

THE FUNCTION OF THE TRINITY IN MOLTMANN'S ECOLOGICAL DOCTRINE OF CREATION

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ACCORDING TO Jürgen Moltmann, "In the 1930's, the problem of the doctrine of creation was knowledge of God. Today the problem of the doctrine of God is knowledge of creation. The theological adversary then was the religious and political ideology of 'blood and soil', 'race and nation'. Today the theological adversary is the nihilism practised in our dealings with nature. Both perversions have been evoked by the unnatural will to power. . . ."¹

Moltmann's ecological doctrine of creation sees God's Spirit "in all created beings." To understand this, Moltmann has interwoven the first three articles of the Apostles' Creed in a trinitarian sense in order to "develop a pneumatological doctrine of creation. This doctrine of creation . . . takes as its starting point the indwelling divine Spirit of creation."² This thinking, Moltmann hopes, will provide a more holistic philosophy of nature. The word "ecology" means "the doctrine of the house." Moltmann's point is that if we see creation only as God's "work," such a doctrine will make little sense, but "if we understand the Creator, his creation, and the goal of that creation in a trinitarian sense, then the Creator through his Spirit *dwells in* his creation as a whole, and in every individual created being, by virtue of his Spirit holding them together and keeping them in life."³ As the inner secret of creation is this indwelling of God, the purpose of Shekinah (God's indwelling) is "to make the whole creation the house of God."⁴ To this theological side of

¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985) xi; hereafter abbreviated *Creation*.

² *Ibid.* xii. Among other things, this thinking eventually leads to these conclusions: (1) "The Spirit is the principle of evolution" (*Creation* 100); (2) "The Spirit is the holistic principle . . . he creates interactions, . . . co-operation and community [and] is the 'common Spirit of creation'"; (3) "The Spirit is the principle of individuation. . ." Therefore "self-preservation and self-transcendence are two sides of the process in which life evolves. They are not mutual contradictions. They complement one another" (*ibid.* 100).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.* xiii. In connection with the notion of Shekinah (*Creation* 90 ff.), Moltmann advocates the kabbalistic tradition of Judaism, which he adopts from Isaac Luria with its divine *zimzum* (God's self-limitation); the essential problem with this doctrine is that its pantheistic and emanationist understanding of creation obliterates the traditional distinction between God and the world by making nothing the condition of the possibility of God's

the doctrine of creation there corresponds an anthropological side, i.e. existence can become a home only if the stresses and strains between human beings and nature are overcome in a viable symbiosis.

Moltmann sees his ecological doctrine of creation as corresponding to his social doctrine of the Trinity presented in his *The Trinity and the Kingdom*. In that work Moltmann attempted to reconceive the Trinity panentheistically in terms of "relationships and communities" and "out of the doctrine of the Trinity."⁵

By taking up panentheistic ideas from the Jewish and the Christian traditions, we shall try to think *ecologically* about God, man and the world in their relationships and indwellings. In this way it is not merely the Christian *doctrine* of the Trinity that we are trying to work out anew; our aim is to develop and practise trinitarian thinking as well.⁶

Such thinking avoids Kant's view that "nothing whatever can be gained for practical purposes, even if one comprehended it [the doctrine of the Trinity]";⁷ it also avoids starting from a general concept of one divine substance, because then "natural theology's definition . . . becomes a prison for the statements made by the theology of revelation."⁸ Such a doctrine of the Trinity would disintegrate into "abstract monotheism." Moltmann compares this to what he believes is Aquinas' idea that when we abstract from the trinitarian Persons "what remains for thought is the one divine nature. It is this . . . which is in general to be called 'God,' not the three Persons, or only one of them."⁹ Finally, Moltmann hopes to avoid Hegel's idea of God as absolute subject, i.e. one subject—three modes of being; here the trinitarian concept of person is replaced by mode of being, and in Moltmann's view this leads to modalism, i.e. "to the reduction of the doctrine of the Trinity to monotheism."¹⁰ Neither a "return to the earlier Trinity of substance" nor adopting a more modern "subject" Trinity is a viable option; instead, he suggests that we refrain from beginning with God's unity [as has been the custom in the West] and commence "with the trinity of the Persons and . . . then go on to ask about the unity." What then emerges is "a concept of the divine unity as the union of the triunity."¹¹ In his doctrine of creation he is presenting

action *ad extra* (cf. *The Trinity* [n. 5 below] 109 ff.). Thus Moltmann writes: "God withdraws into himself in order to go out of himself. He 'creates' the preconditions for the existence of his creation by withdrawing his presence and his power. . . . Nothingness emerges" (*Creation* 87). For Moltmann "The doctrine of the Shekinah is the logical result of making God's pathos the starting point" (*Trinity* 30).

⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom, The Doctrine of God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981) 19; hereafter abbreviated *Trinity*.

⁶ *Ibid.* 19–20.

⁷ *Ibid.* 6.

⁸ *Ibid.* 17.

⁹ *Ibid.* 16.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 18.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 19.

“the corresponding ecological doctrine of creation.”¹² In both works Moltmann suggests that we “cease to understand God monotheistically as the one, absolute subject, but instead see him in a trinitarian sense as the *unity* of the Father, the Son and the Spirit.”¹³

I hope to show how this thinking leads Moltmann to reinterpret the doctrines of the Trinity and of creation. In addition, I hope to show that the choice between monotheism and trinitarianism as Moltmann conceives it is neither required nor possible when the triune God is recognized as the one God who does not surrender His deity in His actions *ad extra*. Indeed, I believe that one can say it is as the one absolute subject that God creates and maintains the world in existence through the Son and the Spirit without being a Hegelian, as long as a clear distinction is drawn between the immanent and the economic Trinity. Since God remains God, it would have to be God alone who is and remains the *only* divine subject in the encounter with creatures. His actions would never become dependent upon those of His creatures, since such a view is workable only if divine and human being are confused and one falls directly into the Feuerbachian dilemma. I intend to explore Moltmann’s method and conclusions regarding the God-world relation with a view toward assessing whether and to what extent his revision of the traditional doctrines clarifies or obscures the being of God the Creator, the Lord and Giver of life of the familiar Nicene Creed.

METHOD AND PROBLEM

Moltmann contends that traditional theology has emphasized duality, i.e. creation *and* redemption, creation *and* covenant, necessity *and* freedom, nature *and* grace. Accordingly, grace presupposes and perfects nature but does not destroy it. Moltmann says this is captured by Rahner’s phraseology “that anthropology is ‘deficient christology’ and christology is ‘realized anthropology.’”¹⁴ He believes that the second part of the proposition fails to distinguish “grace and glory, history and new creation, being a Christian and being perfected,” and has led to “triumphalism,” i.e. “the glory which perfects nature is supposed already inherent in the grace.”¹⁵ While I agree with Moltmann that triumphalism must be avoided, I shall suggest, against his view, that triumphalism would follow only if the glory which perfects nature is supposed somehow inherent in nature or some synthesis of nature and grace. In other words, there would be a problem with this position only if nature and grace were not clearly distinguished and then united.

Moltmann recommends that we say that grace does not perfect nature

¹² *Creation* 2.

¹³ *Ibid.* 2; *Trinity*, chap. 1.

¹⁴ *Creation* 7.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

but prepares nature for eternal glory. Thus, as Christ's resurrection is the beginning of the new creation of the world, we must speak of nature and grace in a "forward perspective" in light of the "coming glory, which will complete *both nature and grace*."¹⁶ The dualities will no longer be defined over against one another; "they will be determined in all their complex interconnections in relation to a third, common to them both."¹⁷ That third is conceived by Moltmann as the *process* common to both, and when this is seen, we will have a reconciliation of opposites such as freedom and necessity, grace and nature, and finally covenant and creation. It is this common process which I believe identifies God with creation and thus fails to distinguish the above-mentioned dualities in the long run. Among many problems which result from this thinking is the idea that Christ's Lordship is provisional; it will be complete only in the kingdom of glory when the Son transfers the, as yet, incomplete kingdom to the Father.

