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Eschatological Space and Triune Kenosis: Jürgen Moltmann on the Nature of Created and Eschatological Space

Abstract

Where did God put creation? By means of experimental theology, this paper offers an answer by leveraging certain arguments from Jürgen Moltmann. These arguments for the divine kenosis of the triune persons and particularly the Father. In so doing, He provides the space in which to place all created matter. This paper first wrestles with certain Protestant positions on the nature of created space, noting that not much is said apart from dealing with the things in that space. Then the paper pivots to Moltmann's understanding of God's first act of creation - kenotic hiddenness. Finally, the paper concludes with Moltmann's concept of eschatological space and the glorification of all creation as God fills all creation with His glory.

Keywords

Moltmann, Space, Time, Creation, Kenosis, Pantheism, Panentheism

Cover Page Footnote

Ph.D. - Christian Theology and Apologetics

“The contemplation of celestial things will make a man both speak and think more sublimely and magnificently when he descends to human affairs.”¹ The Scriptures tell us that the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows his handiwork.² The psalmist goes on to say that everyday creation speaks to all people in their respective languages. As we consider the nature of God’s revelatory and manifold creation, there arises a question of, How did we get here? A fair question for sure, but this paper pivots to a similar but considerably different question, How did “here” come about? In more colloquial terms, was there enough room in which to put all of creation?

In order to answer this question, the present work will employ the works of Jürgen Moltmann and specifically his thoughts on the creation and nature of space as well as its final end.³ That said, the focus of this paper is to determine something of the nature of eschatological space and, more particularly, that of Moltmann’s understanding of redeemed space. His most comprehensive treatment of this topic is in his work entitled, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, which will serve as the main source for presentation and argumentation.⁴ The thesis of this paper is, God the Father created space for all of creation by means of a voluntary kenotic act of divine hiddenness. This is to say that God the Father’s first act of creation may have been an act of concealing rather than revealing. At this point, it is important to note that the following argument takes place in an environment of experimental theology. That is, the goal is not to offer this argument as if it had the force of orthodoxy. Rather it aims to wrestle with and provide a feasible answer for the question, where did God put creation?

This paper is broken up into four parts: 1.) A brief survey of Protestant literature regarding space and the things in it. 2.) The nature of created space as Moltmann understands it. 3.) The nature of eschatological space, according to Moltmann. 4.) Given Moltmann’s particular and somewhat provocative language, it will be necessary to briefly address the charge of pantheism/panentheism as it is leveled against Moltmann’s view of divine *kenosis*.

¹ Marcus Tullius Cicero. *On The Ideal Orator* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2001.

² Psalm 19:1-6 (KJV)

³ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco), 1991; *God in Creation* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco), 1991; *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco), 1991; *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco), 1990.

⁴ Jürgen Moltmann. *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN), 2004.

Terms

As is important in all discussions, there is a need to define certain terms found throughout the paper. First, the term “Eschaton” stands as the time in which all of creation has been made new, i.e., the New Heaven and Earth (Rev. 21:1f). The newness described bears both similarity to the old while at the same time have fundamentally new characteristics. For instance, humans will still be volitional, rational, and relational creatures but, for the purposes of this paper, it is proposed that God’s presence among us will be fundamentally different than the current arrangement. Whereas we enjoy the ubiquitous yet general presence of God in the here-and-now; we will enjoy the ubiquitous special presence of God in the Eschaton.

“General presence” is regarded as God’s omnipresence among His creation coupled with His hiddenness. Perhaps an example of this would be in Exodus 33:22 where Moses is put in the cleft of a rock while God “passed by.” Indeed, God is present, but there remains a hiddenness in that Moses was only allowed to view the back parts or aftermath of God’s special presence. This “special presence” represents the unique localized presence of God in creation. Examples of this would be the presence of God over the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant, the Shekinah Glory, and of course, the incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ. This special sense recognizes that God was uniquely present to the children of Israel wandering in the wilderness in a way that He was not present to the Indo-Europeans of the same time. This distinction between the general and special presence of God is essential in understanding Moltmann’s case for eschatological space. “Historical space” stands for space/time we currently experience as a succession of moments among particulars in the general presence of God. “Eschatological space” is that redeemed space where God’s special presence fills all created places at the fulfillment of human history.

