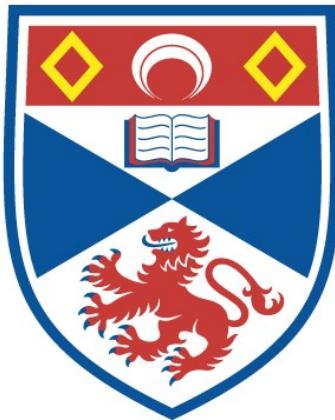


LEANING INTO THE FUTURE : THE KINGDOM OF
GOD IN THE THEOLOGY OF JÜRGEN MOLTmann
AND IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Poul Fossdal Guttesen

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
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**LEANING INTO THE FUTURE:
THE KINGDOM OF GOD
IN THE THEOLOGY OF JÜRGEN MOLTMANN
AND IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION**

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Divinity in candidacy for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy

Poul Fossdal Guttesen
8 July 2005



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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a dialogue between Jürgen Moltmann and the Book of Revelation on the theme of the kingdom of God. In addition to charting out the dialogue, Chapter 1 sets the stage for it through a theoretical reflection on its viability, and places the broad strokes of Moltmann's understanding of the kingdom within his theological project as a whole. Chapter 2 looks at how Moltmann sees the kingdom as the symbol of hope for humanity, and chapter 3 at how he understands the paradoxical and hidden presence of God's coming reign in history. The latter halves of these chapters contain appraisals of the strengths and weaknesses of Moltmann's portrait of the kingdom. The analysis of Revelation will commence with a short chapter (chapter 4) that both looks at the broad strokes of Revelation's kingdom language and shows how Moltmann and Revelation develop their respective understandings of the kingdom in response to similar crises. The analysis of this theme in Revelation will follow a similar movement as seen in chapters 2 and 3: chapter 5 considers how Revelation depicts the future as a regime change, as the time when God will assume the position of geopolitical authority over the earth; and chapter 6 looks at how the book uses kingdom language in its depiction of God (who he is and how he accomplishes his purposes) and in its portrayal of the church. In the latter half of these chapters, the analysis of Moltmann is brought into conversation with Revelation, considering how Moltmann may guide a contemporary reading of the book, and how Revelation suggests ways problematic areas of Moltmann's view may be solved. The concluding chapter will look at what the thesis has sought to accomplish and what further questions it raises.

PREFACE

Six and a half years ago, in a monastery in Westminster, British Columbia, time took a 180 degree turn; God's future turned me upside down. The future ceased to be the empty space I sought to populate with my own dreams and became a gift from God, his homeland that beckons us to journey toward it and let our lives be shaped by it. Almost five years ago I embarked on an academic journey to explore the shaping place the future has in Christian theology. How does eschatology contribute to a Christian understanding of God's world and what demands does it make of those who journey toward the vivifying future of God? And if this future is God's future for humanity and the earth we inhabit, how ought it shape the public life of Christians in the world? After a detour or two and some minor adjustment, this thesis on the kingdom of God in Moltmann's theology and the Book of Revelation marks the completion of one stage of this theological exploration.

If it had not been for close friends and wise women and men, I would have packed my bags and returned to where I came from a long time ago. I owe thanks to more people I can mention, but I must name a few: my supervisors, Prof. Alan Torrance for helping me give the project shape and encouraging me throughout, and Prof. Richard Bauckham for guiding me confidently and graciously through two areas of research few know as well as he; wise guides, Dr. James Houston, who so often has been the gracious hands of God in my life, and Dr. Charles Ringma, who gently lead me through the personal experience that was the seed of this thesis; my flatmates, Sharon Jebb, Louise Lawrence, and Nathan and Claire MacDonald, who made life enjoyable even in the hardest of times; and the following close friends who each in their own way helped me with my work and carried me along when I found it difficult to walk: Gisela Kreglinger, Louise Houston, Keith Hyde, David Rudolph, Wayne Coppins, Vijay Pillai, Ross Wright, Stefan and Sherry Lukits, Ivan and Julie Khovacs, David and Chelle Stearns, Matt and Julie Canlis, Tony and Antonia Clark, Sven and Rose Soderlund, and Dirk and Marion Jongkind with their six wonderful children. My parents, Marita and Leivur Guttesen, deserve a special mention, not only have they supported me throughout my long academic journey, but their radically unconditional love has been an anchor throughout my life. I am also very grateful to

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Solo Deo Gloria

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	i
PREFACE	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
ABBREVIATIONS AND A NOTE ON NOTATION	viii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
I. Introduction	1
II. Theory and Approach	2
A. A Theoretical Apology	2
B. Approach of the Study	9
III. Setting the Stage	11
A. The Crisis of Modernity and Messianic Hope	11
B. Moltmann's Theological Approach	13
C. "Imagination for the Kingdom of God"	15
CHAPTER TWO: THE KINGDOM OF GOD AS SYMBOL OF HOPE	21
I. Introduction	21
II. The Historical Aspect of the Kingdom.	21
A. The Kingdom in the Person and History of Jesus	22
B. History in the Sign of Jesus' Death and Resurrection	25
C. The Messianic Concept of History	28
D. Leaning into the Coming Kingdom	29
III. The Contribution: The World in the History of the Kingdom of God	32
IV. The Transposition of the Logic of Redemption in Moltmann	36
A. The Cross in Moltmann's and the Bible's Logic of Redemption	37
B. The Place of Sin in Moltmann's Understanding of Redemption	40
1. Sin in Moltmann	40
2. The Transposition of Sin	42
C. Problems in Moltmann's Transposition	45
CHAPTER THREE: THE PASSION OF THE KINGDOM IN THE WORLD	48
I. Introduction	48
II. Kenotic Perichoresis: God's Relationship to Creation	48
A. The Presence and Identity of God as Revealed in the Cross	49
1. God's Self-Involvement in the Redemption of Creation	49
2. The Identity of God as Revealed in the Cross	49
B. The History of God's Kenotic Perichoresis with Creation	50
1. The Identity of God in Relation to Creation	51
a. The Immanent Trinity: A Kenotic Perichoresis	51

b.	The Necessary Resolve to Create	51
c.	Creation Purposed for Perichoretic Communion with God	52
d.	The Contradiction in God	52
2.	The Presence of God with Creation	53
a.	The Kenotic Shape of the God-Creation Perichoresis	53
b.	The Kenotic Rhythm and Passion of God's Presence in History	53
c.	The Eschatological Orientation of God's Presence in Creation	54
III.	The Kingdom of Christ in the Spirit: The Rule of God Oriented toward Freedom	54
A.	Introduction	54
B.	The Manifestation of the Kingdom in Jesus	55
1.	Easter as the Foundational Event of the Kingdom	56
2.	The Kingdom in the Person and History of Jesus	58
C.	The Spirit as the Mystery of the Kingdom	60
1.	The Spirit as the Mystery of Jesus	61
2.	The Pneumatological Presence of the Kingdom of God	61
3.	The Process of Resurrection in the Spirit	62
4.	The Pneumatological Manifestation of the Kingdom of God	63
D.	The Rule of God as Oriented toward Freedom	63
1.	The Purpose of the Rule of God	64
2.	The Character of the Rule of God	64
3.	The Demand of the Rule of God	66
E.	The Church as an Anticipation of the Kingdom	66
1.	The Church Between Christ and the Kingdom in the Spirit	66
2.	The Church as Event in the Promised Presence of Christ	67
a.	The Church in the Apostolic Presence of the Exalted Christ	68
b.	The Church and the Presence of Christ among the Poor	69
c.	The Church Oriented toward Christ's Parousia	70
d.	The Apostolic Church of the One, Holy and Catholic Kingdom	71
3.	The Church in the Mission of the Kingdom	72
4.	Conclusion	73
F.	Conclusion	74
IV.	The Contribution: The Presence of the Coming Kingdom in History	75
V.	Problems	78
A.	Deepening of Transposition	78
B.	The Disappearance of God's Sovereignty	80
C.	The Non-Exclusive Relationship of the Church to the Kingdom	84

CHAPTER FOUR: THE CRISIS OF THE KINGDOM AND THE BOOK OF REVELATION	87	
I.	Crisis and the Kingdom of God in Moltmann	87
II.	Crisis and the Book of Revelation	88
A.	Early Christianity and a Crisis of the Kingdom	88
B.	Crisis and Kingdom Language in Revelation	89
III.	The Formal Character and Spatio-Temporal Expansion of Reality in Revelation	94

CHAPTER FIVE: THE FUTURE AS REGIME CHANGE	98
I. Introduction	98
II. The Seventh Trumpet: Heralding a Regime Change	99
A. The Function of the Trumpet Sequence	99
B. The Anticipation of the Seventh Trumpet	100
C. The Seventh Trumpet	100
1. The Transferral of a Kingdom (11:15b)	102
2. Taking a Kingdom (11: 16-18)	104
c. The Dual Act of the Fulfilment of God's Kingdom (11:18)	105
i. The Final Defeat and Punishment of God's Opposition	106
ii. The Final Reward to God's People	108
a) The vindication of the saints	108
b) The inclusion of "those who fear his name"	109
3. The Final Return of God's Presence among His People (11:19)	111
D. Conclusion	113
III. A New View of History in the Light of an Expected Regime Change	114
A. The Kingdom of the Dragon and His Beasts	114
B. The Fall of Babylon and the End of the Draconic Regime	117
C. The Kingdom of God Centred in the New Jerusalem	119
D. What Fades Away and what Remains	121
E. The Upside Down View from the End	122
IV. Interaction with Moltmann	124
A. Kingdom Consonances	125
1. Hope for the Kingdom of God	125
2. History as Seen from the End	126
3. Reading Revelation through Moltmannian Lenses	128
B. A Time for Rebellion and Sin?	132
1. Has Sin had Its Time?	132
a) Sin as the Fundamental Human and Pivotal Cosmic Problem	133
b) Sin as Social Structuring and Personal Internalisation	134
c) Transformation: Restoration and Maturation	137
2. A Time for Rebellion?	137
a) The Goodness of Creation and the Cataclysm of the Fall	137
b) An Anthropocentric Concern for Creation on Its Own	139
c) Hope without the Loss of Divine and Human Freedom	141
d) Conclusion	141
3. Redrawing Moltmann's Hope around a Cosmic Rebellion	142
CHAPTER SIX: THE PRESENCE AND REIGN OF GOD IN HISTORY	143
I. Introduction	143
II. The God of the Kingdom	143
A. The Constancy and Narrative of God's Undisputed Sovereignty	144
1. The Lord God the Almighty: The Constancy of His Sovereignty	144
2. "...and the One who is Coming": The Narrative of His Sovereignty	146
B. The Divine Mediator of the Kingdom of God	149
1. Jesus as Agent of God's Sovereignty	149

a.	Easter and the Establishment of God's Sovereignty on Earth	149
b.	Jesus and the Exercise of God's Sovereignty in the World	150
2.	The Lamb and the Divine Identity	152
C.	The Spirit: Agent of Divine Presence	154
1.	Introduction	154
2.	"The Seven Spirits" as the Power of God in the World	155
3.	"The Spirit" and the Seven Churches	156
D.	Conclusion	157
III.	The Church as an Anticipatory Presence of the Kingdom	158
A.	The Claim of the Church: An Anticipatory Presence of the Kingdom	158
1.	The Easter Foundation of the Church as a Kingdom	158
2.	Churches as Paradoxical and Ambiguous Presences of the Kingdom	161
B.	The Form of the Church: The Kingdom in Exile	162
1.	The Collective Identity of the Woman in Revelation 12	163
2.	The Socio-Political Character of Collective Women in Revelation	165
3.	The Journey of The City of God in the Wilderness	165
4.	The Homecoming of the Kingdom in the New Jerusalem	171
IV.	Interaction with Moltmann	174
A.	Consonances	174
1.	The Dialectics of the Kingdom	175
2.	The Church in the Mission of the Kingdom of God	176
B.	Differences	179
1.	The Sovereignty of God and the Egalitarian Community	179
a.	The Sovereignty of God and the Human Community	179
b.	Christological Perichoresis	181
c.	Perichoresis and the Rule of God	182
d.	The Absolute Rule of God and Provisional Human Authority	185
2.	The Provisional Relationship of Church and State to the Kingdom	186
a.	The Kingdom without Triumphalism	187
b.	The Church and the Mission of the Kingdom	189
CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS AND ANTICIPATIONS		195
I.	Retrospective	195
A.	Consonances and Differences	195
B.	Moltmann, Revelation in the Context of Crises of the Kingdom	197
C.	The Concrete Identity of the Displaced Kingdom	199
II.	Prospective	202
A.	The Situatedness of the Authorial "I" and the Limitations of the Present Study	202
B.	Millenarianism and Jewish-Christian Dialogue	204
BIBLIOGRAPHY		208

ABBREVIATIONS AND A NOTE ON NOTATION

Throughout this thesis references to secondary literature will be made by noting the author and date of publication. Articles by Moltmann will be referenced with a shortened title while major works and other monographs will be noted by the following abbreviations:

<i>CoG</i>	<i>The Coming of God</i>
<i>CPS</i>	<i>The Church in the Power of the Spirit</i>
<i>CrG</i>	<i>The Crucified God</i>
<i>EH</i>	<i>The Experiment Hope</i>
<i>EiT</i>	<i>Experiences in Theology</i>
<i>FC</i>	<i>The Future of Creation</i>
<i>GHHC</i>	<i>Die Gemeinde im Horizont der Herrschaft Christi</i>
<i>GiC</i>	<i>God in Creation</i>
<i>GSS</i>	<i>God for a Secular Society</i>
<i>HP</i>	<i>Hope and Planning</i>
<i>IGEB</i>	<i>Im Gespräch mit Ernst Bloch</i>
<i>HTG</i>	<i>History and the Triune God</i>
<i>IEB</i>	<i>In the End—the Beginning</i>
<i>JCTW</i>	<i>Jesus Christ for Today's World</i>
<i>Man</i>	<i>Man</i>
<i>OHD</i>	<i>On Human Dignity</i>
<i>RRF</i>	<i>Religion, Revolution and the Future</i>
<i>SL</i>	<i>The Spirit of Life</i>
<i>SoL</i>	<i>The Source of Life</i>
<i>SW</i>	<i>Science and Wisdom</i>
<i>TH</i>	<i>Theology of Hope</i>
<i>TKG</i>	<i>The Trinity and the Kingdom of God</i>
<i>ThT</i>	<i>Theology Today</i>
<i>WJC</i>	<i>The Way of Jesus Christ</i>

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I. Introduction

Central to the advent of modern biblical studies was the liberation of the Bible from the heavy yoke of dogmatic tradition so that the biblical books would be allowed to speak with their own voice from within their own historical context. If this was the urgency 200 years ago, many find the opposite to be the case today, the need to free the Bible from the objectivist constraints of modern biblical studies.¹ Finding ways of letting contemporary theological concerns and Scripture exist in a mutually enriching dialogue is one of two concerns that drive this thesis. The other is a concrete theological question, how does the future we expect shape our existence, and how does the God who will bring this future about orient us toward it?

I will seek to bring these two concerns together by constructing a dialogue between a modern theologian, Jürgen Moltmann, and a biblical book, Revelation. Considering my theological question, Moltmann is a natural choice since eschatology shapes his entire theological project,² and since, as his theology has developed, he has become increasingly interested in how the God expected is now at work in the world, orienting it toward its future in him. This double concern is also at the heart of Revelation as it seeks to encourage its readers to remain faithful in their allegiance to God and the Lamb. The dialogue will be constructed around their respective views of the kingdom of God. As we will see toward the end of this chapter, a concern for the kingdom runs throughout Moltmann's theology, and although βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ is not frequently found in Revelation, the book is rife with political language and at the core of its concerns is the reign of God, how God as creator is sovereign over both heaven and earth and how he will come as such to the realm that now languishes under the rule of his enemies, to earth. Works on Moltmann are legion³ and there has

¹ For calls for a theological interpretations of Scripture, see e.g. Fowl 1997, 1998, Watson 1993a.

² Douglas Meeks (1974:88) rightly observes that Moltmann constantly attempts "to make the eschatological revelation of God concrete in relationship to the present."

³ For an exhaustive bibliography on works by and about Moltmann, see Wakefield 2002. Of the many portraits of Moltmann's thought, pride of place must go to Richard Bauckham's two studies (1995 and 1997); of Bauckham's work Moltmann says: "It is not easy for me to reply to Richard Bauckham...he knows too much! He knows my theology, with its strength and weaknesses, better than I do myself. His books ... are far and away the best accounts of my theology." ("The World in God," 35)

been an exponential growth in studies on Revelation recently.⁴ Of specific interest to the present project is Michael Gilbertson's *God and History in the Book of Revelation: New Testament Studies in Dialogue with Pannenberg and Moltmann*. Not only is he concerned with the relationship between the Bible and theology but he conducts a very similar dialogue to what I will attempt here, comparing Moltmann's and Pannenberg's understanding of history with Revelation. I will interact with Gilbertson throughout this study, and have especially benefited from his excellent analysis of Revelation's temporal and spatial categories.⁵ His study is complementary to my own as both are concerned with how eschatology and transcendence shape our understanding of the world. The main difference between the two is that Gilbertson is primarily concerned with how Moltmann and Pannenberg appropriate apocalyptic in their respective views of history and as such is focused on "the debate about the significance of history per se"⁶ while I am concerned with the concrete function of the kingdom of God in Moltmann and Revelation.

II. Theory and Approach

Although there has been a recent proliferation of work on the role of the Bible in theology and on theological interpretations of Scripture, there is far from a consensus that this is a good thing. Since the dialogue between a 20th century German theologian and a first century Jewish-Christian prophet I embark on here will seem to many an exercise in futile anachronism, a theoretical apology may be in order.

A. A Theoretical Apology

Since the emergence of biblical studies and systematic theology as two distinct disciplines after modern biblical scholars intentionally divested themselves of the "shackles" of dogmatic tradition,⁷ the two have often sat in an uneasy relationship with one another, and the attempts to bridge them have often been seen as woefully

⁴ In addition to a multitude of articles and monographs, two monumental commentaries have been published recently (Aune 1997, 1998a, 1998b; Beale 1999). For a helpful overview on critical works on Revelation, see Witherington 2003:51-64.

⁵ See Gilbertson 2003:81-142.

⁶ Gilbertson 2003:1.

