant, and in the prophets, this coming glory [when the

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18 Ibid., 46.
19 See, for example, The Wisdom of Solomon 1:7, 12:1, 7:21 and following.
20 CPS, 137.
21 Ibid., 150.
earth will be filled with his glory, Isa. 60] already enters history, pointing the way forward towards its own consummation.”22 By giving the Law and establishing ideal practices for Israel, God communicates to the whole earth his vision for history, and especially history’s future. The mission of the church does not contradict God’s work through Israel, rather it shows “God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs.”23

By establishing specific practices such as the Sabbath rest, God indicates his intentions for the future in concrete ways. This example carries particular significance for Moltmann because, as Johnson says, “Sabbath is important for Moltmann, in that it also foreshadows the reverse of the zimzum.”24 God’s interactions with Israel can provide a window into the divine mind and plan. In this case, by establishing a Sabbath, a time set apart for the welcoming and expectation of God, we see an historical foreshadowing of that future time when God will come to fill space—when the being of God that was contracted into itself in zimzum is de-limited and fills the space of creation again.

Moltmann writes that “this Sabbath rest has always been understood as a model of the world’s final salvation.”25 In this way, God’s special presence on earth (Shekinah) is intimately related to God’s command for Sabbath. According to Johnson, “In [Moltmann’s] view, the Sabbath is the Shekinah in time, just as the Shekinah is the

22 TK, 85.

23 CPS, 141. Here Moltmann is paraphrasing the apostle Paul in Romans 9 and 11.


25 Moltmann, “The Sabbath – The Feast of Creation,” 40. Moltmann also notes here that the Sabbath must be understood also as a sign of universal salvation, for God does not bless just this or that particular creature, but creates a time (which is a universal category, with no respect for persons) in which all live, for the blessing of all. See ibid., 42, for Moltmann’s assertion that “Sabbath… opens up the entire creation to the kingdom of God’s glory.”
Sabbath in space.” For Moltmann, the actions of God in history that we discern through the experience of Israel are intimately related both to the kind of world he created in himself and the eschatological completion of that world. We now turn to Moltmann’s understanding of Shekinah and the Spirit’s presence on earth, so that in the end of this chapter we can understand why, for Moltmann, the consummation of creation is, in the end, the Sabbath rest of both God and the world.

4.4 Shekinah

The concept of Shekinah is another aspect of Jewish theology borrowed by Moltmann for his metaphysical narrative. It is a critical aspect of the story he writes, because with the Shekinah of God, Moltmann attempts to solve an aspect of the tension between metaphysics and eschatology that we have discerned. The development of the concept of Shekinah as God’s presence in the world is Moltmann’s way of guaranteeing God’s Spirit an integral place in the created order while at the same time maintaining the freedom of creation over against God. Moltmann thinks that in the concept of Shekinah he has found a way to imagine God’s special presence in the world that does not override the autonomy of the world. True to Moltmann’s panentheist metaphysics, the ‘division in God’ that forms his Shekinah in the world also involves a certain kenosis of God. The Shekinah represents a gap formed in God’s own being that will not be reconciled until the eschatological completion of the story of creation.

The ‘Shekinah’ is the name given to God’s personal and physical presence in the world, within spacio-temporal reality. In Jewish theology, this is the special presence of God with the people Israel, the God that comes to rest in the desert tabernacle and in the

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temple of Zion. Franz Rosenweig explains that “the Shekinah, the descent of God to human beings and his dwelling among them, is conceived of as a division which takes place in God himself. God cuts himself off from himself. He gives himself away to his people. He suffers with their sufferings, he goes with them through the misery of the foreign land.” So the Shekinah represents an image of a divided God—a God who exists at once in eternity and also separated from himself in his historical wanderings on earth among the people. Johnson shows how this idea relates to the doctrine of *zimzum* that we’ve already explored. “Corresponding to the cabalistic *zimzum*, or contraction of God to make place for creation, *Shekinah* represented a separation in Godself that will only be reunited in the eschaton when God will be all in all.”

Moltmann recognizes that there has been a process of development for the idea of the Shekinah of God. He writes that “the idea of Shekinah developed out of cultic language, and originally meant God’s tabernacle, or tent, and his ‘dwelling’ among his people.” In later Jewish thought this principle was extended in certain ways, and in Moltmann’s own thought the idea of Shekinah has been expanded greatly. For Moltmann, this is no longer a term to be used exclusively in relationship to Israel’s experience of God, but this becomes a general phenomenon of God’s relationship with creation in its entirety. Johnson explains a critical characteristic of Moltmann’s use of the term Shekinah: “He departs from the Jewish usage of the term which almost exclusively related to God’s presence in the land, worship, and among the people of Israel. Moltmann uses the term freely and interchangeably for God’s presence in the Church, among the

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27 Franz Rosenzweig, as quoted in GC, 15.


29 SL, 47.
nations, and in nature.”30 Typical of Moltmann’s non-dispensationalist approach to redemption theology, he urges his readers not to separate the experiences of Israel from the experiences of the rest of creation. It is the same God, everywhere. And so the particular presence of God experienced by Israel should be understood as the same presence experienced by the church and indeed throughout the world of living things.

Understood in its Jewish context, the Shekinah is the presence of God with his people Israel. The Shekinah was with the people, on the mountaintop or in the valley of the shadow of death. Elie Wiesel calls our attention to a certain midrash that says, “The Holy One, blessed be He, said to the children of Israel: When I saw that you left my dwelling place, I left it also, so that I might return home with you.”31 Something about this concept has captured Moltmann’s attention, and he sees in this God who suffers exile with his people a general principle for the current state of God-world relations. Moltmann exegetes this doctrine with reference to Israel’s relationship with God: “This idea about the God who suffers with us then inevitably leads to the bold concept that God’s self-deliverance goes together with the deliverance of Israel. When Israel is delivered, God’s Shekinah will return home from its wanderings. The divine deliverance lies in the event in which the Eternal One will be united with his Shekinah.”32 The long-awaited consummation of creation represents not only the complete reconciliation of creation to itself and to God, but also God’s reconciliation with himself. In love God has gone outside of himself and has traveled through history with creation, and God will not find his own rest until the final Sabbath of creation, when creation itself is united with God.

30 Johnson, “Shekinah,” 144.
31 Elie Wiesel, quoted in SL, 49.
32 SL, 49.
Johnson explains that this vision of the pilgrim God is actually Moltmann's attempt to make sense of a long-standing theological question. "Jürgen Moltmann uses the Shekinah concept as a solution to the classical problem of the immanence and transcendence of God."33 Humans have asked the question for centuries: how can it be that the everywhere and all-powerful God can be located at a particular place and time in creation? This is the question behind the doctrine of God's Shekinah. Moltmann writes that "the descent and habitation of God at a particular place and a particular time among particular people must therefore be distinguished from the very God himself whom even the heavens are unable to contain. The Shekinah is certainly the present God, but this presence is distinguished from his eternity."34 So within the doctrine of God's Shekinah we are to understand a distinction within Godself. God is at once waiting for creation in the eschatological fulfillment of time, and traveling with the creation in its process toward that future. And for God, this is not yet a state of rest but is a division awaiting its own resolution.

It is important to understand the radical statement that Moltmann is making here about the way that this creation affects the inner life of God himself. In the concept of Shekinah, Moltmann is describing the very being of Godself, exiled from himself in time and space. He writes, "The Shekinah is not a divine attribute. It is the presence of God himself. But it is not God in his essential omnipresence. It is his special, willed and promised presence in the world. The Shekinah is God himself, present at a particular place and at a particular time."35 In some aspects this is a similar argument to the one

33 Johnson, "Shekinah," ii.

34 SL, 48.
Moltmann has made in his monumental *Crucified God*—that God is fully present in the man Jesus, and so experiences the world as a man. This does not mean that there are two Gods, but one God who is able to exist in contradistinction from himself. Moltmann explains: "If the Shekinah is the earthly, temporal and spatial presence of God, then it is at once identical with God and distinct from him... If we talk about a divine 'self-distinction' of this kind, then we are assuming a difference in God... but we are still at the same time holding fast to the identity of the One God."\(^36\)

In his later work, Moltmann has attempted to thoroughly re-interpret the God-world relation in terms of Shekinah theology. In this way he seeks to preserve the unity of God while at the same time affirming one of his most basic convictions: that God participates fully in the suffering of his world and does not reserve for himself a place of eternal bliss in the face of anguish. Moltmann does all of this by positing an essential and paradoxical division in God's own being—an inherently unstable arrangement that must seek resolution in an eschatological re-unification.

By understanding God's presence in this way, Moltmann is able to universalize the idea of Shekinah so that it explains not only Israel's experience of God but all outpourings of God's Spirit in history. He writes that

> in the framework of this Israelite Shekinah theology, the statements of Christian incarnation theology, and utterances about the outpouring and indwelling of God's Holy Spirit on all flesh become comprehensible. The eschatology which follows from both is the vision of the cosmic Shekinah, the cosmic incarnation, and the cosmic temple for the indwelling of the glory of the triune God.\(^37\)

\(^35\) Ibid.

\(^36\) Ibid.