A brief exposition of the forthcoming argument proceeds as follows: Generally speaking, Protestant theology, when dealing with the notion of space-time, gives little attention to the nature of space and more to the nature of things in space and the fact that God is not bound by it or them (i.e., the Creator/creature distinction). As a result, this paper employs Moltmann to propose an answer to how the space for creation came about. First, it is essential that we explore the nature of creation and created space. Secondly, once that nature is adequately established, this paper will discuss the nature of *kenosis* in relation to the triune God and specifically the person of the Father.

Thirdly, having the nature of space and its relation to God established, this paper will then turn to the nature of space once it has been redeemed. More specifically, that the redeemed space of the Eschaton is where God the Father’s special presence fills all created space in a way He does not currently fill created

space. Fourthly, it is necessary to show that what Moltmann is proposing is not pantheism/panentheism. Rather, Moltmann's position is quite the reverse as he unequivocally asserts the Creator/creature distinction while remaining within the scope of orthodoxy. With an introduction to the topic at hand, coupled with certain terms and a proposed trajectory, let us press on to the argument portion of the paper.

Argumentation

The Current State of the Case

Moltmann asserts that in the greater theological discourse, "Meditations on space are rare."⁵ To test his assertion, this paper will take a brief and cursory look at some of the more formative and influential Protestant theological texts to examine their content regarding God and space. These texts are the *Westminster Confession* [WCF], the *London Baptist Confession* [LBC], Francis Turretin's *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, and Richard Muller's *Theological Dictionary of Greek and Latin Terms*.⁶

Regarding creation, the WCF reads, "It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...in the beginning, to create, or make of nothing, the world and all things therein either visible or invisible."⁷ Here our first example speaks to the Creator and what He created, but all that is mentioned is the "stuff" created and not the space in which all of the stuff was created. The aim of this paper is to reach further back than the stuff of "world" or "universe" and ask where/in what space did God put all the stuff. As would be expected, there is similar wording in the LBC which reads, "In the beginning it pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...to create or make the world, and all things therein, whether visible or invisible."⁸ In nearly identical form, the LBC speaks almost exclusively of the things in creation rather than the space in which creation was created.

This trend continues in the High Scholastic tradition representative in Turretin's *Institutes* as he writes against the Platonists as he asked the following questions: "Was the world from eternity, or at least could it have been? We deny... Was the world created in a moment or in six days?... In what order were

⁵ Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 140.

⁶ *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Lawrenceville, GA: Committee for Christian Education & Publications), 1990; *London Baptist Confession* (Pensacola, FL: Chapel Library), 2016; Francis Turretin. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*. Vol. 1, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing), 1992; Richard Muller. *Theological Dictionary of Greek and Latin Terms* [Kindle] (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic), 1985.

⁷ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chap. IV Art. 1.

⁸ *London Baptist Confession*, Chap. IV Art. 1.

the works of creation produced by God in the six days?... Was Adam the first of mortals, or did men exist before him?”⁹ Once again the focus of the creation event is not on the space in which creation takes place but more so on the things found in creation. Certainly, the impetus to resist the Ancient Greek notion of prime matter must not be overlooked, but even then, prime matter is the unformed nothing of the primal creation, and as such, still pertains to the things located in space. So it seems the things contained in the space of creation receive the bulk of theological attention given the polemic bent of the day.