⁷ Although today's biblical scholar might be more humble in the potential of his discipline than his or her academic ancestors, the aim of many is still, in Francis Watson's words, "to regard the church's understanding of scripture as that which the academic community must liberate us from. ... Initiation into this academic community therefore requires the internalising of *a story of salvation* with obvious roots in the Enlightenment's critique of 'positive' religion, and, behind that, in the Reformation's critique of post-biblical innovations within the church." (Watson 1993a:1, 2; cf. Fowl 1997:xiii-xiv)

inadequate.⁸ From the outset the historical critical method, with its insistence on interpreting texts within their original historical context, has seen the theological habit of reading the texts in light of contemporary ideas and concerns as anachronistic anathema. However, over the past few decades, the situatedness and historical contingency of the modern biblical critic's claim to objectivity has been well documented.⁹ Within the increased awareness of the inescapable situatedness of any interpretive effort there has been a marked interest in interpreting the Bible within a Christian context, to not simply read the Bible for theology but to read it theologically.¹⁰ At the present, therefore, there is a lively debate between scholars who want to retain the essential interests of the historical critical study of the Bible as the canon within the guild of biblical studies, and those who deem this an unnecessary and unrealistic reduction of the interpretive process. Although I would place myself in the latter group since I believe that central to a Christian's interpretation of a text is to read it within a Christian view of reality, I nevertheless, as many others, would also want to retain the good the past 200 years have left with us. To elucidate this, I will first briefly set out what I see as two basic concerns usually associated with biblical studies and theology respectively, and then proceed to justify the validity of the two.

Acknowledging that neither "biblical studies" nor "theology" can be reduced to simple definitions, the former, has among other things, been associated with the attempt to determine what meaning a biblical text could plausibly be seen to be intended to produce within its original context¹¹ and the latter with the articulation of

⁸ Foremost of these attempts must be the biblical theology movement, encapsulated in Krister Stendahl's influential essays in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Stendahl 1962), both because of its enormous influence as well as for the devastating critiques levied against it later. On the history of biblical theology, see Reventlow 1992. For a particularly insightful critique of Stendahl's distinction between the supposedly descriptive task of biblical studies and normative task of theology as well as his distinction between what the text meant and what it means, see Ollenburger 1986. The critics of biblical theology usually point to one of two alternative roads. There are those who are sympathetic and committed to the descriptive task of biblical theology but want to restrict it to the historical task of determining the various and even contradictory theologies of the various biblical texts. (e.g. Barr 1999; Räisänen 1990) Others want to abandon it in favour of an intentionally theological interpretation of Scripture. (e.g. Fowl 1998; see also several of the essays in Watson 1993a)

⁹ See Jeanrond 1993:89-90 on how the protest of modern biblical studies against "the theological domestication of biblical texts" cannot be seen apart from other contemporaneous interpretation of the Bible and as such does not simply uncover what the text meant but constitute a rival claim to what it means.

¹⁰ This has taken a variety of forms, see e.g. Childs 1992; Fowl 1997; Seitz and Greene-McCreight 1999; Watson 1993a.

¹¹ This was one of the primary interests that gave birth to the discipline. Here I have chosen to describe what usually is called 'authorial intention' as the meaning the text was 'intended to produce,' since the former often ended in an undue consideration of the psychology of the author. Kevin Vanhoozer has

God and his work as its primary locus, its aim being to make sense of this within its own context. While these have often been seen as distinct concerns of two disciplines that should be kept separate, I will try to show that they ought to be seen as two inseparable aspects of the one task of Christian theology, and perhaps of any interpretive task. I will do so by trying to tease out the implications of a fundamental but hopefully fairly uncontroversial assumption: people write in order to *communicate something*.

First the *communicability* of texts.¹² Authors write in the hope that the meaning readers will decode from their texts corresponds to what they sought to encode in them, what they purposed to communicate through them. Therefore, if texts as communicative acts are to be successful, there has to be a certain level of correspondence between what the author sought to encode and that which the reader decodes. Despite both often misreading and at times being misread, the astounding success of textual communication is seen in that people continue to read and write in order to understand and be understood.¹³

For a text to become a successful communicative act there must be a shared base of knowledge, the most obvious being the comprehension of a particular written language, as well as those assumed socio-cultural factors necessary for interpreting the text that are not supplied by the text. The level of shared knowledge needed for a successful textual communicative act depends on the level of cultural and linguistic particularity assumed in the text and the wideness of the field of legitimate meaning.¹⁴

If textual communicability is taken seriously, what are some of the implications for our concerns? First, the aim to recover the meaning an author sought to encode in a text is not only a valid exercise but an honourable one since it respects the communicative purpose of most texts.¹⁵ Second, this being the case, the attempt

sought to resurrect a valid place for authorial intention through speech-act theory, the author being the one “whose action determines the meaning of the text.” (Vanhoozer 1998:230)

¹² This discussion on textual communicability is primarily drawn from Vanhoozer 1998, especially chs. 5-6.

¹³ This is of course not to deny that there are other motivations for both reading and writing, but to understand and to be understood are two primary purposes for textual communication.

¹⁴ E.g. Instructions for a surgical procedure require a high level of a certain kind of cultural-linguistic particularity, a misreading of which has devastating consequences, while a novel, although it may reflect all kinds of cultural phenomena, does not necessarily require an expert’s knowledge of its cultural setting and often allows for a wide field of readings.

¹⁵ So, Ellul 1977:15, not denying the importance of the structure of texts, critiques structuralism’s disregard of the authors intention, saying, “I remain very certain upon this point: the author had not been a mere writer of “something,” of a text, but he had an *intentional meaning*. And even more he

to know better the socio-historical world texts arose in is a valued part of the interpretive process.¹⁶ Nicholas Lash argues that we need the biblical historians and critics because although “the history of the meaning of the text continues” and therefore each telling will differ from the one before, we tell it anew “under constraint: what we may *not* do, if it is *this* text which we are to continue to perform, is to tell a different story.”¹⁷ However, this claim must be followed up with some important qualifications. The attempt to decode what an author sought to encode does not make one’s own reading less situated, it only means that one seeks to hear the text as well as one can precisely where one finds oneself. Even the most painstaking attempt to elucidate the “there” where the text was produced is still undertaken in the “here” in which the interpreter stands.¹⁸ Also, although some texts have a strictly limited field of meaning, like a construction manual, others have a wide field, especially texts that venture in some way into the liminal field of the meaning of existence.¹⁹ And it is these kinds of texts that tend to survive. They are not forgotten

had also desired to convey meaning by the construction itself, by the organization, by the plan and structure of his work.”

¹⁶ However, even this context can be very elusive since many biblical texts have a complex history of formation that makes them often difficult if not impossible to place within a particular historical context. This reminds us that the text must remain the primary informant for its own context and it also suggest that communities of faith have to take seriously the canonical contexts of their Scriptures, i.e. the meaning they were purposed to produce as a collection of authoritative writings. In this task, B. S. Childs has made an invaluable contribution as he has sought “to understand the various voices within the whole Christian Bible, New and Old Testament alike, as a witness to the one Lord Jesus Christ, the selfsame divine reality. The Old Testament bears testimony to the Christ who has not yet come; the New to the Christ who has appeared in the fullness of time.” (Childs 1992:85)

¹⁷ Lash 1986:44. A negative element of this is to resist the domestication of the Bible, “placing a check on easy systematisation or a use which fails to recognise the awkwardness of the biblical text in all its diversity.” (Rowland 1998b:239)

¹⁸ A common defence among biblical scholars against the charge of objectivism or positivism is that they are aware of their own bias but seek to counter it through the application of a certain ‘neutral’ methodology. This does not hold. The positivism is precisely the belief that through method one can achieve the ideal of approaching the first century “without,” in Stendahl’s words (1962:425), “borrowing categories from later times.” Barr (1999:205) reflects the same sentiment, when he says the biblical scholar must hold his own commitment in suspense if it is to be questioned by the text itself. Precisely because of this, theology is inadmissible in the academic life of the Biblical scholar. (222) Such an attitude wrongly assumes both that one can suspend one’s faith commitment in favour of a methodological stance which provides objectivity and that one’s commitment cannot be challenged if one brings it to the text. Watson (1994:2) also notes how strategies for reading that are over-determined by a particular methodological stance falsely assume that all texts are alike and therefore can be submitted to a “single-reading-perspective.” This is neither to deny that certain methods may uncover things we otherwise would have missed nor dismiss that they may help us to gain a certain critical distance from our own commitments, only that our own subjectivity is not to be dismissed in our reading and that methods are not value neutral.

¹⁹ Philip Wheelwright (1962) helpfully distinguishes between the one-to-one correspondence of symbol and referent in stenosymbolism (as in an IKEA instruction sheet) and the shifting patterns of association in pensive symbolism (as in a poem or rich novel). It is this latter type of texts, usually

because unlike an IKEA instruction sheet, they delve into those regions of life that transcend the passing of time. They can move on because what is imbedded in them goes beyond their author and first readers, they delve deep into matters that are not limited to particular peoples and times.²⁰ This observation leads us toward the other basic aspect of my assumption: texts do not simply communicate, they communicate *something*.

In addition to experiences of life that transcend time and space and the human capacity for the new, the different,²¹ the possibility of texts to span vastly different contexts owes much to their referentiality. While authors and first readers pass away, what they speak about remains; their referent, this is what texts are about. They do not survive by drawing attention to themselves but by their capacity to make *something* present that otherwise is absent by *in-forming* the reader's imagination.²² Although a possible referent should not be limited to a material object or a historical sequence of events but may just as well be a fictive world, an idea, or a mood, texts always make present something that cannot be equated with themselves, with the "set of black marks on white paper."²³ When writers encode a text, they do so in the hope that readers will be able to rightly decipher this set of marks, "make sense of it, to read it, to interpret it,"²⁴ and so see what the author seeks to bring to present in the light the author sheds on it. There are some important implications of this.

First, if texts are about something other than themselves they always draw the reader beyond themselves. In order to read well it is not sufficient to only know the text well but be opened to and engage oneself with that which the text brings into the

associated with liminal situations, that have the capacity to live beyond their first contexts. See Gilbertson 2003:68 for a brief overview of Wheelwright's discussion.

²⁰ So Barth observes, "why should parallels drawn from the ancient world be of more value for our understanding of the epistle [Romans] than the situation in which we ourselves actually are and to which we can therefore bear witness" (as quoted in Rowland 1998b:239) Revelation is a good example of such pensive literature; e.g. Rome is not identified as Rome but in the textured symbol Babylon. But precisely in clothing Rome in the textual garments of Babylon, the symbol and its associations live on after Rome has fallen, waiting for news ways it can uncover the evil cities of the world.

²¹ Anyone who has found themselves in a cross-cultural and cross-lingual context cannot help but be amazed by the human possibility to enter a radically new context, despite the initial and often excruciating difficulties of doing so.

²² For an excellent essay on this two-fold purpose not just of text but of language generally, see Pieper 1992. He cogently argues that the proper use of language is for the purpose "to name and identify something that is real, to identify it for *someone*." (15) Language is abused when it is primarily used for some other and usually self-serving end than the attempt to convey reality. "The dignity of the word, to be sure, consists in this: through the word is accomplished what no other means can accomplish, namely, communication based on reality." (33)

²³ Lash 1986:38.

²⁴ Lash 1986:38.

open. A reading that does not result in engagement with a text's subject matter is a failed reading.²⁵ If this is the case, a successful reading always engages more than the text, it always goes beyond simply the text's perspective on a subject in order to make sense of the subject as a whole. If this is the case, a theological engagement with a text is not only possible but also desirable. And, although engagement can be made with the Bible from a variety of contexts, an important interpretive situation must be from within a Christian community that sees itself as predicated upon that which it believes the Scriptures seek to bring to presence.²⁶

Second, since texts speak about *something*, give a perspective on a subject from a particular situatedness, reading a text is not only related to the text but also to its subject matter. The polyvalence of a rich text is not simply due to the multi-layered and complex nature of writing and reading texts, but also grounded in the rich irreducibility of the referent, that that which we speak and write about always contains more than we can convey and see. As texts lead us through themselves to their referent, they also bring us to something that is always only partially grasped. But as such, the referent can also be an important semantic anchor; it gives any reading both elasticity and boundedness, since the meaning of a thing is always a relational matter but never arbitrary. Although its essence provides it with a substantial continuity, its significance and thus its 'signification' is known only in a dynamic and enriching flow of various relations.²⁷ Any reading of a text will be different than another, for each is done within a particular, non-repeatable context since even when one is exposed to the subject matter from a particular angle within the text, one always

²⁵ Although many scholars question Barth's exegetical practices, one of his great contributions is his insistence on the subject matter. He says of Calvin's reading of Romans, "having first established what stands in the text, [he] sets himself to re-think the whole material and to wrestle with it, till the walls which separate the sixteenth century from the first become transparent, i.e., till Paul *speaks* there and the man of the sixteenth century *hears* here, till the conversation between the document and the reader is totally concentrated on the subject-matter, which *cannot* be a different one in the first and sixteenth century." (Barth, as quoted in Stendahl 1962:420).

²⁶ Says Fowl 1998:6: "Christians' convictions about God's providence must include the view that God has providentially provided in their scriptures what Christians require in order to live and worship faithfully before God." (cf. 8-9, 20-21, 30; Watson 1994:vii) As such, "Christian doctrine is...concerned with the unfolding and uncovering of the history of Jesus of Nazareth, in the belief that this gives insight into the nature of reality." (McGrath [1990:74-5], as quoted in Gilbertson 2003:44)

²⁷ Says Gilbertson (2003:39) "The rhetorical power of a text like Revelation comes from the interplay of the text and the reality to which it relates: to postulate either the absorption of the world by the text or the text by the world is therefore to assume a false antithesis." Drawing on Thiselton, Gilbertson goes on to see how this rich and complex relationship between text and referent is seen in how a *promise* seeks to conform the world to the word and how an *assertion* depends on matching the word to the world; "if a promise can have no effect in reality, it has no meaning. If the assertion does not match reality, *it* has no meaning." (40)

makes sense of it from one's own.²⁸ Gregory of Nyssa was right when he said: "Scripture grows with its readers."²⁹ Part of this enriching engagement with and through texts is bringing our own ideas and concerns within our own ways of thinking and conceptual frameworks to the text in order to see what answer the text may throw at us from its own.³⁰ Therefore, if our engagement with the text is for the purpose of knowing its subject matter, it is valid to bring our own concerns regarding the subject matter to the text, and seek to infer what the implications of the text's perspective of the matter may have for our concerns. Therefore, the theologian's habit to bring his or her own concerns to the text is not an inexcusable anachronistic fallacy but actually the way all of us come to texts—we cannot understand the past without a grasp on our present.³¹

To conclude, since texts are produced in order to communicate, the concerns of the biblical scholar for the ancient contexts in which the biblical texts developed is still important. Being opened up to the particulars in which the text arose can perhaps be compared to how an expert in ancient iconography can open the icon to us by showing us the logic behind the painting of the icon, how its symbolism works, etc. However, if we assumed that the technical knowledge of how icons are produced constituted reading them we would not only have made a categorical error but also darkened the icon, made it into an idol. The purpose of the icon is not to draw us to

²⁸ Because of this, the language of horizons, as e.g. employed by Thiselton 1980 and 1992, seems a better way to distinguish the primary loci of interests usually associated with biblical studies and theology than Stendahl's categories.

²⁹ As quoted in LaCocque and Ricoeur 1998:xi.

³⁰ Although a text should not be reduced to propositional statements, most texts nevertheless make certain judgments on the character and nature of that of which they speak. Thus, part of reading well is trying to discern these judgments, a task that necessarily means a 'translation' of the text's judgments from its own conceptual framework to our own, to say the same thing differently (Yeago 1994:159, 60) See Yeago 1994 for an excellent exposition on the continuity between texts like Phil 2 and later trinitarian formulations. Although the conceptual framework and concerns the Fathers worked with were very different from those of the NT writers, the judgments of the former were not inconsistent with those of the latter.

³¹ Commenting on the irreducible dialectic of existing as historical beings, that our present consciousness is shaped by the history that precedes us, N. Lash says, "If it is true for us, as creatures of history, that some understanding of our past is a necessary condition of an accurate grasp of our present predicament and of our responsibilities for the future, it is also true that a measure of critical self-understanding of our present predicament is a necessary condition of an accurate 'reading' of our past. We do not *first* understand the past and *then* proceed to understand the present. The relationship between these two dimensions of our quest for meaning and truth is dialectical: they mutually inform, enable, correct and enlighten each other." (Lash 1986:79-80) This does not mean that we are helplessly bound to our present but historically conditioned consciousness, but as Jeanrond (1993:96) rightly points out: while one's commitment and purpose of course conditions one's reading it does not necessarily determine it.

itself but through it, to that which it seeks to bring to presence. Likewise, if we see the investigation into the historical contingencies of the text as the aim of reading it or as the limit of a faithful interpretation of it, we have made the text an idol.³² The historical investigation of a text can only aid in bringing the text alive when it helps the reader to perform it, to find ways to read it faithfully within the place on the stage of history and the world he or she occupies.³³ And if this ‘performance’ is going to be a Christian performance, to let the theological heritage of the faith and the ways in which Christians seek to make sense of their faith inform one’s reading is nothing but what should be expected.³⁴

This reflection on the communicability and referentiality of texts is but a brief endeavour into that incomprehensibly wide sea of recent hermeneutical discussion. It is anything but comprehensive but hopefully it may suggest why the present project is not only admissible but also desirable, since in the following pages I will seek to articulate what a first century text and a contemporary theologian seek to communicate about the kingdom of God, and in so doing, hopefully make a small contribution to what it means to believe there is a kingdom ahead of us that in hidden ways is making itself known among us.

B. Approach of the Study

We will first, at the end of this chapter, set the stage by situating Moltmann’s concern for the kingdom within the urgencies of his own theology, looking at how his interest in the kingdom is intrinsically bound up with both the crisis German theology faced after the world wars and with his approach to theology. This introduction to the

³² Vanhoozer, 1998:459-62, drawing on Marion 1991, picks up the idea of text as icon. This seems to be a fruitful way of understanding texts that respects the text and acknowledges its referential character. Just as an icon calls attention to a reality beyond itself through its symbolic imagery, so a text through its signifiers draws attention to something other and greater than it.

³³ “In order to do the job properly, Christian discipleship, the performative interpretation of scripture, needs (just as much as does the interpretation of Beethoven or Shakespeare) the services of scholarship and critical reflection.” (Lash 1986:43) Borrowing from the language of the theatre, “performance” may point beyond the unhelpful debate on whether there is an objective meaning in the text or whether meaning is the subjective production of the reader. A faithful performance cannot be separated from what is in the text but is at the same time intrinsically bound up with the reader who ‘performs’ it.

³⁴ Stephen Fowl argues that “given the ends towards which Christians interpret their scripture, Christian interpretation of scripture needs to involve a complex interaction in which Christian convictions, practices, and concerns are brought to bear on scriptural interpretation in ways that both shape that interpretation and are shaped by it.” (Fowl 1998:8) Although this may be optional for other readers of the text, “Christians, by virtue of their identity, are required to read” it so. (Fowl 1998:30; cf. Rowland 1998b:243; Watson 1993b:62)

basic strokes of the kingdom in Moltmann's thought will provide us with the basic concerns we will entertain throughout the thesis.

