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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Revisiting Jurgen Moltmann's God in Creation: Recognising God's Presence in the Created World

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Abstract

This article revisits the relevance of Jurgen Moltmann's *God in Creation* for modern ecological theology. It examines Moltmann's view of creation as a dynamic community, supported by God's indwelling presence, in light of ecological catastrophes such as climate change, environmental degradation, and biodiversity loss. It scrutinizes Moltmann's trinitarian and ecological viewpoints through theological and hermeneutical analysis. It focuses on concepts such as divine immanence, panentheism, pneumatology, and the community of creation. The article also assesses Moltmann's ecological reconstruction of humanity's place in creation and his criticism of domination-centered anthropocentrism. According to the study, acknowledging God's presence in creation promotes moral accountability, ecological fairness, and long-term connections with

the natural world. The article concludes that Moltmann's ecological doctrine provides important theological resources for Christian engagement with environmental concerns. It offers a framework for integrating spirituality and ecological responsibility

Introduction

The ecological catastrophe of the modern world has compelled theologians to reassess traditional ideas of creation with increased seriousness. Challenges such as climate change, environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, and human exploitation of natural resources complicate humanity's comprehension of its relationship with the natural world. In this context, Jurgen Moltmann's theological insights, especially in his major work *God in Creation*, provide a deep framework for reinterpreting the relationship among God, humans, and the cosmos.

How does Moltmann's doctrine of creation reshape theological understanding of God's presence and ecological responsibility? Moltmann's ecological concept of creation asserts that creation is not simply a passive entity subject to human dominion, but rather a vibrant community upheld by the active presence of God. Re-examining Moltmann's theology is particularly pertinent in a time characterized by ecological concern and technological progress. Conventional theological frameworks frequently depicted God as far from creation, prioritizing divine transcendence over divine immanence. This article aims to revisit the principle elements of Moltmann's ecological concept of creation and to reassess its significance for modern theology and environmental ethics.

This article employs a theological and hermeneutical method through critical analysis of Moltmann's *God in Creation* and related secondary theological literature. Consequently, the paper is segmented into three parts. Part I provides an introduction to the Doctrine of Creation. Part II provides a concise overview of Jurgen Moltmann and his contributions, while Part III examines his writings, specifically "God in Creation," and its significance for the contemporary world.

I

Doctrine of Creation

The Bible establishes our comprehension of humanity in creation. Human existence possesses purpose and significance, as it is not the result of chance or personal volition, but rather the intention of God, who fashioned both humanity and the planet we inhabit.

Biblical Foundations of Creation:

Consequently, we are God's and exist for God's purpose (Pss. 95:6; 100:3). All that we are and possess originates from God, is mediated through God, and is directed towards God as the deity of decree and creation (Rom. 11:36). The theory of creation grounds our worldview in God, guides our actions towards God's glory, and safeguards us from idolatry (Acts 14:15; Rev. 4:11).¹ Herman Bavinck (1854–1921) emphasized the significance of this theory for our understanding of God: "God is the singular, unique, and ultimate cause of all that exists."²

William Perkins (1558–1602) encapsulated the theory of creation: "God created all things *ex nihilo* and deemed them very good." Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635–1711) articulated a historical and theological viewpoint: "By traversing time in reverse, one ultimately reaches the origin, beyond which one cannot advance." Beyond this, there exists solely God, who resides in forever. Brakel stated, "The eternal God, wishing to disclose Godself and convey God's goodness, has, in accordance with God's eternal purpose and through God's wisdom and omnipotence, created the universe and all its components."³

The doctrine of creation is fundamental to systematic theology. Creation commences the fulfilment of God's mandate and inaugurates history. This marks the inception of the Bible and the commencement of God's self-disclosure. It establishes the basis for ethics and worship, anchoring the gospel of Jesus Christ in the essence of God, the essence of humanity, and their inextricable relationship as Creator and creature. Following redemption by the incarnate Lord, creation is the most significant manifestation of God's grandeur. This doctrine faced early criticism in the church's history, leading to the initial declaration of the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." Theologians frequently examine the concept of creation within the framework of the doctrine of God. The examination of God's nature inherently prompts the investigation of God's actions. God's actions encompass God's eternal decree, the first creation of the world, and God's ongoing providence over all entities throughout time.

However, there are compelling reasons to examine creation within the context of anthropology as well. The principle biblical text regarding the creation of the world, Genesis 1, culminates in the creation of humanity in God's image (vv. 26–28) and transitions into a more comprehensive exposition of humanity's vocations and relationships (2:4–25). Theologically, God's intention to glorify Godself in the created realm is focused on Christ Jesus our Lord, who is both a human and the Savior of the new humanity (Eph. 3:9–11). As human, we possess a pragmatic interest in comprehending the dynamics of creation about our existence as beings and our connections to the Creator and other entities.⁴

¹ Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed and Systematic Theology: Man and Christ* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2020), 51.

² Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003–2008), 2:407 quoted in Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed and Systematic Theology*, 51.

³ Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed and Systematic Theology*, 51.

⁴ Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed and Systematic Theology*, 51.