Richard Muller bears out these very same tendencies as he reports on Post-Reformation Reformed theology. Muller writes in his dictionary of terms against the Platonic notion of “nothing,” the Reformed tradition does not accept Platonism on this account because “the Platonic *me on* (q.v.), the *nihil* (q.v.), an indeterminacy or plastic, pregnant nothingness... somehow limits the divine creative act.”¹⁰ Contrary to Platonism, “the Protestant scholastics argued a *nihil negativum, materiam excludens*, a negative or absolute nothingness, excluding matter, having no characteristics and in no way limiting the work of God; it is *pure space* and is in no way either a substratum or a precondition for creation.”¹¹ This notion of “pure space” begins to approach a description of the nature of the space in which all things were created. The objection to substratum or precondition is meant to thwart the assertions that matter of some kind must exist for the Designer of that matter to form a thing, to create a thing. In this brief survey, it seems rationally permissible to conclude that a considerable portion of the discussion on God’s relation to space has been devoted to the things in space, or better yet, the lack thereof. Given these brief considerations, there seems to be a modicum of validity to Moltmann’s assertion that the motif of “space” is not often pursued as a subject when dealing with the nature of creation and the things in it.

The Nature of Created Space

“[S]ince God is ‘all in all’, how can anything else that is not God exist at this specific point?”¹² Herein lies the difficulty. If all that existed before creation was God, then where did God “put” creation at the moment God spoke it into existence? “How can God create out of ‘nothing’ when there cannot be such a thing as nothing, since his essence is everything and interpenetrates

⁹ Turretin, *Institutes*, Fifth Topic Questions 3, 5, 6, and 8.

¹⁰ Muller, *Dictionary*, Kindle (*Ex Nihilo*).

¹¹ Ibid. [Emphasis: Mine]

¹² Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 109.

everything?”¹³ This concept seems to have certain problematic elements, one of which being that if all that exists is God, then there is no “nothing” out of which to create. Creation out of nothing seems to have the quality of a misnomer unless we take “nothing” to mean without matter of some sort. Put positively, if all that exists is God, then the notion of “out of nothing” lacks any meaningful referent. Certainly, if this paper aligns with current Protestant notions of created space, nothing cannot mean the Platonic idea of matter without form. If God created out of nothing, and nothing is a no thing, then out of what did God create? More to the task at hand, into what did God create if all there was, was God? An answer to this question lies at the crux of Moltmann’s formulation of created space.

Before the argument proceeds, though, it is important to deal with an objection. The objection may go something like this, perhaps God created space and then proceeded over the course of six days to put creation in that space. So that space became the place for all creation. Of course, the difficulty of this proposition is that God had to create space, and if space is a created thing, then it is not God. If a thing is not God, then there is no place for that created thing, even if that thing is space itself. Where did God put created space? Additionally, should this line of reasoning be taken back to a prior cause it may be said that God needed to make a place in which to put the space in which God put creation. But this does not solve the problem. On the contrary, it may complicate the problem, which ultimately amounts to an infinite regress. If all that exists is God, then there is no space for creation. And should a space for creation somehow come into being where would God put that space? Furthermore, it seems fair to ask, why is it that created space is not full of the brightness and majesty of the creator God? Certainly, it cannot be that God is unable to fill that space as if to say God can make a rock too big He cannot move it, so also He can make a space for creation so small He cannot fill it as He does Heaven for instance.

Moltmann aims to answer this apparent misnomer of creating something out of nothing, while at the same time avoiding the idea that God created a space for the universe that somehow restricts God’s special presence by virtue of the kind of space that place is. He goes about doing this by proposing a system of *kenosis* within the persons of the Trinity. Moltmann writes, “*Zimsum* really means ‘concentration’ or ‘contraction’, a withdrawal into the self...God’s concentration at the single point of this Shekinah in the Temple, not the doctrine of God’s concentration inversion for the purpose of creating the world.”¹⁴ Drawing on Midrashic and Kabbalistic tradition, Moltmann posits a “concentration” of God as the first act of creation. This concentration is understood as a withdrawing of the

¹³ Ibid., 109-110.

¹⁴ Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 109.

localized special presence of God prior to the act of creating matter. Given the gravity of this statement it is necessary to address the mechanism whereby such a “concentration” would come to pass. Put in other terms, Moltmann seems to be arguing that God the Father’s first act of creation is an act of hiddenness and not revelation.