The next two chapters will deal respectively with what Moltmann sees as the historical and relational aspect of the kingdom. In chapter two we will look at how the kingdom functions as a symbol of hope for humanity, how this hope is grounded in the way the promise of the kingdom has appeared in the person and history of Jesus, and how it gives shape to a messianic understanding of history and a corresponding historical praxis. In the third chapter we will look at what has become increasingly important for Moltmann, how the kingdom is present in history, how God's "rule" is present to creation, orienting humanity and the created cosmos in which it lives toward the future opened up to it in the promise of the kingdom.

In chapter four we will set the stage for the second part of the thesis by considering the questions and concerns from our analysis of Moltmann that we want to bring to our study of Revelation and by suggesting what the urgencies are that Revelation responds to in its own depiction of God's rule and kingdom. Here we will try to show that Revelation's depiction of the kingdom responds to a remarkably similar crisis as the one which Moltmann faced in post-war Germany. In the following two chapters, we will first, in chapter five, consider how the future hoped for in Revelation is a "regime change" in which the powers that now occupy the central geopolitical authority on earth will be replaced by God and his Christ. In chapter six we will then turn to the relational aspect, how the book depicts God as the sovereign over both heaven and earth and how he now is orienting the world toward this future, not only in the acts of judgment by which Revelation is often identified but also through the Spirit-enabled kerygmatic witness of the ecclesial communities that have been constituted by the slain Lamb as a kingdom to God. In the last part of both these chapters I will place the preceding analysis into a dialogue with Moltmann, considering how Moltmann may open up ways of reading Revelation today as well as how I think Revelation may suggest correctives to potential weaknesses in Moltmann.

In a brief concluding chapter I will suggest how I think the dialogue I have proposed here has fared in the body of the work, and also make a few remarks on the importance of the authorial "I" as not outside the dialogue but as an interested and situated partner in it.

III. Setting the Stage

A. The Crisis of Modernity and Messianic Hope

Moltmann's theological journey begins in an experience of crisis, when, as a reluctant seventeen year old recruit into Hitler's failing war effort, his anti-aircraft artillery unit in Hamburg was bombed during "Operation Gomorrah." A fellow soldier standing by him was torn to pieces but Moltmann was left unscathed, and he asked himself: "My God, where are you?" and "Why am I alive and not dead like the rest?"³⁵ This deeply personal experience crystallises for Moltmann what he and much of twentieth century German theology sought to come to grips with. The two world wars spelt the death knell to Cultural Protestantism and the collapse of the modern humanist project and its idea of progress.³⁶ However, Moltmann was dissatisfied with the response of dialectical theology, especially as seen in Bultmann's existential theology, because of its incapability to speak the promise of the Gospel into concrete historical reality.³⁷ Therefore, when Gerhard von Rad sharply criticised Bultmann's "epiphanous" understanding of revelation as failing to pay attention "to the peculiar context of 'revelation' in the biblical traditions,"³⁸ he firmly sided with von Rad in the ensuing debate.³⁹

Von Rad argued that from the earliest strands of OT tradition, Israel's confessions about the LORD are "historically determined, that is, they connect the name of this God with some statement about or action in history."⁴⁰ However, in contrast to Pannenberg, who also is influenced by von Rad, Moltmann does not see revelation as history but as "word-history": God reveals himself in his word, his promise that contradicts a given actuality and thus creates history as the history of God's faithfulness to his promise; revelation, then, is "the demonstration of God's

³⁵ *EiT*, 3-4.

³⁶ While initially the concern for Moltmann was history, his later thought expands this in the concern for economic justice in light of the 1.-3. world divide, and ecological justice in light of the ecological crisis.

³⁷ As such, Bultmann's problem is for Moltmann very similar to the pitfall of the often 'other-worldly' nature of traditional Christian hope.

³⁸ Meeks 1974:68.

³⁹ For his own account on the importance of his teachers in Göttingen and A. A. van Ruler in the shape of his own response, see *EiT*, 87-91. For an overview of the "eschatological" milieu in which Moltmann's thought emerges, see Runia 1997; cf. Gilkey 1976:227-233, who argues that the 'new' historical theologians "pivoted the basic axis of Christian thought and concern from a *vertical* axis relating time and eternity, creaturliness and transcendence, into a *horizontal* axis relating present and future, a godless world of the now with a God whose 'being is future.'" (229)

⁴⁰ von Rad (1975:121), as quoted in Meeks 1974:68.

faithfulness to his promise.”⁴¹ “It was not in the *logos* of the epiphany of the eternal present,” says Moltmann, “but in the hope-giving word of promise that Israel found God’s truth.”⁴² As we will discuss in a later chapter, Moltmann embeds the person and history of Jesus within this promissory history of the Old Testament, seeing Easter as the possibility-making event of this history because it opens the whole world that otherwise is bound by the horizon of death up to the eschatological promise the resurrection holds for it.

In the way he develops his understanding of history, Moltmann is particularly indebted to 20th century Jewish thinkers, who were both children of the modern world and also, as Jews, experienced its downfall most acutely.⁴³ As the modern dream of historical progress in European culture was shattered in the first half of the 20th century, they returned to their own Judaic roots for an alternative understanding of history, and found it in messianism. Rejecting the notions that the human race can be educated toward perfection and that history can bring the world to completion, these Jews reverted to messianic categories of hope and redemption, the possibility of the new rising out of history’s ashes.⁴⁴ From their heritage they recovered the biblical notion that the true historical force is found in the hope birthed by promise. It is the promise of the future that can reveal the evil history produces and can offer redemption when it lies in ruin. What we need to seek is not the meaning of history in its evolution or progression of a certain idea but rather the redemption of history. It is after the catastrophe, when the world lies in ruin, that the splinters of redemption shine through it, when the time of the victims has come. Says T. W. Adorno:

Philosophy, in the only form in which it can still be responsibly upheld in face of despair, would be the attempt to regard all things as they present themselves from the standpoint of redemption. Knowledge has no light save that which shines upon the world from the standpoint of redemption: all else exhausts itself in imitation and remains a piece of technique. Perspectives must be created in which the world looks changed and alien and reveals its cracks and flaws in much the same way as it will one day lie destitute and disfigured in Messiah’s light. To attain such perspectives without arbitrariness or force, entirely out of sensitiveness towards things – that alone is the aim of thought.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Meeks 1974:72; for a recent exposition on the similarities and differences between Moltmann and Pannenberg, see Gilbertson 2003:11-19, 143-200; cf. Meeks 1974:64-73.

⁴² *TH*, 40-41. Says Braaten (1967:216), “Christian eschatology speaks of the future in utterances of hope based on the history of promise.”

⁴³ *CoG*, 29-30, where he mentions several authors, and then goes on to discuss Bloch (30-33), Rosenzweig (33-36), Scholem (36-38), Benjamin (38-41), and Taubes and Löwith (41-44). For the importance of Heschel in Moltmann, see Jaeger 1997.

⁴⁴ *CoG*, 29-30.

⁴⁵ T. W. Adorno, as quoted in *TH*, 290-291.

Among these thinkers, Ernst Bloch was especially influential on Moltmann since it was in his principle of hope that Moltmann found the conceptual categories that enabled him to draw together the various ideas that were shaping his theology.⁴⁶ Bloch's dynamic materialism, heavily influenced by Jewish and Christian messianic ideas, has a fundamentally eschatological ontology in which matter is incomplete, its potential not yet fulfilled.⁴⁷ Matter's potential, its "not yet" is then the power of its future, the force that drives what "is" toward what it can be. This creates a historical dialectic with three fundamental elements: The "Not," the experience of the absence of that which is not yet; "Novum," the realization of matter's potentiality; and "Hope," the aspiration, the search and explication of the possible, the realization of the Novum at the front of the present.⁴⁸ The pivotal difference between Bloch and Moltmann is that while the former sees the power of the future as the transcending potential within matter, for the latter it is the promise of God and, in Moltmann's later thought, the pneumatological presence of this promising God in creation.⁴⁹

Although many post-war theologians were reluctant to speak about the kingdom of God in concrete political terms because of the role such language had in Cultural Protestantism,⁵⁰ for Moltmann, it is precisely this retrieval of messianic categories and the conceptual framework that Bloch clothes them in that leads him to see the hope for the coming kingdom as pivotal to a theological response to the crisis of faith in the post-war German context.

B. Moltmann's Theological Approach

Returning to Moltmann's own formative experience, how does this respond to the crisis Christian theology faced after the war in Germany? Perhaps the best way to illustrate it is how Moltmann sees both the modern project and his own thought in relationship to the kingdom of God. This concern for the kingdom colours his whole approach to theology. Although Moltmann has often been critiqued for his

⁴⁶ *EiT*, 92-93; cf. *TH*, 9; *HTG*, 169.

⁴⁷ For a brief introduction to the basic elements in Bloch's thought, see Geoghegan 1998.

⁴⁸ The Novum's fulfilment is the humanizing of the world, when nature and humanity become "one in essence" (Chapman 1981:446). Says Bloch: "The World is not true, but through human beings and through truth it strives to arrive at its homecoming." (as quoted in *CoG*, 33).

⁴⁹ Bloch believes religious hope "reflects the tension between humanity's present estrangement and its future essence," whose 'God' Marxism shows to be the not yet realized ideal of the human essence. (Chapman 1981:438; cf. *HTG*, 169; Eckert 1983:130-31)

⁵⁰ See Runia 1992 for an overview of how the kingdom has been understood in history.

methodological looseness and is self-confessedly experimental,⁵¹ there are some basic trajectories that give shape to his theologising. “If I were to attempt to sum up the outline of my theology in a few key phrases,” he says, “I would have at the least to say that I am attempting to reflect on a theology which has: - a biblical foundation, - an eschatological orientation, - a political responsibility. In and under that it is certainly a theology in pain and joy at God himself, a theology of constant wonder.”⁵² First, by “biblical foundation” he means reading “the Bible as witness of God’s promissory history and the human history of hope.” It is this logic of promise and hope and the relationship between God and the world it conveys that is to guide how we read the Bible. Therefore, it is fundamentally interested in “the power of the future” that is revealed in God’s promises and that stirs human hope.⁵³ The Bible is a witness to how the promissory history of God has repeatedly “liberated people from their inner and outer prisons,” whether that is Israel from Egypt or Jesus from death. This is the dangerous but liberating memory from which “we also learn to see critically beyond our own present.”⁵⁴ Second, inherent in the “biblical foundation” is an “eschatological orientation.” The task of theology is not the formulation of orthodox dogma or merely making sense of human existence.⁵⁵ Rather, it seeks to discern how we can faithfully orient ourselves to the promised future of God and his kingdom in the situations which face us now. Third, since this is a hope that is not limited to the church but includes the whole world, it must be “politically responsible.” This means that Christians cannot take a neutral stand vis-à-vis the political realities of the world. Since the promissory history of God witnessed to in the Bible is one of liberation, the church’s stand must always be with and among those that now live in bondage. As the church seeks to discern the role it cannot help but have in society, it must be careful not to play into the hands of the powers that are

⁵¹ It is better to talk of Moltmann’s theological approach than his theological method since although his theology is not arbitrary it is not methodologically committed. He says “I am often asked about my theological method,” and continues, “and seldom provide an answer.... I do not defend any impersonal dogmas, but nor do I merely express my own personal opinion. I make suggestions within a community. So I write without any built-in safeguards, recklessly as some people think.” (*CoG*, xiii, xiv) Moltmann sets his own account of his theological approach and journey in *HTG*, 165-82 and in *EiT*.

⁵² *HTG*, 182.

⁵³ *OHD*, 105.

⁵⁴ *OHD*, 105, 106.

⁵⁵ Moltmann’s continuity with Scripture and tradition is not to be seen “in terms of faithfulness to the past, but faithfulness to promises of the future.” (Clutterbuck 1995:495)

and seek to maintain the status quo that benefits them, but rather ask “about the origin and legitimization of the church in the name of Christ and making Jesus’ message of the kingdom of God for the poor the starting point of a politics of consistent discipleship.”⁵⁶ So, “political theology designates the field, the milieu, the environment, and the medium in which Christian theology should be articulated today.”⁵⁷

Considering this three-fold approach, Moltmann’s theology is to be seen as one of “mediation,” “of relating the Christian tradition and message critically and therapeutically to this modern situation, for only in that way can it communicate the tradition of Christian faith, love and hope.”⁵⁸ It is only as the Gospel of the kingdom is mediated, made present, “in such a way that if falls within the horizons of the understanding of the people of a particular time,”⁵⁹ that it can turn contemporary circumstance toward the peace of God’s kingdom. This necessarily involves adaptations and at times even contradictions as times move from the contingencies of one age to another. But this must be done in such a way that as the Gospel changes its outer garments its substance must remain the same. In modernity, this then means not adapting to the Spirit of the age but with the Gospel entering into the suffering of this age, “taking the side of the victims of the ‘modern world’” and there finding the potential for this world from the hope of Christ and the coming kingdom.⁶⁰ As such, “mediation between the Christian tradition and the culture of the present is the most important task of theology.”⁶¹

C. “Imagination for the Kingdom of God”

Moltmann’s understanding of the kingdom of God is intrinsically bound up with his approach to theology. Indeed, he describes his theology as “imagination for the kingdom of God.”⁶² The close relationship between the two is evident in one of

⁵⁶ *HTG*, 178.

⁵⁷ *EH*, 102-03.

⁵⁸ *ThT*, 94.

⁵⁹ *ThT*, 53.

⁶⁰ *ThT*, ix.

⁶¹ *ThT*, 53. See Rasmussen 1995:42-48 on the mediating method of Moltmann’s political theology. Bauckham 1987:140, says “The greatest achievement of Moltmann’s theology has been to open up hermeneutical structures for relating biblical faith to the modern world. The strength and appropriateness of these structures lie in their biblical basis, their Christological centre and their eschatological openness.” (cf. Hunsinger 1973b:395)

⁶² *CoG*, xiv

his earliest essays, *Die Gemeinde im Horizont der Herrschaft Christi* in which Moltmann claims most of his later ideas exist in incipient form.⁶³

Critiquing the singular christological focus in post-war German theology, he argues that we can only truly account for Christ as the centre if we at the same time account for the horizon around this centre, the horizon being the kingdom of God. First, with Barth and against every attempt to fuse the kingdom with human institutions and achievements, Moltmann emphasises that the kingdom of God is revealed in his word. As God's self-revelation, Jesus is the Kingdom in person; it is in him that God's purposes for the whole world are revealed, in him God has determined himself in favour of all humanity.⁶⁴ This manifestation of the kingdom in Jesus is the objective ground for the redemption of the whole world.⁶⁵ Second, it is precisely this christological centre of the kingdom that indicates that the whole world is the concrete realm of the kingdom, the horizon against which Christ wills to reign. But this "yes" to the world should not and cannot be equated with the utopian progressivism of cultural Protestantism since the basis for the rule of Christ that the resurrection anticipates is articulated in the cross.⁶⁶ Therefore, the church can only anticipate the kingdom in the concrete political, social and cultural processes of the world by following the way God's love is revealed in staurological praxis.⁶⁷ Third, since the way of the kingdom revealed in the cross embraces not only the church but the world, the church must seek partnerships for the kingdom with the orders instituted in the world that have their own future in the kingdom. Fourth, this then

⁶³ Reflecting at the end of his career on this essay, Moltmann says: "I can see that here all the themes of my later theology are really already sounded: the eschatological horizon of history in the kingdom of God; faithfulness to the earth; new partnerships for the church in the world; and 'the narrow wideness of the cross of Christ.'" (*EiT*, 91; cf. "How I have Changed," 15). For an analysis of the place of this essay in Moltmann's thought, see Müller-Fahrenholz 2000:26-39. If not otherwise noted, my discussion is drawn from him.

⁶⁴ For Moltmann's mature development of the relationship between Jesus and "the coming kingdom" that made itself present in his ministry, see *WJC*, 97-99.

⁶⁵ "Die in Christus für die Welt gefallene göttliche Entscheidung steht objektiv über allen in der Welt lebenden Menschen; denn Jesus Christus ist auch ihr Haupt und ihr Herr. Alle Menschen sind darum - objektiv, d. h. von Gott her gesehen, - die Seinigen, sein Eigentum, ob sie es wissen oder nicht, und sind eben auf diesen göttlichen Tatsbestand *de jure* anzusprechen. Sie alle sind 'potentielle Christen'." (*GHHC*, 12).

⁶⁶ "Die Erwartung der erlösenden und zurechtbringenden Herrschaft in allen Dingen unserer weltlichen Wirklichkeit von dem gekreuzigten und erhöhten Christus allein vermag uns die Kraft zu geben, das 'Kreuz der Wirklichkeit' auf uns zu nehmen und diese Welt in ihrer ganzen Wirklichkeit *ohne Vorbehalt, aber auch ohne illusion* anzunehmen." (*GHHC*, 21)

⁶⁷ Note his positive adoption of Blumhart's call that "Christen müssen die Posaune hören, die in der Welt ertönt. Christen müssen diesem Ruf folgen hinein in die Welt," they must commit themselves "im Dienst an der Herrschaft und am dem Leben Christi in der Welt." (*GHHC*, 17-18)

eventually leads to what Moltmann calls “mut zur weltlichen Predigt,” to a kerygmatic praxis that accords with the centrifugal power of the cross that occupies the church’s confessional centre. It cannot remember Easter without being drawn into the concrete cultural, political and social realities of the world that constitute the horizon of Christ’s kingdom, and therefore must seek to shape its praxis in the light that the cross sheds on the kingdom. In taking its christological centre seriously, the church is led out into the world, into the horizon of the kingdom which encompasses both the world (i.e., it is related to the entire world in its concrete realities) and its history (as hope for the last things).

Not only do we find most of Moltmann’s theological concerns in incipient form here but we also see how his understanding of the kingdom is central to the content of his theology, the mirror image of his theological approach. The pivotal part of “the biblical foundation” of his theology is the ‘happening’ of the kingdom in the person and history of Jesus. This is the event that gives faith confidence because here God proves himself faithful to his own promise for the whole world in one person, in the death and resurrection of Jesus. The “eschatological orientation” then is how this appearance of the kingdom in Jesus opens the whole world to its own future in the kingdom. Jesus the centre is the anticipation of the future that awaits the world, of the horizon that is the kingdom that will extend to the whole world. The “political responsibility” for the church is then nothing but taking seriously that its central christological confession does not concern merely its own existence and benefits but includes all things in the rule of God. It is the practical outworking of the fact that as the church exists in the world, it lives for the future of the whole world in the kingdom of God.

These are the basic notes of the main theme that characterises Moltmann’s understanding of the kingdom from the beginning. As his theology develops, some variations on the theme emerge, the two most important being how he sees the kingdom as a symbol of hope and how he augments the eschatological focus of his early emphasis with a second relational one.