With this transfer the lordship of the Son ends . . . it means the consummation of his sonship . . . all Jesus' titles of sovereignty—Christ, *kyrios*, prophet . . .—are *provisional* titles, which express Jesus' significance for salvation in time. But the name of Son remains to all eternity.¹⁸

Moltmann also contends that

Without the difference between Creator and creature, creation cannot be conceived at all; *but this difference is embraced and comprehended by the greater truth* which is what the creation narrative really comes down to, because it is the truth from which it springs: *the truth that God is all in all*. This does not imply a pantheistic dissolution of creation in God; it means the final form which creation is to find in God.¹⁹

The problem is that if the difference is embraced in this way, one could argue, as Moltmann does, that since God and creatures mutually coexist, the kingdom of glory arises from the history of suffering, which, according to the kabbalistic doctrine of creation, God makes part of Himself in order to create and to redeem; it follows that redemption then cannot be viewed as a free new act of God in creating a new heaven and a new earth.

Thus "It is from the apotheosis of the Lamb that the kingdom of glory comes into being."²⁰ This differs from John's Gospel, which traces the origin of Jesus' glory to his relation with the Father as one who was full of grace and truth as the Word who was God (Jn 1:1, 1:14–18). Believers in the Word incarnate would see God's glory, while those who refused to

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 8, emphasis mine.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Trinity* 92.

¹⁹ *Creation* 89, emphasis mine.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 90.

believe did so because they "look to each other for glory and are not concerned with the glory that comes from the one God" (Jn 5:43). The kingdom of glory, in Moltmann's view, comes into existence from within history and cannot be identical with God's self-sufficient glory revealed in the cross and resurrection. He argues that "God and the world are then involved in a common redemptive process." God participates in the world's pain; thus "we need God's compassion and God needs ours." Finally, "God himself becomes free in the process . . . even God himself will only be free when our souls are free."²¹ While Moltmann says God does not act out of deficiency of being,²² it is precisely here that God's being is indeed deficient by virtue of His need for redemption, glory, and freedom. This thinking results from Moltmann's conviction that "The trinitarian concept of creation integrates the elements of truth in monotheism and pantheism" by enabling us to "find an integrating view of God and nature which will draw them both *into the same vista*. It is only this that can exert a liberating influence on nature and human beings."²³

The question which is being raised here, then, is whether there can be a process common to both nature and grace, freedom and necessity, etc. which encompasses them and determines their present and future meaning without obliterating the distinction between God and the world. For Moltmann this process is both possible and necessary because his theological starting point is a version of pantheism, which maintains that we cannot cling to any distinction between the immanent and the economic Trinity. Thus "The economic Trinity not only reveals the immanent Trinity; it also has a retroactive effect on it,"²⁴ principally because, in the words of Unamuno, "A God who cannot suffer cannot love either . . . only that which suffers is divine."²⁵ Hence

*Christian pantheism . . . started from the divine essence: creation is a fruit of God's longing for 'his Other' and for that Other's free response to the divine love. That is why the idea of the world is inherent in the nature of God himself from eternity. For it is impossible to conceive of a God who is not a creative God. A non-creative God would be imperfect . . . if God's eternal being is love, then divine love is also more blessed in giving than in receiving. God cannot find bliss in eternal self-love if selflessness is part of love's very nature.*²⁶

Moltmann rejects identifying the world process with God as he believes this took place in the speculative theology of the 19th century,²⁷ arguing

²¹ *Trinity* 39. Moltmann asks, "Does God really not need those whom in the suffering of his love he loves unendingly?" (ibid. 53). For the same idea see *Creation* 82 ff.

²² *Trinity* 23.

²³ *Creation* 98, emphasis mine.

²⁴ *Trinity* 160.

²⁵ Ibid. 38.

²⁶ Ibid. 106, emphasis mine.

²⁷ Ibid. 106-7. See also *Creation* 103, where Moltmann explains that the German romantics such as Goethe have turned people into indifferentists with their pantheism. He

that "In order to understand the history of mankind as a history *in* God, the distinction between the world process and the inner-trinitarian process must be maintained and emphasized."²⁸

Yet, given the fact that it is impossible to conceive of a God who is not creative and who cannot find bliss in His eternal self-love, the question arises as to whether, in this reasoning, there can be an inner-trinitarian process distinct from that trinitarian thinking which defines God's love as selflessness and which then insists that God cannot have existed without being the Creator.

The problem here is captured succinctly by Etienne Gilson in his analysis of Descartes's natural theology: "Now it is quite true that a creator is an eminently Christian God, but a God whose very essence is to be a creator is not a Christian God at all. The essence of the true Christian God is not to create but to be. 'He who is' can also create, if he chooses; but he does not exist because he creates . . . he can create because he supremely is."²⁹ According to Gilson, the most striking characteristic of Descartes's "stillborn God" was that "the God of Christianity" had been "reduced to the condition of a philosophical principle" and that "The most striking characteristic of such a God was that his creative function had integrally absorbed his essence."³⁰ Despite the fact that objections could be raised to Gilson about how the nature of "He who is" is to be conceived (i.e., does God supremely exist merely as an act of existence whose essence is to be, or as the triune God who knows and loves Himself in the freedom of transcendence which is His alone?), the question he raises here is decisive.³¹ It concerns the fact that God is free and does not need to create in order to be God. It concerns the distinction between the eternal being of God and His free but real relations with the world.

NECESSITY AND FREEDOM

Moltmann certainly recognizes and actually seeks to avoid this problem when he writes:

believes he has overcome this by saying, "everything is not God; but God is everything" (ibid.). But all he actually has done is rejected a simple pantheistic identification of God's Spirit with matter and identified this instead with "the overriding harmony of the relations" which he finds at work in history and nature (ibid. 103). We have here a more complex "relational" identity which can discern "future transcendence, evolution, and intentionality," but it is still an identity and not a relationship between essentially distinct beings, i.e. Creator and creatures.

²⁸ *Trinity* 107.

²⁹ Etienne Gilson, *God and Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University, 1979) 88.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 89.

³¹ This is the gist of Moltmann's objection to Aquinas' view of the Trinity as "one divine substance"; he calls this abstract monotheism.

The later theological interpretation of creation as *creatio ex nihilo* is therefore unquestionably an apt paraphrase of what the Bible means by 'creation'. Wherever and whatever God creates is without any preconditions. *There is no external necessity which occasions his creativity, and no inner compulsion which could determine it.* Nor is there any primordial matter whose potentiality is pre-given to his creative activity, and which would set him material limits.³²

But his pantheism causes him to ascribe an inner compulsion to God's nature which he himself recognizes the *creatio ex nihilo* intended to exclude. Hence in answering this question Moltmann writes: "If we lift the concept of necessity out of the context of compulsive necessity and determination by something external, then in God *necessity* and *freedom* coincide; they are what is for him axiomatic, self-evident. For God it is axiomatic to love, for he cannot deny himself. For God it is axiomatic to love freely, for he is God."³³ Therefore God is not "his own prisoner" and remains true to Himself.