When discussing the doctrine of the Trinity, there is often a delineation between the ontological Trinity (the oneness of God) and the economic Trinity (the persons of God). In both Midrashic and Kabbalistic tradition, the God in view is only an absolute monad absent triune persons. As such, speaking of God as contracting or concentrating Himself may not find approval from those who see the oneness of God as immutable or simple. The scenario is considerably different from the perspective of Christian theology. In Christian theology, God acts both *in se* (in and toward Himself) and *ad extra* (in and toward His creation).¹⁵ So then it may be said that God acts toward Himself in a way distinct from that way which He does toward His creation. Of course, there is a multitude of things that could be addressed regarding this point, but suffice it to say that such a distinction is not outside the bounds of historic Reformed orthodoxy.

That said, if there is to be any application of “condensing” or “concentration,” then it will be done in terms of divine *ad extra* actions. That is to say that “concentration” pertains not to the ontological monad that is God but economically with regard to the creative work of the triune persons. How then does *zimsum* (concentration) pertain to the creative action of the divine persons?¹⁶ Moltmann proposes that *zimsum* is no outlier but rather is central to the Christian faith. Moltmann writes, “Christian theology talks about ‘God indwelling’ in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit ‘into our hearts’ (Rom. 5.3) and ‘on all flesh’ (Joel 2.28-32; Acts 2:17) is the beginning of the new, eschatological creation. It will be completed when God is ‘all in all’ (I Cor. 15:28 AV).”¹⁷ The same can be said of Jesus Christ for in Him dwells the fullness of the godhead bodily. The keyword there being “bodily.” Christ being God is present to Himself in a way that He was not present to Judas Iscariot or Pontus Pilate. Indeed, Christ is God manifest in the flesh, and when He emptied Himself and took on Him the form of a servant God was uniquely present to creation. But

¹⁵ Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Divine Essence and Attributes*. Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 2003. See page 328. “***In se and ad extra: the absolute and relative understanding of divine infinity.*** The bifurcation of the topic, then, yields an *ad intra* attribute of infinity or greatness (*magnitudo*) that is predicated of God *absolute*, followed by a pair of *ad extra* attributes, *omnipraesentia* and *aeternitas*, predicated of God *relative*. In some cases, the paradigm is complicated a bit by the addition of *magnitudo* or greatness as an *ad extra* or relative attribute and by a further distinction between *omnipraesentia* and *immensitas*.”

¹⁶ Also spelled “*tzimsum*.”

¹⁷ Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 110.

in the person of Christ, God was present in a special way; different from the way in which God was present to the shepherds keeping watch over their flock by night. Along these same lines, Richard Muller concludes, “Thus it can be said as a rule that whereas God is generally present to all things, he is present graciously and specially only to some.”¹⁸

Moltmann regards the emptying of Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as kinds of kenosis. In so doing, he ascribes to the triune persons a kenotic nature to each of the persons. This, of course, raises the question then of how the Father is kenotic. To unpack this question, let us consider the several formulations of the Reformed scholastics and then observe certain similarities in Moltmann’s language. Muller writes of the Reformed scholastics and their doctrine of God’s relationship to space in the following words,

God, after all, cannot be like either kind of infinite series since he is not composed of parts or moments that could be described as different in magnitude, location, duration, and so forth - nor ought God to be viewed as occupying an indivisible point or moment, but rather in his immensity as containing all times and places, having no limit of essential perfection.¹⁹

In addition, he writes quoting Joseph Carlyle,

The Divine Essence (as one of the Ancients hath expressed this astonishing mysteries) is whole within all things, and whole without all things, no where included, nor where excluded, containing all thing, contained of nothing, yet not at all mingled with the nature of these things, nor defiled with their pollutions.²⁰

For the purposes of this paper, it is important to note the dichotomy of ideas: whole in Himself/whole in all things, whole within all things/whole without all things, and no location/containing all places. Here we see again evidence of differentiation between *in se/ad intra* actions and *ad extra* actions of God.

