CHAPTER I

Hope for the World

Copying God

If, as Walter Lowe has stated, theology in [the twentieth] century was born amid the darkness of war, it would be difficult to find a person more representative of theology’s struggle to emerge from this darkness than Jürgen Moltmann. The influence of his work can be traced, in part, to the fact that Moltmann’s thought possesses an acute awareness of the darkness of the past century and of the godforsakenness of the present. But Moltmann is not willing to leave us in the dark. In the midst of this darkness and godforsakenness, there is reason to speak of light and God’s presence. It is this hope of the coming God that penetrates every part of Moltmann’s theology.

In his tenacious holding to hope in the face of darkness, Moltmann “has been willing to force us theologically to imagine our world eschatologically.” Moltmann’s ability to “imagine eschatologically” has presented us with vital contributions in almost every aspect of theology. Among the most important are his interpretations of the doctrine of the Trinity, his Christology and his understanding of the relationship between God and suffering. Throughout all of his writings there are two characteristics of Moltmann’s thought that are particularly striking. First, there is a remarkable consistency in his thinking. Whether he is writing about the Trinity or the problem of suffering, his eschatologically-oriented framework can be seen as directing the development of his thought on the given topic. Repeatedly, we will have occasion to observe this feature.

Secondly, the central impulse of Moltmann’s work is practical. He characterizes his work as not concerned “so much with what is always right, but more with the word which is addressed to us here and now; not so much with correct doctrine but with concrete doctrine; and therefore not so much with pure theory but with a practical theory” (HTG 167).
Thinking eschatologically is never for Moltmann empty speculation, nor is eschatology a way of escape into the future. Moltmann’s pastoral concern for the church directs his approach in doing theology. Whether he is thinking about the intricacies of the doctrine of the Trinity or the proper understanding of revelation, his ultimate concern is to offer a counsel of hope for the church as the people of God.

In Moltmann’s thought, the church must think eschatologically if it is to live faithfully in the godforsaken present. Only the in-breaking of the future into the forsaken now offers hope; only by experiencing the current conditions with the hopeful eyes of the future can the church find direction for living with blessing and grace. Moltmann attempts to help the church take seriously both the darkness of our age as well as the promise of the age to come.

As the body of Moltmann’s work continues to grow, his influence continues to grow. And, in the words of, Douglas Meeks, we can expect this trend to continue. Although he has already “More than any other contemporary theologian . . . provided a wealth of resources for reconceptualizing the church,” Moltmann’s “contributions will become all the more crucial . . . as theology turns its attention in a more concentrated way to the question of the church’s faithful existence and even survival in a market society.”

My examination of Moltmann’s thought finds resonance in his own project of helping the church to be faithful. To that end, I gratefully acknowledge Jürgen Moltmann’s humility, creativity, commitment and witness as examples for my life. When I first discovered Theology of Hope, I was, to quote Kant, “shaken from my dogmatic slumber.” The combination of passion, concern for the church, and theoretical depth captured me. Beyond his theological work, from prisoner of war, to student, to pastor, to scholar, Moltmann’s life has been a wonderful witness to the hope of the Gospel. In spite of the need to be mindful of godforsakenness, Moltmann taught me to counter the awareness of the darkness of our age with the promise of God’s presence. Whatever criticism I may bring against his thought in this thesis, it is important to confess that it is far outweighed by my indebtedness to the creativity and energy he has personified in his writing over the years.

1a. Introduction
The broader interest from which my thesis emerges is my concern, after Barth’s critique of natural revelation and the philosophical critique
of foundationalism, to help shape a post-foundational ethic. After being pushed to the margins of the western Christian tradition by demythologization and modernization, the doctrine of the Trinity, surprisingly, has re-emerged as a source for re-imagining and grounding the moral life. A growing number of theologians assert that the human community is called “to copy God.” The internal and external relationships of the Father, Son, and Spirit have become fertile ground for speculating about who we are as human persons-in-relation and for recasting a vision of a shared life.

With the publication of *The Crucified God, The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* and several essays, Moltmann helped to re-establish the doctrine of the Trinity as a vital area for theological exploration. As Volf muses, “Perhaps no single other theologian of the second half of [the twentieth] century has shaped theology so profoundly as Jürgen Moltmann.” And much of that shaping has been centered in the task of envisaging the Trinity in terms of social relations. An important connection in Moltmann’s work happens when he links divine social relations and human intersubjectivity. In making this important move, Moltmann grounds ethics in the very life of God.

My aim in this thesis is to explore Moltmann’s contention that the Trinity provides a moral and ethical program, or what he often calls a social program for life in this world. On a philosophical/theological level, I want to investigate how Moltmann understands the life of the Trinity to be the ethical blueprint for life.

