



## An Evaluation of Jürgen Moltmann's Concept of Time and Space in the New Creation<sup>1</sup>

Raymond R. Hausoul

Evangelical Theological Faculty, Leuven, Belgium

rbhausoul@gmail.com

---

### Abstract

This article concentrates on Jürgen Moltmann's elaboration of time and space, which constitute a hermeneutical key when talking about the new creation. It presents a general survey of Moltmann's concept of time and space, and critically evaluates the doctrine of *zimzum*, the dialectic of time and eternity, and the view on limited and omnipresent space which influences Moltmann's view on the new creation. In my approach I argue extensively that the time and space of creation will not change into the infinite free time and space of God, but they will border on it, and thereby be connected and separated by it.

### Keywords

Moltmann, cosmic eschatology, new creation, time-eternity, space

Jürgen Moltmann has currently been bringing to the fore again the complexity and relevance of the discussion about the new creation in systematic theology.<sup>2</sup> This article concentrates on his elaboration of time and space, which constitute a hermeneutical key when talking about the new creation. Moltmann's opinion on time and space has been going through a long development. The first summary thoughts on this matter can be found in his *Trinität und Reich Gottes* (1980; *The Trinity and the Kingdom* [1993]). Thereafter he develops the subject of time and space more comprehensively in his *Gott in der Schöpfung* (1985; *God in Creation* [1985]) to end up writing *Das Kommen Gottes* (1995; *The Coming of God* [1996]) where he shows the relevance of his view on time and

---

<sup>1</sup> Peter Vermeersch, to whom the author is greatly indebted, translated this essay from Dutch.

<sup>2</sup> Hermann Häring, "Schöpfungstheologie: Ein Thema im Umbruch," *Theologischer Revue* 97:3 (2001): 182.

space for the theological discussion about the new creation. My approach to Moltmann's concept of time and space is mainly based on these works.

First of all I present a general survey of Moltmann's concept of time and space regarding the current creation and the new creation. This general survey is necessary because Moltmann himself acknowledges that he does not always let himself be understood easily. To him, theology is an experimental way of thinking, which he notes as proposal.<sup>3</sup> Going from his participation in various theological discussions, he writes:<sup>4</sup> "That may to some extent explain the variety of the influences on me and my reactions, which may have irritated some doctoral students concerned with my theology." A closer analysis of Moltmann's theology is therefore important for a productive interaction and to avoid stereotyping Moltmann's views from the very start. In this study, I recognize, as opposed to Józef Niewiadomski, the consistency and unity of Moltmann's theology.<sup>5</sup> By stating such a recognition, I am not saying that shifts do not occur. For example: in Moltmann's earlier writing the central point is God's kingdom, while in his later works the new creation is more at the centre and the kingdom is connected with the social eschatology.<sup>6</sup> The fact that shifts do occur, however, is of importance to this article.

The purpose of this study is twofold. In the first part I summarize Moltmann's understanding of time and space with regard to the new creation, after which in the second part I critically evaluate those features, which influence Moltmann's Christian views on the new creation.

---

<sup>3</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Das Kommen Gottes: Christliche Eschatologie* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1995), 14.

<sup>4</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *In der Geschichte des dreieinigen Gottes: Beiträge zur trinitarischen Theologie* (München: Kaiser, 1991), 231 (ET:174): "Das mag die Vielfalt der Einflüsse und meiner Reaktionen ein wenig erklären, die manche Doktoranden, die sich mit meiner Theologie beschäftigten, irritiert haben mag."

<sup>5</sup> Józef Niewiadomski, *Die Zweideutigkeit von Gott und Welt in J. Moltmanns Theologien* (Innsbrucker Theologische Studien 9; Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 1982), 10-12, 53, 127, 153; See conversely: Peter F. Momose, *Kreuzestheologie: Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Jürgen Moltmann* (Ökumenische Forschungen 7; Freiburg: Herder, 1978), 40-41; Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 4-5, 23, 33-35, 214; Siu-Kwong Tang, *God's History in the Theology of Jürgen Moltmann* (European University Studies. Series 23. Theology 57, Theology 57; Bern: Lang, 1996), 89-90; Matthias Remenyi, *Um der Hoffnung willen: Untersuchungen zur eschatologischen Theologie Jürgen Moltmanns* (Regensburg: Pustet, 2005), 96-99, 451; Pablo Carlos Sicouly, *Schöpfung und Neuschöpfung: "Neuschöpfung" als theologische Kategorie im Werk Jürgen Moltmanns* (Konfessionskundliche und Kontroverstheologische Studien 76; Paderborn: Bonifatius, 2007), 128-129, 354-359, 367-370.

<sup>6</sup> Günter Thomas, *Neue Schöpfung: Systematisch-theologische Untersuchungen zur Hoffnung auf das "Leben in der zukünftigen Welt"* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2009), 317.

## 1. General Survey

When Moltmann talks about 'creation' he considers the three phases of creation: *creatio originalis*, *creatio continua* and *creatio nova*, all of which are directed as a process at the eschaton.<sup>7</sup> In that way, both the current creation and the new creation together form one history of God with the world. By doing so, Moltmann clarifies creation in terms of the eschatology as well as the eschatology in terms of creation. When he speaks about space and time in the new creation we take into account this comprehensive theology of creation.

Another aspect that typifies Moltmann's theology is the doctrine of the *zimzum* (צמצום, 'withdrawal') originating from the Kabbalistic mystic Isaac (ben Salomo) Luria Ashkenazi (1534-1572).<sup>8</sup> This doctrine *zimzum* states that God's eternity and omnipresence was voluntarily restricted to bring forth the creation. As Moltmann writes:<sup>9</sup> "In his omnipresence God makes a place for his creation, by withdrawing his presence from this primordial space. God restricts his eternity so that in this primordial time he can give his creation time, and leave it time." By withdrawing the own infinity at the time of creation, God created an 'empty space.' (חלל הפנוי) in which a finite world could be realized.

### 1.1 Moltmann's Concept of Time

Just like Augustine, Moltmann does not let our time begin *before*, but *with* the creation (*creatio cum tempore*).<sup>10</sup> Doing so, he distinguishes the original aeonic time in which God creates heaven and earth (Gen. 1:1), and the beginning of the transient earthly historical time that starts in Genesis 1:5: "Evening passed and

<sup>7</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Theologie der Hoffnung: Untersuchungen zur Begründung und zu den Konsequenzen einer christlichen Eschatologie* (München: Kaiser, 1964), 123-124; *Gott in der Schöpfung: Ökologische Schöpfungslehre* (München: Kaiser, 1987), 68-69.

<sup>8</sup> See for more information: Karl E. Grözinger, *Von der mittelalterlichen Kabbala zum Hasidismus*, vol. 2: Jüdisches Denken: Theologie, Philosophie, Mystik (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2005), 626-627, 811-816; Jan Bauke-Ruegg, *Die Allmacht Gottes: Systematisch-theologische Erwägungen zwischen Metaphysik, Postmoderne und Poesie* (Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann 96; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998), 172-177.

<sup>9</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 310 (ET:282): "Gott räumt in seiner Allgegenwart einen Raum für seine Schöpfung ein, indem er seine Gegenwart aus diesem Urraum zurückzieht. Gott schränkt seine Ewigkeit ein, um in dieser Urzeit seiner Schöpfung Zeit zu geben und Zeit zu lassen."; Cf. Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 326-327; "Gottes Selbstbeschränkung und die Geschichte des Universums," in *Wissenschaft und Weisheit: zum Gespräch zwischen Naturwissenschaft und Theologie* (München: Kaiser, 2002), 76-78; *Der Weg Jesu Christi: Christologie in messianischen Dimensionen* (München: Kaiser, 1989), 352; *Gott in der Schöpfung*, 98-105; *Trinität und Reich Gottes: zur Gotteslehre* (München: Kaiser, 1980), 124.

