

THE JUSTIFICATION OF GOD? THE STORY OF GOD'S WORK ACCORDING TO JÜRGEN MOLTMANN: PART 2

Ernst M Conradie
Department of Religion and Theology
University of the Western Cape

Abstract

This is a continuation of the essay on Moltmann's understanding of the narrative of God's work. It explores Moltmann's emphasis on the eschaton as 'new creation'. This emphasis is necessary given the way in which creation is faulted due to its bondage to transience. The essay concludes that Moltmann rightfully reminds us not to universalise sin, but that one should not universalise suffering too easily either.

Key Words: Consummation, Eschatology, Moltmann, New creation

Introduction: The Consummation of all Things

Moltmann describes the consummation of all things in terms of the mutual indwelling of God in the world (theo-en-pan-ism) and of the world in God (panentheism). In the beginning the Creator is a God who can be inhabited, but in the end creation is made into God's habitat. What comes into being through God's contraction is now gathered up again as God's own.¹ On the one hand, God comes to dwell in creation through the 'coming' (*adventus*) of Jesus and through the *perichoresis* of the Spirit; on the other hand the whole of creation is called to participate (*perichoresis*) in the life of the triune God. For Moltmann, the whole of creaturely reality is opened up for God's indwelling. Through this perichoretic indwelling of God in the world every wrong in history is redressed, every form of suffering is healed. This allows for the participation of God and creation in the celebration of an eternal Sabbath – best characterised by festivities, joy, laughter, dancing and play.² However, not even the universal salvation through the new creation is for Moltmann in itself the goal. In response to the history of suffering, it ultimately serves the justification of God, that is, the glorification of the Father of Jesus Christ.³

It may be helpful to explore in more detail Moltmann's understanding of eschatological consummation as new creation in order to overcome creaturely suffering.

Nova Creatio

Moltmann describes the eschatological consummation as a new beginning, indeed as a new creation. The eschaton implies *consummation* and not merely *reparation*. This is the necessary consequence of his recognition that suffering is embedded in creation itself. Moltmann stresses that the 'new' in the new creation is not only new as compared to sin, but also as

¹ Farrow 1998:434.

² See especially Moltmann 1973, also 1977:110-113. Here Moltmann is at his most eloquent. Christian hope, Moltmann (1997:123) maintains, expects "eternal joy in the dance of fellowship with all created being and with the triune God." Indeed, "The laughter of the universe is God's delight" (Moltmann 1997:135).

³ See Moltmann 1990:182.

compared to creation. God cannot be content only to overcome sin; the conditions that made sin should also be overcome. The radically new and different eschaton breaks the paramount power of this closed future and crushes disabling despair by opening new possibilities.

This is also the way in which Moltmann portrays the resurrection of Christ in *Theology of hope*, namely as a history-making *nova creatio* which also redefines what may be described as historical.⁴ Likewise, the consummation of all things, the hope for the resurrection of the body and the hope for the redemption of all creation is described here as *nova creatio*, a prelude for eternal life.⁵ In *The crucified God* he adds that “The eschatological resurrection of the dead does not mean a restoration of the creation which has been made obsolete by human sin, but the ‘creation-of-the-end-time’ that is now dawning.”⁶

In an early essay on the category of the new in Christian theology Moltmann emphasises that the new is not mere renewal but the entrance of the wholly unexpected. He also stress that the new future does not come out of the good that is available in the history of creation; it is out of the bad, the evil, the godless that God creates anew.⁷ Hope is born from the negation of the negative as well as from the anticipation of the fulfilment of God’s promises. He says: “The first *creatio ex nihilo* will be taken up into a new *creatio ex Gloria Dei*. Out of this new creation will arise a new being that will put an end to the ambivalence of all created beings between being and nonbeing. In such a new being God himself will come to his rest.”⁸

In *The future of creation* (1979), Moltmann again suggests, with reference to the resurrection of Christ, that the eschaton, like the original creation, will be a *creatio ex nihilo*, a radically new thing.⁹ The most fundamental structures of creation will be annihilated: “The new creation does not emerge out of the restoration of the old creation; it follows from creation’s end. Out of ‘the negation of the negative’ a Being arises that has overcome the conflict between being and non-being and is hence absolutely new.”¹⁰ However Moltmann does not propose an apocalyptic *annihilatio mundi*. He prefers the notion of *transformatio mundi*: The world will be ‘transfigured’ in the eschaton.¹¹

In *The coming of God* Moltmann insists that he wishes to affirm both a sense of continuity and discontinuity between creation and eschaton. He again uses the term *nova creatio* to characterize the newness of the eschaton: “What is new announces itself in the judgment of what is old. It does not emerge from the old; it makes the old obsolete. It is not simply the old in a new form. It is also a new creation.”¹² The new is surprising; it could never have been expected. It evokes astonishment and transforms everything that it touches. However, Moltmann adds, the eschaton is not without analogy: “What is eschatologically new, *itself creates its own continuity*, since it does not annihilate the old but gathers it up and creates it anew. It is not that another creation takes the place of this one: ‘This perishable nature must

⁴ Moltmann 1967:179. He says: “The raising of Christ is then to be called ‘historic’, not because it took place in history to which other categories of some sort provide the key, but it is to be called historic because, by pointing the way for future events, it *makes* history in which we can and must live” (1967:181).