First, we see an intentional move from the kingdom being *the* symbol to *a* mediating symbol of hope. In Moltmann’s early writings, up to *God in Creation*, “the Kingdom of God” functions as the integrating symbol of Christian hope, as “the comprehensive Christian horizon of life” and as “the breadth of the horizon of hope

opened up through Christ for Christianity as it lives and suffers in history.”⁶⁸ As Christ is the centre of Christian hope, the Kingdom of God is the horizon encircling it. However, as Moltmann becomes increasingly concerned with the ecological crisis facing the earth because of the anthropocentricity of modernity, he becomes increasingly concerned to differentiate between hope for humanity and for creation, relating the kingdom to the former.⁶⁹

Although he uses “the kingdom of God” as the comprehensive symbol of hope in *God in Creation*,⁷⁰ in the preface to the paperback edition of the book, published some five years later, he describes the book as an attempt at “integrating the historical symbol of hope, ‘the Kingdom of God’, with the natural symbol of hope, ‘the new creation of all things’,” just as he had in *Theology of Hope* expanded the personal hope for “eternal life” by integrating it with the expectation of the redemption of humanity in the kingdom.⁷¹ This three-fold differentiation of hope then becomes a structuring principle for the *Coming of God* where he first deals with “eternal life” as personal eschatology (part II), then with “the Kingdom of God” as historical eschatology (Part III), thirdly with “New Heaven – New Earth” as cosmic eschatology (Part IV), and finally he adds a new symbol “Glory” as the divine eschatology the other three are oriented toward (Part V). He illustrates the relationship between these as three concentric circles, in which “the Kingdom of God” is the mediating symbol between “eternal life” and “the new creation.”⁷² While the individual personal hope for eternal life is embedded within the expectation for the kingdom, the hope for the redemption of humanity must itself be seen within the expectation of the transformation of the whole cosmos in the new heaven and earth.⁷³

In the following chapters our focus will be on this mediating symbol, seeing the kingdom as referring to the history of God with humanity, the way in which He overcomes the alienation of humanity from him and reconciles humanity to himself.

⁶⁸ CPS, 134, 133.

⁶⁹ It is in *GiC* that Moltmann first, in a sustained way, begins to consider the future of creation on its own terms.

⁷⁰ *GiC*, 8; cf. 53-56; cf. *WJC*, 98 where he equates the future kingdom with the “new creation.”

⁷¹ *GiC*, xi.

⁷² *CoG*, 132. While the integration of these three symbols is a particular focus of *CoG*, the recent minor work *IEB*, *TH*, and *GiC* can be seen as his main treatises on each of these symbols.

⁷³ While Moltmann is careful to make this distinction when discussing the eschatological ‘homeland’ of the kingdom, he tends to use it comprehensively in other contexts, as e.g. when he describes his theology as an “imagination for the kingdom of God” in the very same preface he has taken care to distinguish its function as a symbol of hope. (*CoG*, xiv)

Second, while Moltmann has affirmed from the outset of his theological journey that the kingdom has broken into history in the person of Jesus, *Theology of Hope* was singularly focused on what this means for the kingdom as a symbol of hope. However, from *The Crucified God* on he becomes increasingly concerned with how the kingdom expected is now present in the world in anticipatory form. Noting how βασιλεία can refer either to the present and actual rule of God in the world (which is disputed and manifests itself in hidden ways) or to the universal goal of divine rule (which is eschatological, universal and undisputed),⁷⁴ he, in *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, makes a distinction between the historical aspect of the kingdom and the relational aspect, its future and its presence. Of the inseparability of these two, Moltmann says:

If we view history, with its conditions and potentialities, as an open system, we are bound to understand the kingdom of God in the liberating rule of God as a transforming power immanent in that system, and the rule of God in the kingdom of God as a future transcending the system. Without the counterpart of the future of the kingdom, which transcends the present system, the transforming power immanent in the system loses its orientation. Without the transformation immanent in the system the future transcending the system would become a powerless dream.⁷⁵

In relation to human history then, the historical aspect of the Kingdom of God refers to the specific hope that the history of Jesus sets out for all humanity, and the relational aspect to the anticipatory presence of the future of humanity in its social relationship within creation before God. “In history God rules through Spirit and Word, liberty and obedience. But his rule comes up against conflict, contradiction and contention. It is a controversial rule, veiled in antagonism.” As such, it is oriented beyond itself to “that future when God will rule uncontradicted, and in his glory will be all in all.” At the same time however, the future kingdom can throw “its light ahead of itself into this history of struggle” precisely because it is now present in paradoxical and hidden ways. “We therefore have to understand the liberating activity of God as the *immanence* of the eschatological kingdom of God, and the coming kingdom as the *transcendence* of the present lordship of God.”⁷⁶

Thus, when we speak about the “Kingdom of God” in Moltmann’s thought, we are concerned with human sociality in all its relationships before God and his purposes. Its concerns are what the social, political, economic, cultural and religious

⁷⁴ CPS, 190.

⁷⁵ CPS, 190.

⁷⁶ WJC, 97-98.

processes which constitute human sociality are to look like when aligned to the will and purposes of God. Then, when we enquire into the Kingdom of God in its future fulfilment, we seek to depict the character of human sociality in all its dimension as it is brought into the full presence of God and is predicated upon this. And when we enquire into the presence of the Kingdom of God in history, we seek to discern how this future reality is present within the era that is predicated on powers that contradict it, and how, by its presence, precisely those relations which now often oppose it are being aligned toward its future. In the following two chapters which constitute our analysis of the place of the kingdom in Moltmann's theology, we will first turn to this historical aspect, how the kingdom is the symbol of hope for humanity, and then to how Moltmann perceives how the divine rule of this kingdom revealed in Christ is present in the world by the power of the Spirit.

CHAPTER TWO: THE KINGDOM OF GOD AS SYMBOL OF HOPE

I. Introduction

At the end of the previous chapter we explored how Moltmann's understanding of the dialectic between Christ as the confessional centre of the church and the kingdom of God as the universal horizon within which he is the centre gives shape to Moltmann's basic theological approach and is pivotal in informing the content of his theology. Here, in our analysis of how Moltmann understands the historical aspect of the kingdom, we will first look at how our hope for the coming kingdom is grounded in the death and resurrection of Jesus which is the event that makes its future coming possible. Then we will in succession look at how, on basis of this Moltmann develops a dialectic understanding of the world (it exists in the contradiction between death and resurrection), a view of history that is seen as messianic mediation, and an understanding of Christian praxis that is messianically informed. In our evaluation, we will consider how Moltmann's messianic understanding of history can help us to theologically appropriate biblical hope as we seek to make sense of our own world. The chapter will conclude by what I see as a basic weakness in Moltmann's understanding of the history of the kingdom, how he transposes the biblical logic on human rebellion and sin into a fundamental and necessary structure in creation.

II. The Historical Aspect of the Kingdom.

If the coming kingdom is the horizon which informs Christian faith and praxis centred on Christ, how, if it radically differs from the world as we know it, can it be known? and why, if it is a vision of the future, should we hope for it rather than dismiss it as an unrealistic utopian vision? For Moltmann, both its knowability and 'realism' are grounded in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The kingdom breaks into history in the ministry of Jesus, and the future of the world in this kingdom is made possible because of Easter: In entering death in the death of the Son, God has broken death's chains, and in the resurrection, Jesus has entered the future that awaits the world. Moltmann develops this is by considering how Jesus and his message are embedded in the hope for the kingdom in the promissory history of the

Old Testament and how this hope has been radicalised and universalised in the cross. He then interprets the history of the world in light of the death and resurrection, and as such sees a Christian understanding of history as messianically mediated. This in return leads to a praxis from the hope of the coming kingdom.

A. The Kingdom in the Person and History of Jesus

Israel's history is driven by the promises of God. In contrast to her neighbours who lived through the cycle of the year with the repeated epiphanies of their seasonal gods,¹ Israel's is the promising God of the nomad.² Even when Israel settles in the land, she does not adopt the agrarian deities found awaiting her there. Rather she subsumes their cults to her own history with God. Their annual celebration and rituals that maintained the cycles of life by holding the forces of chaos at bay become in Israel festivals by which she maintains her history with God, remembering what He has done for her as the God of the Exodus, and anticipating, on basis of this memory, how He will fulfil the promises that are still outstanding.³ This creates a view of history which is determined by the logic of promise. The people are bound to a reality that does not yet exist but has been opened up to them as a divine possibility in the promise of God.⁴ “In the promises, the hidden future already announces itself and exerts its influence on the present through the hope it awakens.”⁵ Therefore, life is not experienced cyclically but as a trend from the tension promise creates toward its fulfilment, from the time when reality contradicts the promise till it corresponds to it.⁶ History is “viewed as the time period between the Promise and its fulfilment, a time period pregnant with possibility.”⁷ There are two implications of this. First people's hearts are set “on a future history in which the fulfilling of the promise is to be expected.”⁸ Since any fulfilment falls short of the expected before the parousia, the promise drives history forward by its surplus. As was the case in Israel, the promise never ceases to drive history since any fulfilment always falls short

¹ TH, 97-99.

² TH, 96-97.

³ TH, 99-102; cf. TH, 40-41.

⁴ TH, 103.

⁵ TH, 18.

⁶ TH, 103-104.

⁷ Cornelison 1993:114; cf. TH 16.

⁸ TH, 103.

of the expectation for the divine promise.⁹ Second, the deferred fulfilment does not end in disillusion because the future it expects “does not have to develop within the framework of the possibilities inherent in the present, but arises from that which is possible to the God of that promise. This can also be something which by the standard of present experience appears impossible.”¹⁰

Initially, the promise is seen only in terms of how the LORD calls his people out of the land of their bondage with the promise of a land rich in every resource for an abundant life, where the LORD will be their God and they his people. However, as Israel’s history gets intertwined with the nations around her, the promise is universalised. And as Israel faces her own tragedies, it is intensified. By the time of the prophets, “*the universalizing of the promise finds its eschaton in the promise of Yahweh’s lordship over all peoples. The intensification of the promise finds its approach to the eschatological in the negation of death.*”¹¹ This universalising of the promise is often driven by the expectation of judgment on the nations that rage against Israel but at times develops into an expectation that God has also a future for the nations just as he has for Israel. Its intensification, eventually bearing fruit in the expectation of a resurrection of the dead, is driven by the need for the vindication of the faithful who did not taste the promise but suffered injustice.

It is within this promissory history of Israel, that Jesus must be understood, especially his death and resurrection. Jesus announced that the kingdom Israel hoped for was drawing near in and around him; in his proclamation of the Gospel the promise was coming to the unexpected, the sinners, the poor and the godless.¹² This hope was shattered in his death.¹³ Not only was he rejected by the religious authorities that should have embraced him and executed by the political power he should have defeated, but he was also forsaken by the God whom he called Father and whose kingdom he proclaimed.¹⁴ However, since it is precisely this God who also raised him from the dead, he and the kingdom he proclaimed are vindicated.¹⁵ Jesus

⁹ TH, 104-106.

¹⁰ TH, 103.

¹¹ TH, 132.

¹² CrG, 126-52; cf. WJC 96.

¹³ “The death of Jesus is also the death of his eschatological message through which he brought God to utterance and made the kingdom of God immanent.” (CrG, 122)

¹⁴ CrG, 122; cf. TH, 210-11.

¹⁵ CrG, 175-76; cf. 153, 168-71.

was raised ahead of the rest into the kingdom that awaits all,¹⁶ “into God’s future and was seen and believed as the present representative of this future, of the free, new mankind and the new creation.”¹⁷ As such, the resurrection of the crucified one is the scandalous “promise” for the world which stands in contradiction to it.¹⁸ However, precisely in the way the promise is fulfilled at Easter, it undergoes two important transformations. First, while Israel’s particular hope is not abrogated and still awaits its concrete fulfilment,¹⁹ the promise is now not ethnically limited but the resurrection of Jesus anticipates the vivification of all flesh, since the resurrection is the “conquest of the deadliness of death.... the abolition of the universal Good Friday, of that god-forsakenness of the world which comes to light in the deadliness of the death of the cross.”²⁰ This “is why God’s presence in the crucified Christ gives creation eternal life, and does not annihilate it.”²¹ As the pivotal establishment of God’s promise, the resurrection reveals the promise to be God’s abrogation of the fundamental condition that faces all, death. He “creates salvation” for the world precisely by suffering the “disaster of the whole world inwardly in himself.”²² Second, precisely in that Christ rose into his own future in the kingdom, the eschatological hope has been made firm.²³ The realism of the coming is grounded in the anticipatory appearance of the kingdom in Jesus.

We now turn to how Easter, because of the way it responds to the universal condition of death, is the sign in which history is seen, how this is to be understood messianically, and how it calls for a particular kind of historical praxis, how “it means following the intention of God by entering into the dialectic of suffering and dying in expectation of eternal life and of resurrection.”²⁴

¹⁶ See *TH*, 139ff on how Moltmann interprets the resurrection of Jesus within Israel’s promissory history.

¹⁷ *CrG*, 168.

¹⁸ *CrG*, 173.

¹⁹ The fulfilment of God’s promises to Israel is one of the reason for Moltmann’s millenarianism. (*CoG*, 196-99; cf. *CPS*, 138-39, 149-50)

²⁰ *TH*, 211; cf. *CrG*, 189

²¹ *GiC*, 91.

²² *TKG*, 160.

²³ *TH*, 145-48.

²⁴ *TH*, 211, where he notes that this “assenting to the tendency towards resurrection of the dead” is grounded in the “expectant knowledge” of “the event of the resurrection of Christ.”

B. History in the Sign of Jesus' Death and Resurrection

But how, then, can Christian eschatology give expression to the future? Christian eschatology does not speak of the future as such. It sets out from a definite reality in history and announces the future of that reality, its future possibilities and its power over the future. Christian eschatology speaks of Jesus Christ and *his* future. It recognizes the reality of the raising of Jesus and proclaims the future of the risen Lord. Hence the question whether all statements about the future are grounded in the person and history of Jesus Christ provides it with the touchstone by which to distinguish the spirit of eschatology from that of utopia.²⁵

By entering his opposite in the death of the Son, God has broken the bondage of the conditions the world lives under, transience that leads to suffering and death, and opened up all creation for its future in God's kingdom. In the cross the history of the world's suffering has been "taken up into this 'history of God.'"²⁶ In his resurrection, Jesus, as the firstborn of the many, enters into the future of the whole world. In this way the future has broken into the present. Therefore, the world must now be seen in this light, not finally bound to death but the impossible has been made possible, history has been opened up to life in the kingdom as seen in the resurrection of Jesus. "In that one man the future of the new world of life has already gained power over this unredeemed world of death and has condemned it to become a world that passes away."²⁷ As such, Easter is a "history-making event," it is unparalleled in history and as such determines history, orienting it toward the possibility of its own future in the coming kingdom.²⁸ Easter, then, is the epistemological foundation for a Christian understanding of history because it is the ontological foundation of its future. This is "the reality in history" whose future Christian hope proclaims.

However, what makes the resurrection a truly history-making event is its unfinished character. Although Jesus entered his own future in his resurrection, Easter nevertheless foreshadows "his eschatologically still outstanding goal and end."²⁹ Although Easter is the centre of the history of God's promised kingdom, its fulfilment is still outstanding, the history of him who rose into the future of the kingdom is not fulfilled before he returns in glory in the coming of the kingdom to the

²⁵ *TH*, 17.

²⁶ *CrG*, 246-47.

²⁷ *CrG*, 171.

²⁸ *TH*, 180. See Rasmussen 1995:62-65, for a brief description of the logic of promise in *TH* that shows well how it is related to modern future-oriented consciousness but fails to adequately account for Moltmann's strong criticism of progressivism. For a full account of the logic of promise in Moltmann's early theology, see Morse 1979.

²⁹ *TH*, 219.

whole world.³⁰ If all things had come to their end at Easter, history would cease, but precisely because Jesus entered the future that he eventually will bring to all, Easter “makes history in which we can and must live.”³¹ The fulfilment of the promise in Jesus therefore “makes the reality of man ‘historic’ and stakes it on history.”³² As such, “the *logos* of the *eschaton* is promise of that which is not yet, and for that reason it *makes* history. The promise which announces the *eschaton*, and in which the *eschaton* announces itself, is the motive power, the mainspring, the driving force and the torture of history.”³³ In this way Moltmann has bridged the ditch between present and future, between the historically known and the eschatologically unknown, without collapsing the distinction. The hope for the Kingdom “keeps history moving by its criticism and hope;”³⁴ criticism, because the light of the kingdom shed from Easter always reveals the unredeemed state of the world, and hope, because this very light is the beginning of the future of the world.³⁵ Richard Bauckham says of the view of the world that grows out of this:

The cross represents, and indeed reveals with full clarity for the first time, the plight and the fate of this world. But the same Jesus who was crucified was also raised and sustained in his own person the total contradiction of cross and resurrection. His resurrection is therefore God’s promise of new creation for the whole of the godforsaken reality which the crucified Jesus represents. It is therefore an event of *dialectical* promise: it opens up a qualitatively *new* future, which negates all the negatives of present experience.³⁶

From Easter, history is seen in the sign of the cross and the resurrection, its present state under the conditions of transience is aligned to the former while its future in the kingdom is aligned to the latter.³⁷ The cross of the raised one shows how God has entered the deadline of the history of the world and the resurrection of the

³⁰ *CrG*, 171. It is in this light that Moltmann’s assertion that “the resurrection of Jesus from the dead by God does not speak the ‘language of facts’, but only the language of faith and hope, that is, the ‘language of promise’” should be understood. (*CrG*, 173) Against Otto 2001:301 (cf. Otto 1992:85) this does mean that for Moltmann Easter is simply a symbol of what occurs in history as people grasp for the potential, but rather that Easter is the eschatological event that opens up history (and all its historical facts) to its own future, it is a “history-making event.” (*TH*, 180; *CrG*, 105-06) Although its verification is eschatological its bodiliness is essential, “Christ’s resurrection is bodily resurrection, or it is not a resurrection at all.” (*WJC*, 256-57) It is only as such that it is the basis for the resurrection of all creatures. (*WJC*, 256-59; cf. Hunsinger 2004)

³¹ *TH*, 181.

³² *TH*, 139.

³³ *TH*, 165.

³⁴ *TH*, 165.

³⁵ So, in *CrG*, 1, he notes it is only as people are reminded of the cross that they are both set in a critical relationship to their present circumstances as well as opened to the future that does not grow dark.

³⁶ Bauckham 1995:101.