<sup>10</sup> Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* XI.6.

morning came: the first day".<sup>11</sup> This transient historical time, which Moltmann calls *chronos*, is characterized by change: a past, a present and a future. Because something changes, one recognizes that there is time. Here Moltmann follows in the footsteps of many Christian theologians who, going from Platonism, associate time with variability and eternity with invariability.<sup>12</sup> This 'temporal' creation is therefore by definition a variable creation, which, in this respect, does not know completeness and corresponds to an open asymmetrical unbalanced system, which is directed at its future completion.

According to Moltmann this incomplete *chronos* reflects God's absence on earth. The current transient time will eventually come to an end. There will be a moment that "time is no more" (χρόνος οὐκέτι ἔσται, Rev 10:6).<sup>13</sup> *Chronos*, the earthly linear time, as we know it, the incessant transient time of growth and destructive decay, will also cease to exist. *Chronos* will meet its end on the last day, when the resurrection of the dead will take place, "in an undivisible moment, in the blink of an eye" (ἐν ἀτόμῳ, ἐν ῥίπῃ ὀφθαλμοῦ, 1 Cor. 15:52). Because, in Moltmann's view, the dead exist in God's eternal time, their time between death and resurrection lasts exactly that moment.<sup>14</sup> "This last day in time is at once the present of eternity to all times. [...] In content it is defined as 'the day of the Lord', to which all times are simultaneous." When the eternal God comes to live on the new earth and God's glory fills creation, the earthly time changes into an 'aeonic time' which knows no beginning and end, and no earlier (*Vorher*) and later (*Nachher*) anymore.

### 1.1.1 Present as Relative Eternity

In our current historical time, Moltmann does recognize a *Vorher* and *Nachher*, which distinguish future and past by the present. So, the future and the past are

<sup>11</sup> Moltmann, "Gottes Selbstbeschränkung und die Geschichte des Universums," 76-78; *Kommen Gottes*, 291, 311, 326-327; *Der Geist des Lebens: eine ganzheitliche Pneumatologie* (München: Kaiser, 1991), 86; *Weg Jesu Christi*, 353; *Gott in der Schöpfung*, 124-128; *Trinität und Reich Gottes*, 115, 124.

<sup>12</sup> Plato, *Timaios* 27d; See for a survey: Fabian Schwarzbauer, *Geschichtszeit: über Zeitvorstellungen in den Universalchroniken Frutolfs von Michelsberg, Honorius' Augustodunensis und Ottos von Freising* (Orbis Mediaevalis 6; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2005), 65-72; Stephen Edelston Toulmin and June Goodfield, *The discovery of time* (Chicago: University, 1965), 42-44.

<sup>13</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, "Der 'eschatologische Augenblick'. Gedanken zur Zeit und Ewigkeit in eschatologischer Hinsicht," in *Vernunft des Glaubens: Wissenschaftliche Theologie und kirchliche Lehre, Festschrift zum 60. Geburtstag von Wolfhart Pannenberg*, eds. Jan Rohls and Gunther Wenz (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 584; *Kommen Gottes*, 308.

<sup>14</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 307-308 (ET:279-280): "Dieser letzte Tag der Zeit ist zugleich die Gegenwart der Ewigkeit zu allen Zeiten. [...] Er ist inhaltlich bestimmt 'der Tag des Herrn', dem alle Zeiten gleichzeitig sind."

times of not-being, because the earlier is *no-more* and the later is *not-yet*. Only the present *is*, and Moltmann holds this in great esteem.<sup>15</sup> His first reason to value the present is that the point in time 'now' on a timeline distinguishes as well as connects the past and the future (resp. as end and as beginning of their period of time). A second reason is the possibility to experience the past in the present by memory (*memoria*) and the future by expectation (*expectatio*).<sup>16</sup> That way, the present as 'now' or 'moment' is unique in the earthly historical time. To Moltmann, the present is the "atom of eternity" (*Atom der Ewigkeit*) which is a fragmentary reflection of the "aeonic time" that will characterize the new creation.<sup>17</sup>

Moltmann does emphasize that this 'now' or 'moment', in which past, present and future converge, can only be seen as a glimpse of the aeonic time. After all, it is impossible to remember the past in a perfect way, like a movie does. Our memories and expectations remain relative and changeable by experiences and expectations in the present.<sup>18</sup> Consequently there is a big difference between memory and past as well as between expectation and future. After all, in this fragmentary reflection we are talking about a relative eternity that is not able to fully grasp past, present and future.

### 1.1.2 *Quality Time Kairos and the Augenblick*

Above the relative simultaneity by memory and expectation in the transient time (*chronos*), Moltmann positions the quality time (*kairos*). This *kairos* is "the proper time', 'the favourable opportunity,' 'the unique chance' upon which 'a second chance' never follows," and in which the dark transient time transforms into the light-emitting future moment that will begin soon.<sup>19</sup> But Moltmann warns not to equate *kairos* with the eschatological moment or the aeonic time.<sup>20</sup> He who does, states that the moment finds its end in the

<sup>15</sup> Moltmann, *Theologie der Hoffnung*, 21-22 where the writer explicitly expresses Blaise Pascal's complaint about the scorn of the present (*Pensées* nr. 172).

<sup>16</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 313-314. Cf. Aristotle, *Physics* 114-115.

<sup>17</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 319; "Eschatologische Augenblick," 585. Cf. Augustine, *Confessiones* XI.20.26; Parmenides, *Fragments* B 8,5.

<sup>18</sup> Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering rightly in a violent world* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 30, 45, 49-56.

<sup>19</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 320 [ET:290-291]: "die rechte Zeit,' die 'günstige Gelegenheit,' die 'einmalige Chance,' der niemals eine 'zweite Chance' folgt."

<sup>20</sup> Moltmann, *Theologie der Hoffnung*, 39-50; *Kommen Gottes*, 320-323, with references to: Søren Kierkegaard, *Der Begriff Angst* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1984), 94; Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief (Zweite Fassung)* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1922), 481; Rudolf Bultmann, *Geschichte und Eschatologie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1964), 106.

present. Nevertheless, the eschatological moment is not the same as the temporal moment in which past and future are stagnant. What happens in the current quality time is only an anticipation of what will happen with the dead in the eschatological moment. There is still a question of resemblance and difference.

Even superior to this *kairos*-moment is the experience of the present as depth-experience of the moment (*Tiefenerfahrung des Augenblicks*), which is the paradoxical “eternal now” (*nunc aeternum*).<sup>21</sup> Also this moment interrupts, like an atom of eternity, the transient time and ruptures the difference between past and future. God’s presence is no longer experienced in the temporality, but in the timelessness of the mystical *nunc aeternum*. It is a moment of ecstasy that occurs on this earth and has its own experience of time. Not only is this *Tiefenerfahrung des Augenblicks* a *relative* contemporaneity of past, present and future, but an *absolute* present, an undivided presence in the present, a fulfilled moment in life. One who withdraws from God, experiences time as transience and death as its universal end. Completely different is the experience of life of someone who has enjoyed the *Tiefenerfahrung des Augenblicks* and received a foretaste of eternity. As this moment is brief, it generates a hunger for the eternal life, which is characterized by the perfect undisturbed fullness of life.