\(^37\) Moltmann, *God Will Be*, 40.
This is the summary of the consummation of the world: that all things will be full of God and will come to rest in God. When this is realized, God too will come to rest within himself. “The history of God’s indwellings in people and temple, in Christ and in the Holy Spirit, point forward to their completion in the universal indwelling of God’s glory and its manifestation: ‘The whole earth is full of his glory’ (Isa. 6:3).”

4.5 Incarnation and Spirit Christology

Moltmann’s Shekinah theology is meant to bridge the gap between his metaphysics of the world and the goal of the world story. As we have seen, he does not intend for Shekinah theology to be understood only in terms of Israel’s experience of God. Rather, he intends this to serve as a general theory for the God-world relationship. This must also include the Christian experience of God, namely, the incarnation of the Son in Jesus. But for Moltmann, the incarnation must be understood in a very specific way. It must be understood in terms of a ‘Spirit christology.’ In this way, Moltmann seeks to preserve the continuity between the Jewish and the Christian experiences of God in the context of a panentheistic world story.

Briefly defined, Spirit christology is the proposition that the divine son-ship of Jesus was a function of the Spirit of God resting on and filling his human being. This is a kind of ‘adoptionist’ christology that solves the dilemma of the two natures of Jesus by explaining that Jesus was a ‘regular’ human being who was identified as the Son of God by God’s special election of this man. Moltmann believes that this scenario best fits with the original Jewish context of the ministry of Jesus. He writes that “according to Jewish expectation, the messianic son of God is the human being who is filled with the Spirit of

God... He comes in the Spirit of the Lord and brings the Spirit of the Lord, so that it fills the whole earth.”39 If the incarnation is understood in this way, it flows naturally with an overall Shekinah theology, because the incarnation of Christ is understood to be of the same kind as the other concentrations of the Spirit in history. In this understanding, Jesus Christ is the epitome of the Shekinah reality by virtue of the extreme and seemingly unique concentration of the Spirit in this one man. “Jesus is uniquely endowed with the Spirit, his anointing is ‘without measure’ (John 3:34), and the Spirit ‘rested’ on him—that is to say, in him the Shekinah found its abiding dwelling place.”40

Moltmann’s universal concern should be understood as a major driving force in this christology. He says, “We are starting with a pneumatological christology, because we discover that the efficacy of the divine Spirit is the first facet of the mystery of Jesus.”41 By highlighting the Spirit even in the incarnation of Christ, Moltmann lays the groundwork for cosmic eschatology. Although Moltmann certainly believes that the incarnation of Christ in Jesus was a unique event, he does not want to remove it too far from the possibilities for creation in general. If Jesus represented the substance of the one pre-existent Son in human form, it is certainly a fact to be celebrated for Moltmann. But if Jesus represented a massive incarnation of the Spirit—the same Spirit already at work throughout creation—then we might hope that truly Jesus is but “the firstborn among many brothers and sisters” (Rom. 8:29). For this reason Moltmann will insist on the primacy of the Spirit in the incarnation. This event also carries with it particular consequences for the Spirit: “If we talk about a ‘condescending’ of the Spirit, we have

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39 WJC, 85.
40 Ibid., 90.
41 Ibid., 73.
also to talk about a *kenosis of the Holy Spirit*, which emptied itself and descended from the eternity of God, taking up its dwelling in this vulnerable and mortal human being Jesus.\(^{42}\)

Moltmann is aware of the fact that the broad stream of tradition on this topic is not in agreement with his own position, but he regards the dominant tradition to be mistaken. He thinks, in fact, that the Gospel witnesses support his own Spirit christology. This is “the truth of the synoptic Spirit christology which in the course of history was driven out by the christological pneumatology of Paul and John.”\(^{43}\) Some have expressed the concern that this position undermines the uniqueness of the incarnation of Jesus, but Moltmann believes he has prevented that mistake. Bauckham tells us that, for Moltmann, “the uniqueness of Jesus’ trinitarian relationship to the Father and the Spirit prevents this Spirit Christology from being a ‘degree Christology,’ as other forms of Spirit Christology have often been.”\(^{44}\) A ‘degree christology’ would say that the uniqueness of Jesus is only a matter of the *degree to which* the Spirit was poured out on him. But Moltmann’s theology does not go this far—he maintains the uniqueness of Jesus based on the decision of God to choose this one man. Moltmann insists on the unique status of Jesus, but the role of the Spirit is also emphasized to such an extent that we can discern the incarnation as one of a *series* of historical events leading ultimately to a cosmic indwelling. “These indwellings of God in Christ and in the congregations of his people point beyond themselves to the *cosmic Shekinah* in which God will be ‘all in all’ (I Cor. 15:28).”\(^{45}\)

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\(^{42}\) Ibid., 93.

\(^{43}\) SL, 293.

\(^{44}\) Bauckham, *Theology of Moltmann*, 20.

\(^{45}\) ET, 316.
4.5.1 The Death and Resurrection of Christ

This interpretation of Jesus Christ also begs the question of the purpose and efficacy of his death and resurrection and its place in the metaphysical narrative that Moltmann writes. How does Moltmann’s decidedly pneumatological christology understand the work of Christ? Moltmann’s answer to this question is well-summarized in *The Way of Jesus Christ*:

If Jesus’ resurrection is interpreted as the anticipation of the general resurrection of the dead, how is his death to be interpreted? His death is then the anticipation of the death that is universal and absolute... As an anticipation of universal death, Golgotha is the anticipation of the end of this world and the beginning of a world that is new... What has already happened to Christ is representative of what will happen to everybody: it is a happening *pars pro toto*.”

So the death and resurrection of Jesus is to be interpreted primarily through the lens of *God’s promise*. As Moltmann says, it is a happening *pars pro toto*—literally, a *part for the whole*. In this one death and resurrection we are to understand the destiny of all things: total death, and total resurrection. Bauckham explains that, for Moltmann, “in raising the crucified Jesus from the dead, God enacted his promise for the new creation of all things, which is a promise not of another world, but of the transformation of this world in the temporal future.” As Moltmann frequently notes, the primary biblical category for talking about a vision of this magnitude is the genre of apocalyptic. And in apocalyptic terms, the events of the death and resurrection of Jesus should be understood as nothing less than the beginning of the end of one world and the dawning of something new. “If this death is viewed against an apocalyptic horizon, and not as something normal

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46 WJC, 155.

or natural, then the great apocalyptic dying, the death of all things, has already begun. ‘This world’ is passing away.”

The death and resurrection of Jesus is the beginning of all true Christian hope precisely because of the newness inherent in the resurrection. This newness is the foundation of an eschatological hope that transcends the present metaphysics of the world. It is our first taste of a world to come, and as such the resurrection itself provides all the grounds we need for a life-transforming hope. “As the New Testament shows, expectation of the approaching end is directed, not towards the death of this world, but towards the birth of the world that is new. Because the kingdom of God is ‘at hand,’ the end of this Godless world has also come into view.” In this understanding, the cross and resurrection do not necessarily effect the salvation of the world in themselves—but they point toward a future salvation. They represent a promise of salvation, but we are not saved until we are transformed from our present form into a life of fulfilled experience of God and creation. “When Moltmann says that the event of the cross includes the whole of suffering and sinful reality within the love of God, he means that it does so representatively, through the Son’s identification with the godforsaken and the godless. The actual reconciliation of all things in God is a process which stems from the cross and moves towards eschatological completion.”

In a sense, Moltmann’s interpretation of the cross is less triumphant than the classical tradition. Because in Moltmann’s view, the death of Jesus itself does not effect salvation. It is a horrible, unjust death that awaits vindication through resurrection. But as

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48 WJC, 157.

49 Ibid., 158.

a 'horrible, unjust death' it has its own power. Moltmann's *Crucified God* is an attempt to show the significance of this godforsaken death and its implications for our understanding of Christian ethics and even our view of God. Bauckham says that "in *The Crucified God* Moltmann was developing a theology of the cross in the sense of Luther's *theologia crucis* and explicitly as a modern continuation of the radical direction of Luther's *theologia crucis*. This makes the cross, in all of its stark negativity, the basis and criterion of Christian theology, 'the test of everything which deserves to be called Christian.'"\(^51\)

In Moltmann's view the cross retains its ugliness and its evilness—he resists all attempts to spiritualize that most brutal rejection of God and humanity. For Moltmann, it is impossible to say that 'in that old rugged cross... a wondrous beauty I see.' Instead, the cross represents all that must be overcome in this world of death, and it represents God's identification with that present reality. This is consistent with Moltmann's emphasis on the physical nature of creation and the necessity of a resurrection from the dead. "The immortal soul may welcome death as a friend, because death releases it from the earthly body; but for the resurrection hope, death is 'the last enemy' (I Cor. 15:26) of the living God and the creations of his love."\(^52\)

In *The Crucified God* we read that "the death of Jesus on the cross is the center of all Christian theology. It is not the only theme of theology, but it is in effect the entry to its problems and answers on earth."\(^53\) When we read Moltmann's statements about the

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\(^{52}\) CofG, 65-6.