It is Moltmann's desire to develop “practical” rather than “pure” theory that sets the direction and produces the trajectory for this study. I will be asking if Moltmann’s trinitarian ethics does, in fact, do what he intends. Does his theory provide practical guidance for human life? Does living according to this understanding of the Gospel guide us to experiencing fullness and meaning, authenticity and blessing in our life as creatures on this earth? Or is the ethical fall-out of Moltmann’s thought far less helpful and even, sometimes, guilt-inducing?

1b. Conditions for Imitations

In making trinitarian relations a guide for human intersubjectivity Moltmann is arguing that a proper understanding of the inner relationships of the Trinity grounds and makes available the ethical vision for being human. The foundational role the Trinity plays in showing the church how to live faithfully is evident in the adaptation of the phrase “the Trinity
is our social program.” Here Moltmann emphasizes that creation in general and humans in particular are, to use Volf’s phrase, to “copy God.”

While the notion of copying God has a heritage in theology, the very idea of a creature being or acting like its Creator raises two questions: “In what way are we to copy God?” and “What conditions make it possible to copy God?” Moltmann’s answer to the first question can be sketched rather easily; though much more will need to be said about the way in which he develops this position. In summary fashion, we can say that for Moltmann divine life functions as an ideal and norm for human life as human relationships are to mirror the relationships found within the Trinity.

Humans are to copy the divine relationships of inner-trinitarian life in the way they relate with one another, with creation, and with God.15 Moltmann sets up a sophisticated analogy, which he identifies as an analogia relationis, between the relations of intra-trinitarian life and the differentiated relations of human life.16 As the analogy is fully explicated, the Trinity becomes understood as both an inviting community in which a refilled creation is called eschatologically to participate and the ethical ideal which the church is called to embody in the forsaken creation of the present.17 For Moltmann, there is an inextricable link between the being of the godhead and the ethical norms of human relationality.18 But questions arise about this link because the intra-trinitarian life exists as the interchange between “same” Others, an exchange that is characterized by familiarity, constancy, and predictability. However, action between and among humans is not intra-human, but inter-human. Not only is there not the same kind of predictability, constancy, and reliability in human inter-subjectivity, human relationships are further complicated by the violence of sin and evil.

Tension heightens in Moltmann’s answer to the second question—what conditions must exist in order for creation to be able to copy God. As we shall see, his theology of hope begins with a radical difference between Creator and creature in terms of an initial rupture between the two. The result is that creation finds itself always already godforsaken. Without access to God, creation as a non-copy, can only repeat its own disastrous relationships. The conditions for embodying divine-like relationships do not exist in the creatio originalis. The hope of creation comes from the promise of God to overcome the rupture.

In the revelation of Jesus Christ, divine life is available to be copied. As such, Jesus Christ is not merely the means of revelation, but the content as well as he makes visible the perichoretic relationships of the Trinity. The imitation of Christ morally is preceded by the transformation of creation
from a godforsaken non-copy into an ontologically similar copy. God’s in-breaking into godforsaken creation changes the conditions of the relationship between Creator and creation. The difference which was initially understood as rupture is redeemed in God’s movement toward creation from the future. As God’s presence replaces his absence, the “same” otherness of divine relationality is duplicated as creational difference. Moral imitation is possible because creaturely life becomes a replica of inner-trinitarian life.

But how does this overcoming of difference allow for the possibility of an ethic if creation is absorbed into divine life? Here I want to investigate Moltmann’s trinitarian ethics by analyzing the conditions of reality that exist in the interplay between the difference/rupture of the present and the unity/overcoming of the future. In the end, I will suggest that Moltmann’s attempt to ground human mutuality in trinitarian life is problematic because the unity which characterizes divine mutuality, when all is said and done, trumps and brackets creational integrity and difference.

I will be suggesting that in Moltmann’s thought ethical direction for creation comes at too high of a price. Reduced to its fundamentals, creation exists in paradox: To truly be creation it must become like God, yet in becoming like God, it ceases to be creation. God’s overcoming of the rupture between creation and himself is not fully realized in the here and now as creation still awaits the totality of God’s redemption. Until that time, the difference and forsakenness of creation is held in tension with the unity and indwelling of the future. And caught between the difference of current experience and the sameness of eschatological unity, creation is called to anticipate the future by embodying perichoresis in all its relationships. At the point of God’s arrival from the future, creation will be filled with divine life. At that time the conditions for creaturely relationships to imitate perfectly divine relationships will be met. The rupture will be healed. But this movement gives rise to some nagging questions: What remains of the difference between God and creation? Is there a danger that the differences in creation are blurred, and perhaps, eclipsed? And like Plato in the Timaeus, does the suggesting of creation as a divine copy taint creation with lack? Are sin and redemption to be understood as part of creation from the beginning?