### 1.1.3 Reflection: Historical Time and Aeonian Time

In his conviction that from Genesis 1:5 on there is a distinction between the original aeonic time and the transient earthly historical time, Moltmann connects the eschatological moment with the original aeonic time which he later calls “original moment”.<sup>22</sup> The eschatological moment leaves the transient historical time of past, present and future, and enters, just like the original moment before Genesis 1:5, into eternity.<sup>23</sup> Practically, this means that we should not think that the time in the new creation is similar to the time in this creation as we now know it. Time disappears and makes room for eternity, just like it was before Genesis 1:<sup>24</sup> “The end of time is the converse of time’s beginning”. In that way, a reflection is formed: from aeonic time through transient historical time back to aeonic time.

<sup>21</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 319-320.

<sup>22</sup> Moltmann, *Gott in der Schöpfung*, 86.

<sup>23</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 323; Cf. *Erfahrungen theologischen Denkens: Wege und Formen christlicher Theologie* (München: Kaiser, 1999), 97; *Weg Jesu Christi*, 353-355.

<sup>24</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 323 (ET:294): “Das Zeitende ist die Umkehr des Zeitanfangs”; Cf. “Eschatologische Augenblick,” 586.

This change of time occurs because the eternal God comes to live in the new creation. According to the doctrine of the *zimzum* God then no longer chooses to be limited as it was during the historical time (*Selbsteinschränkung*), but removes this self-restraint (*Selbstentschränkung*). God will then be 'all in all' when appearing in creation with the full splendour of God's glory. This last act does not mean that creation becomes equal to God, but that creation itself participates in the godlike life. Moltmann carefully watches over this distinction between God and creation. The fact is that God knows an "absolute eternity," while the new creation will know a "relative eternity" that takes part in the "absolute eternity" and which in theology has of old been referred to as "aeonic time." The glorified creation and the glorified human being remain finite, but not mortal; they remain subject to time, but no longer subject to transience.<sup>25</sup>

Because of God's presence in the new creation, there is a profound transformation and transfiguration of time and space. The transient historical time makes way for eternity and the limiting space for the omnipresent creation:<sup>26</sup> "The primordial time and the primordial space of creation will end when creation becomes the temple for God's eternal Shekinah. The *temporal* creation will then become an eternal creation, because all created beings will participate in God's eternity. The *spatial* creation will then become an omnipresent creation, because all created beings will participate in God's omnipresence. Creation's departure from time into the aeon of glory comes about through the annihilation of death and the raising of the dead."

#### 1.1.4 *The Fullness of Times in the Aeon of Time*

At the dawn of the aeonic time, life conquers death. Then, the resurrection of the dead will happen in the blink of an eye. All this will take place synchronously, for all people at the same time (simultaneously), as well as diachronically, for all the dead from Adam on, on the last moment of time, at the

---

<sup>25</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, "Schöpfung als offenes System," in *Zukunft der Schöpfung: ges. Aufsätze* (München: Kaiser, 1977), 133; Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 308; Moltmann, "Eschatologische Augenblick," 588.

<sup>26</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 323-324 (ET:294): "Die Urzeit und der Urraum der Schöpfung enden, wenn die Schöpfung zum Tempel der ewigen Schechina Gottes wird. Die zeitliche Schöpfung wird dann zu einer ewigen Schöpfung, weil dann alle Geschöpfe an der Ewigkeit Gottes teilnehmen. Die räumliche Schöpfung wird dann zur allgegenwärtigen Schöpfung, weil dann alle Geschöpfe an der Allgegenwart Gottes teilnehmen. Der Austritt der Schöpfung aus der Zeit in den Aion der Herrlichkeit geschieht durch die Vernichtung des Todes und die Auferweckung der Toten."

beginning of eternity. Then all times of the historical time come together to be transformed and glorified and to be absorbed in the eternal or aeonic time of the new creation.<sup>27</sup> So, the aeonic time is a 'fullness of times' of which the depth-experience of the moment (*Tiefenerfahrung des Augenblicks*) already gives a foretaste. Just like God is 'all in all' in the new creation and permeates everything, the aeonic time will then also permeate the historical time:<sup>28</sup> "In the new aeon a mutual perichoresis between eternity and time also comes into existence, so that on the one hand we can talk about 'eternal time' and on the other about 'eternity filled with time'."

How can we picture this 'eternity filled with time' concretely? Moltmann himself admits not being able to depict this precisely. The images that he uses to describe this glorified and transformed time are versatile and abstract:<sup>29</sup> "a beginning without end," "fulfilled time," "aeonic time," "time filled with eternity," "eternal time," "time of eternal life," "time of eternal livingness," "cyclical time," "reversible time." Moltmann's representation of the 'reversible time,' which replaces the 'irreversible time,' clarifies in the best way what exactly he means. The irreversible time of growth and decay or birth and death applies to the visible current creation. But to the invisible future creation, the reversible time of the aeons is applicable. This transition from one time into another is referred to by Moltmann as *Zeitsprung* (leap of time).<sup>30</sup>

To Moltmann the future aeonic time is not a linear timeline that carries on endlessly, but a cyclical time (*Zeitkreis*) in which all times return eternally.<sup>31</sup> With this image he holds on to the idea of the new heaven and earth as a dynamic happening:<sup>32</sup> "However we may imagine this, it is the very opposite of 'a deathlike silence.' If we have to think of it as the time of eternal life, then we

<sup>27</sup> Moltmann, "Eschatologische Augenblick," 582; *Kommen Gottes*, 123, 308, 324.

<sup>28</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 325 (ET:295): "Es entsteht auch eine weckselseitige *Perichorese* zwischen Ewigkeit und Zeit in jenem neuen Aion, so daß man einerseits von 'ewiger Zeit' und andererseits von 'zeiterfüllter Ewigkeit' sprechen kann."

<sup>29</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 324 (ET:294): "Anfang ohne Ende", "erfüllte Zeit", "äonische Zeit", "mit Ewigkeit erfüllte Zeit", "ewige Zeit", "Zeit des ewigen Lebens", "Zeit der ewigen Lebendigkeit", "Zeitkreis", "reversible Zeit".

<sup>30</sup> Ya-Tang Chuang, "Eschatological Future and Aeon in Moltmann's Theology: Antwort von Jürgen Moltmann," in *Sino-Theology and the Thinking of Jürgen Moltmann. Sino-Theologie und das Denken Jürgen Moltmanns*, eds. Jürgen Moltmann and Thomas Tseng (Internationale Theologie 10; Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2004), 127.

<sup>31</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 324-325; *Weg Jesu Christi*, 354-355.

<sup>32</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 324 (ET:295): "Wie immer man sich diese vorstellt, sie ist das genaue Gegenteil der Totenstille. Soll sie als Zeit des ewigen Lebens gedacht werden, dann muß sie als Zeit der ewigen Lebendigkeit vorgestellt werden."



have to imagine it as the time of eternal livingness.” The eternal life is a fulfilled life that has nothing to do with timelessness and death. Also elsewhere Moltmann expresses this insight:<sup>33</sup> “[W]ithout remembrance and without expectation we should perceive only points in time, momentary perceptions and snapshot impressions, but no connection between them. We could hear no melody and perceive no movement.” And in an earlier article he writes:<sup>34</sup> “It will therefore be permissible for us to assume that there will be time and history, future and possibility in the kingdom of glory as well, and that they will be present in unimpeded measure and in a way that is no longer ambivalent.” Yet carefulness is required when we talk about the future aeonic time in terms of our historical time. He who does not maintain this caution, risks deriving his expectations for later from his experiences from now. In that case the future holds nothing new in store anymore to expect.