\(^{53}\) CG, 204.
death of God in the context of his metaphysical narrative of creation, critical aspects of
the cross emerge that help to illuminate both the metaphysics of the world and the end of
the story in the future of God. For Moltmann, the death of Jesus on the cross tells us
something about the inner nature of God himself. It is a confirmation of the tendency
toward kenosis that we have already seen in the initial decision of God to become the
creator of the world. Moltmann writes that “when the crucified Jesus is called the ‘image
of the invisible God,’ the meaning is that this is God, and God is like this.”

Moltmann tells us that the meaning of the cross and resurrection is very specific.
He says, “The center [of theology] is occupied not by ‘cross and resurrection,’ but by the
resurrection of the crucified Christ... and the cross of the risen Christ.” In this way the
event surrounding the death and resurrection of Jesus encapsulate the whole of the
metaphysical narrative of creation that Moltmann writes. These events tell the story of the
kind of world we live in and the kind of God who gives it life. It is a world of transcience,
and God is a God who suffers this transience in his own being, for the sake of love. This
is the summary of chapter two of this paper. But here Moltmann also indicates the hope
that emerges from the actions of God in history, a hope that goes beyond the given
metaphysics of the world. When we observe ‘the resurrection of the crucified Christ’ we
see a kind of divine action that transcends the structures of death inherent in the world. It
is a divine act that mediates between metaphysics and hope in Moltmann’s narrative of
creation.

The death and resurrection of Jesus tells the story of our lives and our hope. It
takes our death as a given, and shows a way beyond death, in the fellowship of God. This

54 CG, 205.
55 Ibid., 204.
is the meaning of Christ for us now. Moltmann says, “According to Christian ideas, God will raise the dead though his Spirit of life. This Spirit, the life-giver, is in community with Christ already experienced now, in this life, as ‘the power of the resurrection.’ As this power, the Spirit of life is stronger than death and must therefore be called immortal.”56 As the people of God, we experience the Spirit of the resurrection because we trust in the promise implicit in the resurrection of Christ. By placing ourselves in this relationship to God and his work in the world, we participate in a process of the Spirit already at work to make things new. About the eschatological process now set in motion by the resurrection of Christ, Bauckham says, “It is the process of resurrection or of the communication of eternal life to the mortal creation, represented in a series of stages: first the resurrection of Jesus Christ, then at his parousia those who belong to Christ, then the resurrection of the rest of the dead and the annihilation of death itself.”57

In contradistinction to Barth, Moltmann understands the work of Christ on the cross as the beginning, not the end, of redemption. He says: “Through a one-sided theology of the cross, real futurist eschatology is lost, and then pneumatology is not given its proper status. Of course the whole universe is present and represented in Christ’s universal representation, as what he represents. But that is only the basis for its rebirth, not as yet the goal.”58 Because all is not yet finished with regard to the salvation of the world, we are to understand ourselves as co-laborers with God in the process of redemption. “One could say that Christian eschatology is the study of the tendency of the

56 CofG, 71.
57 Bauckham, God Will Be, 20-1.
58 Sl., 151
resurrection and future of Christ and therefore leads immediately to the practical knowledge of mission.”

Moltmann looks favorably on John Wesley’s understanding of redemption and healing of this life, this world. He says, “For Wesley, sin is a sickness that requires healing rather than a breach of the law requiring atonement. He therefore interprets the justification of the sinner with the concepts of regeneration or rebirth rather than with those of judgment, just as the Anglican theology of his time—turning away from the legalistic theology of Rome—also cast back to the doctrine of physical redemption held by the early Greek Fathers.”

4.5.2 Hell and the Work of Christ

The efficacy of Christ’s death and resurrection also includes one other aspect that is important to Moltmann’s narrative of creation: “Through his sufferings Christ has destroyed hell.” God’s work in Christ—especially the aspect of his full identification with the conditions of the world—has made hell impossible for God’s creation. Hell as nothingness, as nihil, is wrapped up in Christ’s victory over that same nothingness in his resurrection from the dead. “In the crucified Christ we see what hell is, because through him it has been overcome.”

59 TH, 195.
60 SL, 164.
61 Moltmann in Bauckham, God Will Be, 46.
62 Ibid.
As previously noted, Moltmann understands hell as the God-forsakenness of the *nihit.* We know that this nothingness is the prerequisite for creation, but does it now pose a threat to creation? Moltmann thinks not. “In the light of creation, the cross of Christ means the true consolidation of the universe.” In this passage Moltmann indicates that, with the death and resurrection of Christ, the *nothing* and the *something* have been ‘consolidated’ in such a way that the ‘nothingness’ has ceased to exist. The Son became the something (incarnation), then became the nothing (crucifixion), and has been declared Lord of both in his resurrection. Moltmann also puts it in this way:

> Let us come back once more to the foundation and justification for the panentheistic vision of the world in God. In the cross of Christ God took evil, sin and rejection on himself, and in the sacrifice of his infinite love transformed it into goodness, grace and election. Evil, sin, suffering and damnation are ‘in God’... So everything that lives, lives from the almighty power of his suffering love, and out of the inexhaustibility of his self-giving love (I Cor. 13:7). There is no longer any Nothingness to threaten creation.

Moltmann concludes that damnation and nothingness are no longer possible for this creation, because God’s cross has transformed the universe and swallowed up death. The only possibility is that creation will now be transformed in God. This is the basis both of Moltmann’s panentheism and his belief in universal redemption. Additionally, Moltmann also finds the idea of hell to be wholly inconsistent with belief in the Christian God—based on a belief in the sovereignty of God. “The logic of hell seems to me not

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63 Cf. GC, 87.

64 Ibid., 91.

65 Cf. SL, 213.

66 Ibid., 212-3.

merely inhumane but also extremely atheistic: here the human being in his freedom of choice is his own lord and god. His own will is his heaven—or his hell. God is merely the accessory who puts that will into effect."\(^68\)

Recognizing that this is a controversial issue from a biblical standpoint, one way that Moltmann solves the apparent problem is by highlighting what he calls the ‘therapeutic circle’ of sin and redemption in the theology of the apostle Paul. He finds in Paul a strong ally for the idea of universal salvation based on the work of Christ. He begins from a point that might seem counterintuitive for his argument, but which in fact forms the basis of his argument: "The Reformation doctrine of justification is based on Paul’s teaching, and Paul’s presupposition is the universality of sin."\(^69\) This is actually helpful for Moltmann’s case, he believes, because he reads Paul in such a way that sin and forgiveness are always taken together. Moltmann writes, "The interpretations of sin and the forgiveness of sins which we find in Paul and the synoptics must not be turned into opposite fronts."\(^70\) What he means is that these are not two different systems of thought in Paul—they are packaged together in such a way that the discussion of sin always presupposes a corresponding understanding of forgiveness.

Moltmann argues that the concept of universal sinfulness cannot be removed from the biblical cycle of redemption through Christ. He makes the case that universal sin is a concept that is only relevant to those who already have grasped the redemption and grace offered through Christ. Without this presupposition of grace, the concept of sin works against God’s mission of redemption. "The Pauline teaching about the justifying

\(^68\) Moltmann in Bauckham, *God Will Be*, 45.

\(^69\) SL, 124.

\(^70\) Ibid., 128.
righteousness of God has the *de facto* universality of salvation from sin as its objective. ‘For one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to the acquittal and life for all men’ (Rom. 5:18).’’71

Moltmann points out that it is the Law itself which is said to make humans aware of sin. It is not necessarily the case that the average person on the street knows their own state of ‘original sin’ intuitively. Moltmann believes that a major obstacle to Christian faith for many has been a misunderstanding of the connection between the universality of sin and the universality of forgiveness. He writes,

> It is this generality [universal sin] that prevents many people from finding either the Catholic doctrine of grace or the Protestant doctrine of justification. These doctrines seem to them vague and abstract. So why should they confess that they are in need of redemption, and accuse themselves of being ‘sinners’? If people no longer ask the question about the divine righteousness, justifying faith loses its foundation and is left in the air.72

Moltmann believes that the doctrine of original sin, understood in isolation from a doctrine of universal forgiveness, is a badly applied half-truth. The biblical solution for Moltmann is thus: “If belief in the universality of deliverance through Christ is the presupposition for an awareness of sin, then functionally, the doctrine of sin belongs strictly within the therapeutical circle which embraces knowledge of Christ, knowledge of our own misery, and the new life in faith. Outside this therapeutical circle, and in isolation from it, the doctrine of sin does nothing but harm.”73 Basically, the idea of universal sin presupposes first a doctrine of universal forgiveness, because these are part of a theological complex in the New Testament that cannot be taken apart. For

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71 Ibid., 124.

72 Ibid., 127.

73 Ibid., 127-8.
Moltmann, to universalize the concept of sin without simultaneously universalizing the concept of forgiveness is to be exegetically inconsistent.

4.6 Kingdom of God Theology

We have examined Moltmann’s understanding of the work of Jesus in the context of the story of creation. In the death and resurrection of Christ we see God’s plan for the whole creation. As we noted above, Moltmann has set out to understand God’s relationship with the world in a consistent way that leaves out no part of creation in the eschatological reconciliation of all things. Moltmann himself says that “the special feature of pneumatological christology is its openness for the activity of the self-same Spirit beyond the person and history of Jesus Christ.” In all of his theology, Moltmann wants us to understand the universal work of God—not limited to the church, and not even limited to Jesus Christ. When speaking about the universal application of God’s plan for the world, Moltmann speaks in terms of ‘the kingdom of God.’