The only problem with this reasoning is that it constrains Moltmann to suppose that in loving the world God is "entirely himself."³⁴ This means that since He cannot but will the good, He has no choice in communicating Himself to His creation. Thus God's own self-determination is "an essential *emanation* of his goodness."³⁵ This view follows Moltmann's hermeneutical presupposition, which is that "the eternal origin of God's creative and suffering love" must include "God's free self-determination, and *at the same time* the overflowing of his goodness, which belongs to his essential nature."³⁶ And this synthesis of God's act [of will] and being resulted from Moltmann's belief that the Neoplatonic

³² *Creation* 74; see also 75: "The world was created neither out of pre-existent matter nor out of the divine Being itself." This is why he rejects Tillich's understanding of creation (ibid. 80). Moltmann thinks Tillich's abolition of the divine self-differentiation from creation is the monism and pantheism Christians must reject (ibid. 84).

³³ *Trinity* 107.

³⁴ Ibid. 55. This supposition follows from his method, and it is worth noting the striking similarity between his conclusion and the view of the Incarnation offered by Ludwig Feuerbach: "there is nothing more in the nature of God than in the incarnate manifestation of God. . . . The Incarnation . . . is therefore no mysterious composition of contraries . . ." (Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* [New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957] 56). Also, "The love of God to man is an essential condition of the Divine Being: God is a God who loves me—who loves man in general" (ibid. 57).

³⁵ *Creation* 83.

³⁶ Ibid., emphasis mine. It is this "at the same time" that is the heartbeat of all pantheism. E.g., Meister Eckhart proposed that "at the same time and once and for all, when God existed and when He generated His Son, God coeternal, and coequal to Himself in all things, He also created the world" (in John F. Clarkson S.J., et al., tr. and ed., *The Church Teaches: Documents of the Church in English Translation* [London: Herder, 1955] 147, no. 399). This pantheistic viewpoint was rejected in 1329 based on the *creatio ex nihilo* which excluded the idea that both creation and Creator were eternal.

doctrine of emanation contained "elements of truth which are indispensable for a full understanding of God's creation."³⁷ In his resolute unwillingness to exclude emanationism and pantheism decisively, Moltmann is led to believe he can reconcile freedom and necessity in relation to the Trinity and creation without compromising the traditional doctrines. Perhaps he would be horrified to find himself in the company of Augustine in this predicament. Appropriately perceiving the need for a clear decision at this point, Gilson put the matter this way:

In short, as soon as Augustine read the *Enneads*, he found there the three essentially Christian notions of God the Father, of God the Word, and of the creation.

That Augustine found them there is an incontrovertible fact. *That they were not there is a hardly more controvertible fact.* To go at once to the fundamental reason why they could not possibly be there, let us say *that the world of Plotinos and the world of Christianity are strictly incomparable; no single point in the one can be matched with any single point in the other one*, for the fundamental reason that their metaphysical structure is essentially different.³⁸

In his trinitarian doctrine Moltmann concludes that "From eternity God has desired not only himself but the world too. . . . That is why the idea of the world is already inherent in the Father's love for the Son. . . . The *Logos* through whom the Father has created everything, and without whom nothing has been made that was made, is only *the other side of the Son*. The Son is *the Logos* in relation to the world. The *Logos* is *the Son* in relation to the Father."³⁹ In connection with this problem, Aquinas clearly insisted that

There are two reasons why the knowledge of the divine persons was necessary for us. It was necessary for the right idea of creation . . . *saying that God made all things by His Word excludes the error of those who say that God produced things by necessity.* When we say that in Him there is a procession of love, we say God produced creatures not because he needed them, . . . *[and] that we may think rightly concerning the salvation of the human race, accomplished by the Incarnate Son, and by the gift of the Holy Ghost.*⁴⁰

By contrast, in Moltmann's thought it certainly appears that if God is

³⁷ *Creation* 83.

³⁸ Gilson, *God and Philosophy* 49.

³⁹ *Trinity* 108.

⁴⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1, q. 32, a. 1, emphasis mine. In this idea Thomas is in accord with Athanasius, who argued correctly and powerfully that "it would be more pious and true to indicate God from the Son and to call Him Father than to name Him from His works alone and to say that He is unoriginated" (*Against the Arians* 1, 34). Not indicating God from the Son leads, among other things, to a false idea of creation. It led Arius to think of Christ as a work of the Father.

not His own prisoner, He is certainly the prisoner of love, which by its very nature *must* freely create another in order to be true to its own nature. For Moltmann selflessness is the essence of love, and that selflessness must apply to God's free love as well as to creaturely love.⁴¹ Consequently God is not free to create or not but must in His very essence be described as creative love. Here and in Moltmann's often repeated idea that for God "not to reveal himself and to be contented with his untouched glory would be a contradiction of himself,"⁴² there can be no distinction between God's eternal self-sufficient love as Father, Son, and Spirit and His free will to create a world distinct from Himself. Rather, he writes, "The generation and birth of the Son come from the Father's *nature*, not from his will. That is why we talk about the *eternal* generation and birth of the Son. The Father begets and bears the Son out of the *necessity* of his being."⁴³

The consequences of this reasoning cause Moltmann to argue that God's freedom cannot mean that He is without obligation to creation since "the self-communication of his goodness in love to his creation is not a matter of his free will."⁴⁴ Moltmann dissolves God's will to act into what he describes as His essential nature, arguing that "his will *is* his essential activity." Thus "God is not entirely free when he can do and leave undone what he likes; he is entirely free when he is entirely himself. In his creative activity he is *entirely* himself. He loves the world in the surrender of his Son with the very same love which he *is*, from eternity to eternity."⁴⁵ Moltmann's failure to distinguish the immanent and economic Trinity then leads him to be unable to distinguish between

⁴¹ *Trinity* 28; this idea is essential to the doctrine of the Shekinah. Since Moltmann cannot conceive of creation as an expression of God's omnipotence—God had to empty Himself of this to create (*Creation* 88)—he argues that it is God's nature to will the good, and since He cannot deny this, therefore in loving the world "he is entirely himself." Consequently it is implied that it would be evil for God not to create, since creation means "communicating himself" and freedom is not freedom to choose but simple "undivided joy in the good." Hence "Love is a self-evident, unquestionable 'overflowing of goodness' which is therefore *never open to choice at any time*" (*Trinity* 55). If God could "choose" not to create, it would in fact be an evil choice, since overflowing goodness has no "free choice"; this for Moltmann would imply arbitrariness or the possibility of a different God than the one he has described.

⁴² *Trinity* 53.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 167. Here there can be no distinction between God's eternal self-sufficient love as Father, Son, and Spirit and His free will *ad intra* and to create a world distinct from Himself; this is the kind of careful distinction cited in Athanasius' epistle on the Council at Arminium and Seleucia. The Eleventh Council of Toledo (675) formulated the matter carefully as follows: "He is the Son of God by nature, not by adoption; and we must believe that God the Father begot Him not through His will and not of necessity, for there is no necessity in God nor does the will precede wisdom" (*The Church Teaches* 128).

⁴⁴ *Creation* 82–83.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

God's being and act, nature and will, as well as creation and redemption at this crucial point.⁴⁶

If, as Moltmann believes, the idea of creation is already inherent in the Father's necessary love of the Son, where is the distinction between God's free love and the necessary creation of a reality distinct from Him to be drawn? If the Son is the Logos in relation to the world, as Moltmann says, then is He not the Logos apart from the world in Himself? Are we dealing with two different Logoi here, one who exists as God the Son and another who exists as the soul of the created world? Has Moltmann here not introduced the world into the Godhead as the other side of the Son just because he has already introduced suffering into the Godhead as part of God's loving nature when he writes in accordance with the doctrine of the Shekinah that creation is traced to a dichotomy in God so that there is a "rift which runs through the divine life and activity until redemption"?⁴⁷ Moltmann is led to argue not only that God "needs" the world and man,⁴⁸ but that the relation between the Father and Son "is necessary love, not free love."⁴⁸

In his concept of the Son as the Logos in relation to the world, Moltmann is unable to maintain what the traditional doctrine of the Trinity intended to assert, i.e. that God's eternal Word is *identical* with God Himself and thus the only-begotten Son of the Father is identical with the Word through whom God creates.⁴⁹ But if this is the case, then it is impossible to conclude that the Father bears the Son out of necessity, for His love is only necessary insofar as it is His free self-affirmation in which He is subject to no necessary determinations from within or without as Moltmann himself believes the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* proposed. Any such necessity would make the love of God subject to a higher law encompassing His actual free love. That higher law, of course, would be accessible as a philosophical principle to which God Himself was subject.