³⁷ *TH*, 200-03; *CrG*, 160-87.

crucified one shows how precisely in doing so, he has broken the bounds of death and has oriented the world to its own living future.³⁸ If this is the case, then the present and the future of the world must be both seen in a radical discontinuity and a radical continuity. Just as Jesus remains the same person in the total contradiction of death and resurrection, so it is precisely the reality that now is bound by the horizon of death (which is its own total annihilation) that awaits resurrection life in the Kingdom.³⁹

By understanding the history of the world in the relationship of the death and resurrection of Jesus to the promised kingdom of God, Moltmann can account for the radical nature of death and suffering without losing hope, and he can develop an understanding of history without seeing it as an evolving progress. Since it is precisely in his death that Christ breaks the bonds of transience, Christian hope is not contingent on historical optimism.⁴⁰ While it will always seek to orient the world toward its coming ‘homeland,’ it does not lose hope in hopeless situations, whether that is at a death-bed or among the most destitute who possess no power to change their circumstances.⁴¹ Indeed while an understanding of history grounded in Easter will seek anticipations of the coming kingdom anywhere, it will especially seek the most hopeless situations because it is precisely in these circumstances that it expects interruptions, or conversions,⁴² of the kingdom in history, and therefore, the kingdom is present precisely not in the glorious triumphs but in the suffering of Christians “drawn by the mission and love of Christ into discipleship and conformity to his suffering.”⁴³

History is not the development of the world’s latent potentialities, but a process that is open to the redemption that is coming to it. “By the raising of Christ we do not mean a possible process in world history, but the eschatological process to

³⁸ *WJC*, 214. This logic is pivotal in Moltmann’s theology, as evident from beginning to end, from *TH* to most recently, *IEB*.

³⁹ Jesus is a revelation of the promised future as Easter reveals what Jesus was and what he will be, and how in all the qualitative differences between these, Jesus remains the same. (*TH*, 84)

⁴⁰ In a recent comment on *TH*, Miroslav Volf notes that hope, unlike optimism is informed by “God’s novum rather than the futurum of latent potentials.” As such it is not contingent on human circumstances. “Hope is not based on the possibilities of the situation [but] grounded in the faithfulness of God and therefore on the effectiveness of God’s promise.” (Volf 2004:31)

⁴¹ It is because of this that Christian hope can go where Bloch’s principle of hope cannot, face death squarely, and face it with hope. (“Hope and Confidence,” 52; cf. *C/G*, 274-78; *GiC*, 92)

⁴² In *CoG*, reflecting his later emphasis on how God works in history, Moltmann replaces the language of “interruption” with “conversion” since while the former simply denotes a disturbance the latter is concerned with the transformation of things, their re-orientation toward the coming in its anticipatory experiences in history. (*CoG*, 22)

⁴³ *TH*, 222.

which world history is subjected.”⁴⁴ Jesus’ resurrection was not the realisation of a latent potential but something that happened to Jesus when every potentiality had died. Therefore, “the things that are not yet, that are future, also become ‘thinkable’ because they can be hoped for.”⁴⁵ So, history, in the sign of Easter, does not ask first how we can orient the potential toward our own ideals but rather seeks to see every situation, both “its possibilities and dangers,” in the light of the redemption that is coming to it.⁴⁶ The arrow of modern history has been reversed, progress has given way to the messianic light that both reveals history’s ruins and is its star of redemption. As such, “the *word* of the promise itself already creates something new”,⁴⁷ precisely where every possibility has ceased. It is precisely because of this that a Christian view of history can stand where every other falters, at the threshold of death and final annihilation. Although before the Parousia everything that lives must die, in the resurrection its death is revealed to not be the end since the vivifying power of God even reaches into the realm of death, and can take that which has lost everything in death and transform it into life in the eternal Kingdom within God’s presence.

C. The Messianic Concept of History

From the various strands developed above, how the kingdom promised to Israel has arrived in Jesus’ person and history, how Easter is a proleptic and anticipatory fulfilment of this hope in Jesus, and how history is therefore seen in his death and resurrection, Moltmann develops a messianic concept of history, in which “the eschatological future of the kingdom of God” is now the power that determines the present; he says:

Through his mission and his resurrection Jesus has brought the kingdom of God into history. As the eschatological future the kingdom has become the power that determines the present. This future has already begun. We can already live in the light of the ‘new era’ in the circumstances of the ‘old’ one. Since the eschatological becomes historical in this way, the historical also becomes eschatological. Hope becomes realistic and reality hopeful. We have given this the mediating name of ‘messianic’. The lordship of Christ points beyond itself to the kingdom of God.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ TH, 179-80.

⁴⁵ TH, 30.

⁴⁶ TH, 84.

⁴⁷ EH, 49.

⁴⁸ CPS, 192.

The logic of this messianic mediation of history, then, is as follows. First, in his whole person and history, including the relationship between his death and resurrection, “Jesus has brought the kingdom of God into history.” Therefore, second, the future, although it has not yet arrived to the rest of the created order, has begun in the raised Jesus. Third, as the future of all has appeared in Jesus, this “has become the power that determines the present,” the eschatological hope has broken into history and in this way it renders all history eschatological as it opens it up to its future in the kingdom, “out of violence and injustice is reborn peace and justice.”⁴⁹ As such, “the resurrection has set in motion an eschatologically determined process of history, whose goal is the annihilation of death in the victory of the life of the resurrection, and which ends in that righteousness in which God receives in all things his due and the creature thereby finds its salvation.”⁵⁰ “The future of the kingdom of God … renews heaven and earth.”⁵¹ Fourth, thus the “lordship of Christ points beyond itself to the Kingdom of God.”⁵² Within this messianic understanding of history what remains constant is the name of Jesus as the one who made the arrival of the kingdom possible on earth and who was raised into it in his resurrection, while the various christological titles are the variables by which we seek to discern the significance of Jesus in every changing context.⁵³ The kingdom “is the all-embracing eschatological breadth of his future, into which the mission and the love of Christ lead the man of hope.”⁵⁴ It is as Christians look at how Jesus’ history remains fixed in his resurrection into the kingdom that they seek to extrapolate who this Jesus is for the world as they orient their praxis in anticipation of that kingdom.⁵⁵

D. Leaning into the Coming Kingdom

Since Christian hope is for the future of this world in the kingdom and since Easter orients history toward the kingdom, “the *pro-missio* of the kingdom is the ground of the *missio* of love to the world.”⁵⁶ Of this mission, Moltmann says:

⁴⁹ “Jesus and the Kingdom of God,” 13.

⁵⁰ *TH*, 163.

⁵¹ *THT*, 23.

⁵² *CPS*, 192.

⁵³ *CrG*, 103-112.

⁵⁴ *TH*, 222.

⁵⁵ “It is profoundly significant that the name of Jesus and his history remain fixed, as fixed as his death, whereas the titles of Christ which are a response to his openness are historically changeable with the passing of time, and in fact change history.” (*CrG*, 106)

⁵⁶ *TH*, 224.

The coming lordship of God takes shape here in the suffering of the Christians, who because of their hope cannot be conformed to the world, but are drawn by the mission and love of Christ into discipleship and conformity to his sufferings. This way of taking into consideration the cross and resurrection of Christ does not mean that the ‘kingdom of God’ is spiritualized and made into a thing of the beyond, but it becomes this-worldly and becomes the antithesis and contradiction of a godless and god-forsaken world.⁵⁷

This rich passage suggests ways in which the kingdom hoped for shapes Christian existence. First, this hope orients the posture of Christian existence toward the world as it hopes for the future of the kingdom.⁵⁸ Christian life is not oriented toward “a thing of the beyond” but to the kingdom that is the “this-worldly” “antithesis...of a godless and god-forsaken world.”⁵⁹ The person who has seen the world as it is in the cross and the hope it has been opened up to in the resurrection, “will never be able to reconcile himself with the laws and constraints of this earth, neither with the inevitability of death nor with the evil that constantly bears further evil.”⁶⁰ For those infected with hope, who “experience the closeness of the kingdom, ‘the chains begin to hurt,’”⁶¹ and they will not be satisfied with anything less than the transformation of the world in the life and righteousness of the coming kingdom.⁶² “To believe means to cross in hope and anticipation the bounds that have been penetrated by the raising of the crucified.”⁶³ Since it is in the sign of the cross that Christians are to lean into the kingdom, they seek to live it where it is now most manifestly absent, in the cause “of the devastated earth and of harassed humanity.”⁶⁴ In the dialectic between the cross and resurrection, between Christ’s passion and the fulfilment of his resurrection in the kingdom,

there is ... no transcending of hope without the paradoxical countermovement of the incarnation of love, no breaking out to new horizons without the sacrifice of life, no anticipating of the future without first investing in it. It is in the incarnational movement even unto passion and death that, paradoxically, the kingdom of God can even now be lived and not just hoped for.⁶⁵

Second, as such it shapes the praxis of Christians in the world as they are drawn “into discipleship and conformity to [Christ’s] sufferings.” The hope for the

⁵⁷ TH, 222.

⁵⁸ “To reimagine the future differently in the light of God’s promise is thereby also at once to force a revaluation of the present and its significance.” (Hart 1999:63)

⁵⁹ Cf. *CrG*, 101.

⁶⁰ TH, 21.

⁶¹ Moltmann, “Jesus and the Kingdom of God,” 12.

⁶² TH, 223-24. “The goad of the promised future stabs inexorably into the flesh of every unfulfilled present.” (TH, 21)

⁶³ TH, 20-21.

⁶⁴ TH, 20-21; cf. *CrG*, 321.

⁶⁵ “Messianic Atheism,” 204.

kingdom does not only provide “consolation *in* suffering” but also “protest *against* suffering.”⁶⁶ And protest has always a for and an against, it is partial. Although Jesus died *for* all and therefore rose into the kingdom *before* all, he died in solidarity with precisely those who now most acutely suffer the absence of God’s kingdom, those on the social, economic and religious periphery.⁶⁷ Likewise those who have been infected with hope and therefore commit themselves in “solidarity with the anxious expectation of the whole creation,”⁶⁸ do so by seeking the justice for the victims of history.⁶⁹ Christians can only be for all by seeking justice for the victims and the conversion of the perpetrators.⁷⁰ As Christians are turned toward the world armed with the light of Easter, they will judge the possibilities that face them and only grasp for those that hold a promise to establish the justice that accords to the kingdom.⁷¹ In addition to human rights,⁷² Moltmann has particularly emphasised three crises that face the modern world, economic justice, ecological justice and the nuclear crisis.⁷³ And although this praxis toward the kingdom is not the kingdom but merely “anticipations,” people can be “empowered [by the way the kingdom has dawned in the crucified and raised Jesus] to alter these relationships, to make the world more homelike, and to abolish internal and external slavery.”⁷⁴

Third, however, precisely because “the coming lordship of God takes shape in the suffering of the Christians,” their “parables of the kingdom” do not only take place where the possible can be oriented toward the promised but also where every possibility has either ceased as at a deathbed, or where it is withheld, as among the severely oppressed. “The Christian hope, in so far as it is Christian, is the hope of those who have no future.”⁷⁵ Since the form in which Christ won the victory for the

⁶⁶ *TH*, 21.

⁶⁷ *WJC*, 112-116. “God has not begun the future of man at the extremities of human progress, but with this humiliated man.” (*Man*, 117)

⁶⁸ *TH*, 223.

⁶⁹ *CrG*, 101. This is key to Moltmann’s political theology; for a brief overview of the political implications of Moltmann’s *Theology of Hope*, see Staedke 1972.

⁷⁰ *TH*, 224. In being for the poor, both the rich and poor are given their particular way into the kingdom of God, to the poor: it is preached that the eternal kingdom of the God who has broken the power of death is theirs, and to the oppressor, it is preached that only in repenting from their way of protecting themselves against the power of death by joining the poor will they enter the Kingdom in which death is overcome. Cf. *CrG*, 126-160; 325-338.

⁷¹ See *HP*, 178-99.

⁷² *OHD*, 3-58.

⁷³ *WJC*, 63-69; *CoG*, 202-18; *CrG*, 329-335; *JCTW*, 24-28.

⁷⁴ *Man*, 116.

⁷⁵ *Man*, 117.

kingdom was his cross, his followers can enter the darkest place that others fear to tread because they know that even if engulfed by it, the hope of the resurrection will sustain them in the negation of death.⁷⁶ Therefore, they can carry the hope of the kingdom precisely into those places where it is most absent; among the crosses of the world they expect the future of the crucified.⁷⁷

III. The Contribution: The World in the History of the Kingdom of God

Aware of the difficulties of God-talk after Kant, Moltmann, from the beginning of *Theology of Hope*, notes that the primary reason that we can know anything about God's ways with the world is grounded in how God has revealed himself and his purposes in the cross and resurrection of Jesus.⁷⁸ It is from the fact that the future can be known in Jesus and that it is known as the future of the whole world in the Kingdom of God, that we can have a thoroughly Christian understanding of history.⁷⁹ This is the basic and crucially important theme of Moltmann's understanding of history as he seeks to push the implications of this in-breaking of the future of God for the world in every area of his thought. However one may want to dispute how he develops this, or, as we will do shortly, question whether what he sees as the basic problem this history responds to is correct, it remains that in his consistent and urgent insistence on how the future kingdom has been opened up christologically at Easter and how this calls for a radical reorientation of Christian praxis in the world is a lasting contribution to contemporary theology.⁸⁰

First, it overcomes the modern ditch between faith and history in a thoroughly Christian way.⁸¹ In distinction from the escapism often found in conservative circles, Moltmann insists on the continuity between what is and what it will become; therefore, hope can never leave things as they are, for it is hope for them—it cannot

⁷⁶ *CrG*, 16-17.

⁷⁷ See *CrG*, 246-47 on how he sees history in the cross; cf. 57-58, 64-65. See Graham 2000 who argues that Moltmann's Christian vision can better account for a moral praxis than humanism since the outcome it hopes for is not based in the probability of one's own success but in the faithfulness of the God who promises.

⁷⁸ *TH*, 17.

⁷⁹ *TH*, 222; cf. *CrG*, 168, 246-47.

⁸⁰ Bauckham 1987:140, who notes that it is his biblical basis, christological focus and eschatological openness which enables Moltmann to make Christian faith relevant to the modern world without losing its central characteristics; cf. Bauckham 1995:30; Rasmussen 1995:42; Hunsinger 1973b:395.

⁸¹ From the very beginning, Moltmann's theological project has fought on two fronts, against the progressivist form Christian messianism took in its modern form (*TH*, 69-76; cf. *CoG*, 5, 10), and against the disappearance of eschatology in the way dialectical theology responded to this crisis (*TH*, 39-42, 47-69; cf. *CoG*, 6, 13-22).

leave the world to hell.⁸² Similarly in distinction from the ahistorical focus of e.g. the existentialist theology of Bultmann, Moltmann insists that God deals with humanity in history. Albeit in hidden, paradoxical and anticipatory ways, the messianic interruptions of God happen not simply within the human subject but in their real interactions within history.⁸³ Moltmann avoids the dangers of the progressivism which characterised 19th century protestant theology and which the dialectic theology of the early 20th century rightly radically rejected, precisely because of the way in which he sees history from the vantage point of how its future goal is anticipated in Christ's entrance into his own future in the resurrection.⁸⁴ A view of history developed consistently from the principle of the messianic mediation set out by Moltmann can never end up in the cultural enmeshment that characterised liberal Protestantism's ideal of an evolutionary understanding of the fulfilment of Christianity within the progression of modern European culture.⁸⁵

Second, it is precisely as we consider Moltmann's understanding of history against the backdrop of liberal Protestantism, that we see how it points to a fundamental reorientation of the progressive view of history that has characterised modern western society, both within academic circles and on the popular level.⁸⁶ Most modern westerners orient themselves toward the future in a movement from the particular location and situation they find themselves in toward the future they can construct by using the potentialities of that which is found around them, directing them toward the end they desire.⁸⁷ Whether this construction of the future is purely selfish, getting what I want, or highly idealistic, the creation of what we think is the best of all possible worlds, the arrow of history moves from my present context to the future. Moltmann shows how for the Christian it should point in the opposite direction. As revealed in the Christ event, the radical openness toward the future is

⁸² *CoG*, 153.

⁸³ Bauckham 1995:31 notes that "highly polemical dialogue with [Bultmann] runs right through *Theology of Hope*." (cf. *TH*, 58-69; *CoG*, 13-22)

⁸⁴ See Gilbertson 2003:173 on Moltmann's understanding of extrapolation and anticipation.

⁸⁵ Against Rasmussen 1995:57 this christologically informed view of history provides a potential internal corrective mechanism to what Rasmussen rightly points out, his over-privileging of certain modern notions, especially of freedom.

⁸⁶ See *TH*, 230-68 on Moltmann's critique of modern concepts of history; cf. *CoG*, 184-192; "Progress and Abyss," 301-308, where he, as elsewhere sees "progress" as the storm that has left the 20th century in ruins (306, 310, cf. *CoG*, 3-6). Josef Pieper grounds this loss in the disappearance of a theological basis for an understanding of history. (Pieper 1994:45-47)

⁸⁷ The following discussion is based on two essays, "The Falls Angels Attend" and "Book-ended by Creation," I wrote at Regent College, Vancouver, Canada, in the Spring of 1999.

not the possibility to populate the unknown through manipulating the present according to one's desire, but rather is orienting one's life according to what is made possible in the light of the coming of God's kingdom.⁸⁸ This reorientation of the fundamental posture toward history is as urgent today as when Moltmann first set it out. For while the great modern metaphysical structures and ideals may have crumbled, the fundamental Western orientation toward the future has not, it has only shrunk to the level of individuals, or perhaps small communities, and their particular desires.⁸⁹ In many ways this has left us with a generation that has lost any ground of meaning and senses of belonging, a generation therefore characterized by an incredibly strong sense of estrangement.⁹⁰ Such a generation will seek a place it can call home, a place that reverberates "yes" to it, where it can know and be known. Bound by the web fear spins, such a generation generates private visions to avoid the nightmare of the unknown, whether that is in the material world offered to it by the current market economy and its cynical marketing structures, or whether that is in some privately structured cosmos of meaning. But such fear binds the fearer and the goal is never achieved as the fearer abuses what is found today to create the tomorrow that does not exist. It becomes an illusory dream that always evades the fearer while holding him or her tightly in its tyranny. Seen in the light the cross and resurrection shed on history, this approach is doomed to failure because it has no true telos, it is not shaped by the created purpose for one's own life nor by life found in one's context. Its posture is un-loving because in the selfish illusion of self-making the self tries to shape 'the other' (whether persons or other members of God's creation) in relation to how it benefits the self instead of relating to the true nature of 'the other.' This makes the self both blind to the other (the other is never seen except as its

⁸⁸ TH, 333-34.