Immediate and Mediate Creation

The term “create” is employed in two contexts in Scripture: immediate creation and mediate creation. *Immediate creation* is the autonomous act of the triune God through which, at the outset and for God’s own glory, God brought forth the entirety of the visible and unseen universe, instantaneously and without reliance on pre-existing elements or secondary causes. The immediate creation was, therefore, a sovereign act of God, distinct from pantheistic concepts of necessary creation; it involved the entire Trinity, affirming the equality of God, Son, and Holy Spirit; it constituted God’s initial act *ad extra*; it was executed for God’s glory; it did not involve the reconfiguration of pre-existing materials or the influence of secondary causes; it was an instantaneous act of God yielding immediate outcomes; and it encompassed all aspects, incorporating both material and immaterial existences. *Mediate creation* refers to divine activities termed “creation” that do not bring out entities’ *ex nihilo*; rather, they modify, adjust, amalgamate, or alter pre-existing materials. God may directly mould, adapt, mix, or modify existing materials, or God may do so indirectly through secondary causes. Hodge states that immediate creation is instantaneous and excludes the notion of any preceding material or collaboration, whereas mediate creation is gradual and encompasses both concepts. This distinction is clearly supported by the Mosaic account of creation. The phrase “immediate creation” should likely be confined to the declaration in Genesis 1:1 and analogous utterances pertaining to the same occurrences.⁵

Competing Theories of Origin

Each belief system or worldview encompasses an explanation for the existence of the universe. This explanation is termed a cosmogony, derived from the Greek phrase meaning “how the world has come to be” (*kosmos gegonen*). Monotheism posits that the entirety of the cosmos is the product of the creative endeavor of the singular, true, and living God. Bavinck observed, “The doctrine of creation is comprehended solely through revelation and is grasped by faith.” He referenced Hebrews 11:3, “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God,” elucidating that non-Christian religions proposing a divine creation, such as Judaism and Islam, do so solely due to the influence of God’s Word.⁶ God’s universal revelation reveals the Creator; but, without special revelation, human religions and philosophies substantially diverge from the theory of creation.

Erroneous perceptions of creation arise from faith in false deities. This world is rife with erroneous belief systems concerning God, such as polytheism, pantheism, panentheism, and atheistic materialism. Polytheism asserts the existence of multiple primary causes of the universe. Augustus Strong (1836–1921) asserted, “It contradicts our fundamental conception of God

⁵ Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, Revised by Vernon D. Doerksen (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 111.

⁶ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 408.

as absolute sovereign to presume the existence of any substance independent of God's will." This secondary essence not only constrains God's omnipotence but also undermines God's beatitude.⁷

A second group of explanations for the universe's creation emerges from pantheism, shown in Hinduism, where all existence is integral to the One. Thus, even if this world (and others) originated at a specific moment, all entities engage in perpetual cycles of expansion and contraction of the One. No genuine division exists between God and creation, as the One generated all by replicating itself and proclaimed, "I am indeed this creation." Other pantheistic faiths, including ancient Gnosticism, assert that God generated the world by a series of emanations from God's essence, with each emanation descending to a lower level of existence, culminating in a shared deity within a spiritual hierarchy of being.⁸

In panentheism, God is the essence of the universe, while the world constitutes God's corporeal manifestation. In antiquity, panentheism was advocated by Neo-Platonists like Plotinus. In the seventeenth century, Thomas Goodwin (1600–1679) criticized certain individuals for asserting that all entities were really "pieces and parcels of Godself." In the pantheistic fallacy that Goodwin contested, God had two facets: one separate from the universe and another as the essence of the world and its components. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), the progenitor of theological liberalism, contended that Genesis 1–2 lacks "a genuine historical character" and deemed the doctrine of creation inconsequential to the sentiment of absolute dependence on the divine, which he identified as the core tenet of religion. Significantly shaped by Neo-Platonism and Baruch Spinoza's pantheistic philosophy, Schleiermacher facilitated the influx of panentheism into contemporary theological liberalism. In the twentieth century, process theologians formulated a conception of God comprising two aspects: an eternal absolute and the temporal realm. This deity did neither create the world nor governs it, but exists in unity with it, experiences its suffering, evolves alongside it, and endeavors to guide it towards goodness.⁹

A fourth sort of non-biblical cosmogony is materialism. From this viewpoint, the physical matter and energy of the universe have perpetually existed, constituting all that has ever been. Epicureanism, as articulated by Epicurus (341–270 BCE), posits that all entities are composed of numerous indivisible atoms whose fortuitous collisions throughout time generated the cosmos and all its constituents, including humanity. Materialism is frequently linked to atheism. Charles Darwin (1809–1882) formulated the materialistic theory of evolution to elucidate the origin of all living entities through the indifferent process of natural selection favoring those best adapted for survival and reproduction. Subsequent scientists developed his hypothesis into Neo-Darwinism, further elucidating evolution as a gradual process driven by random genetic mutations over millions of years. The protracted duration necessitated by evolution aligns with the "big bang" theory, which posits that the universe emerged spontaneously from a singularity of unimaginable

⁷ Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed and Systematic Theology*, 53.

⁸ Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed and Systematic Theology*, 53–55.