¹⁸ Muller, *Post-Reformation* vol. 3, 345. Muller goes on to say, “He is also present ‘in heaven, by his Majesty and glory,’ to the angels and saints - not, of course, to the exclusion of other places, but there in a glorious and eminent manner, and in hell ‘by his vindictive justice.’ (Even so, the distance spoken of by Scripture between God and the impious indicates the absence of his special favor and grace, but not the absence of his essence.) So also does he dwell ‘in the faithful on earth by his Spirit, and in the church by his grace’; and, finally, God is uniquely present in ‘Jesus Christ, in whom, as the scriptures tell us, ‘dwellers all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.’” 345.

¹⁹ Muller, *Post-Reformation*, vol. 3, 332.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 343. See footnote 638

Regarding the latter God is said to be “containing all places,” “containing all things,” and “everywhere itself.”

Karl Barth uses strikingly similar language when he writes, “[I]n God Himself remoteness and proximity are one...He is Himself distant and near in one being.”²¹ In another place, he states a similar formulation. “God can be present to another, this is His freedom. For He is present to Himself.”²² Then, regarding the distinction between the ontological Trinity and the economic Trinity regarding spatiality, Barth offers these remarks,

To this extent God’s presence necessarily means that He possesses a place, His own place, or, we may say safely, His own space. The absolute non-spatiality of God deduced from the false presupposition of an abstract infinity is the more dangerous idea. If God does not possess space, He can certainly be conceived as that which is one in itself and in all. But He cannot be conceived as the One who is triune, as the One who as such is the Lord of everything else.²³

Such considerations even find a place in the pastoral tone of C.H. Spurgeon when he writes, “When this world shall have melted like a dream, our house shall live, and stand more imperishable than marble, more solid than granite, self-existent as God, for it is God Himself - ‘We dwell in Him.’”²⁴ None of the above authors have been charged with pantheism/panentheism, much less to have the charge settle to their account. Though Moltmann, as we shall soon see, writes in more provocative language, it is a contention of this paper that he is no less orthodox on this point. With these formulations in mind, let us now consider Moltmann’s language as it touches on these same topics.

Drawing from two instances (i.e., Jacob’s Ladder and the Burning Bush), Moltmann begins his discussion on space in this way, “[C]an heaven and earth in their finitude ever become the dwelling of the Infinite One? Ought we not rather to say the very reverse – that God is the dwelling place of the world created by him, and that this world remains eternal because it finds space *in him* and is permitted to partake of his eternal life?”²⁵ Remembering the language from the “orthodox” authors mentioned above, Moltmann should not seem too far from the standard formulations of the Creator/creature distinction on this point.

²¹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics II.1*, 461.

²² *Ibid.*, 463.

²³ *Ibid.*, 468.

²⁴ Charles Haddon Spurgeon. *Morning and Evening*. (Lynchburg, VA: The Old-Time Gospel Hour), 1990. See page 254.

²⁵ Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 149-150.

Moltmann takes the existence and presence of God as the very center of contingent existence when he writes, “Space for human living is made possible, and is stabilized, round the centre of the holy space. Where the divine appears in earthly form, the world is made the environment in which men and women can dwell.”²⁶ He goes on to say, “Being is a homogeneous whole. Its extension is the space of being. But there is no space in which Being is not, or Non-being is .”²⁷ As a result, Moltmann announces, “here we shall be taking a different view, and assuming that space is primarily *living space*.”²⁸ Here living space cashes out as living in the sense that God, the fountain of life, sustains and is generally present in and beyond all space.