1c. Methodological Issues

My thesis is located in the current discussions of philosophical theology rather than in systematic theology proper. While the lines between these
disciplines are not all that clear-cut and sometimes even blurry, when I say the temper is philosophical I mean that my discussion will not focus on specific theological doctrines, as for example, the doctrine of the Trinity or the doctrine of Christ. Rather, my primary concern will be to search out, trace, and explore the underlying ontological structure of Moltmann's work and the concomitant ethical impulses which flow from this theological cosmogony.

Furthermore, my chief aim is not exegetical. While I acknowledge the importance of such a work for the life of faith, I do not find it necessary in this present effort for two reasons. First, Moltmann's ethical insights do not rely directly upon such exegesis. Rather, they emerge from his understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity, itself more a construction than a result of exegesis. Since the Scriptural givens about the Trinity are rather sparse, and even fewer about what the interior life of the Trinity may look like, exegetical work will do little to help us understand Moltmann's doctrine of the Trinity and his subsequent ethics. Of course, the argument can be made that the revelation of Jesus Christ grants us insight into intra-trinitarian relationships, but any attempt to read passages regarding the life of Christ in this way would rely first on the construction of a doctrine of the Trinity which would function as an exegetical lens.

Second, Moltmann's references to Scripture are more in the form of proof-texts for his particular philosophical position than sustained exegetical analysis. Moltmann takes statements like “God will be all in all” to be philosophical descriptions of reality and not the confessional metaphorical language of faith. While deciding upon the boundaries between confession and theoretical articulations is difficult, I want to suggest that any time our theological knowledge is taken as comprehending and articulating a confessional mystery, we need to be wary.

As will slowly become evident, in the end I will not be able to hide my concern about Moltmann's ability to ground a normative social program in the Trinity. Although my argumentation and approach is perhaps more philosophical than Richard Bauckham, a leading interpreter of Moltmann, I certainly share his summary description, “Moltmann is trying to hold together two rather different ideas: that (a) the life of the Trinity is an interpersonal fellowship in which we, by grace, participate, and (b) the life of the Trinity provides the prototype on which human life should be modeled.” And, in the end, I also share Bauckham's conclusion in doubting "whether the combination is really successful.”

My hesitation in accepting Moltmann's theory of the social Trinity, while affirming much of what he has to say about justice, violence and
ethics in general,\textsuperscript{27} is also strengthened because of my fear that Moltmann's ruminations about the inner life of God cross the line into speculation, or as it is often referred to today, ontotheology.\textsuperscript{28} There is a fine line between testifying about the Trinity as revealed by Scripture and an ideology rooted in a metaphysical construct.\textsuperscript{29}

\textbf{1d. Divergent Readings}

Any thesis—and mine is such a thesis—which seeks to deepen our insight into Moltmann's overarching ontological structure or theological cosmogony faces the reality that interpreters are far from one mind in describing Moltmann's fundamental position. There is no disagreement about the fact that for Moltmann the eschatological hope of life in/with the Trinity is set in opposition to the despair of godforsaken existence. The differences arise in that some argue that Moltmann stresses the discontinuity between the God-filled future and the godforsaken present, while others see him highlighting the continuity.

The emphasis on the future as God's dwelling place led, it is said, to a denial of any experience of God in the present as the divide between God and creation was seen as intrinsic to creation being creation.\textsuperscript{30} Early critics asserted that creation and new creation are so discontinuous in Moltmann that any continuity of creation into the eschaton is impossible and; therefore, \textit{creatio originalis} is void of meaning.

In Langdon Gilkey's early reading of \textit{TH}, the openness that results from creation's kenosis is necessary because of the lack of any presence in creation. In creation's kenosis, creation is merely emptying itself of that which does not belong, which is everything. The absolute disjuncture between the future and the present undercuts any notion of continuity. In Gilkey's assessment, Moltmann's God of the future negates and violates creation. Far from being a "turning to the world," Gilkey alleges that in Moltmann "the divine presence . . . is the negation of the world in the cross."\textsuperscript{31} Gilkey further explains that in Moltmann there is a "radical denial of the importance of the doctrines of God's present activity through creation, and so of the relevance of culture, secular or otherwise, to theology and our understanding of God."\textsuperscript{32}

While for Gilkey, "eschatology depends . . . on a positive relation of faith to present culture, and thus on an understanding of the activity of God in the present \textit{saeculum},"\textsuperscript{33} for Moltmann it is history that ultimately depends on eschatology. In \textit{Theology of Hope} that which can be "experienced, remembered, and expected as 'history' is set and filled, revealed and
fashioned, by promise” (TH 106/DH 95). Gilkey’s criticism addresses the contingent character of human history. The presence of God stands over against the rupture of creation.