Here we reach the heart of the matter. For if the immanent Trinity is the norm for the truth of our concepts of God, then the trinitarian actions

⁴⁶ Thus, instead of seeing creation and redemption as two distinct actions of the one God, Moltmann refers redemption to a future when "God's creation and his revelation will be one" (*Creation* 287-88). "The goal of this history [of consummation] is not a return to the paradisaic primordial condition. Its goal is the revelation of the glory of God. . . . This . . . represents the fulfillment of the real promise implanted in creation itself" (*ibid.* 207). Obviously, a redemption that is implanted in creation cannot be conceived as a free, new action of the triune God.

⁴⁷ *Trinity* 30.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 58.

⁴⁹ Aquinas, following Augustine, wrote that "Word and Son express the same" in order to avoid any idea that either term merely referred to a property of His which might lead to the idea that we were dealing with a being that was not fully divine (*ST* 1, q. 32, a. 2).

ad extra would remain normative for any interpretation of present and future meaning; these could not be deduced from a panentheistic principle of suffering love discovered in a relational metaphysics and then applied to revelation.⁵⁰ Rather, we would have to acknowledge, as Aquinas himself did following Augustine, that “by faith we arrive at knowledge, and not conversely.”⁵¹ A Christian doctrine of the Trinity, therefore, would derive its meaning from God *in se* acting *ad extra* and not from the realm of history accessible to the philosopher as such. It is my belief that because Moltmann attempts to conceive God’s nature and suffering in creation in a single perspective in which both are on their way toward redemption, he incorporates need, nothingness, suffering, and death directly into the nature of God.⁵² In this way he compromises his own understanding of the *creatio ex nihilo* and is led to redefine the immanent Trinity by the history of the economic Trinity. In the remainder of this article I will restrict myself to indicating the reason why I think this happens to Moltmann and why it leads him both into the modalism he criticizes in Rahner and Barth and into tritheism.

⁵⁰ Thus Moltmann argues against a Cartesian “subject” metaphysics and an Aristotelian “metaphysics of substance” saying, “Both can only be done away with by means of a relational metaphysics, based on the mutual relativity of human beings and the world” (*Creation* 50). The norm for his thinking is a relational metaphysics dictated by the relativity of people and the world and not the freedom of God revealed in His Word and Spirit and acknowledged in the *creatio ex nihilo*. Hence Moltmann’s hermeneutical presupposition is that he can “find a new interpretation of the Christian doctrine of creation in light of the knowledge of nature made accessible to us by evolutionary theories. . .” (*ibid.* 205). Thus his norm is not revelation but revelation interpreted from the perspective of mutual indwellings and developments he believes he has discovered in nature and history.

⁵¹ *ST.* 1, q. 32, a. 1.

⁵² Thus he is led to argue, “It is not through supernatural interventions that God guides creation. . . . Seen in terms of world history, the transforming power of suffering is the *basis* for the liberating and consummating acts of God” (*Creation* 211). Creation traditionally was distinguished from salvation with the idea that creation was good but went wrong. Salvation was a free new action of God by which God negated the spheres of sin and evil which arose in opposition to His good will and were to be destroyed ultimately in the death and resurrection of Christ. By contrast, Moltmann contends that *nihil* is a “partial negation of the divine Being, inasmuch as God is not yet Creator. 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. . .” (*Creation* 87). The result of making the *nihil* something, rather than the symbol that God is truly free in relation to all that is distinct from Him and dependent upon Him, is the incorporation of *nihil* itself directly into the Godhead. We have here the dualism Moltmann himself intends to reject. God-forsakenness, hell, and absolute death are part of God before creation. Ultimately Moltmann can conceive of creation only as an emanation of the divine being because according to the doctrine of the *zimzum* creation refers to a shrinkage process in God Himself and then to His “issuing” outside Himself (*Creation* 87 and *Trinity* 109–10).

METHOD AND THE FREEDOM OF GOD

Since his understanding of the Trinity does not come only from the triune God acting *ad extra* but from a synthesis of human and divine experience, Moltmann does not distinguish clearly between human experience of the created realm and God's being and action in His Word and Spirit. Thus he argues against Schleiermacher that

If one were only to relate the experience of God to the experience of the self, then the self would become the constant and 'God' the variable. It is only when the self is perceived in the experience which God has with that self that an undistorted perception of the history of one's own self with God and in God emerges.⁵³

Accordingly Moltmann assumes that Schleiermacher actually has described God by speaking of our feeling of absolute dependence and concludes that experience does not merely refer to our experience of God but to "God's experience with us."⁵⁴ In neither case, however, has he shown that he is speaking of the Christian God who factually transcends all of our experience even as He makes Himself known; Moltmann merely assumes that Schleiermacher's reduction of the Trinity to abstract monotheism can be overcome with the counterquestion, "how does God experience me?"⁵⁵ But the fact remains that neither Schleiermacher nor Moltmann has shown that he is speaking of the Christian God whose being and action cannot be grounded in experience at all without compromising the distinction between God and the world. As we are beginning to see, this has serious methodological consequences for the relationship between philosophy and theology.

Having blurred the distinction between human experience and God's experience at the outset, Moltmann argues that the more we come to understand God's experience, the closer we come to the perception that

the history of the world is the history of God's suffering. At the moments of God's profoundest revelation there is always suffering: the cry of the captives in Egypt; Jesus' death cry on the cross; the sighing of the whole enslaved creation for liberty. *If a person once feels the infinite passion of God's love which finds expression here, then he understands the mystery of the triune God.* God suffers with us—God suffers from us—God suffers for us: *it is this experience of God that reveals the triune God.* . . . Consequently fundamental theology's discussion about access to the doctrine of the Trinity is carried on today in the context of the question about God's capacity or incapacity for suffering.⁵⁶

Here Moltmann leaps to the assumption that an experience of suffering

⁵³ *Trinity* 4.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 3.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 4-5, emphasis mine.

is not only an experience of God but knowledge of the Trinity. This doctrinal foundation leads him to redefine both the immanent and economic Trinity by the experiences of suffering love which he discovers in both God and creatures. We have already seen that, on the one hand, this procedure compromises God's freedom with the emanationism which Moltmann himself rejects and, on the other hand, compromises the freedom of grace with the claim that creatures have the inherent capacity for the divine and that both nature and grace are in need of completion in the kingdom of glory. He ignores the crucial point that unless God's glory is already inherent in His grace (i.e., His free creation and subsequent intervention in history in Israel, in Christ, and in the Church), it can no longer be seen as the glory of God, who is and remains factually self-sufficient because He does not create, reconcile, and redeem out of need but out of His free love.