## 1.2 *Moltmann's Concept of Space*

Just like time, also space changes when God lives on the new earth. Time and space did come into existence because of God's self-restriction (*zimzum*), in order to create time and space for the current creation. This restriction was necessary to give the current creation a detachment from God and a freedom of movement over against God:<sup>35</sup> “Through the space conceded by God, creation is given detachment from God and freedom of movement over against him. If God were omnipresent in the absolute sense, and manifested in his glory, there would be no earthly creation. In order to make himself endurable for his earthly creatures, God has to veil his glory, since ‘he who looks upon God must die’”. To Moltmann this limited space (*topos*) is inextricably bound up with dividedness or detachment, just like the historical time (*chronos*) is inextricably bound up with transience. When God appears on this earth in full majesty, not only will historical time (*chronos*) be transformed into aeonic time,

---

<sup>33</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 317 (ET:288): “Ohne Erinnerung und ohne Erwartung würden wir nur Zeitpunkte, Augenblickeindrücke und Momentaufnahmen, aber keine Zusammenhänge wahrnehmen. Wir könnten keine Melodie hören und keine Bewegung erkennen.”

<sup>34</sup> Moltmann, “Schöpfung als offenes System,” 133 (ET:126): “Man wird darum auch im Reich der Herrlichkeit Zeit und Geschichte, Zukunft und Möglichkeit annehmen dürfen, und zwar in einem unbehinderten Maße und auf eine nicht mehr ambivalente Weise.”

<sup>35</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 336 (ET:306): “Durch den von Gott eingeräumten Raum wird der Schöpfung Abstand von Gott und Bewegungsfreiheit ihm gegenüber gegeben. Wäre Gott im absoluten Sinn allgegenwärtig und in seiner Herrlichkeit offenbar, gäbe es keine irdische Schöpfung. Um sich für seine irdischen Geschöpfe erträglich zu machen, muß Gott seine Herrlichkeit verhüllen, denn ‘wer Gott schaut, muß sterben’”.

but also limited space (*topos*) into omnipresence:<sup>36</sup> “If God himself appears in his creation, then his eternity appears in the time of creation, and his omnipresence in creation’s space. Consequently temporal creation will be transformed into eternal creation, and spatial creation into omnipresent creation.”. A basis for the end of this limited space or *Urraum* is laid in Revelation 20:11: “and there was no place for them” (τόπος οὐχ εὐρέθη αὐτοῖς).<sup>37</sup> Space and time are indeed no empty abstractions to Moltmann. They are qualified according to whatever happens in them. In Moltmann’s theological thinking about the current creation it is a negative qualification.

### 1.2.1 *Space as Outside and in God*

Despite God creating space for creation, this does not mean that this limited space is separated from God. The Creator lets the world—which is distinguished from God—exist *for* God, *with* God and *in* God. Creation’s space is therefore *outside* God, because it is detached from God, as well as *in* God, because it exists in God.<sup>38</sup> Moltmann sustains this with Scriptural texts such as: “He led me also out into a large space” (Ps. 18:19), “You have set my feet in a spacious place” (31:8), “For in Him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28), as well as with a quotation from *Midrasj Rabba Genesis*: “we do not know whether God is the space of his world or if his world is his space” (II:68.9).

How can we picture this concretely? Moltmann uses the “trinitarian perichoresis” and the fetus in the uterus as example and model.<sup>39</sup> The trinitarian perichoresis points to the complete mutual permeation of Father, Son and Spirit, which leads to a unity with identification. In that way we also have to picture the paradoxical *outside* and *inside* God. The other example that Moltmann uses, is that of the fetus in the uterus: We grow for nine months in the womb and from birth on we feel the first pain of separation. So, each human being exists in relation with others and forms at the same time their living space. That can also clarify the paradoxical outside and inside.

<sup>36</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 308 (ET:280): “Erscheint Gott selbst in seiner Schöpfung, dann erscheint seine Ewigkeit in der Zeit und seine Allgegenwart in dem Raum der Schöpfung. Folglich wird die zeitliche Schöpfung zur ewigen Schöpfung und die räumliche Schöpfung zur allgegenwärtigen Schöpfung verwandelt.”

<sup>37</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 325.

<sup>38</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 328, 331; *Gott in der Schöpfung*, 101.

<sup>39</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 330; “Gott und Raum,” in *Wo ist Gott?: Gottesräume, Lebensräume*, eds. Carmen Rivuzumwami and J. Moltmann (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2002), 32.

### 1.2.2 *God's Residence on Earth in History*

Though God is infinite and creation limited, the Bible does talk about God finding a residence in creation through history. How is this possible without creation being blown up or destroyed by God's infinity? Moltmann mentions two possibilities:<sup>40</sup> (1) Only a part of God lives on this earth; or (2) God voluntarily chooses to be humbled to live on earth. Moltmann finds the second option in the Jewish teachings of the Shekinah and the Christian teachings of Christ's incarnation built thereupon. He particularly concentrates on the Jewish teachings of the Shekinah. God's special presence is then based on the special deed of descent and self-abasement, which finds its very outset already in the divine decision of creation, where God chooses for self-restriction (*zimzum*).<sup>41</sup> One who follows the first option and states that only a part of God lives on earth, automatically discerns God who lives in heaven from God's glory which resides on earth. In Jewish and Christian theology we also come across this first option.<sup>42</sup> In each case, God finds a residence on earth during this historical time. We acknowledge how his Shekinah comes to live among people and leaves them again. After the destruction of Solomon's temple (587 B.C.) the Jewish people expects the return of the Shekinah in the end of time. Just like the depth-experience of the moment (*Tiefenerfahrung des Augenblicks*) gives a foretaste of the aeonic time in which God glorifies the creation and changes it into an eternal creation, also the residence of the Shekinah gives a foretaste in the historical time of God's glory, which permeates creation and changes it in an omnipresent creation.<sup>43</sup>

### 1.2.3 *God's Residence on the New Earth*

At the moment that God chooses to come into the current creation, there can be no spatial distance any more between Creator and creation. After all, independence from and sin against God came into being out of this distance.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 331; *Trinität und Reich Gottes*, 42.

<sup>41</sup> Moltmann, *Gott in der Schöpfung*, 101; *Kommen Gottes*, 332.

<sup>42</sup> Arnold Goldberg, *Untersuchungen über die Vorstellung von der Shekinah in der frühen rabbinischen Literatur: Talmud und Midrasch*, *Studia Judaica* (Studia Judaica. Forschungen zur Wissenschaft des Judentums 5; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1969), 333-335; Peter Kuhn, *Gottes Selbsterniedrigung in der Theologie der Rabbinen* (Studien zum Alten und Neuen Testament 17; München: Kösel-Verlag, 1968).

<sup>43</sup> Moltmann, *Erfahrungen theologischen Denkens*, 39; *Kommen Gottes*, 323-324, 336-337.

<sup>44</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 326-328, 336; *Gott in der Schöpfung*, 100-102.