⁵ Moltmann 1967:215.

⁶ Moltmann 1974:188.

⁷ Moltmann 1968:20.

⁸ Moltmann 1969:36. This formulation preempts many of the insights later developed in *God in creation*.

⁹ Moltmann 1979:161-163.

¹⁰ Moltmann 1979:48.

¹¹ Moltmann 1979:164.

¹² Moltmann 1996:27.

put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality' (1 Cor 15:53)."¹³ The eschatological *novum* does not imply a restoration but a final consummation of all things, but then in such a way that the beginning is gathered up in the end: "The consummation brings back everything that had ever been before."¹⁴ The *novum* includes an anamnestic notion of repetition. Moltmann concludes that "The new creation takes the whole of the first creation into itself, as its own harbinger and prelude, and completes it."¹⁵ The coming God is not a new God, but the God who is faithful to his creation.¹⁶

Finally, in *Science and wisdom* again offers an exposition of his understanding of the relationship between creation and new creation – in response to Celia Deane-Drummond's comment that this remains 'something of an enigma in Moltmann's theology'.¹⁷ Here he summarises what is indeed 'new' in the eschaton in four theses: a) the eschaton will entail neither a continuation of world history, nor an annihilation of the world but a transformation, 'the conferral of a new form to its being-as-it-is'; b) the temporal creation (created 'with' time) will become the eternal creation, what is mortal will become immortal, what is threatened by evil will become indestructible, not only sin but the possibility of sin will be overcome; c) this is possible through a new relationship with God, through God's cosmic *Shekinah*, through the universal indwelling of God's glory; and d) that creation in the beginning should be understood as the promise of the new creation.¹⁸

Moltmann's intentions are clear: He wishes to ensure the newness of the eschaton. He maintains that the eschaton is not merely a continuation or extrapolation¹⁹ of the present world. It constitutes the possibility of something completely new. The eschaton has to overcome suffering – both suffering resulting from human finitude and suffering caused by sin. It has added value over and against sin.²⁰ The eschaton not only contradicts suffering, evil and death, but also the conditions for the possibility of sin and death. Moltmann derives this

¹³ Moltmann 1996:29 (emphasis EMC). See also Moltmann (1996:88): "The eschatological new creation of this creation must surely presuppose the whole creation. For something new will not take the place of the old; it is this same 'old' itself which is going to be created anew."

¹⁴ Moltmann 1996:264-265.

¹⁵ Moltmann 1996:266.

¹⁶ As we will see below, Moltmann has been criticised by many for not being able to affirm a sense of continuity between creation and eschaton. In response to Moltmann's eschatology, Van Ruler (1972:102-118) objects that the eschaton is no *creatio ex nihilo*. The radical newness of the eschaton must be connected with God's equally radical faithfulness to creation, to everything God ever said or did (Van Ruler 1972:113). The eschaton should be understood not as *nova creatio* but as *recreatio* in the sense that there is movement, progression, and consummation in God's creation towards the eschaton.

Rubem Alves (1969:94-97, 152) argues that Moltmann's understanding of the dialectic between future and present becomes docetist because the future is no longer mediated by the present. If there are no present traces of the future that has to eliminate suffering, this future soon becomes implausible. He says:

The pure futurity of God is a new form of docetism in which God loses the present dimension and therefore becomes ahistorical. ... God who is always future is a God who does not become historical in terms of power but who remains ahead, attracting history to himself by means of eros. The biblical communities, however, had a hope for the future because God was present, and in his present, through the exercise of power, which was historical through and through, he negated historically and presently the power of 'what was,' thereby making man and history open for a new tomorrow (Alves 1969:94).

See also Berkhof 1985:512, Gilkey 1968:41, 57; 1970:97, Schuurman 1987:50, 1991:93, 1995:148-9.

¹⁷ See Deane-Drummond 2000:174-177, also 1997.

¹⁸ See Moltmann 2003:52-53.

¹⁹ See Moltmann's (1979:27f) criticism of Hendrikus Berkhof's notion of 'extrapolation.' Moltmann prefers a notion of eschatological anticipation, thus stressing the possibility of a radically surprising *novum*.