⁸⁹ Says Moltmann, "Europe has lost its ability to hope for great things. The European spirit is like a landscape of burned-out craters, covered by a dull layer of lava. Ideologies, utopias, hopeful designs, plans for a better future have become caricatures." ("Messianic Atheism," 192) The only public ideal left seems the consumerist wedding of modern democracy and market economics which constitutes "the freedom" George Bush frequently appeals to in his war on terror, as evident in his second inaugural address, where he concludes: "America, in this young century, proclaims liberty throughout all the world, and to all the inhabitants thereof. Renewed in our strength - tested, but not weary - we are ready for the greatest achievements in the history of freedom." (Bush 2005) See Skorupski 2001:204 who notes how public bourgeois ideals have shrunk in "a kind of combination of existentialism and populism" that serves the consumerism of liberal capitalism in which "the state has a neutral pragmatic role in providing a rule of law within which this pursuit of personal self-definition takes place and in maintaining and refining the socio-economic and technological engines of prosperity which enable it to continue." (204)

⁹⁰ CPS, 165-68.

potential for one's own desires) and destroys the possibility for its own future because it severs every true relation to the other one's future is bound up with. The response of Moltmann's vision of history to this peculiar late modern mixture of despair and presumption⁹¹ is to abandon every such attempt and be seized by the hope that the real "yes" behind every yearning is found in the future God has in store for his children, in "the inviting horizon of God's future,"⁹² that place where heaven and earth are new, when God's yes permeates the whole creation, breathes its vitalizing breath through every eye of his created fabric.⁹³ This is the future that needs no alternative sun because God shines into every corner that darkens souls of the earth, and it is this future the Christian view of history holds out for humanity to be caught up into.

The third implication, which arises out of the reorientation of the historical posture that comes with a Christian understanding of history, is a particular future oriented praxis. It is a choice presented to the world to stop manipulating its present circumstances and let the present, both our lives and the context in which we live, be shaped by the vision of God's future as it is set out in the person and history of Jesus. Openness toward the future is not the possibility of creating what we want but the choice whether to move in the trajectory of the vivifying future of God or in the trajectory of its rejection, toward death, the absence of the fullness of life before God's presence which he purposes for his creatures.

On the one hand it calls for an abandonment of every orientation toward the future, and any anticipatory praxis toward the future that is fuelled by the fear of death and nothingness. "Anyone who reads the 'signs of the time' with the eyes of his own existential anxiety reads them falsely."⁹⁴ The power of the Christ event over history is that its future has dawned within it, and therefore everything can be risked as one seeks to orient one's life toward this future because even in death hope lives and awaits the resurrection. Therefore, the Christian "does not require to preserve himself by himself, in constant unity with himself, but in surrendering himself to the work of mission he is preserved by the hope inherent in that mission." Every role, calling and responsibility will be judged by "whether and how far they afford possibilities for the

⁹¹ See *TH*, 22-25.

⁹² "How I have Changed," 15.

⁹³ Malcolm Muggeridge, as quoted in Escobar 1976:258, expresses a similar movement when he says: "So each symptom of breakdown, however immediately painful and menacing in its future consequences, is also an occasion for hope and optimism."

⁹⁴ *CrG*, 21.

incarnation of faith, for the concretion of hope, and for earthly, historic correspondence with the hoped-for and promised kingdom of God and of freedom.”⁹⁵

On the other hand, the flipside of abandoning a praxis that manipulates the present in order to stave off death is “the imagination for the Kingdom of God”⁹⁶ where we seek out the possibilities of everything in the light of the Kingdom that has been opened up to us in the resurrection. Planning then does not become an irrelevant category. Rather, planning receives its orientation not from the plight of the present but from the hope of the future Kingdom.⁹⁷ Having been infected by hope, Christians, if they are to be true to their hope must seek the fulfilment of everything according to what can be known from the cross and resurrection. Therefore, although on this side of the parousia everyone and all things must meet their death, their life is lived with the light that shines from the future beyond their death, and in this way the joy of the Kingdom that awaits them is tasted in anticipatory ways.

IV. The Transposition of the Logic of Redemption in Moltmann

A weakness in Moltmann’s understanding of the kingdom as a history-making event which affects his theological project as a whole is the way in which he adapts the fundamental concern Easter responds to, no longer seeing it as sin but as a necessary contradiction in creation, its God-forsakenness and its resultant transience. Here, we will first look at how Moltmann adapts the biblical logic of redemption in his understanding of the cross and in his soteriological understanding of creation, and how this informs Moltmann’s understanding of the history of the kingdom. Second, we consider why Moltmann thinks it necessary to modify the tradition and what role sin plays in his innovation of the logic of redemption, no longer seeing it as the basic problem the cross responds to but rather a problem, a particular human instantiation of the fundamental problem of transience. Third, we will consider what seems to be certain crucial weaknesses in Moltmann’s transposition of the logic of redemption and pose the question whether his innovation is necessary.

⁹⁵ *TH*, 334.

⁹⁶ *CoG*, xiv.

⁹⁷ *HP*, 182-84 where he aligns God’s promise with the hope for the *novum* and his providence with planning.

A. The Cross in Moltmann's and the Bible's Logic of Redemption

It is common for critics of Moltmann's theology to centre their questioning on Moltmann's understanding of sin specifically and what it is God accomplishes in the history of redemption generally.⁹⁸ In order to come to terms with the problem these commentators sense, we need to return to what Moltmann actually believes God accomplishes in the Christ event since Moltmann develops his whole understanding of the history of redemption from Easter.

According to Moltmann it is in the death of the Son, that God overcomes the fundamental condition of the world by entering the realm of his absence.⁹⁹ Although God overcomes sin in the cross, the cross being that 'wondrous exchange' in which the Son takes on the condition of sinful humanity so they may become the children of God, the more fundamental concern is another: the basic transient character of nature, that everything which lives dies because everything which was created to share in the eternal life of God exists in a god-forsaken space.¹⁰⁰ The cosmos is meant for life eternal in harmony with itself before God but is incomplete. In the face of death, it seeks and strives for that newness that will come to it and complete it, but as long as it is within death's grasp it is always the tragic struggle where "everything that wants to live ... has to die."¹⁰¹ However, in the death of the Son, God enters the fundamental condition in which the whole cosmos exists, god-forsakeness, and by being present to it breaks its fundamental power. Thus, from the cross, hope of life eternal is extended to not only individual human beings and humanity as a whole but also to the whole order of creation.¹⁰² The cross is the pivot that turns everything toward life in the coming presence of God, and the resurrection "is not merely the endorsement of his death for the salvation of sinners; it is also the beginning of the transfiguration of the body and of the earth."¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Farrow 1998:436-37; Walsh 1987:62-63, whose argument is close to what I develop here.

⁹⁹ *CrG*, 217-18, 246-47.

¹⁰⁰ Although Moltmann begins to develop his panentheism of the cross in *CrG* (277), the Blochian ontology he develops in *TH* suggests such a development. His panentheism is most fully developed in *GIC*. For Moltmann's interaction with Bloch, see especially *IGEB*, "Hope and Confidence," and Bauckham 1987:3-22.

¹⁰¹ *FC*, 164. This is "the sufferings of the whole groaning creation in this present time." (*WJC*, 152; cf. *CoG*, 91-92, 264-68)

¹⁰² See *WJC*, 274-312 how he works this out in his understanding of the cosmic Christ.

¹⁰³ *CoG*, 93.

It is in his doctrine of creation that Moltmann explains why everything that was meant for life in the presence of God is rendered transient because it exists in a god-forsaken context.¹⁰⁴ Since God is omnipresent, God had to vacate a place within Himself for there to be room for creation.¹⁰⁵ Into this space He breathed creation by His life-giving Spirit.¹⁰⁶ This results in a fundamental contradiction: everything that was meant to live from the vivacity of God and in the communion of his love exists now in the condition of the opposite, and thus is bound to transience.¹⁰⁷ But this contradiction in the structure of creation is necessary because without God ceding a place within himself there would be no place in which creation could be.¹⁰⁸ As such, Moltmann collapses Genesis 3 into Genesis 1, he moves the fundamental problem which in Genesis is seen in the fall of humanity into the fundamental structure of creation.¹⁰⁹

From this view of redemption and its corresponding notion of creation, Moltmann sees the whole history of God with his creation as overcoming creation's fundamental contradiction. From how the cross overcomes the fundamental but necessary contradiction in creation arises the hope of the eschatological moment when God completes the movement begun at Easter, when God again fully invades the space he ceded in creation and is fully present to his creation, when "he arrives at his rest in all things, and in which all things will live eternally in him."¹¹⁰ "Redemption, then, is not primarily a restoration of a covenantal relationship broken in history, but a 're-filling' of that space, an overcoming of God's self-limitation by means of an *annihilation nihilis*."¹¹¹ When the process of creation meets its fulfilment in the arrival of God's presence, all things in each and every of their lived moments will be transformed into what they were meant to be, living in eternal communion with the God who gave them their life, who created them out of his love to live in everlasting

¹⁰⁴ *GiC* is his primary work on creation; for a recent overview, see "God's Kenosis." For analyses of his doctrine of creation, see especially Bouma-Prediger 1995; Deane-Drummond 1997.

¹⁰⁵ *GiC*, 87-89.

¹⁰⁶ *GiC*, 98-103, where he says: "The whole creation is a fabric woven by the Spirit, and is therefore a reality to which the Spirit gives form." (99)

¹⁰⁷ See *GiC*, 87-88, on how creation exists in a context of "non-being" God has ceded within himself.

¹⁰⁸ *GiC*, 86.

¹⁰⁹ Although I question Walsh's claim that Moltmann's problem is starting with soteriology instead of creation, his is a convincing overview of how Moltmann collapses the fall into the structure of creation. (1987:72-73)

¹¹⁰ *CoG*, 335.

¹¹¹ Walsh 1987:75.

communion with him, an end which goes beyond both restoration and transformation to the “deification” of creation in the presence of God’s glory.¹¹²

How then is this logic of redemption related to the historical aspect of the kingdom? The kingdom as symbol of hope is to be seen as the expectation of how the problem of transience as it is manifested in human history will be overcome. The history of the kingdom that is oriented toward this hope is the story of the particular character transience takes in humanity and the way God overcomes it. In the cross God has broken the power of the fundamental logic that drives the misery of human history, the violence perpetrated in the attempt to fend off the anomie of transience, the constant struggle to escape suffering and death by one’s own power at the expense of the powerless.¹¹³ In the light the cross sheds on human history, we see that God is not the God of the rulers but of “the poor, the oppressed and the humiliated.”¹¹⁴ Therefore, “the coming kingdom” has “taken the form of a cross in the alienated world. The cross is the form of the coming, redeeming kingdom and the crucified Jesus is the incarnation of the risen Christ.”¹¹⁵ The cry of the crucified one explains why God was present to the blood of Abel for it is always where the power of godlessness is strongest that God defeats it in being present to it. The future hope of the kingdom is therefore oriented toward the moment when the redemption that began in the darkest hour of human history, when the hope of the kingdom died on the cross is fulfilled in the full breadth of human history, when the conditions that now fuel the human history of violence and suffering cease to exist.

It is then within his understanding of the Christ event and how it informs his understanding of history that we see Moltmann’s pivotal innovation over against a traditional understanding of redemption, an innovation that amounts to a transposition of the basic logic of redemption from being primarily related to God’s response to human rebellion and its consequences to being first related to a fundamental contradiction in creation. It is within this contradiction and how God overcomes it that we must see human history, both its trajectory and its redemption. But what then happened to sin in the midst of this transposition?

¹¹² *CoG*, 272-74. See Cottingham 1990 for a discussion on how Moltmann’s cosmic teleology relates to recent theories of a supposedly teleonomic character of biological processes.

¹¹³ *WJC*, 99-102.

¹¹⁴ *CrG*, 329; cf. 195.

¹¹⁵ *CrG*, 185.

B. The Place of Sin in Moltmann's Understanding of Redemption

1. Sin in Moltmann

Although Moltmann is often accused of not giving a sufficient account of sin in his theology,¹¹⁶ he nevertheless affirms sin as a pivotal part of the human condition and that central to the work of the cross is the question of human guilt.¹¹⁷ Of the various places he discusses sin,¹¹⁸ he sets out the basic aspects of his view of sin most clearly in a discussion on the relationship between the cross and resurrection and justifying faith in *The Way of Jesus Christ*. He says:

We understand by ‘sin’ the condition in which a person closes himself off from the source of life, from God. A closing of the self like this comes about when the purposes for which human beings are by nature destined are not discovered or not fulfilled, because of hybris, or depression, or ‘the God complex’, or because of a refusal to accept what human existence is about. This leads to the self-destruction of the regenerating energies of life, and thus to death. The self-deification of human beings is the beginning of their self-destruction, and the destruction also of the world in which they live. This death has to be understood as absolute death, because it is not identical with the natural life process. ‘Sin’ in this sense means missing the mark of being, and has to be used in the singular. It is a happening in the created being as a whole, and it precedes morality, although it is the source of the acts and kinds of behaviour which in a moral sense can be recognized as infringing the laws of life – that is, sins in the plural. Because every created being belongs to a social context shared with other beings, ‘sin’ always destroys life in the social sense too. We talk about the trans-personal ‘power of sin’ because sin involves the inescapable structural processes of destruction over which Paul cries out when he acknowledges for himself personally: ‘I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do’ (Rom. 7.19). Today everyone can see these processes at work in the developments for which he shares responsibility and at the same time helplessly deplores. Ordered systems which once ministered to life are toppling over into their very opposite, so that they now work for death.¹¹⁹

First, sin is “the condition in which a person closes himself off from the source of life, from God.” This, whether by ignorance or wilful rejection, is a “happening in the created being as a whole” which results “in the missing the mark of being.” This is “Sin” in the singular and as such preceded all other “sins” which infringe “the laws of life.” Within it humanity exists as “man in pursuit of his own

¹¹⁶ Kelsey (1993) argues that against common critiques of several strands of modern theology, including Moltmann, sin has not disappeared but has migrated into variety of doctrinal loci. He perceptively observes that what “is sensed is not so much a disuse of the concept of sin as it is an abandonment of the concept of divine wrath, for, if there is no need to talk about the wrath of God, then there is not much need to talk about the sin that incurs wrath.” (1993:178)

¹¹⁷ TKG, 52; cf. CrG, 69.

¹¹⁸ TH, 22-26, 203-208; CrG, 194-95. For how he sees the relationship between sin and death, see especially CoG, 77-95.

¹¹⁹ WJC, 184-85. In FC, 122-123, Moltmann seems to collapse his understanding of sin into the structure of creation as “closedness to the future.”

interests, man who in reality is inhuman, because he is under the compulsion of self-justification, dominating self-assertion and illusionary self-deification.”¹²⁰

Second, although not stated directly in this passage, Moltmann elsewhere grounds this “happening” as the wrong-headed human response to the reality of transience, which preceded sin and made it possible.¹²¹ Sin is the form which the problem of transience has taken in the history of humanity. In face of transience, humanity has turned from the inviting horizon of the coming God and turned to its own efforts to deal with the fear of death. But instead of stemming the tide of transience sin intensifies it.¹²² The drumbeat of human history is the escalation of suffering and death as those who have power seek to avert the might of death by violence, at the expense of the powerless. As such the question of sin plays an important role in the history of the Kingdom, but always within the larger question of the suffering of transience, a suffering that has been intensified by sin.

Third, this human existence in sin is also fundamentally social because people exist in a “social context,” and sin’s death is expressed in a social sense. This is the legitimated violence of “political and economic structures” to exploit some in the interest of others, of alienating human beings from one another.¹²³ This is sin’s transpersonal power, people are enslaved in their social practice to a web of systems that “once ministered to life” but “now work for death.”¹²⁴

¹²⁰ *CrG*, 69.

¹²¹ Rejecting a causal relationship between death and sin, Moltmann sees a correlation between sin and death: “The frailty of the temporal creation of human beings is like a detonator for the sin of wanting to be equal to God [i.e. not bound by transience] and to overcome this frailty.... It is the awareness of death which first creates fear for life, the fear of not getting one’s fair share, of not having enough from life, the fear that life will be cut short. This leads to a craving for life, and to greed.” (*CoG*, 91, 93)

¹²² “Death is only the consequence of sin inasmuch as sin exists because of death: we cannot endure mortality, and by killing we can make other people die. The vulnerability of creation-in-the-beginning makes the act of violence against life possible.” (*CoG*, 91) It is the craving to be like God, “rich, healthy, invulnerable and immortal,” which is the well spring “of the sin that destroys life; not being willing to be what one is, but having to be something different.” (*CoG*, 93) As such, “sin is the violence against life which springs from knowledge of mortality.” (*CoG*, 94)

¹²³ *CoG*, 95. Moltmann adds insightfully that precisely because of the economic injustice that characterises the relationship between the First and the Third World, “a ‘natural death’ is rare among” most who live in the Third world: “most of them cannot afford it.”

¹²⁴ Note how there is a subtle shift in this passage. It begins by acknowledging that sin is an offence against God but states it in the rather weak form as closing oneself “from the source of life, from God” and thus focuses on what humanity does to itself rather than its offence against God. By the end of the passage it is simply seen as that which has shifted from ministering to life to working for death. In here lies a weakness of Moltmann’s understanding of sin, his primary focus is on what sin does to humanity and usually neglects what it means in relation to God, the outrage it is against the holiness of the God who in grace created humanity to be those who bear his image. Kelsey 1993:175-78 notes that among

Fourth, in the discussion following this passage Moltmann then goes on to discuss how the work of justification relates to the expiation of sin. With the forgiveness of sin comes the liberation from sin's power and the reconciliation with God which places the believer "in the service of righteousness and justice" as those who have received "the right to inherit the new creation" with the aim of "participation in God's new just world through passionate effort on its behalf."¹²⁵ Being freed from the power of sin (the power of transience), the life of the believers is bound to the victory of life won on the cross for the whole creation. "Justifying faith is not yet the goal and end of Christ's history. For every individual believer it is no more than the beginning of a way that leads to the new creation of the world."¹²⁶

2. The Transposition of Sin

In his understanding of the work of the cross, Moltmann has not changed the way the logic of redemption works but what it most fundamentally deals with. His understanding of how God interacts with his creation follows faithfully the fundamental movements of the biblical story but he has shifted what these movements first refer to, a fundamental contradiction in creation rather than sin.¹²⁷ Moltmann acknowledges this move when in *Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, in a discussion on the problematic nature of simply attributing suffering as punishment for sin, he argues that "the framework of the question of human guilt" plays the central part in the atoning work on the cross as it reveals the logic of the universal significance of the cross. As such, the question of human guilt "is not the whole of it, or all its fullness."¹²⁸ "Its fullness" is the way in which the suffering of Christ "belongs to the history of the sufferings of mankind,"¹²⁹ which in the end is grounded in "the limitations of created reality itself."¹³⁰ Walsh argues "Moltmann insists that an anthropological understanding of sin is superficial because *behind* anthropological guilt is death, 'absolute death and total end.' Rather than understanding the

political and liberation theologians this structural emphasis tends to eclipse the personal. (cf. Deane-Drummond 1997:217)

¹²⁵ WJC, 189.

¹²⁶ WJC, 186-87.

¹²⁷ FC, 121-24; cf. CrG, 183-87 for his critique of singularly expiatory understandings of reconciliation.

¹²⁸ TKG, 52.

¹²⁹ TKG, 52.