Moltmann employs the language of dwelling in God and God in creation. Since there can be no space that possesses Non-being; he concludes that God is in creation and the creation is in God. The unadorned notion “creation is in God” seems problematic, but taken charitably in light of prior statements of God’s presence in the word and our dwelling in God, Moltmann seems to be on the mark in that we have seen in earlier Protestant confessions that God contains all things and places, and everywhere itself. He continues his argument in *God and Creation* by stating that, “Through their mutual indwelling, they remain unmingled and undivided, for God lives in creation in a God-like way, and the world lives in God in a world-like way.”²⁹ Moltmann ascribes this to divine *kenosis* within the economic Trinity, namely in the Father. He begins with these questions, “Must we not say that this ‘creation outside God’ exists simultaneously *in* God in the space which God has made for it in his omnipresence? Has God not, therefore, created the world ‘in himself, giving it time *in* his eternity, finitude *in* his infinity, space *in* his omnipresence and freedom *in* his selfless love?”³⁰

To answer this question, Moltmann draws from Gershom Scholem’s *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, and specifically from that of Isaac Luria’s lecture as it touches on the “*kenosis*” of the Father.³¹ Such a *kenosis* may be described as God creating “room for the world by, as it were, abandoning a region within Himself, a kind of mystical primordial space from which He withdrew in order to return to it in the act of creation and revelation.”³² Here again, we see a kind of divine hiddenness as the initial act of creative revelation. For Moltmann, what does this hiddenness look like? He explains. “The very first act of all is, therefore, an act that veils, not one that reveals; a limitation on God’s part, not a

²⁶ Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 144.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 145.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 148.

²⁹ Moltmann, *The Coming*, 307.

³⁰ Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 109.

³¹ Gershom Scholem. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. (New York: Schocken Books), 1995.

³² Scholem, *Major Trends*, 261. See also the term “*Tsimtsum*”.

de-limitation.”³³ Before creation, all that existed was God, and in God’s great grace, His creation was not exposed to the overwhelming and glorious magnitude of the divine persons. As such, He created “by withdrawing himself, and because he withdraws himself.”³⁴ So then, for Moltmann, God the Father’s first act of creation was to veil Himself by withdrawing not His essence but His personal effulgent presence (i.e., special presence), thus providing a place in which to put space for creation.³⁵ Our author concludes, “When the triune God restricts his omnipresence in order to permit creation outside himself to be ‘there’...He throws open a space for those he has created, a space which corresponds to his inner indwelling: he allows a world different from himself to exist *before* him, *with* him, and *in* him.”³⁶

Speaking in terms that are easier for spatial creatures to understand, it may be said that the universe’s relationship to God is as “the earth together with the atmosphere and the seas, are the outskirts of his existence his less immediate self.”³⁷ Moltmann asks the reader to consider that “it would seem obvious to think of creation as built up in concentric circles of gradated divine environments. The idea was only pushed out because God, the active Creator, came to be placed so much in the centre of the picture that the God who rested on the Sabbath came to be overlooked.”³⁸ So for Moltmann, in order to understand the relationship of God to the space in which the whole of the cosmos rests, begins with the world, then move to the universe. At the limits of the universe is certainly not nothing, but something, and for Moltmann that something is God. With this sketch of Moltmann’s view on the nature of historical, created, space. To further bolster this paper’s thesis, we will now briefly pivot to God’s relation to created space as it currently is and then finally to what it will be in the Eschaton.

Moltmann writes, “In this respect God is the eternal dwelling place of his creation. But the God who has made the world through his wisdom, and keeps it in existence through his Spirit has always entered into it as well.”³⁹ God is present to all places via his *ad extra* omnipresence in creation. Still, God’s special presence (e.g. the burning bush, Shekinah Glory) “enters” this world from time to time. Moltmann maintains that the special divine presence will fill eschatological space and that God’s occasional special interventions are prototypical of the final and full expression of God’s special presence throughout all creation.

³³ Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 110.

³⁴ Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 110.

³⁵ Moltmann, *The Coming*, 299. “God makes himself the living space of those he has created.”

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 298-299.