Following this logic, Moltmann argues that it is not enough to say that God allows Christ to suffer or that in Christ we see the "sufferings of God who cannot suffer."⁵⁷ To understand correctly the suffering of the passionate God, Moltmann believes that we should start "from the axiom of God's passion"⁵⁸ rather than the traditional view which asserts God's apathy. Moltmann therefore reinterprets the apathetic axiom to say "God is not subjected to suffering in the same way as transient, created beings." Since "God does not suffer out of deficiency of being, like created beings," He remains "apathetic"; yet "he suffers from the love which is the superabundance and overflowing of his being. In so far he is 'pathetic.'⁵⁹ It is this same reasoning which later leads Moltmann to explain that "God and the world are related to one another through the relationship of their mutual indwelling and participation: God's indwelling in the world is divine in kind; the world's indwelling in God is worldly in kind. There is no other way of conceiving the continual communication between God and the world."⁶⁰ But the crucial question which remains unanswered in this reasoning is whether the divine indwelling is *essentially* other than that of the world. Or are they mutually dependent and therefore identical?

Here Moltmann turns to Origen, who asks, "And the Father Himself . . . does He not suffer in a certain way? . . . Even the Father is not incapable of suffering,"⁶¹ and concludes, "The suffering of love does not only affect the redeeming acts of God outwards; it also affects the

⁵⁷ Ibid. 22.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 23.

⁶⁰ *Creation* 150.

⁶¹ *Trinity* 24. Even Origen does not seem to have gone as far as Moltmann, for he also stated that God the Father "suffers . . . becoming something which because of the greatness of his nature he cannot be, and endures human suffering for our sakes" (ibid.).

trinitarian fellowship of God in himself.”⁶² Moltmann classifies apathetic theology with monotheism, declaring that we can only talk of “God’s suffering in trinitarian terms” by starting from God’s passion *rather than* from His apathy; he seeks to develop a doctrine of theopathy by appealing to those rare theologians who started from “God’s passion and not from his apathy.”⁶³ His sources are the doctrine of Shekinah, Spanish mysticism, Russian-Orthodox philosophy of religion, and the Anglican idea of sacrificial love. And what does he discover?

1. According to Moltmann (following Abraham Heschel), it is the divine passion (not God’s apathy) which “is God’s freedom. It is the free relationship of passionate participation.”⁶⁴ Here we may note that in this definition of divine freedom God’s apathy, which Moltmann said it was necessary to affirm, is immaterial for this definition of freedom. This is no accident, because, as we saw above, there is a common term which determines the nature of both freedom and necessity in such a way that God cannot really be free *as* He loves but must be free in accordance with the superior concept of fellowship or self-humiliation which is intrinsic to all selfless and suffering love, i.e. pathetic love.

2. Here Moltmann adopts the doctrine of the Shekinah and grounds this in Jewish mysticism. Ultimately he is led by this analysis to define love according to the explanation offered by the Spanish mystic Unamuno. This becomes the foundation for his redefinition of trinitarian fellowship and of God’s Sabbath relationship with creation. Indeed, Moltmann argues that if Shekinah is viewed “as God in person, then it is necessary to assume a profound self-differentiation in God himself.”⁶⁵ Whereas the traditional doctrine of the Trinity was a development of thought corresponding to a differentiation between the Father and the Son which took place before creation in time, in Moltmann’s thinking the differentiation arises from, and is seen as necessary in light of, the Jewish mystical assertion that God must have, before all worlds, included nothingness as well as creation in His very being. In part, this idea leads Moltmann to the dualism he theoretically rejects.

3. This thinking guides Moltmann to Franz Rosenzweig’s mystical interpretation of creation and redemption. Here it becomes clear that while Moltmann explicitly and consistently rejects pantheism and emanationism, he is compelled by the logic implied in this thinking to maintain the essential insights of both pantheism and emanationism in his doctrines of the Trinity and creation. In order to overcome pantheism and emanationism, Moltmann simply says that his panentheism is compatible with these Christian doctrines without being able to show how.

⁶² *Trinity* 24.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 25.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 28.

He argues here that mysticism bridges the gap between “the God of our fathers’ and ‘the remnant of Israel with the help of the doctrine of the Shekinah.’”⁶⁶ First, God’s descent to His people and His dwelling among them “is thought of as a divorce which takes place in God himself. God himself cuts himself off from himself, he gives himself away . . . he suffers with their sufferings.”⁶⁷ Second, “God . . . by suffering [Israel’s] fate with her, makes himself in need of redemption. In this way, in this suffering, the relationship between God and the remnant points beyond itself.”⁶⁸ Third, God’s unity is defined as a “Becoming Unity. And this Becoming is laid on the soul of man and in his hands.”⁶⁹ In this analysis we begin to glimpse what Moltmann means by the kingdom of glory. As God Himself now *needs* redemption from the division in His own being, so the kingdom of glory is that oneness which is becoming in the soul of the man who experienced suffering in the Exile and experiences suffering even now, but who is looking forward to the time when God will be “all in all” in an age of future harmony which has already begun in the form of his own acts of goodness here and now.

4. We have seen that Moltmann’s basic methodological presupposition is that there is a common element beyond any antithesis between nature and grace and freedom and necessity which, when understood, will resolve our unnatural will to power and enable us to see that we are all really in God and that God is in us. Appealing to the Anglican idea of Eucharistic sacrifice, he writes:

One basic concept runs through the whole literature on the subject: the necessity of seeing the eucharistic sacrifice, the cross on Golgotha and the heart of the triune God together, *in a single perspective*. The immediate occasion for developing the power of God’s suffering theologically was the apologetic necessity for providing a reply to Darwin’s theory of evolution. In what sense are we to understand God’s almighty power?⁷⁰

The key point here is that Moltmann honestly believes that the historical event of the cross and the heart of the triune God can be understood together in a single perspective. If they can, then there is no distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity. And there is no God independent of the world; there is only a God who can be seen from within the world’s perspective as one who is subject to suffering love. The perspective (whether conceived relationally or not) would dictate the nature of God’s love and freedom and to that extent would become that which is truly “almighty.” Here God can no longer be free in the

⁶⁶ Ibid. 29.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 31, emphasis mine.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

traditional sense, i.e. in the sense that He does not exist as one who stands in need.

Thinking this way, Moltmann turns to C. E. Rolt in order to redefine God's almighty power in light of the cross, and several key points which correspond exactly with the kabbalistic understanding of creation emerge.⁷¹ First, "The sole omnipotence which God possesses is the almighty power of suffering love. . . . This is the essence of divine sovereignty."⁷² Here suffering love (pathos) is that which is almighty; thus any idea that God could love in a way that does not involve suffering is eliminated at the outset. This affects everything that Moltmann says in his doctrine of the Trinity and of creation; it leads him finally to argue that the Holy Spirit's suffering is identical with the world's suffering.

The Spirit . . . is God himself. If God commits himself to his limited creation, and if he himself dwells in it as 'the giver of life', this presupposes a self-limitation, a self-humiliation and a self-surrender of the Spirit. The history of suffering creation, which is subject to transience, then brings with it a history of suffering by the Spirit who dwells in creation.⁷³

Moltmann also believes that God's Spirit is identical with the cosmic spirit; thus he writes, "If the cosmic Spirit is the Spirit of God, the universe cannot be viewed as a closed system. It has to be understood as a system that is open—open for God and for his future."⁷⁴ With these conclusions it seems clear that Moltmann's presuppositions cause him to ignore the problem of sin and to blur the distinction which the traditional doctrines correctly sought to maintain. Athanasius, for instance, deliberately rejected the idea that the cosmic spirit could be equated with God's Spirit in this way.⁷⁵ While Moltmann seeks to avoid

⁷¹ *Creation* 86 ff.

⁷² *Trinity* 31. Hence Moltmann goes so far as to say, "God, the Father God of Love, is everywhere in history, but nowhere is he Almighty" (ibid. 35).

⁷³ *Creation* 102.