What God is about in the world is the establishment of his kingdom: the welcoming of all creation into the life-giving relationships of the Trinity. For Moltmann the central hope of the Christian faith is that one day this ideal of God’s Kingdom will be fully realized in the world. This being the driving focus of Moltmann’s program, his work has frequently been described as ‘kingdom of God theology.’

In Moltmann’s reading of the Bible, he has discerned a gradual movement from a provincial understanding of God’s kingdom toward a more universal concept. He sees this movement particularly in the transition from the typically ‘prophetic’ concern about nations to the ‘apocalyptic’ focus on the re-making of the whole cosmos. He writes, “The

74 WJC, 94.
whole world is now involved in God's eschatological process of history, not only the
world of men and nations. The conversion of man in the prophetic message then finds its
correlate in the conversion of the whole cosmos, of which apocalyptic speaks. The
prophetic revolution among the nations expands to become the cosmic revolution of all
things." 75 If this gradual realization of the universal implications of God's kingdom
belongs to the 'matter of Scripture' as it was described in the first chapter of this paper,
then undoubtedly Moltmann sees his own work as a continuation of this realization
process. Moltmann speaks approvingly of the apocalyptic expansion of the prophetic
vision, and adds, "The New Testament did not close the window which apocalyptic had
opened for it towards the wide vistas of the cosmos and beyond the limitations of the
given cosmic reality." 76 Because Moltmann takes this to be the clear direction in which
the scriptures are moving, his own theology works at the edge of the apocalyptic vision
and seeks to fill out the fully universal implications of that vision.

One of the ways in which Moltmann has moved beyond some 'apocalyptic'
understandings of the future reign of God is in his insistence that the future does not hold
destruction for the earth, but only greater life—and no part of creation will be lost to God
on that final day. He writes, "For the kingdom of God is nothing other than the new
creation of all things and the rebirth of everything living. It is as brilliantly variegated as
the creation which we know now. The kingdom of God is not an impoverishment of
creation. It is creation in a still greater wealth." 77 As he says, "in the end is the

75 TH, 137.
76 Ibid., 138.
77 SL, 194.
beginning,” and by this we are to understand that the future consummation we look towards is not the end of the world, but the beginning of a fulfilled world.78

“The promise of the kingdom of God in which all things attain to right, to life, to peace, to freedom, and to truth, is not exclusive but inclusive. And so, too, its love, its neighborliness and its sympathy are inclusive, excluding nothing, but embracing in hope everything wherein God will be all in all.”79 So the fully realized Kingdom of God is that ultimate state of “life, peace, freedom and truth,” as imagined with prophetic images like the lamb and the lion lying down together, and the nations beating their swords into plowshares. Moltmann’s hope is that this day is coming, concretely, in our future. But while human beings can live according to kingdom principles now, for Moltmann the final realization of this promise is up to God, and will require a special work of God entirely beyond human control.

This idea that we must wait for God to initiate his eschatological future could be understood as a tension within Moltmann’s work. It may seem that this perspective removes all traces of the kingdom to the future. This is a supposed problem that runs throughout Moltmann’s theology. On some readings, not only is God’s Kingdom located wholly in the future, but God’s very being also exists as future. Bauckham explains that “a common criticism of Moltmann’s early theology, especially Theology of Hope, was that it denied present experience of God... Moltmann could be understood as continuing the Barthian disjunction between revelation and experience.”80 This assumption about

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79 TH, 224.

80 Bauckham, Theology of Moltmann, 213.
Moltmann’s early work caused some confusion at the publication of *The Spirit of Life*, which places a heavy emphasis on the community’s experience of God in the present. “At first sight this looks like the kind of *volte face* of which critics have often been quick to accuse Moltmann.”\(^{81}\) How does Moltmann’s metaphysical narrative answer this charge? When his whole theology is taken together, we understand that his intention is not to remove the presence of God from the present, but rather to “situate the Christian experience of God within the history that leads from the divine promise to its fulfillment in the kingdom of God.”\(^{82}\) In the idea of the divine Shekinah we see Moltmann’s attempt to maintain his thesis that God is present in creation now, even as we wait for the coming of God. In a sense, he solves this tension of God’s ‘already/not yet’ presence by locating that tension within the very being of God—in that distinction in Godself that forms the Shekinah.

Throughout his career, Moltmann has been clear that the full realization of the Kingdom of God is to be expected *from the future*. Similarly, the people of God wait for a time when we will experience his presence in a more complete way. But this does not mean that there are no traces of the kingdom now, or that we experience nothing of God in the present. In fact, as Moltmann’s later work makes clear, the experience of God’s Spirit in the present *is* the experience of the future Kingdom of God. He says, “The kingdom of God is the eschatological springtime of the whole creation. So charismatic experience is the experience that this life, which has become old, has lost its way and is so heavy-laden with wrongs, begins to flower again and becomes young once more.”\(^{83}\)

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\(^{81}\) Ibid., 214.

\(^{82}\) Ibid., 216.
And so it is necessary to distinguish in our discourse on the kingdom whether we mean by that word the present (incomplete) realities of God’s kingdom or that promised, ultimate state in which God is all in all—the one Kingdom of God. I would suggest that the term kingdom rightly applies to both the present and the future aspects of God’s relationship with creation. But since some distinction must be made, let us speak about the present ‘kingdom’ of God on earth and the complete eschatological ‘Kingdom’ that has been promised.  

The relationships within God that have been opened to creation since the beginning are the essential nature of the kingdom, and these relationships are opened even now. Moltmann indicates that the work of the Spirit is not to force anyone to enter the kingdom of God, but essentially to make the space and invite them in. “If we look at the word fellowship itself, we can say that fellowship does not take by force and possess. It liberates, and draws others into the relationships which are essentially its own.” As a present reality, the kingdom of God exists as one option that we may realize by entering into a certain relationship with God’s Spirit and his coming Kingdom. In some sense the present kingdom consists of just this relationship to the present and future God. “If it is characteristic of the divine Spirit not merely to communicate this or that particular thing, but actually to enter into fellowship with believing men and women—if indeed he himself becomes their fellowship—then ‘fellowship’ cannot merely be a ‘gift’ of the Spirit. It must be the eternal, essential nature of the Spirit himself.”

83 SL, 194.

84 The reader may notice that I have used these designations throughout the paper, except in direct quotes from Moltmann and others, none of whom typically follow this rule.

85 SL, 217.
The Spirit of God invites us into a kingdom reality now, in anticipation of the coming Kingdom of God. For Moltmann, this provides the foundation for a truly Christian mission. He says, “The pro-missio of the kingdom is the ground of the mission of love to the world.”87 Although Moltmann believes that the coming of God’s Kingdom is not an event that depends on human activity, nonetheless he believes that a certain kind of activity in the world is the natural consequence and dictate of the Kingdom hope.

4.6.1 The Church and the Anticipation of the Kingdom

Moltmann’s metaphysical narrative embodies a certain tension. It is a tension that exists between the kind of world we live in, on the one hand, and on the other the action of God in the future that will overcome the transience of the world. The solution to this tension is understood in the terms of ‘hope,’ and the church of Christ is called to bear witness to that hope. Thus, the church plays a key role in the story of creation. Here we will examine the proper form of the church’s witness, according to Moltmann.

In Moltmann’s theology, there are various ways to approach the question of the extent to which human beings presently participate in the eternity of God. In different places, Moltmann answers this question in three distinct ways: objective immortality in relationship with God, participation in God’s Spirit through relationship, and, most importantly, concrete anticipation of the coming Kingdom in the power of the Spirit. Our present condition is paradoxical, because we exist in tension between the times. This means that we are by nature finite, and yet we participate through our hope in a delimited world to come. Moltmann says, “The Christian experience of the Spirit means

86 Ibid., 218.
87 TH, 224.
that we experience this life here as at once mortal and immortal, as at once transient and intransient, as at once temporal and eternal."\(^8\) Here we will look briefly at the several levels at which this statement is true in Moltmann's thinking.

First, we can understand ourselves to be immortal (in a sense) by means of our relatedness to God. Moltmann says, "How are we to understand this divine Spirit of life in human beings? It signifies a relatedness that is immortal...American process theology has also called this 'the objective immortality' of our life history."\(^89\) With the idea of objective immortality, borrowed from process theology, Moltmann indicates one way that humans might be considered immortal beings—in our relationship with God that will remain forever.\(^90\) But this is an entirely passive form of immortality. It is 'objective' but not necessarily 'subjective,' since it is a form of immortality which humans cannot expect to consciously experience after death.

By actively participating in the work of God's Spirit on earth, we attain to a new depth of relationship with God as we participate in a relationship that is itself eternal and that serves as an anticipation of the future of all things. Moltmann says, "The experience of the Spirit is the experience of the Shekinah, the indwelling of God: men and women become in their bodies the temple of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 6:13-20)."\(^91\) To experience God in the present, to be filled with the Spirit, is to participate in a partial way in that

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\(^8\) CofG, 71.