¹³⁰ TKG, 51.

destructiveness of death as the *result* of sin, Moltmann describes it in his eschatological view of creation as ‘an apocalyptic pressure of affliction for everything that wants to live and has to die.’¹³¹

Therefore, Moltmann’s fundamental innovation over against the traditional understanding of redemption amounts to a transposition of sin, from being the fundamental problem to being a specific human problem within the larger question of creation’s transience—sin is not *the* problem but *a* problem nestled within the fundamental contradiction of creation, and the solution is not first God’s response to sin but to the fundamental condition that made sin possible.¹³² And so the logic of redemption is reversed, now it is not sin that has catastrophic consequences in cosmic proportions which are overcome as God reconciles humanity to himself but rather the basic constitution of the cosmos has devastating consequences for humanity and the redemption of humanity is only one part of God’s reconciliation with his estranged creation.¹³³ The difference between Moltmann and the traditional dogma is not the question of the absence of God—fundamental to the work of the cross in both is how God seeks to become present to the earthly realm from which he is absent. The big difference is how this absence is accounted for. For Moltmann it is predicated on a fundamental contradiction in creation made necessary by the kenotic act of God preceding creation while in the biblical logic it is the result of human sin, which the holiness of God cannot tolerate and from which he therefore must retrieve his presence.¹³⁴

There is a cluster of related reasons why Moltmann transposes the biblical logic of redemption.¹³⁵ First, while admitting that both within the Bible and the tradition of the church sin has been seen as the dominant problem God’s story of

¹³¹ *FC*, 164. Walsh 1987:65, says Moltmann “has ontologically structuralized the directional question of sin” and thus fused creation with the fall.

¹³² So in *GIC*, 211, he can say: “God’s activity in history consists essentially in opening up systems which are closed in on themselves; and he does this by way of suffering communication.”

¹³³ Similarly to this fundamentally ontological contradiction in creation, Moltmann develops in *CrG*, 25-32, an epistemological necessity for the cross; by the dialectical principle of knowledge God can only be known in his opposite. Cf. *CrG*, 86-87.

¹³⁴ Even just a casual reading of Leviticus shows how one of the basic concerns of Israel’s cult, or more precisely, God’s concern with Israel’s cult, is the question of how God can be present to his covenantal people without them being destroyed. The elaborate schemes of purification rites and sacrifices are all oriented toward that in the coming of God’s presence to his people the people can worship in his presence and not be destroyed because they carry with them their impurity which the holiness of God cannot tolerate. In the coming of God’s presence, there are only two options, holy communion or death. (Lev 10:1-3)

¹³⁵ *TKG*, 49-52.

redemption responds to, Moltmann claims that in light of what we today know about ecological history and about the human condition, all aspects of suffering simply cannot be accounted for by recourse to sin as we see among the Rabbis, in Paul and in the Western tradition.¹³⁶ It is impossible to trace all suffering back to sin, and “suffering as *punishment for sin* is an explanation that has a very limited value.”¹³⁷ Second, the inadequacy of sin as the catch-all for the misery of the world is accentuated by the suffering of the victims of the horrors of the twentieth century, which for Moltmann are primarily symbolised by Auschwitz and Hiroshima. Third, Moltmann sees as a fundamental problem in the traditional understanding of redemption an unhelpful restorationism which leads to a fundamental conservatism, i.e. redemption is not a transformation but rather a restoration of an older order that has been perverted.¹³⁸ Fourth, the reason Moltmann responds as he does to these concerns, is probably to a certain extent due to the Blochian element in his ontology.¹³⁹ There is a small step from seeing nature as incomplete matter striving for its future potential to seeing this incompleteness as a contradictory yet necessary condition for creation.¹⁴⁰ For these reasons Moltmann thinks we have to reconsider how the logic of redemption as revealed in the biblical witness is to be configured if we are to be faithful to the Christian Gospel within the context in which we now live.

However, considering both the importance Moltmann ascribes to biblical tradition as providing the categories in which to think theologically and the consistency of the biblical witness to sin as the fundamental condition God overcomes in the history of redemption, we must ask whether such a move is necessary. Do the benefits Moltmann sees in it outweigh the problems Moltmann’s position creates?

¹³⁶ TKG, 49-50.

¹³⁷ TKG, 52.

¹³⁸ TKG, 51; FC, 168-69.

¹³⁹ In EH, 25, he says: “It is the greatness of Ernst Bloch, whom we are basically following here, that he has developed not only a “principle of hope” for man, but also an ontology of the not-yet-being, and of possibility in the world process If we understand reality as the realization of possibility, then this necessitates an ontology of that which is not yet but is possible or stands in possibility;” cf. RRF, 217. Gilbertson notes that one of the lasting influences of Bloch on Moltmann is the “unsettled and unconcluded” ontology of the former, resulting in the latter’s suspicion of “any epistemology or ontology based on a backward-looking orientation as deficient.” (Gilbertson 2003:17)

¹⁴⁰ Rasmusson 1995:57-60, notes how Moltmann’s ontology relates to the often overly abstract formulations in Moltmann’s political hermeneutics—the mediation of the future to the present is fundamentally vague and abstract since what the future is like cannot be concretely known—what reality is necessarily fundamentally different from its fulfilment.

C. Problems in Moltmann's Transposition

Moltmann's transposition of the logic of redemption has several unfortunate implications. Here we will look at how it is difficult to affirm the goodness of creation within his schema, how it is in danger of anthropomorphising creation, how it leads to a necessary universalism that undermines human freedom, and how it tends to over-privilege the new.

First, although Moltmann wants to affirm the fundamental goodness of creation, it seems difficult to see how he can do so. Douglas Schuurman rightly regards Moltmann's understanding of creation as "a collapsing of the traditional distinction between creation and fall" leading to "a very negative assessment of the limitations of that creation which ... God called very good."¹⁴¹ Because the fundamental problem is drawn back from the fall into the structure of creation, Moltmann can only affirm creation eschatologically and thus only in what creation will be when radically transformed.¹⁴² If creation can only be affirmed as good at the moment when it is radically transformed, it is hard to see how Moltmann can affirm its fundamental goodness as it is.¹⁴³

Second, Bauckham notes, "one might ... wonder whether Moltmann's understanding of cosmic redemption does not introduce by the back door the anthropocentric view of creation he has been at pains to reject."¹⁴⁴ I would go further, and claim that in his concern to avoid an anthropocentric view of creation, he has anthropomorphised it.¹⁴⁵ By closely paralleling the death and resurrection of Jesus to the nature and destiny of the whole created order, Moltmann has taken what the Bible sees as humanity's particular plight and made it the paradigm for the whole created order. While Paul in Romans 8 sees the particular plight of creation as a consequence

¹⁴¹ Schuurman 1987:61; so also Walsh 1987 who believes Moltmann in the end is unable to affirm the goodness of creation and collapses the fall into creation.

¹⁴² Another implication of this is that Moltmann ends up doing precisely what he rejects, answering the theodicy question by making evil necessary since the deadly context of creation is a necessary consequence of God vacating the space that gives room for creation. For the importance of the theodicy question in Moltmann's theology, see Bauckham 1995:71-98.

¹⁴³ Bouma-Prediger 1997:89, says: "...since creation is essentially faulted, only some new creation can provide an adequate solution to the reality of sin. But to posit the necessity of a new creation undercuts the goodness of *this* creation." See Musfeldt 1991 for the questionableness of Moltmann's use of scientific theories of creation.

¹⁴⁴ Bauckham 1995:211.

¹⁴⁵ In a different line of argument, Lønning 1987 believes Moltmann fails to free himself from anthropocentric view of nature despite his intentions because of a commitment to key element in German idealist tradition.

of human rebellion and its transformation as dependent on humanity's, Moltmann sees the plight of creation and humanity as fundamentally the same problem, although manifested in two different ways.¹⁴⁶ Therefore, Moltmann in the end anthropomorphises creation rather than offering a less anthropocentric view of it—the particular kinds of communion God has with humanity, and the particular plight human beings experience, have their corresponding parallels in nature.¹⁴⁷ Creation is painted in the image of the biblical story of human rebellion and redemption.

Third, this transposition of the fundamental problem the cross responds to lends a strong universalist trajectory to his theology. The necessary problem is a fundamental contradiction in creation. The purpose of God's history with creation is to overcome this state of affairs. From this the expectation arises that the accomplishment of God's mission must be the vivification of all that has been granted life. If anything is lost, it is difficult to see how God's purpose can be seen to have been accomplished. In the next chapter, when discussing how Moltmann's transposition affects his understanding of the kingdom in its relational aspect, we will note how this is in danger of foreclosing precisely the human freedom Moltmann is so concerned to affirm.

Fourth, if a danger in traditional understandings of sin is an unhealthy conservative restorationism, Moltmann's problem is often the opposite. Because redemption responds to a fundamental contradiction in creation which is at minimum the indirect cause of the tragedy of human history, Moltmann tends to over-privilege the new and progressive. Justice, righteousness and freedom tend to always be aligned to that which seems progressively new precisely because in Moltmann it is always from ahead of us that the good arrives.¹⁴⁸

These concerns lead us to question Moltmann's critique of traditional understandings of sin. However, another proposal, including a defence of the traditional view, must be able to account for Moltmann's critique: if sin is the fundamental concern that the history of redemption responds to, how do we account

¹⁴⁶ For Moltmann's interpretation of Rom 8, see *GiC*, 67-69.

¹⁴⁷ Thus in *TKG*, 168, Moltmann can say: "Creation is saved and justified in eternity in the sacrifice of the Son, which is her sustaining foundation." Cf. *FC*, 121-24 where he comes close to equate sin and the bondage of creation; see *GiC*, 67-68 for a more careful differentiation between the two.

¹⁴⁸ Although Moltmann holds out hope for the past, it is not a hope of the restoration of something in the past but its transformation. Cf. Rasmussen 1995:158-68, 376 who links Moltmann's revolutionary commitments to the Postmaterialist ideas of "the New Class fraction" of the upper-middle class.

for the suffering and death that cannot so easily be related to sin? Is the traditional understanding of sin not pastorally inadequate? Does not the traditional dogma lead to an inappropriate conservatism grounded in seeing the eschaton simply as a restoration of a pristine pre-fall order, neglecting the expectation for the radical transformation of creation? Does not a singular focus of sin result in an anthropocentric view of creation? We will let these questions stand for now but will pick them up again in our interaction with Moltmann at the end of our consideration of the expectation of the coming kingdom in Revelation.

CHAPTER THREE: THE PASSION OF THE KINGDOM IN THE WORLD

I. Introduction

While in *Theology of Hope* Moltmann focuses primarily on the historical aspect of the kingdom, as his thinking develops he pays increasing attention to the relational aspect of the kingdom, how the kingdom is paradoxically present in the world as God is turning the world toward its future in the kingdom.¹ In the following analysis of Moltmann's understanding of the relational aspect of the kingdom, we will first look at the broader question of how Moltmann accounts for God's relationship with creation from the cross. Then we will turn to the particular concern of how the kingdom is present in the world as the paradoxical rule of God revealed in Christ and implemented by the Spirit, paying particular attention to how he sees the relationship between the church and the kingdom. We will suggest that the great strength of this development in his thought is how he is able to account for the weaknesses in his earlier eschatological focus without losing its force, showing that historical and relational aspects of the kingdom are intrinsically related and reinforce each other. In the last part of the chapter we will focus our critique around three concerns: how Moltmann's kenotic understanding of the relationship between God and creation is the mirror image of the transposition of the logic of redemption that we outlined in the last chapter, how this kenotic understanding has some unfortunate implications for Moltmann's understanding of God's rule, and how Moltmann does not sufficiently distinguish between the relationship of the church and the world to the kingdom.

II. Kenotic Perichoresis: God's Relationship to Creation

When we talk about the presence of the kingdom in the world we necessarily speak about God's presence since the kingdom implies his rule. Therefore, before we consider the specific question of the presence of the kingdom, we will first look at how Moltmann understands the relationship between God and creation, how God is

¹ In *CrG* he looks at what the cross means for God and what the implications of this is both for our understanding of God and of His ways in the world. His account for God's presence becomes explicitly trinitarian in *CPS* and *TKG*. In his mature thought, as is evident in these two works and which becomes a dominant theme in *GiC* and *SL*, Moltmann accounts for the possibility and actuality of God's presence in the world pneumatologically, while he accounts for the content and contour of that presence mainly christologically, as is most eminently seen in *WJC*.

revealed from the cross, and how this shapes Moltmann's understanding of the trinitarian history of God.

A. The Presence and Identity of God as Revealed in the Cross

1. God's Self-Involvement in the Redemption of Creation

As Moltmann turns from the question of what the cross means for humanity and the world to what it means for God, he argues that God's act in the cross is not exterior to him but one in which he is fundamentally involved as he expends himself in order to become present to his whole creation.² Creation exists in the deathly absence of God's life-giving presence. In the radical self-restriction of the Son in his death, which has its counterpart in the Father and the Spirit,³ God overcomes this creation's contradiction by becoming present to it.⁴ In entering his fundamental negation in creation in the death of the Son, God has made possible the full de-restriction of himself in it. He "creates salvation" for the world precisely by suffering the "disaster of the whole world inwardly in himself."⁵ The eschatological redemption purposed from the foundation of creation is revealed and made possible in the cross: because there God enters and suffers the contradiction of creation so he may "live in it; and that means to come to rest in it, and to remain there."⁶

2. The Identity of God as Revealed in the Cross

Because God involves himself in creation, the cross not only reveals what God does for creation but also who he fundamentally is. For Moltmann, therefore, God's outward acts always correspond to his inward suffering, "from the foundation of the world, the *opera trinitatis ad extra* correspond to the *passiones trinitatis ad intra*."⁷ This is quintessentially revealed in the cross because it is the heart, the dead-centre of the relationship between the Father, the Son and the Spirit.⁸ The cross as an event in God reveals God as a perichoretic communion of Father, Son and Spirit who in their

² *CrG*, x-xi.

³ See *GiC*, 243-49 on Moltmann's trinitarian understanding of the cross.

⁴ *TKG*, 119.

⁵ *TKG*, 160. See *CrG*, 151-52 on how the cross takes place in the life of God, "is a *stasis* within God."

⁶ *SW*, 122. This is the goal of the incarnation, and therefore the incarnation always had the cross in view; cf. "God's Kenosis," 141.

⁷ *TKG*, 160.

⁸ Philosophical premises, whether notions of a unitary substance or subjectivity, must be abandoned when one encounters God at Easter, one must begin with how God is here revealed as the "event" which is the relationship between the Father and the Son in the Spirit. (*CrG*, 245-47; cf. *TKG*, 65)

common love for one another open themselves to creation so creation may be drawn into their eternal communion of love.⁹ In this way the identity of God is bound up with God's history with the world revealed from the cross; says Moltmann:

The doctrine of the Trinity is ... nothing other than a shorter version of the passion narrative of Christ in its significance for the eschatological freedom of faith and the life of oppressed nature.... The content of the doctrine of the Trinity is the real cross of Christ himself. The form of the crucified Christ is the Trinity.¹⁰

For Moltmann, God revealed from the cross both affects creation "but is also affected by it. God relates to the world as Trinity, experiencing the world within his own trinitarian experience, and so his changing experience of the world is also a changing experience of himself."¹¹ Since this is the case, the history of creation's redemption revealed from the cross is also the trinitarian history of God with creation.¹² We now turn to who God is revealed to be in this history.

B. The History of God's Kenotic Perichoresis with Creation

In tracing God's history with creation we will first look at four aspects of his relation to creation:¹³ beginning with Moltmann's kenotic understanding of the immanent Trinity we will move to how God's resolve to create arises from within his eternal communion of love, how this resolve is grounded in the desire for the other who will respond to God's love, and how God self-restricts himself in order to give space for creation as his other. Then we will look at three aspects of God's presence to his creation: how God's whole history with creation has a kenotic shape, how therefore God's presence with creation must be seen in fundamentally kenotic terms, and finally how God's presence in creation is oriented toward the moment when the contradictions in both God and creation are overcome.

⁹ Moltmann's designation of God as "event" which can easily be misleading, is made within the context of the Trinitarian relationship on the cross, in which the term is functionally synonymous with relationship. God is the event of the cross, that is, God is the event which is the relationship between the three persons in the cross. (*CrG*, 246-47; cf. 207)

¹⁰ *CrG*, 246.

¹¹ Bauckham 1997:217. For a critical assessment of Moltmann's view of the impassibility of God, see Jansen 1994.

¹² *CrG*, 207; *TKG*, 112.

¹³ See Lull 1982 on the place of Moltmann within the revival of trinitarian theology in the latter part of the 20th century (cf. Jenson 1987). For a concise review of Moltmann's understanding of the Trinity, see McWilliams 1996. (cf. Peters 1992; Radlbeck-Ossmann 1993) See also O'Donnell 1988 who is generally positive of social trinitarianism but warns that it is unwise to abandon discussions on substance. For more critical assessments at key aspects of Moltmann trinitarian thought, see Neuhaus 1981 and Jansen 1994.

1. The Identity of God in Relation to Creation

a. The Immanent Trinity: A Kenotic Perichoresis

Moltmann sees the Perichoresis of the immanent Trinity in fundamentally kenotic terms.¹⁴ He says:

Every person exists in both the others – that is, it exists *in* and also *out of* (*ek*) the others. They are its living spaces. It is love which allows them to go out of themselves to such a degree that each is wholly in the others. The Father comes to himself in the Son and in the Spirit, the Son in the Father and the Spirit, the Spirit in the Son and the Father. By virtue of their reciprocal indwelling, the trinitarian Persons join themselves to a unity and differentiate themselves mutually: the Father differentiates between the Son and the Spirit through his different relations to them; and so on.¹⁵

The unity of the triune God as well as the distinct existence of each of the divine persons is grounded in a ‘perfect having one’s being in the other.’ The perfect unity of the three is their constitution in each other made possible by their love—they empty themselves radically for each other so they can exist out of each other. Since this kenotic self-surrender is at the heart of God’s trinitarian nature, it is also the mark of all his works ‘outwards’.”¹⁶

b. The Necessary Resolve to Create

God’s resolve to create is neither arbitrary nor simply an emanation but a “necessary resolve” which flows out of this life of perfect love within the immanent Trinity.¹⁷ Fundamental to love is the love for the unlike; therefore, the will to create an “other” is constituent of the fundamental nature of God.¹⁸ The corollary of the perfect communion of love in God is the resolution to create an “other” to whom the Trinity opens itself up to and invites into its own communion. “This premises that the world of human beings and death does not exist outside God, but that from the very beginning it lies within the mystery of the Trinity: the Father creates the world out of love for the Son – the Son redeems the world from sin and death though [sic] his emptying of himself out of love for the Father”¹⁹

¹⁴ In *TKG*, 118-119, he uses it first of the God-creation relation, and in more recent writings it becomes a dominant motif to describe the way in which the three persons reside in one another; see e.g. “God’s Kenosis” and *SW*, 111-26.

¹⁵ *SW*, 118.

¹⁶ “God’s Kenosis,” 141.