⁷⁴ Ibid. Thus he believes that "The freedom towards God of the human being . . . is as unbounded as God's capacity for passion and patience" (*Trinity* 30); and he holds that "As God's image, men and women are beings who correspond to God, beings who can give the seeking love of God the sought-for response, and who are intended to do just that" (*Creation* 77). Where is the need for repentance, grace, and the Holy Spirit here?

⁷⁵ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988) 201 ff., presents the matter with great clarity, especially as it relates to Athanasius' theology. Athanasius, e.g., "would have nothing to do with any attempt to reach an understanding of the Spirit beginning from manifestations or operations of the Spirit in creaturely existence, in man or in the world" (ibid. 201). Athanasius also "turned sharply away from any conception of the Logos as a cosmological principle (or of *logoi spermatikoi*, 'seminal reasons', immanent in the universe) occupying an intermediate status between God and creation" (ibid.). "Athanasius developed the doctrine of the Spirit from his essential relation to the one God and his undivided co-activity with the Father and the Son, and specifically

Stoic pantheism as did Calvin and Barth,⁷⁶ he is led by his method to say what neither Calvin nor Barth would say, i.e. that the cosmic spirit is the Holy Spirit and that, after the Fall, creation is inherently open to God.

Second, "Rolt then goes on to deduce the eternal divine nature from Christ's passion. What Christ, the incarnate God, did in time, God, the heavenly Father, does and must do in eternity."⁷⁷ Here we have a specific avowal of modalism which cannot distinguish the Father and the Son in eternity and so concludes that, as Christ suffered in time, so the heavenly Father does and *must* do this in eternity.

MODALISM

Whereas the tradition rejected patripassianism in order to stress the *eternal* distinction between the Father and Son (independent of creation), so that we might perceive the freedom of God's action in Christ, Moltmann, following Rolt, collapses the actions of the economic Trinity into the being of the Father in eternity by arguing that

the surrender of the Son for us on the cross has a retroactive effect on the Father and causes infinite pain. . . . God's relationship to the world has a retroactive effect on his relationship to himself—even though the divine relationship to the world is primarily determined by that inner relationship. The growth of knowledge of the immanent Trinity from the saving experience of the cross of Christ makes this necessary. *The pain of the cross determines the inner life of the triune God from eternity to eternity.*⁷⁸

The trinitarian doctrine of the Church does not admit that the Father suffers from eternity to eternity simply because the Father almighty sends His Son for the purpose of salvation as a free gift of grace. Here the distinction between the Father and Son is an eternal one which is not defined by the historical events which took place in time. Still, the Father is not remote from the suffering of the Son on the cross, since there is a *perichoresis* between the Father and the Son. Nonetheless, the events in time receive their meaning from God's free will actualized in

from his inherence in the being of the eternal Son" (ibid.). In this way Athanasius preserved the unity of the Trinity by arguing that "The Father does all things through the Word and in the Holy Spirit" (ibid. 202). In addition, "The Holy Spirit does not bring to us any independent knowledge of God, or add any new content to God's self-revelation" (ibid. 203). "Thus, knowledge of the Spirit as well as of the Father is taken from and is controlled by knowledge of the Son" (ibid.). From the outset of Moltmann's doctrine of creation this cannot be done, because he actually equates God's Spirit, which is supposed to be *ex se*, with the cosmic spirit, arguing that *this cosmic spirit* acts in us; this follows his refusal to distinguish the immanent and economic Trinity.

⁷⁶ *Creation* 12.

⁷⁷ *Trinity* 31.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 160–61, emphasis mine.

those occurrences. Moltmann cannot say this, because his method insists that Christ's suffering and the love of the immanent Trinity can be understood in a "single perspective" which encompasses them both.

It is an interesting fact that while Moltmann charges both Rahner and Barth with modalism, they explicitly reject the modalist idea that the Father suffers.⁷⁹ While this is not to deny that some modalist tendencies might be found in their thinking, that subject cannot be treated here. Nevertheless, whatever the errors may be, both Rahner and Barth recognized that to make suffering part of the nature of the eternal God (who existed before all worlds) would be to make God powerless to act as our savior (in history). Thus, e.g., replying to a question indicating that Balthasar and others had criticized him for not having a sufficient *theologia crucis*, Rahner states:

In Moltmann and others I sense a theology of absolute paradox, of Patripassianism, perhaps even of a Schelling-like projection into God of division, conflict, godlessness and death. To put it crudely, it does not help me to escape from my mess and mix-up and despair if God is in the same predicament. . . . The classical teaching on the Incarnation and the theology of the hypostatic union . . . must include, even while avoiding Patripassianism (a suffering and dying of God the Father), a meaningful and serious statement to the effect that *God* died. . . [but] it is for me a source of consolation to realize that God, when and insofar as he entered into this history as into his own, did it in a different way than I did. From the beginning I am locked into its horribleness while God—if this word continues to have any meaning at all—is in a true and authentic and consoling sense the God *who does not suffer*, the immutable God, and so on.⁸⁰

And in his doctrine of the Trinity Barth explained that

one can say very definitely that any systematising of the one-sidedness [of the trinitarian relations] such as is found in part in ancient Modalism (e.g., in the form of Patripassianism) is absolutely forbidden, since it would mean the dissolution of the triunity in a neutral fourth. The eternity of the fatherhood of God does not mean only the eternity of the fellowship of the Father with the Son and the Spirit. It also protects the Father against fusion with the Son and Spirit. . . . [This] would also be incompatible with any serious acceptance of the biblical witness which makes the Father and the Son one in their distinction.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Other references in Moltmann's *Trinity* to the Father suffering are pp. 31, 35, 59, 81, and 83. Moltmann's criticisms of Barth and Rahner can be seen in *Trinity* 143 ff.

⁸⁰ *Karl Rahner in Dialogue, Conversations and Interviews 1965-1982*, ed. Paul Imhof and Hubert Biallowons (New York: Crossroad, 1986) 126-27.

⁸¹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 1/1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975) 397-98; hereafter abbreviated *CD*. For a discussion of how Barth's view of the Trinity relates to Moltmann's, see my "The Function of the Immanent Trinity in the Theology of Karl Barth: Implications for Today," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 42 (1989) 367-99, at 368 and 383-88.

Barth also captured the positive point regarding God's action *ad extra* mentioned by Rahner indicating that

It is not at all the case that God has no part in the suffering of Jesus Christ even in His mode of being as the Father. No, there is a *particula veri* in the teaching of the Patripassians. This is that primarily it is God the Father who suffers in the offering and sending of His Son, in His abasement. The suffering is not His own, but the alien suffering of the creature, of man, which He takes to Himself in Him. But He does suffer it in the humiliation of His Son with a depth with which it never was or will be suffered by any man—apart from the One who is His Son. . . . This fatherly fellow-suffering of God is the mystery, the basis, of the humiliation of His Son; the truth of that which takes place historically in His crucifixion. . . .⁸²

In this analysis there remains a clear distinction between the Father and the Son and between the Father's suffering as a mystery grounded in the immanent Trinity and the creature's suffering, which, while not part of God's nature, is experienced by God for the salvation of creatures.