⁹ Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed and Systematic Theology*, 53–55.

density and energy approximately fourteen billion years ago, with the Earth emerging at four and a half billion years ago.¹⁰

The classifications of polytheism, pantheism, panentheism, and materialism intersect. Popular polytheism frequently correlates with philosophical pantheism. Pantheism and panentheism promote the veneration of the created. Materialists, despite rejecting the existence of God, often deify the world. Renowned astronomer Carl Sagan (1934–1996) asserted, “The universe is all that is or ever was or ever will be,” embodying materialism; however, he also infused secular science with a semblance of religious reverence, stating, “Our feeblest contemplations of the cosmos stir us. . . . We know we are approaching the greatest of mysteries.” If the universe lacks a Creator, it assumes the role of our deity. The apostle Paul articulated that individuals who decline to honor God and express gratitude forfeit “the glory of the uncorruptible God” in favor of tangible aspects of creation (Rom. 1:21–23).¹¹

Creation and Scientific Cosmology

A significant and ongoing challenge for Christian belief in God is the difficulty of correlating the concept of God with the realms of nature and history, or more specifically, to envision this universe as reliant on God. The concept of God is rendered redundant if all phenomena and occurrences in the natural universe and throughout its historical trajectory, including human history, are independent of divine intervention. The perspective of contemporary science, however, severed the ties of reliance that connected the natural world to the ongoing actions of a creator deity. Conversely, Isaac Newton opposed Descartes’ mechanical conception of the universe, as he feared it would undermine the reliance of the physical world on its creator. Newton’s physics was formulated to re-establish the reliance of all-natural phenomena on material forces and ultimately on God.¹²

Despite his intention, the mechanistic portrayal of nature has led to a view of the physical world as autonomous since the late 18th century, shaping human history as well. The rise of Darwinism solidified this understanding, removing references to a creator from nature’s depiction. Although theologians have sought to merge evolutionary views with Christian redemption, modern science largely maintains that theological interpretations are subjective additions to a self-sufficient scientific narrative. Human intuition consistently surpasses mathematical formalism, and while mathematics can adapt to complex data, there remains an aspect of existence that defies precise representation, advocating for the use of ordinary language as a complementary method for conveying reality.¹³

¹⁰ Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed and Systematic Theology*, 53–55.

¹¹ Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed and Systematic Theology*, 53–55.

¹² Wolfhart Pannenberg, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 37–40.

¹³ Pannenberg, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 37–40.

A theology of creation explores the interconnectedness of the universe and certain entities, emphasizing that specific phenomena can only be understood through general assumptions about reality, including theories of time and space. Theology posits God as the perspective through which the universe is perceived, suggesting that if a singular God exists, all else is finite within God's presence. This relationship underpins universal statements about finite reality and necessitates clear delineation of these assumptions for validation. Additionally, the theology of creation strengthens belief in God, extending beyond the origin of the world to encompass the ongoing existence and potential fulfilment of finite reality, integrating the concepts of creation and conservation.

The theology of creation, closely tied to the nature of God, affirms belief in God by addressing both the origin and ongoing reality of creation. It includes not only the initial act of creation but also conservation, redemption, and eschatology. A key debate is whether "creation" signifies the initial formation of existence or the continuous process of entities emerging. This involves two perspectives: *creatio ex nihilo* (creation from nothing) and *continuous creation*. However, these should not be viewed as opposing models; both roots lie in classical doctrine, where continuous creation aligns with conservation, indicating that a being's existence is perpetually reliant on the creative act. Furthermore, the conflation of these terms reflects a misunderstanding of classical concepts.¹⁴

However, a complication arises with the classical doctrine of creation, which is fundamentally linked to the inception of existence as depicted in Genesis. Continuous creation was regarded not as the ongoing generation of new forms of existence but rather as the maintenance of the universe in its original state, with species believed to be immutable despite the emergence of new individual plants and animals. Both classical doctrine and biblical accounts of creation relied on a mythical framework that perceived the world as established at the beginning of time. Contemporary understanding of natural evolution, however, diverges from this traditional creation theory. In current discourse, "continuous correlation" refers to the ongoing emergence of new forms of existence, a view that aligns more closely with the biblical narrative of divine action. The contingency embedded within the natural processes indicates an ongoing creative activity of God throughout the universe's history, making the creation of persistent forms and patterns contingent facts within that historical trajectory. The relationship between God as the creator and this process raises complex questions. Creation, encompassing the entire temporal continuum, is seen as an act within God's eternity, thus inherently everlasting.¹⁵

The Significance of Creation Theology

The concept of God as creator holds substantial implications, particularly the distinction between God and creation. Creation is a divine artifact, separate from its maker, with God existing neces-

¹⁴ Pannenberg, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 37-40.