²⁰ Moltmann 1996:263.

from the resurrection of Christ which he also interprets as an absolutely unique event. To recognise this victory over death is to expect a similar future for the world from this risen and exalted Lord.²¹

The Possibility of the *novum*: Transcendence and Immanence

The question that Moltmann has to address, given this emphasis on the eschaton as new creation, is how this *novum* is possible in the first place. From where does the very possibility of that which is new emerge? Is reality itself structured in such a way as to allow new things to emerge, following for example the dialectic materialism of Marx and the materialist ontology of not-yet being of Ernst Bloch?²² However, such a materialist view of the emergence of the *novum* would not be able to address the finitude of creation itself and the mortality of human beings. An alternative to such a materialist account would be to relate the possibility of a *novum* to God's transcendence, the God who 'calls into being the things that are not' (Rom 4:17) through God's promises. This begs the question how Moltmann understands such transcendence, especially given his own inclination to stress God's immanence in creation through the incarnation of Christ and the *Shekinah* of the Spirit.

In an important essay on 'The future as a new paradigm of transcendence'²³ Moltmann discusses various models of transcendence, for example in terms of physics and metaphysics, and being and human existence. Instead of the Barthian notion of an eternal *presence*, Moltmann suggests the transcendence of a qualitatively new (eschatological) future (i.e. not simply the future as such) impinging on and transforming present history. Transcendence is not understood in terms of spatial metaphors (as a noun) as the Totally Other (*Ganz-Andere*) but in historical categories (as a verb) as wholly transforming (*Ganz-Ändernde*).²⁴ Here especially two categories are crucial: Openness and attraction.²⁵ The future may contain new possibilities, not yet recognised in present experiences. In this way the future 'transcends' the present. Furthermore, the new possibilities that the future may yield also exert a certain attraction on the present through the presence of God's promises.²⁶ We are pulled towards the future, not only pushed from the past. The future is not extrapolated from the present; the future is anticipated in the present. Moreover, the future is the realm from which the transcendent God comes to us *in* history. The future is the mode of God's being. Following Revelations 1:4 one may therefore speak of God's 'coming' (*Kommen*) more than God's 'becoming' or merely a God who will be.²⁷ God comes to us not 'from above' but on the road that we travel 'from ahead'. God's immanence (promise) and transcendence (fulfilment) are therefore understood in historical terms. Moltmann concludes that, "the vision of a qualitatively

²¹ Moltmann 1967:194.

²² For an extended conversation with Ernst Bloch on the difference between hope and confidence, see Moltmann 1969:148-176.

²³ See Moltmann 1969:177-199, also 1979:1-17.

²⁴ Moltmann 1979:11.

²⁵ Moltmann 1969:190.

²⁶ Moltmann 1969:211.

²⁷ See also Moltmann 1970:9f, 1975:51-52. In an early essay on 'the category of the new in Christian theology' Moltmann already adopted the notion of God's 'coming' (*Kommen / Adventus*) for judgement and salvation. He says: "God is not 'beyond us' or 'in us' but ahead of us in the horizons of the future opened to us in his promises." and "God's being is coming, that is, God is already present in the way in which his future masters the present because his future decides what becomes of the present" (1970:10). The strong emphasis on transcendence as God's judgement over suffering in society should be noted here. Judgement is understood in terms of the new that makes the old obsolete in God's eyes (1970:19).

new future of history can become a transcendent horizon which opens up and stimulates the process of transcending towards a new historical future.”²⁸

Moltmann's emphasis on the future is clearly based on a recognition of the unacceptable present, the multiple realities of suffering. He complains that “historical discourse about the ‘coming God’ was displaced by abstract discourse about the ‘eternal God’, who is enthroned in heaven in complete holiness while men suffer on earth, die and disappear forever.”²⁹ In *The experiment hope* (1975), Moltmann therefore stresses God's future mode of existence:

If we follow the biblical discourse about the ‘God of hope,’ we will have to give prominence to the future as the mode of God's existence with us. God is not present in the same way that the things of the world are at hand. God, like the kingdom, is coming and only as the coming one, as future, is he already present. He is already present in the way in which his future in promise and hope empowers the present. He is, however, not yet present in the manner of his eternal presence. Understood as the coming one and as the power of the future, God is experienced as the ground of liberation and not the enemy of freedom.³⁰

Moltmann's earlier work has often been criticised for presenting a thoroughly horizontal eschatology.³¹ According to this criticism, Moltmann regards Christian hope as an altogether human phenomenon. This hope awaits the fulfilment of God's promises in this world (viz. the influence on Moltmann of Ernst Bloch). This accounts for the revolutionary impact of Christian hope and the influence of Moltmann on liberation theology.