In the new creation that changes:<sup>45</sup> “the distanced contraposition of the Creator towards his creation becomes the inner presence of God in his creation.” The new creation turns completely into an eternal residence for God’s omnipresence.<sup>46</sup> Just like God chooses in the beginning for self-restriction to create space and time for creation (*zimzum*), God also abandons this restriction at the end in order to live in the glorified new creation. In that way eschatology does not only refer to what will happen later with the current creation, but also what will happen with God. The foretastes of the glorified new creation in the historical time and limited space, will then find their fulfilment in the eternal and omnipresent creation. In this “omnipresent creation” God lets creation take part in the omnipresence of the Creator forever and gives it the *weiten Raum* in which there is no more oppression or distress.<sup>47</sup>

In this omnipresent creation, a mutual indwelling (*perichorese*) of creation in God and of God in creation comes about, without both getting mixed up with each other.<sup>48</sup> Creation does not merge into God (pantheism) and God does not merge into creation (atheism). Here, Moltmann appeals to Paul:<sup>49</sup> “according to Paul, the Creator does not remain confronting his creation but enters into it with his glory, so permeating everything.” Because of this, God will “be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28). Creation participates in the divine qualities of eternity and omnipresence, just like God used to participate in the historical time (*chronos*) and limited space (*topos*). Consequently this is where creation’s transience and detachment ends, and where creation’s eternal presence begins in the omnipresence of God.

## 2. Critical Evaluation

Jürgen Moltmann’s attention given to the new creation and cosmological transformation is an enrichment for the Christian eschatology. This attention is not self-evident. Many theologians lack a deeper understanding of this

<sup>45</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 337 (ET:307): “aus dem distanzierteren Gegenüber des Schöpfers zu seiner Schöpfung [wird] die innere Gegenwart Gottes in seiner Schöpfung.”; Cf. *Weg Jesu Christi*, 326-328.

<sup>46</sup> Moltmann, *Trinität und Reich Gottes*, 178; *Kommen Gottes*, 325, 337, 345.

<sup>47</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 337.

<sup>48</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 337; *Gott in der Schöpfung*, 96-98, 101; *Trinität und Reich Gottes*, 73, 122.

<sup>49</sup> Moltmann, “Schöpfung als offenes System,” 132 (ET:125): “Auch nach Paulus bleibt der Schöpfer seiner Schöpfung nicht gegenüber stehen, sondern geht mit seiner Herrlichkeit in seine Schöpfung ein, so dass er alles durchdringt.”

subject or even ignore it. However, a cosmic eschatology is indispensable due to the relation between creation and redemption. It is a big step forward compared with a theology that puts God impassively next to history and narrows God's intervention down to the salvation of mankind. Nevertheless—but with respect for Moltmann's theology—I want to make some critical comments on certain aspects of his concept of time and space in the new creation.

### 2.1 *The Doctrine of the Zimzum*

The doctrine of the *zimzum* forms an important basis for Moltmann's protology and eschatology. Because God chooses for self-restriction, an 'empty space,' or nihil, comes into being, which is necessary for creation. God creates the current creation *in* this nihil (*creatio in nihilo*) and creates order in the chaos. Due to the existence of this nihil, creation is incomplete and directed at its future completion. This nihil is therefore defined by Moltmann as "God-forsakenness, hell, absolute death" which threatens the current creation.<sup>50</sup>

This doctrine of the *zimzum* is being criticized from different sides. Wolfhart Pannenberg reproaches Moltmann with a "materially unfounded mystification of Nothing," because of his negative description of the nihil.<sup>51</sup> If this negative nihil is necessary for God to achieve creation, that would also mean that this negativity has its origin primarily in God. Consequently, God seems to be inextricably bound up with the negativity of 'nothingness.' Randall Bush writes:<sup>52</sup> "At worst it would seem to suggest that God is not only the solution, but somehow the origin, of a hostile, universal nothingness that manifests itself in all instances of injustice." And Paul Molnar rightly argues that, by means of the *zimzum*, Moltmann "originally incorporated nothingness into the Godhead by conceiving it as the condition for God's act of creation."<sup>53</sup>

Moltmann, however, emphasizes that the nihil gets its negative influence only from the moment on when the creature cuts itself off from its Creator.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Moltmann, *Gott in der Schöpfung*, 100 [ET: 87]: "die Gottverlassenheit, die Hölle, der absolute Tod"; Cf. "Schöpfung als offenes System," 52.

<sup>51</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), II:29.

<sup>52</sup> Randall B. Bush, "Trinitarian Conflict: A re-assessment of trinitarian analogies in the light of modern psychological and sociological conflict theories," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 19.1 (1992): 30; Cf. Thomas, *Neue Schöpfung*, 330; Remenyi, *Um der Hoffnung willen*, 133; Niewiadomski, *Zweideutigkeit*, 98.

<sup>53</sup> Paul D. Molnar, "Moltmann's Post-Modern Messianic Christology: A Review Discussion," *The Thomist* 56.4 (1992): 679.

<sup>54</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 336; *Gott in der Schöpfung*, 101.

Yet this does not resolve the tension. After all, the nihil is also *necessary* for God to make a separation between Creator and creation. But if this is so necessary for creation, why is it then no longer necessary for the new creation?<sup>55</sup> Pannenberg wonders whether that distance between God and creature is necessary at all. He critically questions whether the biblical God is not present everywhere for the creatures, without removing the distinction between God and creation.<sup>56</sup> Does the psalmist not write: "You surround me, front and back. You put Your hand on me" (Ps. 139:5)? And if God's *Selbsteinschränkung* is required to make a distinction between creation and Creator, than this implicates that the distinction will cease at God's *Selbstentschränkung* in the new creation.<sup>57</sup> But without this fundamental distinction Christian theology becomes uncritical and impossible. However, they who accuse Moltmann of pantheism, are again being referred to the lasting difference between Creator and creature.<sup>58</sup> Though Moltmann explicitly repudiates pantheism and 'emanationism,' he still strongly connects their essential insights in his theology of the new creation. This conveys the impression that the difference between Creator and creature in the new creation does not perish, but does strongly fade away.<sup>59</sup> In this field, the doctrine of the *zimzum* does not give a better explanation than traditional Jewish-Christian creationism which states that God gives space and time to the other.<sup>60</sup> According to this traditional doctrine the triune God does not necessarily have to be restricted to create space for creation. God is fundamentally prepared to give love space to others.

---

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Steven Bouma-Prediger, "Creation As the Home of God: The Doctrine of Creation in the Theology of Jürgen Moltmann," *Calvin Theological Journal* 32.1 (1997): 80; Celia E. Deane-Drummond, *Ecology in Jürgen Moltmann's Theology* (New York: Mellen, 1997), 102-103.

<sup>56</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Anbrechende Zukunft: Jürgen Moltmanns Eschatologie," *Evangelische Kommentare* 29 (1996): 78.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Duane H. Larson, *Times of the Trinity: A Proposal for Theistic Cosmology* (New York: Lang, 1995), 142, 149.

<sup>58</sup> Moltmann, *Gott in der Schöpfung*, 101; *Kommen Gottes*, 337.

<sup>59</sup> Remenyi, *Um der Hoffnung willen*, 144-146, 441-442; Daniel Munteanu, *Der tröstende Geist der Liebe: zu einer ökumenischen Lehre vom Heiligen Geist über die trinitarischen Theologien Jürgen Moltmanns und Dumitru Staniloaes* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2003), 264; Bouma-Prediger, "Creation As the Home of God," 83.

<sup>60</sup> Gisbert Greshake, *Der dreieine Gott: eine trinitarische Theologie* (Freiburg: Herder, 1997), 233; Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie*, II:29; Hans Küng, *Das Judentum: Wesen und Geschichte* (München: Piper, 2007), 719.