Along similar lines, the questionableness of creation for Moltmann leads to serious problems in his ethics according to James Gustafson. Gustafson argues that in *Theology of Hope* "the contingency of the creation rather than its orderliness is stressed . . . It is difficult to get much particular moral guidance from contingency." 34 Gustafson reiterates and makes stronger this claim when he says that in *Theology of Hope* there are “no significant bases theologically, historically, or naturally for the guidance of human action.” 35 Gustafson understands that for Moltmann “ethics must be designed in such a way that it takes into account historical changes and the processes by which moral choices are made.” 36 Yet, Gustafson argues, there must be some continuity or stability in the principles that guide this process. Moltmann acknowledges this need, but it is "only in terms of a concrete future (that) ethical instants acquire continuity." 37 This move does not solve the problem for Gustafson because this concrete future “is simply and only a relativization of all present things.” 38 The result is that Moltmann’s ethic of kenosis ends up producing only an “empty openness” (HP 122). Gustafson believes that in the end Moltmann can only tell us that “things are not immutable; they can be changed. God, the future, makes possible hope and courage.” 39

As Moltmann’s primary concern is for a practical theory, Gustafson’s critique, if on track, would be very disconcerting. If Moltmann’s thought offers little more than a rejection of the forsaken here and now, the moral direction of his theory would be difficult to uncover. In this reading, the necessity of creation’s rupture to provide the opening for God’s presence in Moltmann is a devaluation of creation. The anticipation by creation for the filling of the openness with the kingdom of God is illusory because the eschaton has been robbed of all its meaning in creation’s negation. The negation of creation leads to a denial of God’s presence in creation and the loss of any positive role for ethics. In Moltmann’s thought, the emptying of creation to make room for the coming of creation’s Other is understood by Gilkey and Gustafson to be an abandonment of creation. The overwhelming presence of God in the future does not compensate for his absence from the present.

Contrary to Gilkey’s and Gustafson’s reading of the eschatological openness of *Theology of Hope* is the emphasis Douglas Meeks places on Moltmann’s understanding of the forsakenness of creation as a necessary step in a real process of reconciliation. In arguing that the doctrine of rec-
onciliation is foundational to the theology of hope, Meeks counters Gilkey and Gustafson by holding that there is continuity within the discontinuity for Moltmann. Meeks sees Moltmann as pointing to the work of Christ as creating a space in which intimacy between God and creation can be established. Meeks asserts that "(h)ope, eschatology, promise, the future, the resurrection, the cross: from any particular perspective any one of these subjects might be considered the comprehensive designation of or the undeniable key to the theology of hope. None, however, is more than a crucial component of the overall dialectic of reconciliation."  

Meeks maintains that for Moltmann "the event of the cross and resurrection creates a real process of reconciliation. Thus history . . . will be conceived as open to the coming reconciliation in the 'future of Christ' in God's kingdom." The revelation of Christ confronts creation in its tendency to close itself down to the possibilities of the future. The promise of Christ opens reality to the coming of the kingdom of God. The confrontation of creation by Christ means, as Bauckham asserts, "God's promise is not for another world, but for the new creation of this world" (emphasis his). When Meeks argues that "... creation is good. But it is full of possibilities for becoming worse or better, destroyed or perfected," he is referring to creation's potential to be filled with its Other in intimacy or to isolate itself in narcissistic vanity. Only in remaining open can reality expect its fulfillment. The resurrection of Jesus "is not already the eschatological fulfillment of reconciliation. Rather, it points beyond itself to something not yet realized or present." Jesus' resurrection is a promise to creation that it too will be redeemed from death. Meeks explains that for Moltmann "resurrection is . . . a term that has reference to the future realization of God's creative power over nonbeing." Hence, creation exists in the 'not yet' time of the present awaiting its perfection.

It is this idea that the fulfillment of creation totally arrives from the future that prompts the concern over continuity. Here Meeks sees Moltmann's position to be that "both a total distinction and a total identity between eschatology and history lead to meaninglessness and resignation." In other words, the contradictory movements of both differentiation and identity need to exist simultaneously. Hence, Meeks argues that for Moltmann new creation is new, but somehow creatio originalis continues within the newness. Meeks summarizes that in "the visions of the new acts in terms of the old acts of God always bring to life more than was present in the old acts." There was continuity within "the experience of the radical contradiction . . . because God accomplished a faithful act of identification in it." Even creation's identity comes from the future. The
openness of creation is the receptacle into which God “overspills” identity. However, creation itself is not lost as it empties itself of fragmentary fulfillment and opens itself to “the penetration of all things by the glory of God.”

Because God directs the process of reconciliation and brings identity and fulfillment to creation, Meeks does not understand *Theology of Hope* to be a complete devaluation of creation. The faithfulness of God assures creation’s particularity. Lyle Dabney picks up on this reading when he contends that *Theology of Hope* is rooted in the later Barth’s ‘turn to the world’ where Barth’s earlier emphasis on the disparity between God and creation is complemented with a view of “God and creature standing together in Jesus.”