In his mature work, the pendulum has swung away from a one-sided emphasis on the transcendence of the future. A stronger interest in the relationship between space-time and eternity as the appropriate locus for a discussion of God's transcendence (and thus for the emergence of a *novum*) becomes evident. In continuity with his earlier position, Moltmann maintains that the eschaton is not equated with the epiphany of an eternal presence (Barth) that can only stand in contrast to time, equally near to all ages of history and equally far from all of them³² – which would lead to an annihilation of time. History is not swallowed up completely in the eschaton. Instead, history itself – and therefore also the future – finds room within God's eternal existence as a dimension of eternity. God's being in eternity encompasses all times (past, present and future).

In *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, Moltmann develops the notion of God's presence in creation in terms of the notion of God's indwelling (*Shekinah*) through the Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit, “the world will be transfigured, transformed into God's world, which means into God's own home.”³³ This hope is expressed in a vision of the perichoretic indwelling of God (*Einwohnung Gottes*) in this new world.³⁴ In the eschaton the whole world will become God's home so that God will be ‘all in all’ (1 Cor 15:28); God will be in the world and the world in God.

In *God in creation*, Moltmann develops an ecological doctrine of creation in which he again stresses the immanence of God ‘in creation’ (compare the immanence in history above).

²⁸ Moltmann 1979:15.

²⁹ Moltmann 1975:50-51.

³⁰ Moltmann 1975:50-51.

³¹ See for example Geertsema 1980.

³² See Moltmann 1967:40. Here he contrasts a (Greek) eschatology based on the epiphany of the logos with the Hebrew eschatology based on the promises of God.

³³ Moltmann 1981:104.

³⁴ Moltmann 1981:104.

He rejects a deist notion of God in which the transcendence of God is overemphasised. He says: "In the Western tradition, God kept moving increasingly into the sphere of transcendence, and the world came to be understood in purely immanent and this-worldly terms."³⁵ And further: "Through the monotheism of the absolute subject, God was increasingly stripped of his connection with the world, and the world was increasingly secularized."³⁶ Instead, Moltmann proposes a trinitarian and specifically pneumatological³⁷ understanding of the *immanence* of God in creation. God is present in the world, but the world is also present in God.³⁸ Moltmann is nevertheless clear in his determination to preserve God's transcendence and the fundamental distinction between Creator and creation.³⁹ He therefore rejects the process view of a dipolar relationship between God and creation which leads to a fusion of God and nature and a divinisation of nature, which subsequently becomes co-eternal with God.⁴⁰ He also rejects a 'pantheistic dissolution of creation in God.'⁴¹ The world is not in itself divine, nor an emanation from God's eternal being.⁴² Also in the eschaton, the distinction between Creator and creature will be maintained.⁴³

At the same time, if creation is relatively distinct from God, then God can also dwell in creation. The eschaton may therefore be understood as God's indwelling (*Shekinah*) in creation,⁴⁴ which is already anticipated in the celebration of the Sabbath.⁴⁵ Moltmann adds that in the kingdom of glory the world remains God's creation and will not become God-self.⁴⁶ In this way Moltmann tries to balance the transcendence and immanence of God. He concludes that: "It is therefore impossible to think of this world-transcendence of God

³⁵ Moltmann 1989:54.

³⁶ Moltmann 1985:1.

³⁷ For his emphasis on 'Creation in the Spirit', see Moltmann 1985:9f, 98f. Creation comes into being through the Spirit (Gen 1:2), exists in the Spirit and is renewed through the Spirit. He adds: "When we say that the creation's Creator Spirit indwells both every individual creature and the community of creation, we mean that the presence of the infinite in the finite imbues every finite thing, and the community of all finite beings, with self-transcendence." (1985:101).

³⁸ Moltmann 1985:13, 17; 1989:15. Moltmann's position is usually described as pantheist. He says, for example, that: "The one-sided stress on God's transcendence in relation to the world led to deism, as with Newton. The one-sided stress on God's immanence in the world led to pantheism, as with Spinoza. The trinitarian concept of creation integrates the elements of truth in monotheism and pantheism. In the pantheist view, God, having created the world, also dwells in it, and conversely the world which he created exists in him" (1985:98). However, it should be noted that Moltmann's approach is best understood in terms of his trinitarian theology. He says, for example, "But differentiated pantheism is not capable of linking God's immanence in the world with his transcendence in relation to it. This is the benefit of the trinitarian doctrine of creation in the Spirit and of the Creator Spirit who indwells creation. This doctrine views creation as a dynamic web of interconnected processes. The Spirit differentiates and binds together ..." (1985:103).

³⁹ Moltmann 1985:79.

⁴⁰ Moltmann 1985:78. Moltmann concludes that process theology does not have a doctrine of creation; it can only account for the continuing preservation of the world.

⁴¹ Moltmann 1985:89.

⁴² Moltmann 1985:72, also 80-86. Elsewhere, Moltmann (1981:113) describes the metaphor of emanation as belonging to the language of pneumatology and rejects the Christian critique against the neo-Platonic doctrine of emanation. However, he concludes that the doctrine of emanation (and the doctrine of decrees) can do no more than to lead us to the threshold of an all-embracing trinitarian doctrine of creation (1985:86).