## 2.2 *The Transience of the first Creation*

### 2.2.1 *Past, Present and Future*

In Moltmann's theological understanding of time he builds on the traditional-Augustinian dialectic of time and eternity.<sup>61</sup> This is particularly striking when he talks about the present as the highest form of *being*. Augustine of Hippo is the first theologian who intensively deals with the relation between time and eternity. Influenced by Neo-Platonism—which puts time and eternity opposite each other—he considers eternity as a radical change of the transient earthly time.<sup>62</sup> Yet the Church father argues that time is part of God's good creation and proves that creation is in motion.<sup>63</sup> Time is therefore connected with the variability, which Augustine opposite puts invariability as the highest completeness.<sup>64</sup> Moltmann argues that the earthly historical time (*chronos*) is not only connected with variability, but also with transience:<sup>65</sup> "Chronos then becomes the power of futility, the futility of everything that happens or is done in time. Chronos devours all the children whom he bears." Especially the past is the most negative to Moltmann. In the current creation the future can still change the past, but the past cannot change in the future.<sup>66</sup> Günter Thomas criticises this: someone who earned a diploma in the past, knows that this influences his or her future. The future would look different without this event in the past.<sup>67</sup> Because Moltmann deems the past more negative than the future, he also risks conceding God's fidelity in the past and only save God's fidelity in the future. His statement:<sup>68</sup> "With the raising of Christ from the dead, the future of the new creation sheds its lustre into the present of the old worlds", is thereby partly reversible: with the raising of Christ from the dead, the past

<sup>61</sup> Moltmann, *Trinität und Reich Gottes*, 115; *Gott in der Schöpfung*, 124-129; *Kommen Gottes*, 291.

<sup>62</sup> Augustine, *Confessiones* XI.16.21; *In Ioh. Ev. Tractatus* 38,10.

<sup>63</sup> Augustine, *Confessiones* XI.5,7; XI.13,15; Cf. Eginhard P. Meijering, *Augustin über Schöpfung, Ewigkeit und Zeit: Das elfte Buch der Bekenntnisse* (Philosophia Patrum 4; Leiden: Brill, 1979), 52-54; Ingolf U. Dalferth, *Gedeutete Gegenwart: zur Wahrnehmung Gottes in den Erfahrungen der Zeit* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 209-210.

<sup>64</sup> Augustine, *Confessiones* VII.11.17.

<sup>65</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 312 (ET:284): "Chronos wird [...] zur Gewalt der Vergeblichkeit alles dessen, was in der Zeit geschieht oder getan wird. Chronos verschlingt alle Kinder, die er gebiert."

<sup>66</sup> Moltmann, *Gott in der Schöpfung*, 144.

<sup>67</sup> Thomas, *Neue Schöpfung*, 335.

<sup>68</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 46 (ET:28): "Mit der Auferweckung Christi von den Toten leuchtet die Zukunft der Neuschöpfung in die Gegenwart der alten Welt hinein".

expects a new hope in creation. Christ delivers the past as well as the future from transience, and glorifies them in honour of God. The light that Moltmann talks about in the above-mentioned quotation, is thereby not the light of a total different creation, but the light of this renewed creation with its past, present and future.<sup>69</sup>

### 2.2.2 *The Transient Earthly Historical Time*

Despite the fact that Moltmann holds on to a good beginning of the creation, this first creation is the beginning of a process of creation that unfolds into *creatio originalis*, *creatio continua* and *creatio nova*, and finds its redemption, fulfilment and completion in the new creation.<sup>70</sup> That is why Moltmann talks about an unfinished first creation which, from the beginning, looks forward to the new creation. The “it was very good” (Gen. 1:31) is not yet completely applicable to the current creation, but it covers the whole process of creation from the first unfinished and temporal creation to the deified and eternal creation. Here the question arises: was this new creation originally already the goal of the first creation? The difficulty of an affirmative answer is that the new creation would then be a deliverance *out of* the current creation. So the current creation would be a prison from which God has to rescue all creatures. This increases the risk of considering the new creation discontinuous with the first creation. Moltmann covers himself against this scenario. He who blames his concept of the *zimzum* for despising the first creation, learns that it is exactly *this* creation which can now already exist *in God*.<sup>71</sup>

But if the first creation knew a good beginning, how did *chronos* become so violent that it devoured all the children whom he bore? What is the actual cause that Moltmann characterizes things like the earthly historical time as negative? How should we picture this badness of time *an sich*? To suppose that the earthly time is bad, sounds as odd as to suppose that the earthly numbers are bad and change in the new creation. Delving deeper into thoughts about this is important because of its theological consequences in the discussion about the ‘here-now’ and the ‘here-after.’ In the past, several answers have been given to this question:<sup>72</sup> (1) time became transient because of a metaphysical fall of time;<sup>73</sup> (2) time became transient because of an imperfect

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Thomas, *Neue Schöpfung*, 339.

<sup>70</sup> Moltmann, *Theologie der Hoffnung*, 123; *Weg Jesu Christi*, 307; *Trinität und Reich Gottes*, 116, 228-229; *Gott in der Schöpfung*, 53-55, 68-69; *Kommen Gottes*, 109, 290-291.

<sup>71</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 329.

<sup>72</sup> Thomas, *Neue Schöpfung*, 50.

<sup>73</sup> Zo de neoplatonist Plotinus, *Enneades* III.7; Origenes, *De Principiis* 1.6.2.



creation; and (3) time became transient because of the historical Fall of humans. Moltmann rejects all these possibilities, without giving an alternative. Each explanation for the negative suffering comes across to him as a motivation for the suffering:<sup>74</sup> “The question of theodicy . . . is the all-embracing eschatological question. . . . It is a practical question which will only be answered through experience of the new world in which ‘God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’” It is incomprehensible to him that Church fathers, following Paul, explained the suffering as deriving from the Fall: death as punishment for sin. Equally incomprehensible to him are the modern explanations that explain suffering as a natural consequence of finiteness: death perpetuated in the order of creation. But, as already stated, Moltmann does not give an answer of his own to the question. On the one hand he follows the modern explanation stating that death is not the consequence of sin, and on the other hand the Church fathers who state that death is part of the elements which God will conquer.<sup>75</sup> At the same time, going from his acceptance of the doctrine of the *zimzum*, one can derive that the root of all evil lies within creation itself:<sup>76</sup> due to God’s self-restriction a creation comes into being that from the beginning risks to fall into a dark evil thing. Neither is Moltmann completely consequent with his separation of death and sin: he states that sin does not lead to death, but that death does lead to sin, in the same way that time leads to transience. The iron logic behind this is: future generates transience, life generates death.<sup>77</sup> But this suggests that death is both cause and result of the negative. This is one of the fields of tension in Moltmann’s theology. To Moltmann, death is after all a temporal property of this imperfect creation that God conquers once and for all in the new creation.<sup>78</sup> But does that not make death belong to the current creation which Moltmann does call imperfect, but from the beginning also “good”? Why then does it have to be conquered? In all of this, the cause of death, and by that also of the transient earthly historical time, remains an un-discussed mystery in Moltmann’s works.

---

<sup>74</sup> Moltmann, *Trinität und Reich Gottes*, 65 (ET:48): “Die Theodizeefrage . . . ist die umfassende eschatologische Frage. . . . Sie ist eine praktische Frage, die nur durch die Erfahrung der neuen Welt, in der ‘Gott abwischen wird allen Tränen von ihren Augen’, beantwortet wird.”

<sup>75</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 109-110.

<sup>76</sup> Thomas, *Neue Schöpfung*, 330; Cf. Gershom G. Scholem, *Die jüdische Mystik in ihren Hauptströmungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996), 289.

<sup>77</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 312.

<sup>78</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 96, 109.