\(^89\) Ibid., 72-3.


\(^91\) GC, 96.
future indwelling of God in all things. Moltmann explains that this is a new kind of relatedness to God, beyond our given relationship as creature to creator.

A different divine presence is revealed in the experience of the Holy Spirit from the presence that is revealed in creation-in-the-beginning. First of all men and women in their physical nature (1 Cor. 6:13-20), and then the new heavens and the new earth (Rev. 21), will become the ‘temple’ which God himself indwells. That is the eternal sabbath: God’s rest, and rest in God. That is why the history of the Spirit points towards that consummation which Paul describes in the panentheistic-sounding formula: ‘that God may be all in all’ (1 Cor. 15:28).\(^{92}\)

To enter into this new kind of relationship with God’s Spirit has consequences for our experience of reality. “According to the testimony of the Bible, people’s first experience with God is the experience of an immense liberation—of being set free for life.”\(^{93}\) Moltmann explains that this event of internal and external liberation is properly understood in relation to both Christ and the universal Spirit of God—for these are two aspects of one movement of God in the world.

In the event in which believers are born again to become children of God and heirs of his kingdom, the efficacies of Christ and the efficacies of the Spirit interpenetrate. If we call this event *justification* we are describing it as the operation of Christ. If we call it *regeneration*, we are describing the operation of the Spirit. We need both viewpoints if we are to understand the event completely.\(^{94}\)

This personal experience of God’s Spirit represents a form of immortality, for the believer participates in a new kind of relationship to God, a relationship that properly belongs to the new creation of the world, and hence a relationship that endures. But even this personal experience of God is not yet the fullness of our participation in the future. It is only when we live in *active anticipation of the future Kingdom* that we attain to our full

\(^{92}\) SL, 212.

\(^{93}\) Ibid., 99.

\(^{94}\) Ibid., 153.
potential in relationship with God. For this relationship is not grasped as a thing in itself—it is primarily experienced as a co-laboring with God. It is in kingdom living that we reach our deepest relationship with the Spirit, because the Spirit presently subsists in just these kinds of co-participatory endeavors. Bauckham writes, “What is of greatest importance here for the understanding of Moltmann’s later development of pneumatology is that the Spirit is located historically between the resurrection of Jesus and the universal future of Christ… It mediates between the particular history of Jesus and the universal future of the world.”\textsuperscript{95} The presence of the Spirit is in the mediation of the present and the future, and so we enter truest relationship with God by locating ourselves in that same place.

Bauckham explains Moltmann’s view of the church in this way: “The church lives between the past history of Jesus and the universal future in which that history will reach its fulfillment: the former directs it in mission towards the latter.”\textsuperscript{96} The church is essentially the community that actively mediates between the present conditions of the world and God’s future. Moltmann says that “Christian ethics therefore have this Christian eschatology as their premise… (Isaiah 60:1): ‘Arise, become light, for your light is coming and the glory of the Lord is rising upon you.’”\textsuperscript{97} Bauckham illustrates Moltmann’s approach by showing that for mystical traditions, “God is experienced in turning inward and upward, while for Moltmann God is experienced in turning outward and forward.”\textsuperscript{98}

\textsuperscript{95} Bauckham, \textit{Theology of Moltmann}, 152.

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., 13.

\textsuperscript{97} Moltmann in Bauckham, \textit{God Will Be}, 266.

\textsuperscript{98} Bauckham, \textit{Theology of Moltmann}, 220.
For Moltmann, the idea of ‘Christian freedom’ has both personal and social aspects. But above all, he emphasizes that the highest form of freedom is ‘future.’ He says, “The definition of freedom to which Christian faith brings us goes even beyond freedom as sociality. We said that the faith of Christians is essentially the hope of resurrection. In the light of this hope, freedom is the creative passion for the possible… It is directed towards the future, the future of the coming God.” To live for this future is to live a life of true Christian freedom, and it is to this freedom that the church is called.

“What the church is about is something more than the church.” The events of the future belong to the whole cosmos, and not to one particular group of people—neither to Israel nor to the church. But this is not to downplay the significance of either Israel or the church. These particular groups have a special place in the story, by virtue of the fact that it has been given to them to bring the good news to the world and to embody the gospel insofar as they are able. Bauckham writes that, in Moltmann’s story, “the church is pars pro toto: a preliminary and fragmentary part of the coming whole (the universal kingdom), and so representative of the whole for the sake of the rest of the world whose future the whole is.”

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99 SL, 119.

100 ET, 15.

101 Poul Guttesen identifies “the non-exclusive relationship of the Church to the kingdom” as one of the “problems” implicit in Moltmann’s kingdom of God theology, implying that Moltmann compromises the “unique relationship between the kingdom and the Church.” Guttesen, “Theology of Moltmann and the Book of Revelation,” (PhD diss., St. Andrews University, 2006), 84-6. Guttesen is certainly right in his reading of the universality of the coming kingdom, but this does not imply that the church does not have a unique relationship to it. As we will see, in Moltmann’s view the church is in fact ‘elected’ to the vocation of anticipation — although this will probably not be enough to satisfy many readers. Also see Geicko Müller-Fahrenholz, The Kingdom and the Power: The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann, trans. John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), for the concern that universalism creates “ecclesiological problems” (102).

102 Bauckham, Theology of Moltmann, 145.
For Moltmann, election is to be understood not primarily as a special status for the elect, but as a vocation in the world. To be elect is to be given a mission in the world, and that mission it to anticipate the coming Kingdom of God in word and in deed. Moltmann says, “To live in anticipation means letting one’s own present be determined by the expected future of God’s kingdom and his righteousness and justice.” To anticipate the final Kingdom in history is to live as if it were the present reality, and to transform the present conditions of reality until they resemble the righteousness and justice of God. Moltmann reminds us, however, that our efforts in the present must not become a substitute for the future we await: “The anticipation of the kingdom is not yet the kingdom itself, but it is a life which is determined by that hope. It is a historical form of God’s kingdom.” As we have been describing it, then, the present historical form is to be called the kingdom in anticipation of the Kingdom.

But what does the anticipation of the Kingdom look like in concrete terms? First, it means that the believing community cannot accept any form of death—and especially not any form of preventable death. By ‘death’ we mean both physical death and any institutionalized structure that suppresses the flourishing of life in any of its forms. Moltmann explains that “hope, finally, means that we cannot come to terms with dying at all, or with any death whatsoever, but remain inconsolable until redemption comes.” So the church as a hoping community is fundamentally inconsolable and will agitate relentlessly for a change in what Moltmann describes as the present antagonistic conditions of immanence. Because life on this side of the eschaton will never be fully

103 Moltmann, God Will Be, 286.
104 Ibid.
105 Ibid.
reconciled, "the transcendence of the kingdom itself beyond all its anticipations keeps believers always unreconciled to present conditions, the source of continual new impulses for change."  

As long as there remains on the earth any condition of injustice, the people of God are to remain vigilant in opposition to that evil. Moltmann reminds us that this mandate encompasses not only the relationships between individuals or nations, but the relationship between humanity and the earth as well. "There can only be peace on the foundation of justice. Justice creates peace. This is also true of the relationship between human civilization and nature."  

In the church’s call to be ‘inconsolable’ in the face of death, we see both the tension and the unity inherent in Moltmann’s metaphysical narrative. In his understanding of the kind of world we inhabit, Moltmann has shown that death is a natural and inevitable part of the processes of life. And yet, here we encounter his admonition that the church not be reconciled with any kind of death whatsoever. How are these two teachings to be understood in light of each other? They are to be understood in terms of the hope that springs from the resurrection of Christ. Death is a natural part of the world. But the narrative of the world that Moltmann writes, derived as it is from a belief in God’s future, is a story that calls for hope beyond present realities. This is the point of Moltmann’s metaphysical narrative, and it is the reason why we have chosen to think together his philosophy of the world and his theology of the future in this way.

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106 Bauckham, Theology of Moltmann, 10.

107 WJC, 255.
4.6.2 The Church and Politics: De-Stabilizing World Systems

The unique role that Moltmann imagines for the church is tied to the nature of reality and reality’s future. This implies a new interpretation of church, because in Moltmann’s system the church does not exist so much for the saving of souls as it does for the concrete anticipation of the future of the earth. As we have seen, in Moltmann’s understanding the church of Christ is called to live this mission not only with respect to individual persons, but with respect to the structures of society as well. Our unwillingness to accept the present systems of death will make us a community that seeks revolution instead of one that seeks stability. This understanding of the mission of Christianity is possible in part because Moltmann doesn’t take ‘Christianity’ to be a goal in itself—the Kingdom of the future is the goal. So Christianity’s task is not to create or maintain itself, but to till the soil of history to make it ready for something new.108 As Moltmann says, “Being a Christian is not yet in itself the completion, but represents only a messianic path towards a possible future consummation of the condition of being human.”109

Based on this last statement, it may appear that Moltmann holds a rather low view of the church, understanding it as merely one ‘path’ among many leading toward God’s future, and this might be the case. But we must also point out that Moltmann does understand the church, along with Israel, to be a central feature of God’s creation project. He writes, “The Christian community is not one particular religious community among others. It is a small, resisting and steadfast witness to the coming reshaping of the whole present world system, like the Jewish community too.”110 The church finds its

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108 Cf. TH, 325.
109 GC, 8.
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significance in its calling to resist at all costs the present systems of death, in anticipation of God’s coming. The Christian church is to be a community with only one Lord and God, and that means it must actively renounce all other claims to those titles. “[Peace] with God brings us into continual conflict with the godless powers of this unpeaceful world. It is only in resistance to them that we can be in conformity with ‘the Lord our God.’”111 For Moltmann, there is no sense in which we are the church of Christ unless we are actively resisting the powers of the world that bring death.