¹⁵ Pannenberg, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 37-40.

sarily while creation is contingent. This differentiation is crucial in Christian theology to avoid conflating creator with creature, as highlighted in Paul's epistle to the Romans, which warns against diminishing God to worldly status. A key tenet of Christian creation theology is to acknowledge God's dominion over the universe, assigning humans a stewardship role rather than ownership. This stewardship establishes a moral responsibility toward ecological and environmental matters, framing humanity as custodians accountable to God.¹⁶

Furthermore, the theology of creation affirms the inherent goodness of creation, as noted in the biblical narrative where God declares creation "good." While sin has led to the world's fallen state, creation remains fundamentally benevolent and capable of redemption. Despite acknowledging the imperfections introduced by sin and human malevolence, Christian belief maintains that creation deviates from God's original, pure intention, and calls for restoration to this ideal state. Additionally, humanity is created in God's likeness, underscoring the importance of this concept for understanding human nature and destiny. This theological framework reaffirms the positive view of creation and its ultimate purpose in alignment with God's design.¹⁷

II

Jurgen Moltmann: Life and Theological Contributions

The German Protestant theologian Jürgen Moltmann cultivated his theological interest while interned in a prisoner-of-war camp near Nottingham, England, where he recalls engaging with Reinhold Niebuhr's seminal work *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (1941). Upon his return to Germany, Moltmann commenced his career as a theologian. His trilogy, comprising *The Theology of Hope* (1964), *The Crucified God* (1972), and *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (1975), garnered him international recognition. Moltmann engaged with the concept of hope in dialogue with the Marxist author Ernst Bloch (1885–1977) in the first of these discussions.

Theology of Hope

Moltmann is a leading theologian in the evolution of a theology of hope. He asserts that the Theology of Hope transcends a mere superficial endorsement of 'positive thinking,' positing that all of creation yearns for rebirth by the God of hope. He contends that we must recognize the misery and injustice that characterize our current global experience. It is only then can we perceive the power of, and testify to, God's commitment to restore the world. Moltmann posits that Christian hope holds particular significance within the framework of suffering. He recognizes that the world is rife with pain, injustice, and violence. Nevertheless, he does not endorse an

¹⁶ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, Sixth Edition (West Sussex, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2017), 199–200.

¹⁷ McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 199–200.

optimism that overlooks or trivializes the reality of human pain. Christian hope compels believers to acknowledge suffering and actively combat it.¹⁸

The Crucified God

The Crucified God examined the significance of Christ in a suffering society and introduced an innovative perspective on the concept of “a suffering God.” Despite Moltmann’s future significant contributions to other theological domains, particularly the idea of creation, the doctrine of the Trinity, and ecological concerns, he remains mostly recognized for his early works.¹⁹

In *The Crucified God*, Moltmann contended that the cross serves as both the foundation and the standard of authentic Christian theology. The fervor of Christ, particularly his lament of divine abandonment - “My God! My God! “Why have you abandoned me?” Mark 15:34 is central to Christian thought. The crucifixion should be regarded as an occurrence between God and the Son, wherein God endures the death of God’s Son to redeem sinful humanity. Moltmann contends that a God incapable of suffering is inherently defective rather than flawless. Moltmann emphasizes that God cannot be compelled to change or experience suffering, yet asserts that God chose to endure suffering. The agony of God results directly from the divine will and readiness to endure pain; a God incapable of suffering is inferior to any human being. A deity incapable of pain is an entity that cannot engage. God remains unaffected by suffering and injustice. God’s profound insensitivity renders him impervious to any influence or disturbance. God is incapable of weeping, as God possesses no tears. However, one who is incapable of suffering is also incapable of love. Thus, God is likewise an unloving entity.²⁰

Doctrine of the Trinity

Moltmann consolidates several previously discussed concepts, notably the notion that love entails the lover engaging in the sorrows of the beloved. The concept of a suffering God may initially appear blasphemous from the perspective of Christian orthodoxy. The patristic period recognized two untenable perspectives about the suffering of God: “patripassianism” and “theopaschitism.” The former was deemed heretical, while the latter was considered a potentially deceptive ideology. *Patripassianism* emerged in the third century and was linked to authors including Noetus, Praxeas, and Sabellius. It focused on the conviction that God endured suffering akin to that of the Son. The suffering of Christ on the cross should be perceived as the suffering of God. These authors assert that the sole distinction within the Godhead consists of a succession of modes or operations. In other words, God, Son, and Spirit were merely distinct modes of existence or

¹⁸ Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (London: SCM Press, 2021), 112-114.

¹⁹ McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 69.

²⁰ McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 184-85.

manifestations of the same fundamental divine essence. This variant of modalism, sometimes referred to as Sabellianism, will be examined further concerning the doctrine of the Trinity.²¹

Theopaschitism emerged in the sixth century and was associated with authors like John Maxentius. The fundamental slogan linked to the movement was “one of the Trinity was crucified.” The expression can be understood in a wholly conventional manner (it re-emerges as Martin Luther’s renowned phrase “the crucified God”) and was advocated as such by Leontius of Byzantium. Nonetheless, it was deemed potentially deceptive and perplexing by more prudent authors, like Pope Hormisdas, resulting to the formula’s gradual obsolescence. The idea of a suffering God rehabilitates *theopaschitism* and elucidates the connection between the sufferings of God and Christ, so circumventing the *patripassian* dilemma. For instance, Kazoh Kitamori differentiates the modalities of suffering experienced by God and Son. “God, concealed within the death of God the Son, embodies divine suffering.” Consequently, the suffering of God encompasses not either the anguish of God the Son or the distress of God, but rather the shared suffering of two beings who are fundamentally one. The most refined articulation of this idea is located in Moltmann’s Crucified God.²²