### 2.2.3 *The Eternal Cyclical Time*

When Moltmann states that the linear time in the current creation ultimately changes into a cyclical time in the new creation, he again follows the Church father Augustine. Many have discussed this Augustinian proposal.<sup>79</sup> By accepting a cyclical time Moltmann rejects the idea of the hereafter as an eternal standstill. After all, in a cyclical time there is a past and a future and they do not cease to exist. The following applies to the linear time:<sup>80</sup> “Reversible forms of time dominate closed, symmetrical systems and systems in equilibrium—which, however, do not exist in historical reality.” With the coming of God, there will be a life that does not die anymore and a time that does no longer cease to exist. But does humanity not run the risk then of becoming prisoner of an eternal closed and repeating cycle? Is it not more logical to state that humankind experiences its full freedom in an open linear time which does elapse, but is not marked by death and transience? The question arises, which is more humane and creation friendly and enriching: (1) an elapsing linear time which does not leave a trail of suffering and death; or (2) an always recurring cyclical time that does not permit new situations. He who does not consider the earthly historical time as negative and holds firmly on to a continuity between the first and the new creation, would rather feel sympathy for the linear time in the new creation. On the other hand, he who is less keen on this earthly linear historical time and considers the new creation discontinuous to it, would rather choose for a cyclical time. But even with the latter choice, one has to ask the question: Does not each recurrent moment, however beautiful it may be, in the course of time produce the effect of an irritating replay, as demonstrated by a film like *Groundhog Day*? If that would be the case, the eternal cyclical time would finally change into an eternal prison from which creation could never escape. Though it is obviously true that “transience will perish” (4 Ezra 7:31), this does not necessarily mean that the linear time will perish as well. Also, Revelation 10:6 is hard to interpret exegetically in that way.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Karlmann Beyschlag, *Grundriss der Dogmengeschichte: Gott und Mensch*, vol. 2, Grundrisse 3/1-2 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2000), 103vv.

<sup>80</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 314 (ET:285): “Reversible Zeitformen beherrschen geschlossene, symmetrische und gleichgewichtige Systeme, die es in der geschichtliche Wirklichkeit jedoch nicht gibt”.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (New International Greek Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 538-539; David Edward Aune, *Revelation 6-16* (Word Biblical Commentary 52B; Dallas: Word, 1998), 567; Robert Henry Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (International Critical Commentary; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1920), I:263.

Richard Bauckham comments on these kinds of Moltmann's exegetical applications as follows:<sup>82</sup> "What little exegesis he offers tends to be remarkably ignorant and incompetent." Earlier Moltmann wrote about this:<sup>83</sup> "When I asked myself what I would like to have done differently and at which points I have to admit that my critics are right, then I have to name exegesis first." Healthy exegesis is indeed important to get a clear picture of the biblical discussion about time and eternity. Yet, Moltmann's model does not immediately fall apart with this criticism, because these scriptural passages are not fundamental, but reinforcing to his proposal. Yet, Bertold Klappert rightly criticises Moltmann for holding on too much to the Augustinian time-eternity dialectic in his model. Instead of talking about an end of time in God's eternity, like Moltmann does, he prefers to talk about a fulfillment of the creation time in God's future creation time.<sup>84</sup> Because Moltmann considers the earthly linear time as negative, he actually ignores too much the initial creation as chosen by God. Despite the fact that this creation, chosen by God, is actually not situated in Genesis 1 but in Revelation 21-22, does constitute a continuation of the creation in Genesis 1. If that were not the case, there would indeed be a fundamental discontinuity.

### 2.3 *Limited and Omnipresent Space*

#### 2.3.1 *Spatial Matter*

How on earth should we then picture Moltmann's vision of an omnipresent creation? Researchers have more than once pointed out that this question remains obscure in Moltmann's theology.<sup>85</sup> Proceeding from the doctrine of the *zimzum*, Moltmann has provided a negative perspective on the limiting space, and so he argues in favour of an omnipresent creation in which there is no more distance between Creator and creature. A difficulty with this view is that it precludes any matter, because otherwise there would again be a space limited by matter, or: spatial matter. Then talking about a new omnipresent

<sup>82</sup> Richard Bauckham, "Time and Eternity," in *God Will Be All In All: The Eschatology Of Jürgen Moltmann* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2005), 179-180; Cf. *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, 25-26.

<sup>83</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, "The adventure of theological ideas," *Religious Studies Review* 22 (1996): 104.

<sup>84</sup> Bertold Klappert, *Worauf wir hoffen: Das Kommen Gottes und der Weg Jesu Christi* (München: Kaiser, 1997), 72-75.

<sup>85</sup> Celia Deane-Drummond, *Creation Through Wisdom: Theology and the New Biology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2003), 138, 192; Bouma-Prediger, "Creation As the Home of God," 88-89; Remenyi, *Um der Hoffnung willen*, 449; Thomas, *Neue Schöpfung*, 323; Sicouly, *Schöpfung und Neuschöpfung*, 319, 352.

creation looks suspiciously a lot like a gnostic cloud of anti-materialism. Then God ultimately concedes this magnificent creation to eternal destruction. Then the glorified resurrection body of the citizens of the new earth is only conceivable as a-spatial and omnipresent and also the incarnation of God the Son seems to be undone. If God the Son is truly God and truly man, then God is not free from space. In general, Moltmann clearly rejects this kind of thoughts:<sup>86</sup> “If, however, the event of the raising of the one who was crucified is recognized to be *creatio ex nihilo*, then it is not a case here of possible changes in existing things, but of all or nothing. Then it becomes clear that the current world ‘cannot bear’ the resurrection and the new world created by resurrection,” and further:<sup>87</sup> “Without the ‘new earth’ there is no ‘resurrection of the body.’ Only the new earth offers possibilities for the new embodiment of human beings.” Moltmann seems to make it perfectly clear that the new creation is a material creation with room for corporality. After all, God does not want to be glorified without the deliverance and healing of the current creation. We should not consider matter merely as a casing of the spiritual and therefore profess the unity of spirit and matter. Not just man, but the whole of creation longs for God’s coming and the consequent deliverance (Rom. 8:19-21). Karl Rahner writes:<sup>88</sup> “We Christians are therefore the most sublime materialists: we cannot and must not think of the completion of the Spirit and reality at all, except we also think the ‘Endurement of matter and its completion. . . . We affirm the eternity and the eternal glory of this matter.’ Christ’s resurrection of all things shows that God’s promise is not for another, but for the new creation of *this* world, with all its material reality.<sup>89</sup> Without spatial matter, any kind of evocative discussion about a river, city or tree of life, in connection with the new creation, seems to be a pointless choice from the very start.

---

<sup>86</sup> Moltmann, *Theologie der Hoffnung*, 206 (ET:226): “Wenn aber in dem Geschehen der Auferweckung des Gekreuzigten *creatio ex nihilo* erkannt wird, so stehen hier nicht mögliche Veränderungen des Seienden auf dem Spiel, sondern Nichts und Alles. Dann tritt heraus, daß diese Welt die Auferstehung und die aus Auferstehung geschaffene neue Welt ‘nicht tragen kann’”

<sup>87</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 124 (ET:104): “Ohne die neue Erde gibt es keine ‘Auferstehung des Fleisches’. Erst die neue Erde gibt die Möglichkeit für die neue Leiblichkeit der Menschen.”