Both Meeks and Dabney see Moltmann as turning to creation in *Theology of Hope*. Both hold that in Moltmann’s view of reconciliation Christ does not re-establish some line of continuity of being between God and creation. The person of faith must accept the promise of God’s coming presence and live in anticipation of creation’s renewal. Moltmann turns to creation because he affirms the necessity of creation’s continuity in the new creation. Yet, this very promise of the future perfection of creation leads to the distrust of present creation and the feeling of homelessness. As persons trust in this promise, their ties with the God-forsaken world become loosened. Hope becomes “the unquiet in the heart of man” (TH 21/DH 17) which protects creation’s openness. In the light of the promise, human history is revealed to be transitory and provisional. As a result, “those who hope in Christ can no longer put up with reality as it is, but . . . contradict it” (TH 21/DH 17).

For Meeks, this means “from the point of view of faith . . . one finds the creative love of God only when he no longer creates himself out of status and achievement, but recognizes himself in the miserable of the earth.” The conflict between hope and bodily reality expands and broadens creation’s receptivity as it awaits complete fulfillment. In understanding Moltmann’s ethics as pointing to the “questionableness of the world,” (TH 86/DH 77) neither Meeks nor Dabney view Moltmann as rejecting creation. In stressing God’s desire to indwell creation, Moltmann is seen as giving new value to the cosmos. For Moltmann, creation is valued, but only for what it can become through its Other. Creation has received the promise of offspring from God.

Moltmann’s ability to talk both in an affirming and rejecting way about creation has led some to see a fundamental shift between his earlier stress on discontinuity in *Theology of Hope* between the *creatio originalis*
and *creatio nova* and his apparent emphasis on continuity is his later works. William French follows Gilkey's reading of the early Moltmann as rejecting creation, but French draws a line somewhere between the Moltmann of *Theology of Hope* and the Moltmann of *God in Creation*. In the earlier Moltmann there is a polarization of history against nature, of eschatology against creation, christology against cosmology, and the existentialist focus on decision, act and event against metaphysics and natural law. The result of this radical distinction between present and future has “led to destructive distortions of our notions about God’s action in the world, the status of creation and our theological picture of the human person.”

In his review of *God in Creation*, French argues that when this book is “read against Moltmann’s earlier works, this book displays a grand reversal of theological direction and sensibility, a seismic shift from a focus on history, eschatology, and ‘openness to the future’ to one on nature, creation, and respect for ‘dwelling’ within the present.”

French highlights the change he sees in Moltmann by contrasting passages from earlier works and *God in Creation*: “Where once [Moltmann] challenged us not to live in ‘the world’ as our ‘home,’ Moltmann now in *God in Creation* shifts direction to hold that the ‘messianic promise’ is that ‘the world should be home.’” While holding in *Theology of Hope* “‘all reality’ is ‘inadequate’ and ‘surpassable’” and describing “the world as ‘Godless,’ and reality as ‘corrupt,’” later in *God in Creation*, Moltmann argues that “human history ‘must be brought into harmony with the laws of life and the rhythm of nature.’” French concludes that in spite of “deep continuities,” there is a “great sea of change that separates *God in Creation* from Moltmann’s earlier agenda.”

In fact the sea of change is so great that French brings his analysis to a climax with his claim that “if Moltmann is right now, he was wrong then.” Moltmann has substituted a new creation-friendly cosmogony for the old cosmogony that devalued creation.

To follow French’s reading we would essentially have to say that there are two distinct positions in Moltmann’s work, separated by a “great sea of change.” But such a reading, we will argue, fails to account for the underlying consistency throughout his entire corpus of central themes, first developed in the theology of hope. Even if there may be something to the criticism that Moltmann lacks “philosophical analysis and logical rigor,” which could easily lead to possible confusions, opting for French’s “seismic shift” in Moltmann fails to recognize the consistency by which Moltmann employs oppositional pairs to capture the dynamic nature of reality. These oppositional pairs—or themes in “radical contradiction” as Meeks de-
scribes—represent an essential differentiation of reality, but a differentiation which, at the same time, exhibits both an originary and consummatory unity. So while Moltmann may at times, for example, emphasize philia (love of like for like) over agape (love for the different) or divine absence over divine presence or creatio nova over creatio originalis, such points of emphasis do not in the least deny that both philia and agape are, however contradictory, movements of a single divine love. In this reading, I differ from McDougall’s recent interpretation of Moltmann’s view of love. She pays little attention to philia and instead focuses on agape as “the biblical principle of love.” She is more concerned with the distinction of “creative love” and “crucified love” in Moltmann’s conception of agape. In so doing, she under-emphasizes the dialectical structure of Moltmann’s thought.