³⁷ Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 149.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 149.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 150

George Beale offers a similar concurring sentiment but with greater specificity when he writes, “It was this divine presence that was formerly limited to Israel’s temple and has begun to expand through the church, and which will fill the whole earth and heaven, becoming coequal with it.”⁴⁰ Indeed, God has at times dwelt among His people in often unique and awe-inspiring ways.⁴¹ Moltmann recounts such things in writing, “He dwells in the midst of his people, he has his dwelling on Zion, he dwells among those scattered in exile and with them returns to his dwelling. ‘The Word became flesh and dwelt among us’, in Christ the fullness of the Godhead ‘dwells’ bodily, and at the end the eternal God will ‘dwell’ among human beings.”⁴² For Moltmann, just as God dwelt in these individual places, He will dwell in this way among all people in the Eschaton.

Moltmann declares, “The One who here among men and women is hidden beneath the cross will be revealed in glory – whether it be that he ‘comes again’ from heaven, or whether he emerges from his hidden presence and fills everything with his radiance.”⁴³ For Moltmann, “creation is destined to be the dwelling space for God. 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).”⁴⁴ Isaiah 6:3 rests at the core of Moltmann’s theology on this point. The Scriptures do not teach that the effects of God’s glory will fill the earth but that the whole of creation will be filled with God’s glory. Moltmann takes this to mean that God’s glory will fill the earth in the way God’s glory filled the Temple or hovered over the Mercy Seat.

Beale shares a similar position when he writes, “The eschatological goal of the temple of the Garden of Eden dominating the entire creation will be finally fulfilled (so Rev. 22:1-3).”⁴⁵ Beale goes on to unite the beginning of creation with the fulfillment of creation in saying that “Adam’s purpose in that first garden-temple was to expand its boundaries until it circumscribed the earth, so that the earth would be completely filled with God’s glorious presence.”⁴⁶ It seems at this

⁴⁰ George Beale. *The Temple and the Church’s Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic), 2004. 368.

⁴¹ Psalm 46:5 – God is in the midst of her; Deut 23:14 - God walketh in the midst of thy camp; Isa. 12:6 – Great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee; Hosea 11:9 – I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee; and I will not enter into the city; Joel 2:27 – And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel; Zephaniah 3:15 – even the Lord is in the midst of thee; Zechariah 2:5 I will be the glory in the midst of her; 2:10-11 I come and I will dwell in the midst of thee...I will dwell in the midst of thee; 8:3 – thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem.

⁴² Moltmann, *The Coming*, 302.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 305.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 307.

⁴⁵ Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 368.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 369.

point to ask why Moltmann holds to a *kenosis* of the Father as he does? Moltmann anchors his reply in John 17:21 which “delineates the connection between the trinitarian indwellings of the divine Persons and the shared opening of themselves to become the living space for created beings: ‘That they may all be one, even as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they also may be in us.’”⁴⁷ Christ’s High Priestly Prayer stands as a pillar for Moltmann’s entire case that God in a God-like way will dwell in creation and that creation in a creature-like way will dwell in God. So, just as God dwells with His people or in the burning bush; there will come a time when God will dwell in all the universe in a way that we do not currently experience. Put another way, “The holiness and the glory of the eternal indwelling of God is the eschatological goal of creation as a whole and of all individual created beings.”⁴⁸

For Moltmann, “creation is destined to be the dwelling space for God.”⁴⁹ If all is to be redeemed and all is to be made new, then space, being a created thing, must be redeemed and made new. Moltmann proposes that this redemption and ontological renovation “means that for those God has created, the space (*topos*) of detachment from God ceases, and eternal presence in the omnipresence of God beings in the Eschaton.”⁵⁰ Note here that Moltmann employs “omnipresence” not “immensity” thus drawing attention to the economic rather than ontological Trinity. Put another way, “The transcendence of the Creator towards his creation is added the immanence of his indwelling in his creation.”⁵¹ Once again, the emphasis on indwelling here is not essential but personal in the trinitarian formula. In the Eschaton, when all has been redeemed in Christ and when Christ has given all back to the Father so that He be all in all, then “all created beings will participate directly and without mediation in his indwelling glory, and in it are themselves glorified.”⁵² Speaking of Christ, Moltmann concludes, “As a consequence, when he completes his lordship and hands over the kingdom, his incarnation is transcended. It follows from this that in the eschatology the creation will confront God immediately with the same purity and goodness that it had at the beginning, and will participate in his glory.”⁵³ Our author takes this indwelling to define what it means for a created particular to be permanently glorified. Glorification is not merely a glorification of the person, but central to that glorification is that all redeemed creation will dwell in God’s glory,

⁴⁷ Moltmann, *The Coming*, 299.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 318.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 307.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 308.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 307.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 307.