Third, after indicating that the sacrifice of love on the cross was neither simply a reaction to sin nor a *free decision* of God's will, Moltmann argues that it is part of love's nature to be capable of suffering. "Self-sacrifice is God's very nature and essence."⁸³ This insight later leads Moltmann to what he considers the following harmonious balance between the Reformed doctrine of decrees and Tillich's emanationism: God's "divine life flows into his resolve, and from that resolve overflows to his creatures."⁸⁴ And this ultimately persuades Moltmann to argue that creation itself becomes part of God's nature in His Sabbath rest.⁸⁵

Fourth, Rolt's thinking leads to a view of the Trinity which is "open" toward the world, and this means that

Love *has* to give, for it is only in the act of giving that it truly possesses, and finds bliss. That is why God *has to give himself* . . . and it is only in this way that he is God. *He has to go through time*; and it is *only* in this way that he is eternal. . . . *He has to be man and nothing but man*; and it is only in this way that he is completely God. . . . 'It was necessary for God to be Man, for only so could He be truly God.' . . . In order to be completely itself, love has to suffer.⁸⁶

⁸² Barth, *CD* 4/2, 357.

⁸³ *Trinity* 32.

⁸⁴ *Creation* 85.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 278 ff. Thus he asserts that God's Sabbath "does not spring from God's activity; it springs from his rest. It does not come from God's Acts; it comes from his present Being" (*ibid.* 282). Consequently "The human sabbath" becomes "the rhythm of eternity in time" (*ibid.* 287). While the tradition held that God's Being and Act are one in order to preserve God's freedom, Moltmann argues that God is directly present in His Sabbath and can be equated with the evolution of history itself as it transcends itself (*ibid.* 205).

⁸⁶ *Trinity* 33.

In his creation doctrine this leads Moltmann to conclude that God's descent to human beings and His dwelling among them is to be conceived 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. . . ." ⁸⁷ Thus

God the Spirit is also the Spirit of the universe, its total cohesion, its structure, its information, its energy. The Spirit of the universe is the Spirit who proceeds from the Father and shines forth in the Son. *The evolutions and the catastrophes of the universe are also the movements and experiences of the Spirit of creation.* ⁸⁸

Moltmann writes that it is "one-sided to view creation only as the work of 'God's hands' . . . something . . . to be distinguished from God himself. *Creation is also the differentiated presence of God the Spirit, the presence of the One in the many.*" ⁸⁹ Consequently "men and women correspond to the Creator in their very essence" and "God enters into the creatures whom he has designated to be his image." ⁹⁰ In this thinking, where is the distinction to be found between the Holy Spirit and the spirit of the universe? Where is the distinction to be found between Christ as the image of the unseen God and sinful creatures who *need* reconciliation? And if it cannot be found, how is our unnatural will to power to be overcome?

This analysis explicitly negates God's freedom to stress the fact that suffering (the historical suffering in Christ) defines the nature of both God's freedom and love. Clearly there is and can be no distinction here between time and eternity ⁹¹ or between God's eternal begetting of His Son in the unity of the Holy Spirit and His free (gratuitous) actions *ad extra*. Rather, God's creative and salvific functions have integrally absorbed His essence. We have here a prototypical compromise of God's freedom as expressed in the Bible and in the tradition. It is no longer the case that the one God is the single transcendent subject of His actions in His Son and Spirit. Rather, His transcendent being and action are defined by His need to be man, His need to suffer, and His need for another outside Himself. Moltmann's own explanation of God's freedom leaves him in a logical and theological dilemma.

He may argue that God really is subject to no internal or external necessities. Then he would have to reject his own panentheist interpretation of the Trinity and of creation because the Christian God who loves is intrinsically free both in nature and will. Or he may argue that God is

⁸⁷ *Creation* 15 and 86 ff.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 16, emphasis mine.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 14, emphasis partially mine.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 77-78.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* 287 and 112 ff. Moltmann actually believes that "Time is an interval in eternity" (*Trinity* 111).

subject both to internal and to external necessities. Then he would have to reject the biblical and traditional view of creation and of the Trinity. But he cannot logically hold both positions at once. Yet that is exactly what he attempts to do, because it is of the very nature of panentheism to conceive of the God-world relation from within a process common to both God and creatures, nature and grace, freedom and necessity, and into which these opposites are finally resolved by becoming an original perichoretic unity.

Panentheism cannot admit that God could have existed without a world but freely chose not to, that nature is not in itself open for grace but needs grace in order to become open, and that God's freedom excludes the idea that He exists because of any internal or external necessity. It would not be inaccurate to say that in Moltmann's theology relationality is the subject and God is the predicate instead of the other way around. Thus he argues that the doctrine of the two natures does not refer to

two metaphysically different 'natures'. It is an expression of his exclusive *relationship* to the Father, by reason of his origin, and his inclusive *relationship* of fellowship to his many brothers and sisters. His *relationship* to God is the relation of God's own Son to his Father. His *relationship* to the world is the relationship of the eldest to his brethren.⁹²

The fact is that the doctrine of the two natures does refer to two metaphysically distinct natures or it does not convey the same meaning as Chalcedon at all. For the man Jesus was both true God and true man as the one mediator. But since Moltmann conceives the Incarnation as the cessation of God's omnipotence,⁹³ he is forced to substitute for the reality of Jesus, true God and true man, the perichoretic relationship inherent in suffering love itself. This thinking causes the difficulties in both the doctrines of the Trinity and of creation which we have been exploring in this article.

TRITHEISM

Since God cannot be a single subject of His actions *ad extra*, Moltmann at times is actually led to describe three subjects: "we interpreted salvation history as 'the history of the Son' of God, Jesus Christ. We under-

⁹² *Trinity* 120, emphasis mine. In connection with the Spirit Moltmann attempts to overcome pantheism and to improve panentheism, arguing that "It is not the elementary particles that are basic . . . but the overriding *harmony of the relations* and of the self-transcending movements, in which the longing of the Spirit for a still unattained consummation finds expression. If the cosmic Spirit is the Spirit of God, the universe cannot be viewed as a closed system" (*Creation* 103). Here Moltmann's concept of relationality leads again to the confusion of the Holy Spirit with the movements of creation.

⁹³ *Trinity* 118-19 and *Creation* 88. Hence "God becomes omnipresent," *Creation* 91.

stood this history as the trinitarian history of God in the concurrent and joint workings of the three subjects, Father, Son and Spirit. . . .⁹⁴ In considering the meaning of revelation in relation to Gal 1:15, Moltmann contends that "God reveals his Son . . . God does not reveal 'himself'. He reveals 'his Son'. The Son is not identical with *God's self*. He is a subject of his own."⁹⁵ In his creation doctrine Moltmann claims that "The Spirit also acts as an independent subject . . . each subject of the Trinity possesses his own unique personality. . . ."⁹⁶ Also, in the kingdom of glory Moltmann believes that "The kingdom of God is therefore transferred from one divine subject to the other; and its form is changed in the process. *So God's triunity precedes the divine lordship.*"⁹⁷ Finally, Moltmann argues that "On the cross the Father and the Son are so deeply separated that their relationship breaks off."⁹⁸ With assertions such as these it is no wonder that Walter Kasper legitimately notes the "danger" of tritheism in Moltmann's theology.⁹⁹

Here his modalism returns to haunt him. For God's Lordship is the Lordship of the God who is simultaneously one and three. Previously Moltmann argued that God's unity is the unity of His triunity and that he would investigate God's threeness and then proceed to ask about His unity; from this it follows that "the unity of the Trinity cannot be a monadic unity. The unity of the divine tri-unity lies in the *union* of the Father, the Son and the Spirit, not in their numerical unity. It lies in their *fellowship, not in the identity of a single subject.*"¹⁰⁰ Moltmann thus logically concludes that the kingdom of glory can be incomplete and changes when transferred from one subject to another. Among other things, such a change would mean that Jesus is not always Lord but becomes and ceases to be Lord in time and as time reaches its fulfilment. This is why Moltmann explicitly redefines the meaning of Lordship, arguing that since Christ's Lordship is purely economic, the trinitarian formulas are baptismal and that this must be the case because "the history of the Son . . . is not a completed history."¹⁰¹ As "Christ himself is not . . . as yet complete," Moltmann believes that 1 Cor 15:28 means that "The divine rule was given by the Father to the Son through Christ's

⁹⁴ *Trinity* 156.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 86-87.