⁴³ Moltmann 1985:64. See also Bouma-Prediger 1995:116.

⁴⁴ This implies that God will dwell in the whole creation (Rev 21:3) and the whole creation will be "the manifestation and mirror of his glory" (Moltmann 1985:288).

⁴⁵ Moltmann (1985:5) explains: "If the creative God himself dwells in his creation, then he is making it his own home, 'on earth as it is in heaven'. All created beings then find in nearness to him the inexhaustible wellspring of their life, and for their part find home and rest in God."

⁴⁶ Moltmann 1985:184.

unless we think simultaneously of his world-immanence; and it is equally impossible to conceive of God's evolutive immanence in the world, without his world-transcendence. The two are mutually related."⁴⁷

In *The coming of God*, Moltmann again makes use of the notion of divine self-restriction (*zimsum*). However, this is now embedded in more sophisticated understanding of the relationship between time and eternity. Here he develops the patristic notion of the *aeon* or *aevum* to distinguish between God's absolute eternity and the relative eternity of the new creation beyond space and time.⁴⁸ With Augustine, Moltmann wants to maintain that the world was created with time not in time. There was no time before creation. However, God's eternity does not imply a negation of temporality; it is not timelessness. On the contrary, eternity as the fullness of creative life includes an opening for time 'in' eternity.⁴⁹ Here Moltmann again follows Augustine's distinction between the primordial beginning in which God created heaven and earth (Gen 1:1) and the historical beginning of earthly time (Gen 1:5).⁵⁰ It is within this context that Moltmann speaks in *The coming of God* about God's creative resolve to create a world different from Godself.⁵¹ Out of this self-restriction of God's eternity there emerges a time for creation, the primordial aeon, an opening for time within eternity.⁵² Furthermore, the space created by God's self-withdrawal is not an empty vacuum of nothingness (unlike in *God in creation*), but is living space in God. God becomes hospitable, a God who can be inhabited. This also constitutes an ecological (*oikos*) doctrine of God.

This protological distinction has an eschatological parallel which Moltmann explores in *The Way of Jesus Christ*, in *The coming of God* and again in *Science and wisdom*. Creation will not be taken up into God's absolute eternity. Instead, he maintains that there will be an eschatological transition of the temporal creation into aeonic time (relative eternity) and space (i.e. where the transitoriness of time will be transcended towards the 'fullness of time').⁵³ Moltmann says: "Aeon is not the absolute eternity of God. It is the relative eternity of created beings who participate in God's Being. Aeon is time, but a time filled with eternity."⁵⁴ Moltmann suggests that this relative eternity would allow for the possibility of simultaneity (through remembrance and expectation) and omnipresence.⁵⁵ Here God's primordial self-restriction is paralleled with God's de-restriction so that God may be 'all-in-all'.⁵⁶

Moltmann suggests that the Christian hope is not so much that that which is finite will be absorbed into the infinite. The temptation is to think that the world will become eternal

⁴⁷ Moltmann 1985:206.

⁴⁸ See Moltmann 1996:282, also 1990:158, 328f (where he refers to the primordial moment as the 'inceptive aeon').

⁴⁹ Moltmann 1996:281.

⁵⁰ Moltmann 1996:282.

⁵¹ Moltmann 1996:281-2. Here Moltmann (1996:298) adds explicitly that God does not leave a vacuum as the kabbalistic doctrine of *zimsum* suggests (and for which Moltmann is criticised by Torrance – see above). God allows a world that is distinct from Godself to exist before God and in Godself. God's self-restriction does not leave empty space, but makes God habitable and hospitable (1996:299). The primordial nothingness – which Moltmann defends in *God in creation* – is not mentioned again in *The coming of God*. God makes living space in Godself.

⁵² Moltmann 1996:282.

⁵³ Moltmann 1996:279f.

⁵⁴ Moltmann 2003:109.

⁵⁵ Moltmann 1996:290, 294f, 2003:88-97.

⁵⁶ See also Moltmann 1990:329.

if it can find space within God, if God is the dwelling place of the world. Instead, the Christian hope may be that God in God's infinite love will find a dwelling place amongst that which is finite. Consummation does not mean absorption into the divine being but joyous fellowship between the Creator and creation – if creation is understood not as a synchronic fixation of the cosmos in one particular moment (especially the final moment), but diachronically as the whole history of the cosmos, in all its bodily, material, earthly dimensions and all its concrete lived experiences, all of it together. The consummation implies that everything that had ever been before is gathered up and brought back in the eschaton.⁵⁷ Relative eternity thus allows for the simultaneous presence of all times in history.⁵⁸