Moltmann contends that God and the Son endure suffering, but in distinct ways. The Son endures the agony and demise of the crucifixion; God relinquishes the Son and experiences God’s absence. While both God and the Son participate in the crucifixion, their role is not same (the *patripassian* position) but rather separate. “In the Son’s suffering, the God endures the anguish of abandonment.” In the demise of the Son, death befalls God Godself, and God endures the death of the Son out of compassion for abandoned humanity. Moltmann’s assertive claim that “death comes upon God” prompts contemplation on whether God might be conceptualized as having died or, more provocatively, as being dead.²³

Ecological Theology

Jurgen Moltmann’s ecological theology arises from his comprehensive philosophy of creation, particularly as expressed in his seminal work, *God in Creation*. Moltmann contends that creation is not only a passive entity for human subjugation but a vibrant community upheld by the presence of God. He underscores, from biblical and Trinitarian viewpoints, that God permeates creation through the Spirit, rendering the earth sacred and interrelated. Humanity is thus urged to refrain from exploiting nature and to engage responsibly in the preservation and cultivation of creation. Moltmann critiques contemporary industrial society and anthropocentric theology for their roles in ecological degradation, asserting that Christian theology must reclaim a cosmic

²¹ McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 184-85.

²² McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 184-85.

²³ McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 184-85.

perspective whereby humans, animals, plants, and the environment coexist in reciprocal interaction before God.²⁴

Moltmann posits that ecological theology is profoundly eschatological. He dismisses the notion that salvation pertains solely to human souls or a celestial destiny disconnected from the earthly realm. He emphasizes the "new creation" promised by God, in which the entire cosmos engages in redemption and renewal. This comprehension compels Christians to actively participate in ecological justice, environmental preservation, and sustainable living as manifestations of God's impending kingdom.²⁵ Moltmann's ecological perspective integrates theology, ethics, and hope, positioning creation care as a fundamental element of Christian discipleship and social duty.

III

Revisiting Moltmann's God in Creation

Moltmann refers to God the Holy Spirit in 'God in Creation.' God is 'the lover of life,' and God's Spirit is in all created entities. Moltmann has abandoned the traditional categories of theology that adhered to the structure of the three articles of the Apostles' Creed to facilitate understanding. Moltmann has intricately intertwined these three articles in a trinitarian context, enabling him to formulate a pneumatological doctrine of creation. This theology of creation commences with the immanent divine Spirit of creation; Moltmann anticipates that it may thus offer avenues for dialogue with both traditional and contemporary non-mechanistic, holistic views of nature. The subtitle characterizes this idea of creation as an 'ecological doctrine.' This is primarily designed to highlight the ecological problem of our era and the ecological mindset we must adopt. Moreover, it serves as a reference to the symbolism of 'home' and 'dwelling' that Moltmann have utilized in his book *God in Creation*. The term 'ecology' is derived from Greek, signifying 'the doctrine of the house' (*oikos*). What is the relationship between the Christian theory of creation and 'a doctrine of the house?' When we perceive solely a Creator and the creation, there exists no link. However, if we comprehend the Creator, the creation, and the purpose of that creation in a Trinitarian context, then the Creator, through the Spirit, resides inside the entire creation and in each individual created entity, as God's Spirit sustains and animates them.²⁶

The fundamental essence of creation is in the indwelling of God, analogous to the intrinsic nature of the sabbath of creation, which is God's repose. In inquiring into the purpose and future of creation, we ultimately reach the transformative presence of the triune God inside God's creation, which, through this presence, evolves into a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21), culmi-

²⁴ Jurgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God: 1984-1985* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 1-15.

²⁵ Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 34-58.

²⁶ Jurgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (London: SCM Press LTD., 1985), xii-xiv.

nating in God's perpetual sabbath, when all creation will attain happiness. The sacred essence of creation is the *Shekinah*, the indwelling presence of God; its mission is to transform all of creation into the dwelling place of God. If this is the theological aspect of the ecological theology of creation, the anthropological aspect must align with it. Existence can only become a sanctuary if the relationship between nature and humanity is devoid of tensions and conflicts characterized by reconciliation, tranquillity, and a sustainable symbiosis. The presence of human beings within the Earth's natural system parallels the presence of the Spirit within the soul and body of an individual, thereby terminating the alienation of humans from their true selves.²⁷

As in previous works, Moltmann has employed an ecumenical approach. Moltmann has endeavored to engage with both Protestant and Catholic sources and to converse with theologians from each tradition, aiming to elucidate the commonalities between the churches, including existing impasses and our optimistic efforts towards mutual understanding. Moltmann persistently pursued interaction between the Eastern and Western faiths and have found that Orthodox theology has retained a creation wisdom that was marginalized and forgotten in the West due to modern advancements in science, technology, and industry. The earliest traditions of Christian theology often provide the most significant concepts for the essential transformation in our perspective towards nature that is urgently required now. Moltmann dedicated a significant portion of his attention to Christian and Jewish sources. Christianity adopted the notion of creation from the Scriptures of Israel and should thus heed the insights offered by Jewish interpretations of these shared traditions. The pinnacle of creative wisdom resides in Jewish theology and the observance of the Sabbath. By forsaking the Sabbath, Gentile Christian churches have forfeited this avenue of access, which is frequently disregarded entirely.²⁸