In contrast, Richard Bauckham (as well as Meeks) does acknowledge the play between opposites when he asserts “apparent major changes of direction in Moltmann usually turn out, on closer study of his work, to be deeply rooted in an essentially continuous development of his thought.” Moltmann himself talks about his work in this way. While he readily acknowledges the tension between early and later works and even within a given work, he certainly does not understand any shift in emphasis to be a radical departure from his theology of hope. Moltmann admit to departing from a theology of hope. Moltmann views any shift in focus as necessary in his attempt to adequately describe the nature of reality. For example, the shift from Theology of Hope’s emphasis on the forsakenness of creation to God in Creation’s emphasis on creation as home is explained as necessary because “always to stress only the distinction between God and the world in the doctrine of creation is to adopt a one-sided approach . . . ” (HTG 133).

1e. Contradictory Monism

My own take on this state of affairs is that it is a unique trait of Moltmann’s position that he stresses simultaneously both continuity and discontinuity. As Meeks, I believe rightly noted, Moltmann believes that emphasizing both “total distinction and total identity between eschatology and history lead to meaninglessness and resignation.” Rather both the distinction of discontinuity and the continuity of identity need to be held on to in and through their contradiction. It is this simultaneous opposition and harmony—unity in opposition—that is the characterizing and integrative feature of Moltmann’s cosmogony. For Moltmann the reality of the cosmos is inherently contradictory. Indeed, I want to suggest that Moltmann’s
complex thought especially comes into coherent and fruitful focus when it is seen as a cosmic coincidence of opposites, a position that in this thesis I will call “contradictory monism” following the lead of the Dutch historian of philosophy D.H.T. Vollenhoven. According to Vollenhoven, as Calvin Seerveld helpfully elaborates, “contradictory monism” (coincidentia oppositorum) is a type of thought that has a long history in western thought, recurring in various thinkers such as Heraclitus, Cusanus, Eckart, and Hegel.68

In contradictory monism, reality is, as James Olthuis explains, caught up in “the cosmic process (that) is inherently contradictory and eternally recurring.”69 There are two horizontal currents continually and eternally occurring. The movements concurrently run counter as “the universal cosmic law realizes itself in a process of differentiation” even as “there is the process in the opposite direction of a return to the universal origin and unity.”70 In contradictory/harmonic monism, the direction of differentiation is usually considered to be “the direction of time, of immediate experience, and of ordinary life.”71 The originary unity mutates into a plurality within temporal reality. The dynamic processes of time result in the differentiation of the universal into the particulars. The second concurrent movement is towards unity. In this direction, the experience is of the ‘wholly other, of a different direction, eternal, trans-personal and sacred.”72 The direction of the eternal manifests the originary and ultimate unity that makes this position monistic. When the movement of unity is revealed within differentiated reality “ordinary human experience becomes something else, divine, yet it remains itself.”73 The issue at hand in contradictory/harmonic monism is the relationship between the two movements. The model of reality allows for, even emphasizes, a recognition of unity and plurality and of sameness and difference, the plurality/difference exists for the sake of a greater unity/sameness.

In this thesis, faced with the kind of interpretive conundrums and puzzles that beset readers of Moltmann’s corpus, I will set out to show how understanding Moltmann’s thought (in its own unique way) as a cosmic coincidence of opposites, not only is able to help reconcile divergent readings, but positively delivers a consistent and coherent reading of his theological cosmogony. A preliminary list of opposing realities is given here as a guide to the development of our argument:
Moltmann’s Coincidence of Opposites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>godforsaken present</th>
<th>God-filled future</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>creatio originalis</td>
<td>creatio nova</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>abandonment</td>
<td>fulfillment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>futurum</td>
<td>adventus</td>
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<tr>
<td>sending</td>
<td>gathering</td>
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<tr>
<td>difference</td>
<td>sameness</td>
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<tr>
<td>kenosis</td>
<td>theosis</td>
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<tr>
<td>agape</td>
<td>philia</td>
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FIGURE 1

If. Outline of Chapters

Consequently, chapter two will concentrate on explicating Moltmann’s critique of classical monotheism and the various attempts to make sense of the Trinity from a starting point which (over)stresses unity and immutability. After rejecting what he calls the “god of Parmenides,” Moltmann begins to craft a relational model of God appealing to a dynamic understanding of reality which manifests itself in perichoresis. In chapter three, the notion of perichoresis as divine love is unfolded. Moltmann, again using his ability to assert contradictory states of affairs, differentiates between two types of divine love, philia (love of the same) and agape (love of the different). This distinction allows Moltmann to stress both the safe, ongoing relations among the “same” members of the Trinity and the need for God to create a “different” other which comes to be in a forsaken place. Hence, creation is simultaneously within the perichoretic divine community and abandoned by God.