The fellowship of creation with God in the eschatological consummation would imply the co-presence of all 'chapters' in the history of God's creation. Moreover, it allows for the glory of God to pervade everything and for creation to participate in God's glory. Again, this does not mean that the world becomes divine or God, nor does it dissolve into God's infinitude. It "participates as world in God's eternal being."⁵⁹ For Moltmann, the marvel of the Jewish notion of *Shekinah* and the Christian doctrine of the incarnation is that the infinite God finds a dwelling place in the finite creation.⁶⁰

On this basis Moltmann finds room to maintain both God's immanence and God's transcendence. He suggests that a mutual indwelling of the world in God and of God in the world will come into being in the eschaton. This implies a reciprocal *perichoresis* where God's salvific presence infuses the world and where the world is taken up and transformed in God's presence.⁶¹ This mutuality and reciprocity characterises God's loving relationship with the world. It is an expression of a more fundamental perichoresis within the triune God.⁶²

Discontinuity and Continuity?

The suffering embedded in creation requires an understanding of the eschaton as *nova creatio*, as something radically new compared to creation in its present form. For Moltmann, the eschaton therefore cannot merely be understood as restoration (*restitutio in integrum*).⁶³ The problem is clearly not only one of sin that needs to be negated. The suffering and death embedded in creation can only be addressed through a new creation. However, the emphasis on the new threatens a sense of continuity between this earth and new earth, between cosmos

⁵⁷ Moltmann 1996:265.

⁵⁸ See Moltmann 2003:92f.

⁵⁹ Moltmann 2003:78.

⁶⁰ Moltmann 1985:149.

⁶¹ See already Moltmann 1981:157, also 1985:16f, 150f; 1996:295, 307. See also the analysis of Moltmann's concept of perichoresis by Joy Ann McDougall (2002). She argues that there is tendency in Moltmann's writings to apply the inner-trinitarian perichoresis univocally to the relationship between God and the world. This masks the unequal nature of the relationship between Creator and creation and can inhibit the freedom and otherness of creation if this is not balanced by an emphasis on the differentiating activity of the Holy Spirit.

⁶² Moltmann 1981:150f. See also Bouma-Prediger 1995:119-126. This is exemplified in the mutual *Shekinah* of God and humanity in Christ. 'In Christ' there is a double indwelling: the indwelling of God and of believers. See Moltmann 1996:306.

⁶³ See Moltmann's (1974:259-261) interesting comments on Van Ruler's insistence that the primary problem that has to be addressed through the 'emergency measure' of the incarnation is that of sin. For Van Ruler, the eschaton is therefore best understood in terms of restoration (*re-creatio*) which suggests a radical affirmation of the goodness of God's creation.

and eschaton, between my body and the hope for the resurrection of the body. Without such a sense of continuity Christian hope will be less consoling and may easily become ephemeral. Moltmann has been sharply criticised (especially amongst reformed scholars) for his emphasis on the discontinuity between creation and eschaton. The argument is that Moltmann is unable, despite his own intentions to the contrary, to consistently to affirm the goodness of creation or God's faithfulness to *this* creation.

The American reformed theologian Doug Schuurman argues that Moltmann makes contradictory remarks with regard to such continuity: On the one hand Moltmann maintains that the eschaton is the fulfilment or *telos* of creational life; on the other hand he says that the eschaton is the annihilation or *finis* of creational reality.⁶⁴ Schuurman suggests that this is related to the way in which the created order itself is faulted.⁶⁵ Accordingly, the eschaton therefore requires an annihilation of the created order.⁶⁶ Any hope for some form of continuity between creation and re-creation is effectively smashed.⁶⁷ If all creation is to be annihilated, how can there be hope for the future of creation? Annihilation may be dreaded but surely it cannot be hoped for.⁶⁸ Schuurman only sees the need for an eschatological annihilation of sin and a transformation of the good creation that God in his providence continues to uphold. The eschatological future contradicts the present only insofar as it is subject to sin.⁶⁹ Accordingly, the Christian hope is for the renewal of this ravaged, sin-torn world, and not for a second world created *ex nihilo*.⁷⁰

Another American reformed theologian Steven Bouma-Prediger also finds Moltmann's radical discontinuity between creation and eschaton problematic. He concludes: "The old creation will be caught up and absorbed (*wird aufgehoben*), when the kingdom is fully consummated, creation will be discarded (*abgetan*). In short, the new creation is not the renewal but the annihilation of creation."⁷¹ Bouma-Prediger argues that Moltmann is driven to this problem due to his conflation of creation and fall. Creation is necessarily faulted due to the bondage to transience (*Knechtschaft unter die Vergänglichkeit*)⁷² since death and transience is ontologically constitutive of creation itself (Rom 8:19f). Bouma-Prediger argues that if creation is essentially faulted, then only a radically new creation can provide an adequate solution to such faultedness.⁷³ To posit the necessity for a new creation in this

⁶⁴ Schuurman (1991:106) provides a helpful explanation of Moltmann's dual and somewhat confusing emphasis on both continuity and discontinuity. He argues that creation and eschaton are continuous in that both states are marked by openness to new possibilities and the conditions necessary for this openness. They are discontinuous in that some of the features of creation which limit possibilities are removed in the eschaton.