Beyond Christianity, Judaism, particularly in its kabbalistic heritage, formulated concepts on the divine *zimsum* (God's self-limitation) and the holy *Shekinah*. These principles have consistently shaped Christian thought subtly; however, it is now essential to engage with them intentionally and in open discourse - crucial for comprehending nature as creation and significantly impactful for Jewish-Christian communication. Ultimately, the ecumenical approach is accessible to the secular *oikoumene*, which translates to 'the inhabited world,' encompassing the sciences, technologies, and economics that currently shape the interactions among humans, machines, and nature.²⁹

Creation as God's Dwelling Place

Jurgen Moltmann's main contribution in *God in Creation* is his interpretation of creation as the abode of God. Moltmann asserts that God is not remote from creation but inhabits it through divine presence. Utilizing the biblical notion of the Sabbath, he contends that God resides inside

²⁷ Moltmann, *God in Creation*, xii-xiv.

²⁸ Moltmann, *God in Creation*, xii-xiv.

²⁹ Moltmann, *God in Creation*, xii-xiv.

creation, rendering the world a sanctified realm where the divine presence is perpetually encountered. This perspective contests traditional views that distinctly separate God from the universe, advocating instead for an interpretation of creation imbued with divine grandeur and purpose.³⁰

Panentheism and Divine Immanence

A notable element of Moltmann's theology is his support for panentheism, the doctrine that the world exists inside God, who transcends the cosmos. In contrast to pantheism, which identifies God with nature, Moltmann asserts that God is both transcendent and immanent. Creation resides within the divine reality, upheld by the Spirit of God. This panentheistic perspective acknowledges the sanctity of the natural world and promotes reverence for all life forms. It also establishes a theological foundation for ecological stewardship, as damaging creation constitutes an affront to God's presence within it.³¹

Community of Creation

Moltmann presents the concept of the community of creation, wherein all living entities - humans, animals, plants, and the Earth - are interrelated constituents of a collective community. Humans are not sovereigns of creation but rather participants in it. This perspective vehemently opposes anthropocentrism and advocates for an ecological worldview that esteems the dignity of all beings. Moltmann emphasizes the interconnection of life, urging people to engage in stewardship, justice, and environmental care.³²

Role of the Holy Spirit

A notable theme in Moltmann's work is the Holy Spirit's function as the life-giving factor in creation. He characterizes the Spirit as the vibrant essence that perpetually supports and rejuvenates life. This pneumatological perspective broadens the theology of creation to encompass not only the first act but also emphasizes God's continual engagement in upholding the universe. The Spirit unites all beings and nurtures the vitality of existence, emphasizing that creation is a dynamic, Spirit-infused reality.³³

Ecological Ethics and Responsibility

Moltmann's theology possesses significant ethical ramifications, especially concerning ecological stewardship. By depicting creation as sacred and divinely inhabited, he contests exploitative perspectives on nature and advocates for responsible care. His ecological theology underscores

³⁰ Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 6-8, 275-80.

³¹ Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 98-102.

³² Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 9-12, 173-176.

³³ Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 9-10, 268-272.

sustainability, justice, and stewardship for future generations. This viewpoint is particularly pertinent in the context of contemporary environmental challenges, where theological contemplation can motivate pragmatic ecological initiatives and ethical accountability.³⁴

Moltmann advocates for a relational interpretation of creation based on the notion of God's immanent presence within the world. Utilizing biblical traditions, particularly the motif of the Spirit of God as the source and sustainer of life, he contends that God's presence pervades every facet of creation. This viewpoint criticizes anthropocentric beliefs and encourages humanity to acknowledge the sanctity and interdependence of all living entities. Moltmann's conception of creation as God's abode presents an ecological spirituality that merges theology with environmental stewardship. By depicting creation as a community of life instead of a hierarchy of domination, he reinterprets humanity's position from exploiters to caregivers and co-creators. His theology aligns with modern ecological initiatives and interfaith discussions that pursue sustainable and ethical lifestyles within the Earth's constraints. Recognizing God's presence in the natural world is not merely a theological assertion but also a moral and spiritual obligation that demands ecological justice and stewardship.

Critical Evaluation

Jurgen Moltmann's conception of *God in creation* contributes profoundly to modern ecological theology by showing creation as a lively, dynamic community sustained by God's presence. His theology is notable for its strong ecological orientation, which challenges the exploitative views of nature held by contemporary industrial civilization. Moltmann argues that creation is not a passive entity to be manipulated by human beings, but a sacred reality in which God's Spirit dwells. His Trinitarian framework supports this view by underlining the relational communion between God, Son, and Holy Spirit, offering a model for harmonious relationships within creation. Moltmann used this tactic well in order to critique anthropocentrism and urge a more inclusive perspective where humankind falls within the larger ecological community as opposed to dominating it. Moreover, his synthesis of theology and ecological ethics makes Christian teaching relevant in the face of ecological deterioration and climate crisis.