Chapters four and five examine forsaken creation’s movement away from God which is concurrently God’s eschatological movement towards creation and the (re)filling of creation with his presence. Chapter four does so by looking at Moltmann’s doctrine of Jesus Christ and his take on the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection. In the revelation of Jesus Christ, Moltmann most clearly sees the oppositional movements of reality. From the historical direction, Jesus Christ is the crucified God who displays the Hell of abandonment. From the eschatological direction, Jesus Christ is the risen Son who gives the promise of life to a creation which now lives in anticipation of God’s final arrival. In chapter five, God’s arrival in creation as a cosmic perichoresis is scrutinized. While reality is described by
two simultaneous, oppositional movements, in this chapter I argue that, in the end, he gives privilege to the unifying, eschatological movement. Problems surface as Moltmann faces difficulties in asserting that there is room for creational differences as he had previously argued that such differences were only possible if God withdrew and thereby ceded a space within the divine community. Without an adequate account of difference, the analogy between divine subjectivity and human subjectivity is severely weakened.

Chapter six is concerned with the ethical implications drawn from intra-trinitarian life. Moltmann's understanding of the church's call to witness through an anticipatory, self-sacrificing, non-violent life is rooted in his model of God, his view of creation and the (dis)connection between them. However, his ethic allows for the possibility of self-assertion and even violence. When and how such acts are permissible is, to say the least, ambiguous. Even more unclear is how such acts are to be reconciled with the analogy relationis he has worked so hard to establish.

In the final chapter, I attempt to bring together the questions and concerns which have emerged throughout the study. In a world of violence and hatred, how does one embody the kenotic relations of the Trinity? When faced with violence, we are to give ourselves sacrificially away to the violent other not knowing what to expect. Such a counter-cultural move is the only way to work towards the reclamation of the (violent) other.

However, for Moltmann, sometimes in the mess of daily life and its violence, we can choose to be guilty and not be sacrificial. But when? Moltmann's proposal of copying God provides, I propose, precious little detail here.

In spite of the many genuine insights and helpful critiques in Moltmann's work, in the end, attempting to locate a social program for human life within trinitarian life appears to create more problems than it solves.

Notes

distinction is helpful in considering Moltmann. His use of eschatological thinking appears to be very onto-theological at times. I think Kearney too quickly identifies Moltmann in the line of the “eschatological notion of the possible” in The God Who May Be (Bloomington, In: Indiana University Press, 2001).

4. See also Jürgen Moltmann, Hope for the Church: Moltmann in Dialogue with Practical Theology (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1979)

5. A helpful resource for seeing the breadth and influence of Moltmann’s work is James Wakefield, Jürgen Moltmann: A Research Bibliography (Lanham, MD.: Scarecrow Press, 2002).


7. Meeks, “The Future of Theology,” 253. Given Volf’s assertion that Moltmann is the most influential theologian in the last fifty years and Meeks surmising that his influence on the church is going to grow, it becomes clear the analysis of Moltmann’s practical “wealth of resources for reconceptualizing the church” is a project which must continue.”


9. Samuel Powell, The Trinity in German Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 198, notes the connection: “Moltmann shares with Barth the opinion that the basis for our knowledge of the Trinity is Jesus Christ.” Powell maintains that Moltmann’s modification of Barth’s thought is not “anti-Barthian” but a “natural development.” Powell also understands Pannenberg’s work as an extension of Barth’s thought, 233ff.

10. The list of contemporary theologians who have written on the Trinity is extensive and ranges from feminist models, personalist philosophies, liberation theologies and creational approaches. The danger, which is recognized by several of these thinkers, is that Trinity simply becomes a screen upon which the theologian projects her version of what would happen in the human sphere.


13. See John Loeschen, The Divine Community: Trinity, Church, and Ethics in Reformation Theologies (Kirksville, Mo.: The Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1981) for an overview of Luther and Calvin’s use of the Trinity in ethics. Another important source for an introduction to contemporary Trinitarian thought are the essays collected in Christoph Schwöbel, ed., Trinitarian Theology Today (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995).


The sheer quantity of articles, books, and dissertations published in response to the work of Jürgen Moltmann suggests the aptness of Volf’s evaluation of Moltmann’s influence. For an extensive bibliographic listing of the books and theses spawned by
this work see Dieter Ising, et. al., Bibliographie Jürgen Moltmann (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1987). Also see the Richard Bauckham’s bibliography at the end of The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995).

15. Conor Cunningham, Genealogy of Nihilism (London: Routledge Presss, 2002), offers clarity in his discussion of analogy, particularly that of Thomas.


17. Colin Gunton, The Promise of Trinitarian Theology, 42ff., in his sketch of the history of the Trinitarian analogies puts Moltmann in contrast to Augustine where the human mind is the focal point of the analogy between God and humanity. Moltmann’s analogy is certainly more holistic in comparison.


21. Christoph Schwöbel, “Christology and Trinitarian Thought” in Trinitarian Theology Today describes the relationship between Scripture and the doctrine of the Trinity in a provocative way: “I am . . . not claiming that we can offer scriptural proof for a developed doctrine of the Trinity . . . however . . . we detect in the expressions of Christian practice in worship, proclamation, reflection, and action an underlying proto-trinitarian depth structure” (127).