⁶⁵ Schuurman (1991:161) resists any notion that death and suffering belongs to the good creation. In fact, he sees this as a 'trenchant obstacle to repentance' and "a rage against God which alleges that God is the author of the misery of the world and which blinds humanity to the goodness of God mirrored in the world."

⁶⁶ Schuurman (1987:62) comments: "Humanity stands in need of redemption from sin and its effects, not from creation itself". Volf (1995:136) defends Moltmann against such criticisms by pointing to Moltmann's insistence, especially in his later work, that the eschaton does not imply an annihilation of creation. Although Moltmann tries to (and has to) defend both a sense of continuity and of discontinuity, his emphasis is clearly on the newness of the eschaton.

⁶⁷ Schuurman 1987:50, 1991:93. In a subsequent article Schuurman (1995:148-9) acknowledges that Moltmann allows for continuity (through the importance Moltmann attaches to the category of creation) more than he (Schuurman) earlier appreciated.

⁶⁸ Schuurman 1991:103.

⁶⁹ Schuurman 1987:52.

⁷⁰ Schuurman 1987:67.

⁷¹ Bouma-Prediger 1997:89. The reference here is to Moltmann 1985:63.

⁷² The reference here is to Moltmann 1985:69.

⁷³ Bouma-Prediger 1997:89.

way undercuts the goodness of creation. Moltmann is therefore unable to ultimately affirm creation, despite his almost overwhelming emphasis to the contrary.⁷⁴ His emphasis on the new future leads to a devaluation of present creation.⁷⁵

Concluding Comments

On the basis of the discussion above one may draw the following conclusions on Moltmann's version of the narrative of God's work:

- Firstly, there can be little doubt that there is indeed a circular movement in Moltmann's version of the story, although it is debatable whether this could be described as 'neo-Platonist'. Unlike neo-Platonist thinking Moltmann commences with the triune God (and not the One) and concludes with the participation of the whole of creation in God's own being, or, more precisely, the mutual indwelling (*perichoresis*) of God in creation and creation in God. He balances God's primordial self-withdrawal (*zimzum*) with the eschatological notion of *aevum* (relative eternity) in order to distinguish the Creator from creation also in the eschaton. Likewise, he balances the alienation of creation from God through a history of suffering with God's coming (*adventus*) toward creation – which he describes in terms of the categories of solidarity, affirmation, prophetic judgement and waiting.⁷⁶ The turning point of the story is the cross where it becomes evident that creation is godforsaken and where Godself in Jesus Christ becomes godforsaken. This turning point constitutes at the same time the epitome of suffering, namely death. This turning point itself is balanced through the resurrection which Moltmann interprets as an eschatological event, that is, as the basis for the promise of God to renew the whole creation.
- Secondly, three levels of Moltmann's understanding of the sources of suffering require our attention. As I argued above, he is, throughout his oeuvre, clearly very sensitive to the victims of history, those who are 'sinned against' and those who are trapped within structural violence. In response to these manifestations of suffering Moltmann offers prophetic critique together with a message of God's affirmation of the inherent dignity of the victims. However, he also insists that suffering cannot be reduced to the impact of sin. Indeed, natural suffering is quite inevitable within the created order since it coincides with finitude, including mortality. Death is life's natural end and cannot be merely equated with the result of sin.⁷⁷ Moreover, Moltmann is deeply aware that biological evolution implies selection and that many living beings are brutally sacrificed in order that the fittest (the most adaptable) may survive.⁷⁸ Amongst the human species an awareness of such finitude leads to anxiety and more or less necessarily to alienation. The only response available to Moltmann is to proclaim the hope for a radically new creation where such natural suffering will be overcome – a theme to which he returns countless times. Beyond the impact of sin and of natural suffering, Moltmann describes

⁷⁴ Bouma-Prediger 1995:238; 1997:89. See Walsh (1987:57) for a similar criticism of Moltmann: "If the new is totally new and even a *novum ex nihilo* or a *creatio nova*, then how can it take up and preserve the old within itself?"

⁷⁵ Bouma-Prediger 1995:247.

⁷⁶ See Moltmann (2003:65): "God acts in the history of nature and human beings through his patient and silent presence, through which he gives those he has created space to unfold, time to develop, and power for their own movement. We look in vain for God in the history of nature or in human history if what we are looking for are merely divine interventions. Is it not much more that God waits and awaits ..."

⁷⁷ See Moltmann 1996:77-95.