Moltmann's theology immediately raises a host of theological and philosophical concerns. One of the major criticisms is the vagueness of his understanding of panentheism. God is distinct from creation, although Moltmann's constant stressing of God's immanent presence in the universe sometimes seems to hide the distinction between Creator and created. Critics suggest it could lead to accidental pantheistic readings. The other matter is his conception of divine suffering. Moltmann's argument that God suffers with creation is a comfort and a companion to the oppressed and the suffering, but many theologians doubt the consistency of a suffering God with conceptions of sovereignty and omnipotence. This conflict creates an ambiguity about the tradi-

³⁴ Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 34-36, 186-190.

tional attributes of God and incites debates about the balance between divine transcendence and immanence.

Furthermore, Moltmann's theology is limited in its capacity to deal with the problems of evil and natural suffering in creation. He sees pain as an expression of God's activity in the world, but critics say his view doesn't sufficiently account for the way a good and active God allows ecological devastation, natural disasters, and the pain of the innocent. For some critics, therefore, his theodicy is not enough. Moreover, even if Moltmann is a passionate advocate of ecological responsibility, his work is less practically engaged in scientific management and environmental policy. His theological vision is both uplifting and ethically potent but at times it lacks particular tools for facing contemporary ecological and technological concerns. But even with these limitations, Moltmann's theology continues to be influential because it transforms Christian views of creation, pushes for ecological care, and calls the church to actively participate in environmental restoration.

Contemporary Relevance

The final decades of the twentieth century witnessed an increasing interest in the valuation of the globe by humanity. Certain authors contend that the exploitative perspective towards nature, characteristic of the twentieth century, directly stems from the Christian notion of creation. In a seminal 1967 essay, historian Lynn White Jr. (1907–87) contended that the Judeo-Christian concept of humanity's dominance over creation has nurtured the perception that nature exists to fulfil human needs, hence justifying a profoundly exploitative mindset. White contended that Christianity has a significant load of culpability for the contemporary ecological problem. White resisted that Christianity was culpable for the burgeoning ecological problem due to its invocation of the "image of God" notion, as articulated in the Genesis creation narrative (Genesis 1:26–7), which served as a rationale for the exploitation of the Earth's resources by humanity. He contended that the book of Genesis legitimizes the concept of human supremacy over creation, resulting in its exploitation. Notwithstanding its historical and theological shallowness, White's work significantly influenced the formation of popular scientific perspectives on Christianity specifically and religion broadly. A meticulous examination of the Genesis text reveals that themes such as "humanity as the steward of creation" and "humanity as the partner of God" are suggested, rather than the theme of "humanity as the lord of creation."³⁵

The concept of creation, rather than opposing ecology, underscores the need of human accountability for the environment. In the influential study, *Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship* (1986), Canadian theologian Douglas John Hall (born 1928) emphasized that the biblical notion of "domination" should be specifically interpreted as "stewardship," irrespective of secular interpretations of the term. The Old Testament perceives creation as humanity's possession, handed to them for stewardship and care. Comparable perspectives exist in other religions, characterized

³⁵ McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 201-02.

by distinct emphases and foundations; the Assisi Declaration (1986) regarding the ecological significance of religion signifies the acknowledgment of this important issue. A theory of creation can serve as the foundation for an ecologically attuned ethic. Calvin B. DeWitt (born 1935), an ecologist, contends that four essential ecological principles are clearly identifiable throughout biblical texts, mirroring the Christian theory of creation.

The *earth-keeping principle*: just as the creator preserves and sustains humanity, humanity must preserve and support the creator's creation. The *Sabbath principle*: creation must be permitted to recuperate from human exploitation of its resources. The *fruitfulness principle*: the fecundity of creation is to be appreciated, not obliterated. The *fulfilment and limits principle*: humanity's position within creation is constrained by established boundaries that must be honoured.³⁶

Theological education, in general, cannot anticipate how earthly consciousness might be pragmatic; rather, such endeavors often culminate in eco-ministries rather than eco-justice ministries. Christian churches are already engaged in many eco-ministry initiatives, such as tree planting and local ecological projects. Only a limited number of congregations or dioceses have addressed agricultural concerns such as land difficulties and organic farming. Sentimental perspectives on ecological concerns are currently facing criticism from several sectors. Eco-justice ministries encompass more than mere tree plantations, although the issue of justice is viewed solely from an anthropocentric standpoint. Consequently, it is essential to reconcile ecological concerns with justice viewpoints. Eco-justice ministries embody a significant interdisciplinary ecological ministry, focused on advocating for justice for vulnerable populations within processes, systems, and transformations.³⁷

Bas Wielenga identifies three tiers of eco-injustice occurring in our surroundings: global, national, and local. Exploiting resources and disposing of hazardous trash in the South, urban elites imposing hazardous waste on rural communities, and upper castes discriminating against lower castes over water and garbage management. Examining the ecological issue in isolation may obscure associated justice concerns; nevertheless, an integrated perspective reveals their interconnection. The World Council of Churches sought to connect with the theme: Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation. Bas recognized the productivity of this strategy, stating, "In promoting the simultaneous and interconnected pursuit of all three, which aligns closely with our perspective on eco-justice, two significant insights have emerged. Initially, this endeavor must be collaboratively pursued by individuals from diverse religious and secular backgrounds. Secondly, this must be founded on robust, enduring commitments."³⁸ It is well recognized that the cultivation of consciousness is integral to our theological education. Developing ecological consciousness just through curriculum-focused theological education is a challenging endeavor. It may be effective

³⁶ McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 201-02.