⁵³ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 259.

and in this dual way, be glorified. Moltmann concludes with the words of Revelation,

In the final vision of the book of Revelation, heaven descends to earth. The earth becomes the city which holds paradise within itself. The city becomes the place open to all. In this place God's Shekinah finally comes to rest. In its rest, all created beings find their eternal happiness. For this 'the Spirit and the Bride' call in the unrest of history and in the sufferings of this present time (Rev. 22:17).⁵⁴

For Moltmann, the Spirit and the Bride are not only calling individuals to salvation in Christ but rather the final words of Holy Scripture are a call to all of creation to come to Christ in a grand and final redemption by the Triune Creator.

The Charge of Pantheism/Panentheism

Here we take pantheism to mean that God is all things. Panentheism is taken to mean that God is in all things. Both may be chargeable to Moltmann, but perhaps the latter serves as the best candidate for conviction. Still, it seems unlikely given the following statements, and given the limitations of this paper, it is advantageous to employ Moltmann's own words in brief.

Regarding this charge, Moltmann writes, "God's indwelling in the world is divine in kind; the world's indwelling in God is worldly in kind."⁵⁵ Indeed, Moltmann notes in one place where Spinoza implies "a pantheistic notion" when touching on concepts of space and matter. In rejecting such a notion, Moltmann goes so far as to demand that space and matter be regarded as separate, thus providing multiple echelons of being.⁵⁶ He goes on to say that neither space nor matter (of the Platonic sort) ought to have infinity or eternity attributed to it because such language is a deification of the creaturely.⁵⁷ On this point, Moltmann retorts by writing, "But such an idea would be the end of the biblical faith in creation."⁵⁸ If we are to take Moltmann at his word, then it seems he opposes pantheistic/panentheistic ideologies quite straightforwardly. Given this statement, it seems apparent that while Moltmann may be speaking in somewhat unfamiliar terms, he is aware of the possibility of crossing into pantheistic

⁵⁴ Moltmann, *The Coming*, 319.

⁵⁵ Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 150. See also footnote 26 above for nearly identical language.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 147-152.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 154.

intellectual territory. Furthermore, it is not readily apparent that Moltmann's formulation, as laid out above, is much different from those formulations found in the Confessions and Reformed Scholastics.

Conclusion

In summary, Moltmann maintains that space is a limited created particular which God the Father created via *kenosis*, thus "veiling" His special presence. In that restriction, he made a place in which to put the space for creation. In positing this, Moltmann can answer the question of where God put creation while at the same time avoiding the less than precise notion of creation out of nothing. By positing space in this fashion, Moltmann then proposes a time yet future in which Christ will redeem all things, including creation and the created space in which it is placed. After which Christ will give all to the Father who will fill all in all. Thus God will dwell in creation in a divine way, and creation will dwell in God in a creaturely way. Thus we conclude with the thesis of this paper, God the Father created space for all of creation by means of a voluntary kenotic act of divine hiddenness.

Though this paper is a brief exposition of Moltmann's great theological contributions and thus admitting further study and extrapolation, it seems that he remains for the greater part within the historical Protestant dogmas on the topic of God, creation, and space. Still, the writer of this paper is uneasy whenever time-tested theological language is substituted or glossed for the sake of present argumentation. That said, Moltmann provides for stimulating theological consideration, which historical Christian dogmatics may hesitate to embrace on no other basis than that his formulations seem novel. Perhaps such considerations are worth the risk.

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