⁷⁸ See Moltmann 1990:294.

suffering as the shadow side of God's pathos. God's resolve to love something other than God implies vulnerability and therefore suffering – especially if such love entails any degree of reciprocity. Here Moltmann is perhaps at his strongest and at his weakest, especially where he speculates about the power of a primordial *nihil*.

- Thirdly, Moltmann's understanding of the relationship between natural suffering and suffering as a result of human sin requires specific attention. As we have seen above, several of Moltmann's critics within the reformed tradition suggest that he fails to distinguish adequately between creation and fall and that he therefore cannot consistently affirm the goodness of the created order. Moreover, sin becomes inevitable on this basis. However, these critics tend to underplay or ignore the problem of natural suffering. With many other contemporary theologians conscious of insights from evolutionary biology, Moltmann refuses to do that. Instead, he recognises the universality of suffering. In my view Moltmann's intuition here is sound, but he could have been more careful in distinguishing these two episodes of the story. The primary and most evident manifestations of suffering are related to the long-term impact of human sin (structural violence). This applies to human suffering and suffering amongst other species. In Africa, people seldom die of purely natural causes;⁷⁹ they die of something and that something is typically related to various human threats to health. Even in the case of natural catastrophes such as earthquakes, volcanoes and tsunami's, suffering is deeply intertwined with social structures that exacerbate such suffering.
- Fourthly, this reluctance to distinguish the episodes of creation and sin rigorously has repercussions for Moltmann's understanding of salvation. My impression is that there are two voices that reverberate throughout Moltmann's oeuvre. The one voice seeks to show solidarity with the victims of human history. This voice is born from Moltmann's many dialogues with Jewish scholars and with liberation, feminist, black and Minjung theologians. This voice emphasises the need to come to terms with those who are sinned against and prompts Moltmann's prophetic theology. Salvation is here understood as affirmation of the dignity of the marginalised and as victory over the powers of evil.

The other voice speaks in more generalised terms over suffering as natural suffering, as the inevitable shadow side of God's resolve to create. If I am not mistaken this voice emerges from Moltmann's German conversation partners. Over and above German complicity in the Holocaust, in Third World poverty and in environmental degradation, Moltmann seeks to offer a word of consolation to a German audience, people with the same anxieties, personal troubles, sicknesses and confrontations with death and dying as others around the world. Here Moltmann's soteriology is more generalised and more speculative. Here suffering is universalised and drawn into God's own being. Here salvation is likewise universalised and hope for a radically new creation is entertained.

These two voices reverberate in my own life and theological reflection as a tenth-generation Euro-African, predominantly a child of slave owners but also of quite a few slaves, who somehow still is an ambiguous beneficiary of the legacy of imperialism, colonialism and apartheid. Clearly, within such a context there is a need to confess guilt for the sins of the past, to look for a healing of our memories and to find a common way to address the suffering of the present and the future. In a context of rape, economic inequality, HIV-infection and environmental degradation the impact of structural violence (including patriarchy) can scarcely be ignored. Here an affirmation of the dignity of those

⁷⁹ Moltmann (1996:95) makes this point as well.

who are sinned against is needed more than ever, while we may also maintain hope for victory over the powers of evil. In addition, we may still entertain hope for the liberation of oppressors, for the forgiveness of sinners, perhaps even forgiveness for those who apparently cannot escape from the trap of consumerism.

However, within the current South African context, more than a decade into a new dispensation, there also seems to be a recognition that the lines between those who are sinners and those who are sinned against cannot always be drawn sharply. This is typically true in the case of marriage trouble, family feuds, community conflicts and even in the case of labour disputes and various forms of fighting over scarce resources, also within a university context. All too often we are both victimised and perpetrators at the same time. This is especially evident from the impact of crime and gangsterism but also from the HIV/AIDS pandemic in this country. Sin has indeed become so embedded in society that it is often rather difficult to determine who the victims are and who the perpetrators are. In a context of endless mutual accusations, it may be a great relief to recognise that we are all sinners, that confession is more appropriate than mutual accusations and that we are all in need of God's liberating word of forgiveness. There is indeed a need for the liberation of oppressors *and* there is a need for a word of forgiveness for the victims.⁸⁰

In such a context there is a need for a more fully developed doctrine of sin, one that can indeed be liberating and that can overcome a musty moralism. This will not emerge if the suffering embedded in creation itself is too easily conflated with the suffering resulting from sin. While Moltmann rightfully reminds us not to universalise sin too quickly, I sense a need to remind Moltmann not to universalise suffering too quickly.

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⁸⁰ See Moltmann 2000:183ff where he speaks of the two sides of oppression, namely that of the master and of the slave. He argues that oppression destroys humanity on both sides. He subsequently develops a black theology for whites, a liberation theology for the First World, a Minjung theology for the ruling classes and a feminist theology for men.

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