³⁷ Solomon Victus, "Theological Education and Earth Consciousness: Towards Eco-Justice Ministries," in *Nourishing Roots: Political Economy of Christian Faith*, edited by Solomon Victus (Delhi: ISPCK, 2025), 156-158.

³⁸ Bas Wielenga, *Towards an Eco-Just Society* (Bangalore: CSA, 1999), 155 quoted in Victus, "Theological Education and Earth Consciousness: Towards Eco-Justice Ministries," 157.

tive only when the curriculum is integrated with diverse exposures, perspectival direction, and incentive. Not all individuals with religious beliefs possess an awareness of earthly matters, yet the majority aspire to lead a fulfilling life on this planet. A comprehensive survey is required to examine the evolving attitudes and theological stances of theological students during their education and a decade thereafter.³⁹

Solomon Victus observed that initially, many individuals express sincere concern for ecological issues during their studies; however, they subsequently shift their focus to the power dynamics within their local diocesan or regional church, resulting in a diminished commitment to environmental awareness and an embrace of prosperity theology, which undermines ecological consciousness. In an urban Indian milieu, a pastor's engagement in ecological initiatives is significantly constrained. Conversely, if a pastor resides in a rural or countryside location, the opportunities for ecological engagement are relatively greater. The accompanying initiatives may be initially pursued for eco-justice ministries as proposed by Solomon Victus. 1. Enhancing understanding of energy, resources, and waste management; 2. Elevating the significance of land and indigenous products while advocating for organic agriculture; 3. Improving farmers' infrastructure - including storage, pricing, and marketing techniques to achieve self-sustainability; 4. Gradually eliminating genetically modified seeds, nuclear weapons, and corporate resources; 5. Developing semi-mechanized initiatives for cottage enterprises; 6. Opposing the state's or corporations' new inconsequential initiatives under the guise of employment and technology solely to enhance GNP growth; 7. Engaging in collaborative biblical study to ascertain its relevance.⁴⁰

The significance of Christians and Theological Education is increasingly evident as we go further. Gustavo Gutierrez once articulated regarding a broader perspective, "When one is concerned with one's own stomach, it is materialism, but when one is concerned with other people's stomachs, it is spirituality." We have been validating the spirituality of panentheism through sacred texts and doctrinal statements. If we accept that the splendour of God is in all fully alive beings, then our present worldview and way of life are erroneous. Sallie McFague asserts that Christians are summoned not only to exemplify an alternative conception of abundant life but also to provide a counter to individualistic consumerism, which is undoubtedly necessary; Christianity, alongside other world religions, can present such an alternative vision. Religions advocate for counter-cultural perspectives to develop compassion for God and the world. If theology education falters in this earth-centric goal, we have no role in advancing earth consciousness.⁴¹

³⁹ Victus, "Theological Education and Earth Consciousness: Towards Eco-Justice Ministries," 156-158.

⁴⁰ Victus, "Theological Education and Earth Consciousness: Towards Eco-Justice Ministries," 156-158.

⁴¹ Victus, "Theological Education and Earth Consciousness: Towards Eco-Justice Ministries," 164.

Conclusion

In *God in Creation*, Reformed theologian Jurgen Moltmann clarifies a relationship between God and the created order that is described as impure or corrupted. He contends that love represents a holistic bilateral relationship between the Creator and the creation, irrespective of its flaws. At the inception of the world, it was chaotic, unrefined, and enclosed in darkness; nonetheless, the Triune God was present within the tumult. It illustrates that God resides within every creation, irrespective of its character as benevolent or malevolent. Divine creations are unique in every regard, and while they may seem unusual or unpolished, they are exceptional and amazing within our realm. In his letter to the Romans, Paul asserted that all of creation experiences anguish or groaning in frustration (Romans 8:22). If creation endures suffering, God endures it as well. God perceives the lamentations of all creation and organizes the world with precision. Our world neglects to emphasize the protection, valuation, and preservation of the environment. Recognizing the divine in all creation necessitates the protection, appreciation, and conservation of it, nurturing love rather than hostility. We must remember the words of the revered Tamil Saint Ramalinga Swamikal (Vallalar), who proclaimed, “Whenever I encounter a withered crop, I wither.” If we revere God and acknowledge the divine in all creation, animosity, conflict, aggression, and exploitation will be eradicated. Rather than awaiting a day when God organizes all creation in order, let us strive to make each day a positive experience for all creation and a better world to live.

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