<sup>88</sup> Karl Rahner en Karl Rawer, “Weltall—Erde—Mensch,” in *Christlicher Glaube in moderner Gesellschaft*, vol. 3 (Freiburg: Herder, 1988), 428: “Wir Christen sind also die sublimsten Materialisten: wir können und dürfen uns keine Vollendung des Geistes und der Wirklichkeit überhaupt denken, außer wir denken auch die Bleibendheit der Materie und ihre Vollendung. . . . Wir bekennen die Ewigkeit und die ewige Herrlichkeit dieser Materie.”

<sup>89</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, 9-10, 18, 35.

Moltmann does not give a proper answer to the question what proportion matter exactly bears to the doctrine of the omnipresent space in the *zimzum*.<sup>90</sup> This generates the danger of walking into the trap of pantheism. God cannot be locked up in time or space. God is sovereign and independent from the limitations of creation. This difference between Creator and creature is of crucial importance when talking about the new creation. In this respect Moltmann rightly states that we should not consider creation's space identical to God's 'space'. After all, space is too small to contain God (cf. 1 Kgs. 8:27). At the same time, God gives space to all creatures. This space is originally as little pernicious by itself even as time is pernicious by itself. This perniciousness comes into being because humanity secludes itself from God, so that there is no room for God in this space. Space is then characterized by distance. In the new creation God abolishes this pernicious distance and gives a complete love space to the creation. In that way, the distinction between Creator and creature remains preserved. It is exactly the doctrine of an omnipresent creation that constitutes a great risk to remove this distinction, because if there is no space between God and creature both get mixed up with each other. Then humanity does eventually end up as an a-material drop in the ocean of the deity. However, it is an essential part of creation that God gives it love space and quality time in the new creation in which the Creator is glorified, so that God is all in all (1 Cor. 15:28).

### 2.3.2 *Continuity and Discontinuity*

Would God, who created space and let all fullness dwell spatially in Jesus Christ, turn against these limited spaces? From Genesis on it is obvious that God is highly interested in this earth and puts humankind in a specific area on earth, be it the Garden of Eden, be it the Promised Land. Starting from this pattern, the biblical expectation knows no relation between humanity and God detached from the earthly space. Also the *eschaton* blesses this life on earth. Contrary to what emerges for the greater part in theological schemes, the Bible has no knowledge of a future life in a 'heaven' detached from earth. Heaven and earth are inextricably bound up with each other. So, a new heaven also means a new earth. After all, he or she who rejects the expectation of a new earth, will end up in an eschatological mysterious discussion about an inconceivable un-earthly reality.

Moltmann acknowledges this danger and points out that the teachings of a complete destruction of the earth conflicts with the fact that God created this

---

<sup>90</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 306; See partly his thoughts about this in *Theologie der Hoffnung*, 195-196.

creation and considered life on earth as meaningful: he or she who holds on to a destruction makes the creation undone and should wonder why God created this first world at all.<sup>91</sup> In the end, that would lead to humanity getting detached from creation. That is not a hopeful message for this earth. So, Moltmann argues that humanity will be resurrected together with the current creation.<sup>92</sup> That way, history is not just a matter of human beings and human decisions. Also nature has a history and even is part of history. The rigid space will be glorified and transformed into a love space. The cosmos changes into a paradise and humankind may participate in this cosmic transformation. So, God meets men not only in time but also in space.

### 2.3.3 *Deification of Creation*

Despite the acceptance of the continuity between the old and the new creation, Moltmann rightly points out that the new creation excels the old one by far. A new creation does not mean a return to the original condition of Genesis 1.<sup>93</sup> When Moltmann wants to connect the end with the beginning, that would only be so in as far as the end completes the beginning and does not replace it by something else.<sup>94</sup> The *creatio ex nihilo* completes itself in the *creatio ex vetere*. In the end, God accomplishes the first creation in the incorruptible new creation. The ultimate goal of that is the glorification of the universe in relationship with God. When Moltmann talks about the connection between the current and the future creation, he chooses to use the terminology of Athanasius' statement:<sup>95</sup> "God became human so that we human beings might be deified".<sup>96</sup> God adopted the human nature in Christ, so that human beings could be partakers of the divine nature. The 'space' of human life in Jesus Christ is unified with God, unconfused, but also inseparable, and that is also the case in the new creation. And just like the Christian is born of God and consequently takes part of the divine nature, the new creation takes part of this divine nature. There is no ontological change of human nature into the divine nature. God remains transcendent and unapproachable for creation. Human-kind will not be equal to God, but will have an essential part of God's nature

<sup>91</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 285.

<sup>92</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 304.

<sup>93</sup> Kenneth Leech, *Experiencing God: Theology as Spirituality* (San Francisco: Harper, 1985), 258; Vladimir Lossky, *The vision of God* (The Library of Orthodox Theology 2; Bedfordshire: Faith, 1963), 129-137; Ross Aden, "Justification and Sanctification. A Conversation between Lutheranism and Orthodoxy," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 38.1 (1994): 98-99.

<sup>94</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 290.

<sup>95</sup> Athanasius, *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*, 54.

<sup>96</sup> Moltmann, *Kommen Gottes*, 299.

whereby the distinction between Creator and creature is maintained (cf. 2 Pet. 1:4).<sup>97</sup> Humanity then enters the perfect intimate communion with God. In that way the image of God becomes fully visible in the faithful: “We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18). The ultimate goal is the final exaltation of God’s image and likeness in human form, which will be completely fulfilled in the coming age. Again: this is not about a transformation of the human into deity; the point is that the creature reflects God’s full nature, just like a clean mirror gives a reflection of the human being that looks in it, without ceasing to be a mirror. To put it concretely, this also means that we need to be careful to state—going from the doctrine of the deification—that the space that is limited by creation changes into an omnipresent space. The space of creation will not change into the infinite free space of God, but it will border on it, be open toward it, and thereby be unimaginably enlarged.<sup>98</sup> So, it is true that creation will eventually be ‘absorbed’ in God, but not in the sense of a mystic-ontic communion, like a drop is absorbed in the wide ocean. The human being remains creature and enjoys the perfect, intimate communion with God.<sup>99</sup> The extension of these statements, from the single believer to the whole of creation, is reasoned by Moltmann in going from the fact that the eastern-orthodox theology never separated person and nature from each other as strictly as the modern western theology did. With this enunciation about the new creation, Jürgen Moltmann presents a new enriching framework in Christian theology. God finally gives creation the time and space that was in God’s mind from the beginning of creation and to which Genesis 1-2 already refers with the spatial life in the Garden and the resting time of the Sabbath. That is how the glorified human being celebrates God’s glory in the everlasting time and in the spatial sanctuary of the new creation.

---

<sup>97</sup> Moltmann, *Geist des Lebens*, 191; Robert V. Rakestraw, “Becoming Like God: An Evangelical Doctrine of Theosis,” *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 40.2 (1997): 266; Roger E. Olson, “Deification in Contemporary Theology,” *Theology Today* 64.2 (2007): 187, 191; Karl Barth, *The Christian Life: Unpublished fragments of Church Dogmatics IV.4* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004), 28; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999), III:21; Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1993), 232; John Calvin, *Calvin’s Bible Commentaries: Catholic Epistles* (Charleston: Forgotten Books, 2007), 342; Richard J. Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude* (Word Biblical Commentary 50; Waco: Word Books, 1983), 181; Peter H. Davids, *The letters of 2 Peter and Jude* (Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 176; Anton Vögtle, *Der Judasbrief/Der zweite Petrusbrief* (Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar 22; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1994), 140-141.

<sup>98</sup> Hendrik Berkhof, *Christelijk Geloof* (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1979), 560.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Gerrit C. Berkouwer, *De wederkomst van Christus* (Kampen: Kok, 1961), II:268.