22. The scarcity of biblical references regarding trinitarian relationships is a source for my concern that an in depth description of inner-trinitarian life is presumptuous. The issue of the limitations of theoritical thought, even theological ones, is properly a concern for philosophy. See Herman Dooyeweerd, A New Critique of Theoretical Thought vol. 1, tr. David Freeman and William Young. (Jordan Station, On.: Paideia Press, 1984), especially p. 82ff.

23. While Trinitarian theology has helped to produce a “trinitarian hermeneutics,” I am not aware of a movement towards “trinitarian exegesis.” Or to put it another way, the current concern with trinitarian thought flows from particular issues in systematic theology and not directly from exegetical interests. While this by no means settles the legitimacy of trinitarian theology, it does suggest which issues are fundamental.


29. In James Olthuis’ essay in Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition, ed. James Olthuis and James K.A. Smith, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005) raises the question in this manner: “what then is the nature of legitimate theologizing about the Trinity, and when is the boundary to metaphysics or ontotheology crossed. That is a complex question . . . ” Olthuis chooses to emphasize the kingdom of God as a point of departure for theorizing about the moral life in contrast to the inner life of the Trinity. Jean-Luc Marion, God Without Being, tr. Thomas Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). 143, warns that “to do theology is not to speak the language of the gods or ‘God.’”
35. Gustafson, Theology and Ethics, 48.
36. Gustafson, Theology and Ethics, 46.
37. Gustafson, Theology and Ethics, 47.
38. Gustafson, Theology and Ethics, 47.
40. Meeks, Origins, 2.
41. Meeks, Origins, 98.
42. Meeks, Origins, 98.
44. Meeks, Origins, 115
45. Meeks, Origins, 102.
46. Meeks, Origins, 98.
47. Meeks, Origins, 118.
49. Meeks, Origins, 78.
50. Meeks, Origins, 106.
51. D. Lyle Dabney, “The Advent of the Spirit: The Turn to Pneumatology in the Theology of Jürgen Moltmann,” The Asbury Theological Journal 48:1, Spring 1993, 83. In a similar statement, Meeks, Origins, affirms that “behind all of Moltmann’s theology of hope is Barth’s recovery of the reformed tradition’s conception of reality in terms of covenant. According to this tradition, knowing God entails doing God’s will” (43).
52. Eberhard Jüngel, The Doctrine of the Trinity (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Press, 1976), 1, argues that Barth’s discussion of God’s being “takes place doubtless in the Christology of the Church Dogmatics, which therefore on this account not only determines the whole Dogmatics but accompanies it in the form of fundamental paragraphs. That part of the Church Dogmatics which especially deals with Christology is the doctrine of reconciliation.” Walter Lowe, Theology and Difference, contends that it is ethics’ problematic nature in Barth which “can effect or reflect the ‘great disturbance.’ That is, ethics does not initiate the point of contact between God and creation. Rather, it is in the ‘persistent asking of questions’ and the denial of answers, that ethics for Barth maintains a tension and ambiguity. Only in a context of such questionability can ethics refer to God” (137).
53. Meeks, Origins, 144. See also Meek’s, Origins, statement that “for Moltmann, it is only in terms of the covenant otherness of God that man becomes aware of the profound misery in himself and his world” (153).
55. French, 78.
56. French, 79.
57. French, 80.
58. French, 81.
59. French, 81.
60. French, 81.
61. French, 78.
64. Bauckham, The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann, 214.
65. See Moltmann’s reflection on his theological career in History and the Triune God in which he declares “I did not attempt to write these books as theological textbooks, informative on all sides, balanced in judgment and reassuring in wisdom. In them I wanted to say something specific in a particular cultural, theological and political
situation, and took sides” (HTG 173). As stated in the introduction of this work, Moltmann considers his work in three phases, not as three separate theologies. The wide range of topics and conversational partners results in different emphases. Some inconsistency, or lack of rigor, results because, to use Rorty’s distinction, Moltmann is a ‘world-revealer’ and not a ‘problem-solver.’

66. Dabney, “Advent” picks up on this reading when he contends that Theology of Hope is rooted in the later Barth’s ‘turn to the world’ where Barth’s earlier emphasis on the disparity between God and creation is complemented with a view of “God and creature standing together in Jesus” (83).

67. Meeks, Origin, 118.


70. Olthuis, Models, 29.

71. Olthuis, Models, 29.

72. Olthuis, Models, 29.

73. Olthuis, Models, 29.

74. This list is adapted from Nicholas Ansell, The Annihilation of Hell: Universal Salvation and the Redemption of Time in the Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann, Ph.d. thesis, Vrije Universitat-Amsterdam, 2005. My reading of Moltmann draws upon Ansell’s understanding of Moltmann’s ‘theocosmogony.’