This is a fundamentally new understanding of the role of the church. No longer is the Christian church to be understood as a purveyor of afterlife options, but it should be seen as an organized rebellion against world structures that promote death. This means, for Moltmann, that the primary mode of existence for the church is as a cultural destabilizer, inasmuch as stability leads to apathy in the face of injustice. “Here the task of Christianity today is not so much to oppose the ideological glorification of things, but rather to resist the institutional stabilizing of things, and by ‘raising the questions of meaning’ to make things uncertain and keep them moving and elastic in the process of history.”112 To faithfully serve our one Lord and God means, in concrete terms, a continual agitation and questioning of all systems which prevent the flourishing of life.

For Moltmann, this kind of theology and this kind of church inevitably takes sides in the political struggles of our time. His own theology was born in the midst of those struggles. He writes, “Early on, the political theology which Johann Baptist Metz and I developed from 1967 onwards released the ‘revolutionary spirit’ of the original Christian

110 CofG, 314.
111 ET, 174.
112 TH, 324.
faith.”\textsuperscript{113} For Moltmann, this revolutionary spirit means embracing as an ideology something like this: “Everyone according to his abilities—everyone according to his needs. That is the law of the truly humane society (Acts 4:32-35).”\textsuperscript{114} He recognizes that this kind of society comes at a cost, but it is a cost he deems acceptable. “The surrender of the privileges of the rich is not too high a price to pay for a humane society, with dignity and justice on both sides.”\textsuperscript{115}

What this means in terms of concrete political structures is not so obvious.

Moltmann wants to think beyond the present dualities and options of our world in order to imagine a new world order that would privilege all life, human and otherwise. One of his recent suggestions for a political structure is this:

If we look for an alternative to the individualism and the centralism of modern societies, the obvious course would seem to be to reconstruct these societies from below, starting from the local communities which people can survey, keep track of and live with, and where they can develop as persons... Society will become more humane and more creative in a federation of independent communities.\textsuperscript{116}

By structuring society with a more intimate, community-based approach, Moltmann thinks that the modern world has the best chance of maintaining human dignity as well as a connection with and care for the earth. If we try to reconcile this possible suggestion with Moltmann’s assertion that humanity must have only ‘one common future’ together, as we explored in chapter one of this paper, we sense that some practical problems might arise in the implementation of his suggestions here. Theoretically, there would need to be some way of giving small communities relative independence from one another while at

\textsuperscript{113} ET, 185.
\textsuperscript{114} SL, 194.
\textsuperscript{115} ET, 186.
\textsuperscript{116} SL, 252.
the same time assuring that all were working toward ‘one common future.’ How that might be accomplished is unclear.

Although it is probably not possible to nail down his political views using popular categories, Gorringe describes Moltmann’s position in this way: “To put words into his mouth, what emerges as a liberative politics is a feminist, Green socialism.”

Describing his own position, Moltmann prefers to speak only of a path that is qualitatively distinct from both liberal and conservative politics. “In order to gain space for innovatory action in history, every Christian eschatology must critically address and challenge both the conservative blockade of the future and the progressive occupation of the future.” In his view, the conservative impulse is to clamp down on all possible change for fear that the world is bordering on disaster at every moment. The progressive impulse is to co-opt the future to a linear, causal understanding of time, assuming that the future depends entirely on present action.

Aside from large-scale political structures, Moltmann focuses also on one other key issue for which he thinks the church must become an active proponent. This one key aspect of Moltmann’s vision for modern society involves the centrality of the Sabbath. He writes that “the Sabbath or Sunday interruptions of working time belong to the inalienable dignity of human beings, and are therefore not at the free disposal of arrangements about flexible working hours. They protect the dignity of men and women against the commercialization of their lives.”

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117 Gorringe in Bauckham, *God Will Be*, 112. Although we have not explored Moltmann’s views on gender equality in this paper, it is certainly the case that his acquired feminist (and generally liberative) sensibilities do drive a significant portion of his work.

118 Moltmann in Bauckham, *God Will Be*, 278.

119 Ibid., 229.
understanding of Sabbath as space for God’s future, there is also the issue of human rights in a free-market society. Here the operative principle is that human societies do not own their members, and it is not our right to use others or treat human beings as commodities in whatever form that might take. Our society should have built into it a weekly practice that reminds us that we wait for the liberation of the whole earth, and in waiting we ourselves are liberated from the oppressive powers of the common market. For Moltmann, these political and social struggles belong at the heart of what it means to be ‘church.’

4.7 Last Things: Parousia, Millennium and the Novum

Having explored the nature of the world and the story of God’s presence in it, we now turn our attention to God’s future and the aspects of Moltmann’s metaphysical narrative that have not yet occurred in world history. This is Moltmann’s answer to the critical question, ‘What do we hope for, and for what do we wait?’ According to Moltmann, we wait for the parousia of Christ, which will bring with it the millennial rule. And after this, the new creation—the novum. Moltmann understands this as an apocalyptic hope—a coming new revelation and movement of God in the world. This is not a faith in ‘progress’—this is a hope in God’s future. Moltmann writes, “Apocalypticism preserves the Christian doctrine of hope from facile optimism and from false prophets who say ‘peace, peace, when there is no peace’ (Jer. 8:11).” Moltmann locates the story he tells in the sphere of apocalyptic, but is always quick to show the

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121 CofG, 234.
ways that his vision diverges from a more popular understanding of the apocalyptic ‘end of the world.’ Primarily, he wants to make sure that his readers understand that we’re not talking about an apocalyptic destruction of this earth: “When we wait and hope for the new creation, we are not seeking another world; we are seeking for this world to be different.”

In Moltmann’s opinion, an apocalyptic interpretation of the future is the proper expression of authentic Christian (and Jewish) faith. But early on in the history of the church, this critical faith was subverted in capitulation to earthly powers. This represents a fundamental betrayal of the prophetic mission of the people of God, and Moltmann blames this capitulation for much of what he sees as the ineffectiveness of the gospel in terms of building a humane society.

But was it not also a sign that Christianity was becoming a civil religion when the expectation of the parousia lost its force and ceased to have anything to say to the enlightened world? Renunciation of hope for the messiah was the price the Jews paid for emancipation in modern society; and similarly, very early on, renunciation of hope for the parousia was the price paid for Christianity’s integration into the Roman empire.

Moltmann wants to correct this theological error by turning our attention back toward the parousia of Christ and the events to follow it. Moltmann asks, “What, then, does the future of Christ bring? Not a mere repetition of his history, and not only an unveiling of it, but something which has so far not yet happened through Christ.” It is not the case, as many have thought, that the future brings only the ‘unveiling’ of the present rule of Christ. For Christ clearly does not rule the earth in the present. What the

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122 Moltmann in Bauckham, God Will Be, 83.

123 WJC, 313.

124 TH, 228-9.
future brings is the actual rule of Christ on earth. And this implies a millenarian understanding that has become one of the more contested aspects of the story that Moltmann tells.

Does Moltmann believe that millenarian thinking is necessary for Christianity? Simply put, “historical millenarianism no—eschatological millenarianism yes.” In other words, he thinks that we must believe in a literal reign of Christ in the future, following the parousia. This is necessary to put right what is wrong in the present, before the final new creation. This is an ‘eschatological millenarianism.’ But the idea of an ‘historical millenarianism’ (or sometimes ‘presentative millenarianism’) is another thing altogether—an idea that Moltmann thinks has done much damage to the world, especially when the church has arrogantly assumed itself to represent the millennial rule of Christ on earth. “The presentative millenarianism of the holy rule, the holy empire and ‘the Christian era’ must be dispelled. Hope as the embracing category has to be freed from the wreckage of Christian history.” In Moltmann’s view, “It is not the disappointment that was for two thousand years Christianity’s chief problem; it was the fulfillment.” By this he means that the great trouble with the church has not been the delay of Christ’s return, but the church’s assumption that it represents Christ’s rule on earth.

The idea of a coming millennial rule has been historically neglected in mainstream theology, but nonetheless Moltmann finds it to be essential to the full Christian story. Bauckham writes that “Moltmann brings the millennium in from the

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125 CoF, 192.

126 Ibid., xv. This does not means that Moltmann denies all experience of the rule of God on earth. His intention here is to correct what he considers to be the exaggerated understanding that the church or the holy empire is God’s kingdom on earth.