⁹⁶ *Creation* 97.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 93, emphasis mine. Moltmann also writes of the divine persons: "They have the divine nature in common; but their particular *individual nature* is determined in their relationship to one another. . . . The three divine Persons exist in their particular, unique natures as Father, Son and Spirit in their relationships to one another, and are determined through these relationships" (*Trinity* 172, emphasis mine).

⁹⁸ *Trinity* 82.

⁹⁹ Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ* (New York: Crossroad, 1986) 379, n. 183.

¹⁰⁰ *Trinity* 95, emphasis partially mine.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* 90.

resurrection" and "in the final consummation it will be transferred from the Son to the Father. 'The kingdom of the Son' will then become the kingdom of glory . . . in which God will be all in all."¹⁰² Intimately connected with this are the problems of adoptionism and subordinationism.¹⁰³

The result of this reasoning is that Moltmann cannot describe God as free to choose to relate with us; rather, the Father generates the Son by necessity¹⁰⁴ and "the love of the Father which brings forth the Son in eternity becomes creative love. . . . Creation proceeds from the Father's love for the eternal Son."¹⁰⁵ Consequently "Freedom arrives at its divine

¹⁰² Ibid. 92.

¹⁰³ This is why Moltmann argues that for Paul the title Son is not a Christological title of sovereignty (*Trinity* 87–88), while the *New Jerusalem Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1986) states correctly that for Paul the title Son (as in Rom 9:5) implied a strictly divine significance (60, n. d). Moltmann actually believes he has avoided all subordinationism and yet makes the conspicuous subordinationist assertion, "Through the incarnation of the Son the Father acquires a twofold counterpart for his love: his Son and his image. . . . This means an increase of his riches and bliss" (*Trinity* 121). See also n. 92 above. Instead of arguing with the Bible that the Lord has made us His friends in Christ, Moltmann explicitly redefines Lordship to mean friendship (ibid. 56, 215 ff., and 221). Thus "God is nowhere more divine than when he becomes man" (ibid. 119).

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 167; cf. also 58.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 168. This reasoning leads Moltmann actually to change the Creed, which speaks of the Father begetting the Son in eternity in an utterly unique way. He argues that the Father not only begets the Son; this would make him "a father in the male sense" (ibid. 164). The procession of the Son from the Father "has to be conceived of both as a begetting and as a birth" (ibid. 164). Thus "He is a motherly father too." Moltmann's pantheism here overcomes both a "patriarchal" monotheism of power and lordship and what he calls matriarchal pantheism with this "bisexual" understanding of the Trinity. This, he believes, is the radical rejection of monotheism (ibid. 165). But the fact is that by adding the notion of birth to the notion of begetting, Moltmann compounds the problem by incorporating bisexual images into the Godhead, whereas there ought to be none at all. Cf. Roland M. Frye, "Language for God and Feminist Language: Problems and Principles," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 41 (1988) 441–70, esp. 444 ff. Moltmann makes the same mistake in his doctrine of creation, arguing that while *creatio ex nihilo* means a calling something into existence without precondition, creation is also determined by God's withdrawal within. Thus the doctrine must mean God creates "by letting-be, by making room, and by withdrawing himself. The creative making is expressed in masculine metaphors. But the creative letting-be is better brought out through motherly categories" (*Creation* 88). The problem here is that the use of masculine or motherly categories is irrelevant to the issue of whether, in the trinitarian and creation doctrines, the Bible intended to present us with the idea that creation ought to be understood as emanation or as the incomprehensible work which could be properly understood through faith in the Son. Then it could not be explained at all by arguing that God's love means incorporation of nothingness into the inner being of the Trinity and subsequently arguing that creation results from that negation. That is precisely the mythology that the *creatio ex nihilo* was originally designed to protect against. Even more important, however, is the fact that Moltmann distorts the fact that references to God the Father in the Bible and the tradition were not references to maleness

truth through love. Love is a self-evident, unquestionable 'overflowing of goodness' which is therefore *never open to choice at any time*. We have to understand true freedom as being the self-communication of the good."¹⁰⁶ In Moltmann's synthesis of freedom and love we find the necessary emanation of the divine goodness which the traditional doctrines intended to protect against. This, then, is clearly the pantheistic emanationism which was necessary to Moltmann's understanding of God's love from the outset; here there is and can be no actual distinction between the Father begetting the Son and the act of creation *ad extra* resulting from a new decision and act on the part of God. It is this thinking which leads quite logically to the idea that "the Son's sacrifice . . . on Golgotha is from eternity already included in the essential exchange of the essential, the consubstantial love which *constitutes* the divine life of the Trinity."¹⁰⁷ This leads Moltmann to believe that God's love is

literally ecstatic love: it leads him to go out of himself and to create something which is different from himself but which none the less corresponds to him. The delight with which the Creator celebrates the feast of creation—the sabbath—makes it unequivocally plain that creation was called into being out of the inner love which the eternal God himself *is*.¹⁰⁸

This emanationist interpretation of creation envisions God's mysterious and miraculous act of *creatio ex nihilo* not as an *act* of God's free *will* and decision expressing His being as the one who loves, but as a coming into being out of the inner love which God is as one who suffers.

We have returned to where we began. Can we understand and maintain God's freedom as implied in the doctrines of creation and the Trinity if we believe that the traditional dualities can be transcended in a common being which they are said to share now or in the future? Since God is and remains distinct from creatures even as He suffers for them in the cross of Christ, I have argued that Moltmann's belief that God needs creatures is an idea necessary to his panentheist reinterpretation of freedom but excluded from the perception of faith. Moltmann cannot maintain the freedom of God, because he believes that "The so-called 'sovereignty' of the triune God . . . proves to be his sustaining fellowship with his creation and his people."¹⁰⁹

or femaleness, as they were in pagan and Gnostic religions (cf. Frye 444). Moltmann's suggestion that we correct our unnatural will for power by including feminine characteristics within the Godhead therefore amounts to a redefinition of God's immanent Trinity using bisexual imagery drawn from human experience. Christians rejected this kind of thinking not because they were trying to impose patriarchal power models on others but in the knowledge that God is not as we are, i.e. creatures who are sexually limited.

¹⁰⁶ *Trinity* 55.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 168, emphasis mine.

¹⁰⁸ *Creation* 76.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 241.

Here the social analogy applies to the divine fellowship which is formed through the mutual indwelling of the Father in the Son, and of the Son in the Father through the Spirit. Here it does not mean the Fatherhood or the Sonship; it means the community within the Trinity. It is the *relations* in the Trinity which are the levels represented on earth through the *imago Trinitatis*, not the levels of the trinitarian *constitution*.¹¹⁰

The problem with this reasoning is that Moltmann believes he can speak about the trinitarian relations without speaking about the essential constitution of the Trinity as Father, Son, and Spirit by which we know of these relations. The only way this can be done is if the unity of the Trinity is conceived modalistically as a neutral fourth fellowship/relationship which can be appropriated apart from any specific reference to the Father, Son, or Spirit acting *ad extra*.¹¹¹ I believe I have indicated to some extent why I think this cannot be done.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ This faulty thinking results from Moltmann's rejection of the traditional doctrine of appropriation. "Contrary to the Augustinian tradition, it is not that the work of creation is only 'appropriated' to the Father, though being actually the work of the whole Trinity. On the contrary, creation is actually a product of the Father's love and is ascribed to the whole Trinity" (*Trinity* 112).