127 Ibid., 148.
margins to which the mainstream theological tradition has assigned it and fully into the
sphere of properly theological concerns and assessment.”\textsuperscript{128} In the biblical origin of this
concept, Moltmann distinguishes between two ‘resurrections,’ especially in Paul (cf. Phil.
3). “The resurrection from the dead necessarily leads into a reign of Christ before the
universal raising of the dead for the Last Judgment. That is to say, it leads into a
messianic kingdom in history before the end of the world, or into a transitional kingdom
leading from this transitory world-time to the new world that is God’s.”\textsuperscript{129} Bauckham
understands this to mean that “this is a ‘transitional kingdom’ leading from this transitory
world-time to the new world that is God’s. It is not yet the kingdom of glory, which
comes when Christ hands back the kingdom to the Father.”\textsuperscript{130}

Some, and notably Volf and Bauckham, have wondered out loud if the millennial
rule of Christ is necessary to Moltmann’s story of creation in the first place. Why, they
wonder, must there be a ‘transitional kingdom’ before the final new creation of all
things—the novum? Bauckham says, “The fundamental question we shall have to ask is
whether the idea of the millennium fulfills a theological need which Moltmann’s
understanding of the new creation of all things cannot fulfill.”\textsuperscript{131} This seems to be a
legitimate question, because on some readings of Moltmann the millennial rule represents
just an awkward middle ground that seems to be a complication of the story. Moltmann,
however, has maintained his position, in part because he believes the transitional
kingdom of Christ is necessary to bring justice to the world for the oppressed—and this is

\textsuperscript{128} Bauckham, \textit{God Will Be}, 123.

\textsuperscript{129} CoFG, 195.

\textsuperscript{130} Bauckham, \textit{God Will Be}, 22.

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 134.
necessary because, in Moltmann’s vision of the novum, final judgment means life for all, including the oppressors. This argument will likely not satisfy the critics of Moltmann’s idea of the millennial rule of Christ, but Moltmann has made it clear that this remains an important aspect of the story he wishes to tell.

4.7.1 Universal Salvation

Throughout his theology, Moltmann maintains the deep conviction that the end of this story includes a universal new creation and a universal salvation. In the following quotation he describes why he thinks a universalism of Christ’s resurrection is necessary:

The millenarianism founded on Christ’s resurrection from the dead has as result the universalism of eternal life: ‘Behold, I make all things new’ (Rev. 21:5). The millenarianism founded on legalistic, apocalyptic ideas of judgment results in the separation of humanity into believers and unbelievers, and ultimately into the saved and the damned... In the first viewpoint christology dominates the eschatology; in the second, the apocalyptic eschatology that is presupposed dominates the christology.132

For Moltmann, the way to reconcile the resurrection hope with the idea of God’s judgment is to transform the concept of judgment itself. In his opinion, judgment can become a hope-filled idea, although in the course of Christian interpretation it has tended to go another direction. Moltmann condemns this misappropriation of judgment when he writes that

the medieval pictures of judgment disseminated fear and terror in order that tempted men and women should seek comfort and salvation in the means of grace provided by the church... Because psychologically it has done so much to poison

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132 CofG, 196. We should note at this point that when Moltmann says he intends for ‘christology’ to rule eschatology, we cannot understand this to mean ‘what Jesus said according to the scriptures,’ for Jesus clearly made statements about apocalyptic judgment and separation of the sheep from the goats. Rather, we must understand ‘christology’ here to mean something like ‘the kind of hope that emerges from the fact of Christ’s resurrection.’ Although we do not find this explanation in Moltmann’s writing, it seems to agree with his overall preference for seeking ‘the matter of scripture’ throughout his theology.
the idea of God, it is high time to discover the gospel of God’s judgment and to awaken joy in God’s coming righteousness and justice.\(^\text{133}\) Recognizing the centrality of judgment to any Christian eschatology, Moltmann will set about to re-formulate the concept, showing it to be truly ‘good news’ for the world.

The good news of God’s judgment begins with the recognition that “judgment is not God’s last word. Judgment establishes in the world divine righteousness on which the new creation is to be built. But God’s last word is ‘Behold, I make all things new’ (Rev. 21:5). From this no one is excepted.”\(^\text{134}\) Judgment, then, is not an end in itself, but sets the conditions for a new universal righteousness. The judgment of God precedes the novum—the new creation—and serves to vindicate the oppressed and name the evil of the world for what it is. It is a condemnation of everything that kills in a world of transience—but it is not the condemnation of the oppressors themselves, only the part they have played in the world system.

Moltmann recognizes that his notion of universal salvation is a highly controversial point. Despite the common assumption that a more conservative understanding of judgment is supported by the biblical witness, Moltmann actually believes the scriptures to be on his side in this case. He reminds us that “in their dispute with Barth, Brunner and Ebeling appealed purely and simply to ‘the scriptures’ or ‘the Bible,’ going on to reject the doctrine of universal salvation as speculative theology. Evangelical and fundamentalist theologians still argue in just the same way today.”\(^\text{135}\) But, he argues, the problem here is precisely the way that the scriptures have been used in

\(^{133}\) Ibid., 235.

\(^{134}\) Moltmann in Bauckham, God Will Be, 47.

\(^{135}\) CofG, 240.
the debate. In fact, "universal salvation and a double outcome of judgment are... both well attested biblically. So the decision for the one or the other cannot be made on the basis of 'scripture.'” Deciding this debate, for Moltmann, is not a matter of accumulating proof texts, but is a matter of tracing the general trajectory of the gospel of the resurrection—a task which necessitates speculation but which may be more closely in touch with 'the matter of scripture' itself.

So on Moltmann's reading of the scriptures, the judgment of God remains. But this judgment becomes hope for the oppressed and the oppressor both. "The eschatological point of the proclamation of 'the Last Judgment' is the redeeming kingdom of God. Judgment is the side of the eternal kingdom that is turned towards history." We might say that the concept of judgment represents God's 'no' to the sin of the world, but it functions only to lay the foundation for his universal 'yes' to all that he had made. "The judgment of the living and the dead is one more reason to hope for Christ's coming; it is not a subject for fear. The Judge who is expected is the One who gave himself up for sinners and who suffered the pains and sicknesses of men and women." With this understanding of judgment in mind, the Christian proclamation becomes a joyous celebration of God's righteousness and justice and good news to all who will hear it. "The Last Judgment is not a terror. In the truth of Christ it is the most wonderful thing that can be proclaimed to men and women. It is a source of endlessly

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136 Ibid., 241.
137 Ibid., 255.
138 WJC, 315.
consoling joy to know, not just that the murderers will finally fail to triumph over their victims, but that they cannot in eternity even remain the murderers of their victims.”

To fully grasp the end of the creation story in Moltmann’s theology, we must also understand that this salvation is coming, not just to the world of humans, but to all of creation. Moltmann insists that “faith in God the Creator cannot be reconciled with the apocalyptic expectation of a total annihilation mundi. What accords with this faith is the expectation and active anticipation of the transformatio mundi.” According to this idea of total transformation, we cannot understand a resurrection of only humans in the end, but we must recognize in this event a resurrection of all of creation, everything that has ever existed. Moltmann characterizes this raising of everything by explaining it as a movement beyond transience. “Redemption is the final new creation of all things out of their sin, transitoriness and mortality, for everlasting life, enduring continuance and eternal glory. The new creation is not without any presuppositions, like creation-in-the-beginning. It presupposes what is old, and is therefore seen pre-eminently in the raising of the dead.”

What does this mean for a creation that Moltmann has affirmed to be genuinely temporal by design? It means not that time will cease, but that time will become eternal. It means not that there will be no process and no progression in eternity, but that all the times will be fulfilled and brought together at once. Bauckham interprets Moltmann’s eternity in this way: “Eternity is not static. Creation, redeemed and healed from all evil and suffering, will live in a new kind of time. This must be a time in which temporal

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139 CofG, 255.
140 GC, 93.
141 SL, 9.
movement does not entail the loss of the before as one moves on into the after... Nothing is any longer lost, but more may be added.  

Corresponding to the present metaphysics of the world as he has described it, Moltmann thinks that in ‘eternal time’ God and creation will continue to move into the new possibilities of the future. Temporality itself does not end. But the difference between the ‘time of transience’ and this new ‘eternal time’ is striking: while in the present time of creation, the past is gone and is accessible only to memory, in their eternal fulfillment all beings will possess the reality of their past immediately. The whole of life—all lives—will be present at once, not in a static or monolithic sense, but in a sense of completeness that does not rule-out continued new experiences and continuing creation. Together in full partnership with God, all of creation will continue forward into the possibilities of ‘future,’ leaving nothing in the past. Riches upon riches, from one glory to the next.

This is the destiny of all things, because, as Moltmann thinks, this was God’s plan from the beginning. “The ‘traces’ of God in nature and human existence are a reflection of the coming new creation of all things. Not every soul is ‘Christian by nature,’ but every soul is by nature made and destined to be the image of God and to participate in his eternal kingdom.” To be Christian is not to be saved now, but to now participate in the

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143 This leaves open the question of what happens to the memory of evil. In this description of ‘eternal time’ as Moltmann develops it, it seems likely that no memory will be permanently erased, but rather the emptiness, the god-forsakenness and evil, of various memories will be filled by an overwhelming hope of a future with God. For this conclusion, it is important to remember that Moltmann does not portray good and evil as opposing universal forces – he speaks in terms of goodness and nothingness, *nihil*. Evil understood as *emptiness* can be ‘filled and fulfilled’ in a way that evil as a metaphysical reality can never be.

144 ET, 73.
life of that Spirit who will one day save the world. “The Spirit of the resurrection who acts in Christ, and through him in human beings, is also the Spirit who brings all living creatures into the springtime of eternal life.” And when the final day comes, and the new creation of God arrives from God’s future, the whole universe will at last find its place in the midst of the relationships of the Trinity—the final home prepared for all before the foundation of the world. “The new creation will not only manifest the liberty of the children of God. It will also bring ‘the deification of the cosmos’ through the unhindered participation of all created beings in the livingness of God.”

4.7.2 The Consummation of Creation in God: Sabbath and Shekinah

The goal of this history of creation is not a return to the paradisal primordial condition. Its goal is the revelation of the glory of God. It is true that this end ‘corresponds’ to the beginning in the sense that it represents the fulfillment of the real promise implanted in creation itself; but the new creation of heaven and earth in the kingdom of glory surpasses everything that can now be told about creation in the beginning.

The end of this creation story is not just the re-establishment of a world before the Fall. It is not just a ‘problem solved’—it is a consummation, a completion. God’s initial creation in the beginning did not have itself as its final goal, but it was a project originating in the very being of God which would seek its final completion in God. Ultimately, the end of the project is reflected in the beginning: the panentheistic relationship between God and world that began with the creation of a world within God and that ends with the complete interpenetration of God and the universe. The goal of

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145 WJC, 253.
146 CofG, 92.
147 GC, 207.
God’s creation project is that, after all is finished, God will have a new partner and an
infinite array of fulfilled relationships with all the work of his hands. “In order not to
celebrate alone, God created the heavens and the earth…”148 Another way to describe this
consummation is in terms of *perichoresis*—a term usually reserved for the Trinity but
transformed by Moltmann to describe the final relationship between God and creation.
This means also the full indwelling of God in his universe. For creation, “the coming
presence of God in his creation is also the redemption, transfiguration and eternal life of
all creatures,” and for God this means “the de-restriction of his omnipresence which had
been self-restricted in relation to the present creation.”149

Bauckham recognizes that, for Moltmann, the new creation is the point at which
God and creation both come to their desired place of rest. “The eschatological Sabbath is
also the cosmic Shekinah.”150 In Moltmann’s understanding of the present conditions of
history, God is cut off from himself in his journeys with creation, that is, in his Shekinah.
God suffers the conditions of transience in order to come into his own final rest—his
Sabbath—alongside the whole of the universe. His Shekinah, his willed presence in the
world, is reunited to God only at the time when the whole being of God fills the world.
“Once God finds his dwelling place in creation, creation loses its space outside God and
attains to its place in God.”151 This eschatological event has equal significance with
respect to both God and creation. God comes to rest when God fills all of creation, and
creation comes to rest when it loses its distance from God. In the end is Sabbath for all,

150 Ibid., 25.
when both God and creation may live without the previous tension within and between
themselves. When this time comes, "created beings participate in the divine attributes of
eternity and omnipresence, just as the indwelling God has participated in their limited
time and their restricted space, taking them upon himself." 152

Moltmann uses the imagery of the butterfly emerging from its cocoon to imagine
this new beginning for all things. "Created beings emerge out of time into the aeon of the
divine glory through the raising of the dead and the cosmic annihilation of the power of
death. Then all things will be brought back again in time, and will be gathered
together." 153 What comes next? None can say. But now that God's dream for creation has
been realized in his union with the world, the real adventure is about to begin:

It is also even permissible to assume that in the kingdom of glory there will be
time and history, future and possibility, and these to an unimpeded degree, and in
a way that is no longer ambivalent. Instead of timeless eternity it would therefore
be better to talk about 'eternal time'; and instead of 'the end of history' we should
talk about the end of pre-history and the beginning of the 'eternal history' of God,
human beings and nature. 154

152 Ibid.
153 WJC, 329.
154 GC, 213.
Conclusion

From the beginning, it has been clear that Moltmann writes his theology for the express purpose of changing the world. He believes that the proper task of theology is to address systems of death with a life-giving Christian story, rooted in the promises of God for the future of creation. As a result, throughout his many theological writings we can discern a grand story taking shape—a metaphysical narrative of creation that seeks to explain both what kind of world this is and where it is going. Moltmann has said that “the transforming mission requires in practice a certain Weltanschauung, a confidence in the world and a hope for the world.” By telling a story about God and the world that includes both a general metaphysics and a specific narrative, Moltmann has sought to provide his readers with a comprehensive Weltanschauung so that the people of God might be consoled in this vision, and empowered to do the work of God on earth.

As we have seen, the kind of story that Moltmann chooses to write is partially determined by his own approach to theology and his own assumptions about the relative authority of tradition, the Bible, and the Spirit of God at work in the world. By understanding theology as ‘imagination for the kingdom of God’ and feeling unconstrained by many traditional sources of authority as he does, Moltmann has set out to write a story that is more creative and experimental than many of his readers will be comfortable with. In this story he combines insights about the modern world with

\[1\text{ TH, 288.}\]
resources he finds in the Bible and in various mystical Jewish doctrines. The result is a synthetic story of creation that is not taken wholly from one tradition or another, but which he believes to be powerful enough to bring new hope and life to the world.

In Chapter 2 we examined what kind of creation Moltmann believes this world to be. First of all, it is a creation that emerges through a thoroughly trinitarian process, and this origin leaves the mark of relationality on creation itself. The universe is process-oriented by nature, and this involves an understanding of creation as genuinely temporal. The future is not determined, but it exists only as possibility. Creation moves out into this future in a way that is un-coerced by God. Creation evolves freely, and the only ‘master plan’ implicit in the metaphysics of the world is the tendency toward community and relationship in all that exists. Moltmann believes that this kind of world is best suited to the purposes of the Trinity, because a free world is able to reciprocate love freely. God’s intention in creating a world within himself is that this world would ultimately join in the life of God’s own being.

In Chapter 3 we realized the inherent tension between the kind of world God created and his goal for that world. The tension is in the freedom of the world itself. This kind of world stands over against God as a genuine ‘other,’ and God has chosen to give it this space for the sake of authentic relationship. But implicit in the panentheistic origins of the world is the panentheistic completion of the world as well—that God might be all in all and that creation might participate freely in his own triune life. Moltmann seeks to solve this tension through a variation on his general philosophy of time. Just as in historical time the world moves freely into the boundless sphere of possibility that is ‘future,’ so God’s future stands above all three modes of historical time as the
transcendent possibility for history itself. As such it represents a ‘future beyond all futures’ and is not subject to the metaphysics of the created order. By placing our hope in this eschatological future that comes from God, we can hope for a reality that is beyond the realm of possibility in the present order. Specifically, we can hope to be raised from the dead just as Jesus was raised from the dead.

In Chapter 4 we saw how both of these critical aspects of Moltmann’s theology come together in a comprehensive metaphysical narrative that is able to take into account both the present conditions of the world and a future that has not yet dawned. This story of the world, in its past and future dimensions, is the story of God in the world. In Moltmann’s kind of eschatological panentheism, the beginning of the universe within the being of God corresponds to the progressive interpenetration of God and world in the story that follows. As Moltmann sees it, from the very beginning of this story the Spirit of God has been present in creation drawing all life into community with God. This same Spirit spoke through the prophets of Israel and was manifest most fully in the person of Jesus Christ, in whom, as Moltmann says, ‘the Shekinah found its abiding dwelling place.’ In the absence of Jesus, this Spirit is now present in the people of God as the Spirit of Hope. By virtue of the raising of Christ, we anticipate the raising of the whole creation in the powers of this same Spirit. In the end, all is raised into the very life of Godself, and the panentheistic vision is complete.

As Miller and Grenz have pointed out, throughout Moltmann’s story we can discern a “scarlet metaphysical thread” that can be called an “eschatological ontology.”

Indeed, it has been the central thesis of this paper that this metaphysical thread is not

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incidental to Moltmann’s project but is in fact a determining feature of the narrative itself, just as the narrative, in its own way, functions to fulfill what is lacking in the metaphysics. The story that Moltmann writes involves the convergence of Christian doctrine, biblical imagery, concern for the present conditions of the world, and, interestingly, a passionate argument for a particular ontology of the universe. The project he is engaged in is vast, and touches on most aspects of life and knowledge. And, as we have seen, it is a project in which metaphysics and narrative depend on one another and condition one another throughout. Only by understanding these two aspects of Moltmann’s project together and in light of one another can we understand the comprehensive nature of the Weltanschauung he has tried to provide.
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VITA

Bob Zurinsky lives in the state of Washington in the U.S.A. He works in Campus Ministries at Seattle Pacific University. He loves being outside, cooking food, and listening to Björk.