¹⁷ In *GiC*, 79-86, Moltmann sets his own trinitarian understanding against the backdrop of the reformed doctrine of divine decrees and emanationist understandings of creation. (cf. *TKG*, 105-08)

¹⁸ *TKG*, 106-07, 111-12.

¹⁹ “God’s Kenosis” 141.

c. Creation Purposed for Perichoretic Communion with God

Just as the triune persons dwell in each other, in the space they have ceded for each other, so God's purpose in creation is that creation is to have its being in God and God is to dwell in his creation. God's first movement in achieving this is his protological act in creation. God, through alterations in the trinitarian relations, cedes a space within himself in which his creation can exist, and in this way "determines himself to be the living-space for all those he has created."²⁰ This kenotic act is both necessary for the possibility of creation (since God is omnipresent he has to cede a space within himself if there is to be any room for creation)²¹ and it is fundamental to the God-creation perichoresis which is predicated upon the inner-trinitarian perichoresis—"God makes himself the dwelling place for those he has created, and at the same time he enters into his creation in order to make it his own dwelling place."²²

Since the purpose of the divine restriction is to make creation God's own dwelling, the eschatological counterpart to the protological restriction is the moment when God de-restricts himself and again fills the space he ceded, making the creation which exists in him the home from which he exists. God's double movement of creation is grounded within and accords to the eternal communion of the love of the three. The three who exist in emptying themselves in love for one another throw themselves open for the other, creation, so that it may be drawn into the trinitarian communion of love.²³

d. The Contradiction in God

It is as we consider what creation means for God that we see how the fundamental contradiction in creation finds its counterpart in a contradiction in God: The god-forsaken space in which creation exists is a space God has forsaken in

²⁰ *SW*, 120; cf. *TKG*, 111; "God's Kenosis," 141.

²¹ It is as "God withdraws to himself [that] he can create something whose essence is not divine, can let it co-exist with himself, give it space and redeem it." *SW*, 119)

²² *SW*, 123.

²³ Although noting fundamental problems with his panentheistic account of the God-creation relation, Bouma-Prediger notes how Moltmann is careful to distinguish himself from both Pantheism and Process Theology by accentuating both the difference between the two as well as their mutual communion. (1995:253-55; cf. 1997:77-79) "The world lives in God in a world-like way, and God lives in the world in a God-like way. They interpenetrate each other mutually without destroying each other." (*SW*, 123)

himself, the flipside of the history of redemption is how God overcomes the contradiction in himself which he voluntarily took on in his love for creation.²⁴

2. The Presence of God with Creation

a. The Kenotic Shape of the God-Creation Perichoresis

The broad sweep of God's history with his creation is shaped by kenotic retraction and expansion, it is a history that ultimately moves from panentheism toward 'theoenpanism,' from a contradiction in God and creation which made their perichoretic communion possible to the fulfilment of that communion when this double contradiction is overcome.²⁵

b. The Kenotic Rhythm and Passion of God's Presence in History

Not only this history as a whole but "every act outwards is preceded by an act inwards which makes the 'outwards' possible."²⁶ A creative act *ex nihilo* is always logically preceded by a divine self-restriction, seen most radically in the cross where God lowered "himself into his own impotence" in order that creation may be freed from the chains of death and opened up to its own future in Him.²⁷ This paradoxical kenotic rhythm, where "God is nowhere greater than in his humiliation,"²⁸ underpins two fundamental aspects of Moltmann's understanding of God's presence in the world.

First, it is a real creative presence. Everything that exists and lives is the creative counterpart to God's self-restriction, a fruit of the divine Spirit. In the "unceasing inflow of the energies and potentialities of the divine Spirit," God, "preserves it, makes it live and renews it" as it grasps for its potentialities in the inflow of the Spirit.²⁹

However, second, this kenotic rhythm happens in a creation that exists under the conditions of the protological kenosis, in the common passion of both God and

²⁴ *GiC*, 88.

²⁵ *CoG*, 306-08.

²⁶ *TKG*, 110.

²⁷ *TKG*, 110. "In this sense, by yielding up the Son to death in God-forsakenness on the cross, and by surrendering him to hell, the eternal God enters the Nothingness out of which he created the world....[and thus] pervades the space of God-forsakenness with his presence...That is why God's presence in the crucified Christ gives creation eternal life, and does not annihilate it." (*GiC*, 91)

²⁸ *TKG*, 119; cf. *CrG*, 245, 277.

²⁹ *GiC*, 9-10.

creation. Therefore, God's presence in the world is primarily passion,³⁰ God suffers with the world, and in suffering with it opens it up to its own future.³¹ "God acts in the history of nature and human beings through his patient and silent presence, by way of which he gives those he has created space to unfold, time to develop, and power for their own movement."³² This hidden presence does not reflect a divine lack of interest in a suffering creation but is rather "the highest form of interest in the other;" instead of shaping creation prematurely into his own likeness by force, the long-suffering God constantly "creates possibilities of life for the other" by "attracting, alluring and enticing" creation into a communion with him.³³ In this way, by the power of the Spirit, God gives creation time to become the creation which freely welcomes the creator who comes to dwell in it.³⁴

c. The Eschatological Orientation of God's Presence in Creation

As is evident in this discussion, the presence of God in a world marked by his absence is oriented toward the moment when this contradiction in creation and its corresponding contradiction in God are overcome, the moment when the God-creation perichoresis corresponds to the life of the three divine person when the creation that exist in and from God becomes the home from which God exists, "creation is destined to be the dwelling space for God."³⁵

III. The Kingdom of Christ in the Spirit: The Rule of God Oriented toward Freedom

A. Introduction

Having outlined how Moltmann understands who God is in relation to creation and how he is present to it, we now turn to our primary concern, how the kingdom is present in the world as God's rule. Moltmann calls the relationship between the Trinity and the kingdom "the functional problem of the doctrine of the

³⁰ *CrG*, 277; cf. *TKG*, 118.

³¹ Says Moltmann, "a trinitarian theology of the cross perceives God in the negative element and therefore the negative element in God, and in this dialectical way is panentheistic. For in the hidden mode of humiliation to the point of the cross, all being and all that annihilates has already been taken up in God and God begins to become 'all in all'." (*CrG*, 277; cf. *TKG*, 118)

³² "God's Kenosis," 149.

³³ "God's Kenosis," 149.

³⁴ "God's Kenosis," 149.

³⁵ *CoG*, 307; cf. *SW*, 117.

Trinity” and adds, “theology is never concerned with the actual *existence* of God. It is interested solely in the *rule* of this God in heaven and on earth.”³⁶ Moltmann rejects monotheistic accounts of this where an absolute divine rule is “exercised by a single, identical subject,”³⁷ an approach whose origin is in early Christian apologetics that sought to accommodate Christianity to Empire, and has in European political thought been consistently used to legitimate authoritarian rule in both state and church (one God – one church – one emperor – one people).³⁸ Rather, one must move from how God is revealed as Trinity from the cross: As a particular story within God’s trinitarian narrative with creation, the history of the kingdom is God’s history with humanity in all its relationships, in which God’s rule is revealed as “the lordships that makes us free.”³⁹

In the following discussion we will begin by considering both how the kingdom of God is manifested in Jesus and how the Spirit is the mystery of the Kingdom. On basis of this we will consider how Moltmann understands the purpose of God’s rule, how He achieves these purposes, and what claim this rule makes on those who subject themselves to it. We will conclude our analysis by considering how Moltmann sees the relationship between the church and the kingdom.

B. The Manifestation of the Kingdom in Jesus

In the last chapter we showed how Moltmann’s messianic understanding of history is grounded in how the future kingdom has broken into the world in the raising of the crucified one. We now turn our attention to what makes the hope for the kingdom possible, namely that the future kingdom is *present* in the raised Jesus, and therefore Jesus is “the present representative of this future, of the free, new mankind and the new creation.”⁴⁰ Moving from the resurrection, we will ask how the kingdom is present in the raised and dead Jesus, and how this vision is informed by how Jesus saw the kingdom drawing near in his ministry.

³⁶ “The question: does God exist? is an abstract one. (*TKG*, 191) In contrast, the Bible asks the concrete question “nach dem Reich Seiner offenen Herrlichkeit in der ganzen Schöpfung.” (“Antwort,” 215)

³⁷ *TKG*, 191.

³⁸ See especially *TKG*, 192-202, where Moltmann first critiques political and ecclesiastical understandings of God’s sovereignty in monotheistic terms (which are hierarchical and as such legitimate unjust and suppressive social structures).

³⁹ *TKG*, 191.

⁴⁰ *CrG*, 168.

The kingdom Jesus proclaimed to the poor, the sick and sinners “begins with the resurrection of Christ from the dead and the overcoming of the power of death by his resurrection.”⁴¹ In him, the goal of the kingdom is achieved, the pivotal victory over transience and its consequences. However, as such, although a real instantiation of the kingdom, the resurrection of Jesus is not its consummation. Rather, as the first among many he has entered the future that awaits all.⁴² However, if the resurrection is the first realisation of the kingdom in the world, how is this appearing made possible? If the raising of the crucified one is the first fruit of the kingdom which Jesus proclaimed in his ministry, how is it revealed in his life? And, how does this appearance of the kingdom in Jesus relate to the world that is not yet the kingdom? The first question leads us to a consideration of how the cross is the foundational event of the kingdom. The second and third draw us to how the kingdom is manifested in the concrete history of Jesus in anticipatory ways and how this informs the way in which the kingdom is present under the conditions of God’s absence in history.

1. Easter as the Foundational Event of the Kingdom

Although the cross shattered Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom, it is also the event that made its vindication in the resurrection possible, and as such is the true beginning of the kingdom.⁴³ How so? Moltmann says,

The Father who sends his Son through all the abysses and hells of God-forsakenness, of the divine curse and final judgment is, in his Son, everywhere with those who are his own; he has become universally present. In giving up the Son he gives ‘everything’ and ‘nothing’ can separate us from him. This is the beginning of the language of the kingdom of God, in which ‘God will be all in all’.⁴⁴

The absence of the kingdom in the world is due to the absence of God from the world, that it exists under the conditions of God-forsakenness. The cross is therefore the hidden beginning of the kingdom because in the death of the Son God enters the realm of his absence, and so enters the passion of the Son God becomes present to the passion of the world, the source of all its suffering and evil, its god-forsakenness.

Since God entered the fundamental condition the whole world exists under, a universal hope is opened up for it, the hope for eternal communion with God.

⁴¹ HTG, 77.

⁴² TKG, 123.

⁴³ CrG, 123-24.

⁴⁴ TKG, 82.

However, although the cross extends hope to all, the way in which Jesus died, who he died as, reveals a fundamental partisanship toward the universal kingdom. In his death as a sinner, as a rebel and as the one forsaken by God, Jesus' criticism of the way of the religious elite is questioned, his confrontation with the Roman sword with the olive branch of peace withers, and most importantly, his intimate bond with God as Father dies as seen in the cry of dereliction. However, in the resurrection, it is precisely those who inhabit these identifications that are shown closest to the kingdom, the righteousness of the kingdom is the one that justifies sinners, the people of the kingdom are those who suffer at the hands of the powers that are, and most fundamentally the kingdom appears among those who experience the godforsakeness of the world most acutely.⁴⁵ Just as the knowledge of God as well as his presence are revealed paradoxically in their opposite in the cross,⁴⁶ so the presence of the kingdom is to be found first among the least expected, the sinners who are sinners at the expense of the self-righteous, the poor who are poor at the expense of the rich, and among the masses of the godforsaken on the earth.⁴⁷

The raising of Jesus is the beginning of the kingdom of God in that it is a happening of the future kingdom ahead of time but the cross is its beginning in that it is the possibility-making event of the kingdom. It is only because of the way God is radically present to the world in its god-forsakenness in the death of the Son that the Father can raise both the Son and eventually all humanity into the kingdom which is predicated on the life-giving presence and communion of God. The double movement of Easter is the foundation for our understanding of the presence of the kingdom of God in the world. In the resurrection we see in anticipation what the kingdom accomplishes, and in the cross we see how God becomes present to humanity, and among whom he first is present. If the kingdom that is made possible and appears at Easter is the one Jesus proclaimed in his ministry, how does the life of Jesus inform us about the kingdom?

⁴⁵ See *CrG*, 126-159 for Moltmann's discussion on how Jesus dies as a blasphemer, rebel, and godforsaken.

⁴⁶ *CrG*, 27.

⁴⁷ *CrG*, 326-27.

2. The Kingdom in the Person and History of Jesus

The Christian confession in Jesus Christ receives its form in Easter but “its content is determined by *the history of Jesus’ life.*”⁴⁸ Applying this basic premise to the kingdom in Christian faith, we see that while it is the central fact of the cross and resurrection that is the foundation of the kingdom’s presence in the world, it is the life and ministry of Jesus that reveals the way the kingdom is present in the world. Moltmann emphasises three things in Jesus’ proclamation of the dawning of the kingdom in his ministry: Jesus’ unique relationship with God as his Father, the anticipatory presence of the kingdom in his ministry, and the way of the kingdom in his proclamation.

Jesus’ ministry begins with his baptism by John.⁴⁹ As such it must be seen in the context of the expectation of the kingdom in which John’s message of repentance is set. In Jesus’ baptism, when he received the Spirit “without measure” (John 3:34) and is called the Son of God, he is revealed to be the messianic figure in which the kingdom will appear that John had proclaimed. However, while the language of sonship is consistent with Israel’s messianic expectation (cf. Ps 2:7), the way in which Jesus expresses this relationship throughout his life, calling God “Abba,” points to a new intimate relationship with the God whose will he believes he is carrying out.⁵⁰ This transforms Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom. In distinction from the Baptist he proclaims “the intimate nearness of God the Father,” not “the coming of the wrathful judge of the world,”⁵¹ where “what rules is *the justice of mercy* for all the weary and heavy-laden. In the kingdom of the Father what reigns is the *liberty of the children of God* in the Spirit.”⁵² This is not “the ‘last days’ before the judgment,” but the nearness of the God’s kingdom demonstrated in “signs of grace” to the disenfranchised and in miracles of healing the sick.⁵³

Moving from the intimate relational context in which the whole of Jesus’ life is to be seen, it is within Jesus’ mighty deeds that we see how the kingdom appears. Jesus’ healings and exorcisms are messianic signs of the kingdom of God in that they

⁴⁸ WJC, 140.

⁴⁹ See WJC, 87-91 for how Moltmann relates and contrasts Jesus’ message of the kingdom with John the Baptist’s.

⁵⁰ WJC, 74; cf. CrG, 121-22.

⁵¹ WJC, 90-91.

⁵² WJC, 90.

⁵³ WJC, 91.

counter the fundamental powers under which the unredeemed world exists, they are “the dawn of the lordship of the divine life in this era of Godless death.”⁵⁴ However, since those who were healed eventually die, and since the terrorising forces that negate life rage on, these mighty deeds are not a fulfilment of the kingdom but rather signs of what creation will be in the coming kingdom of God just as Jesus himself was “the *provisional representative* of the still absent God.”⁵⁵ In the gospel “it is already present, but *present* only as the *coming* kingdom,”⁵⁶ an anticipation of its future under the conditions of transience and death.⁵⁷

Although the raised Jesus has entered a new “reality” that is discontinuous with the world as it is, the anticipatory appearance of this kingdom in his ministry happened in the world under the conditions it still exists in. Precisely because of this, how it appeared around him can be informative of where we see it in our world. Jesus’ mighty deeds are “parables of the new creation in the midst of the everyday life of this exhausted world.”⁵⁸ So wherever the sick become well and the tormented find peace we see real anticipations of the resurrected order and the annihilation of the forces of death in the kingdom of God.⁵⁹

Implied in the anticipatory presence of the kingdom in Jesus’ person and ministry is a certain way of life for those who seek to live in the presence of the coming of the kingdom in a world of death that passes away. Moltmann develops such a messianic ethic in a variety of ways, including the way Jesus radicalises Israel’s Sabbath laws and the laws for the Year of Jubilee,⁶⁰ which amounts to a “real programme for social reform” for the poor and indebted in the Galilean countryside.⁶¹ From the way in which the kingdom Israel hoped for appeared in Jesus, ecclesial communities are enabled to practice “the great alternative to the world’s present system.”⁶² Central to this alternative is the proclamation of the kingdom to the poor, which does not “put the poor on the way to becoming richer, which is a way that is always fraught with violence” but rather “puts them on the way to community”

⁵⁴ WJC, 104.

⁵⁵ CrG, 256.

⁵⁶ WJC, 97.

⁵⁷ WJC, 97.

⁵⁸ WJC, 99; cf. “Jesus and the Kingdom of God,” 8-9, where he notes that these deeds are premonitions of the resurrected order just as sickness and suffering are premonitions of death.

⁵⁹ WJC, 105-111.

⁶⁰ WJC, 119-122.

⁶¹ WJC, 121.

⁶² WJC, 122.

characterised by communal sharing.⁶³ In this way the violence against the poor is broken, the logic in which the rich maintain their wealth by keeping the poor poor.⁶⁴ In such a culture of sharing we find an anticipation of the kingdom of God, where the cycles of violence and injustice break down and the poor are transformed and given dignity as the rightful heirs of the kingdom.⁶⁵

When the apocalyptic expectation of the approaching kingdom fades, so does such an anticipatory praxis. However, when this hope is kept alive, ecclesial communities are enabled to live as “the great alternative to the world’s present system”⁶⁶ in hope of not only their own future but the future of the whole world.⁶⁷ Although “the Sermon on the Mount … offers the ethic of a particular community.... this ethic is directed to the redemption of the whole people (*ochlos*), and claims universality.”⁶⁸ “Christian messianic ethics celebrates and anticipates the presence of God in history. It wants to practice the unconditioned within the conditioned and the ultimate in the penultimate.”⁶⁹ Taking his clues from the way Jesus radicalises Israel’s Sabbath laws, Moltmann argues that economically this means seeking a just order in which the needs of all people are met, politically it means seeking a form of government where the dignity and freedom of all is maintained, culturally it means an open solidarity between those who are different, and ecologically this means peace with the ravaged earth.⁷⁰ These are the sacramental forms of God’s presence in history that “at the same time [point] beyond themselves to a greater presence, and finally to that present in which “God will be all in all.””⁷¹

C. The Spirit as the Mystery of the Kingdom

The Spirit is the mediating link between the kingdom’s presence in the concrete person and history of Jesus and its universal presence in the world. Here we will first look at the work of the Spirit as the kingdom drew near in Jesus, how the presence of the kingdom consequently must be seen as pneumatological, how this

⁶³ WJC, 101.

⁶⁴ WJC, 99, 101.

⁶⁵ WJC, 101.

⁶⁶ WJC, 122.

⁶⁷ WJC, 122-27.

⁶⁸ WJC, 125.

⁶⁹ OHD, 110.

⁷⁰ OHD, 110-111.

⁷¹ OHD, 111. For a recent essay that develops the same concerns, see “The Liberation of the Future.”

pneumatology shapes the purpose of the kingdom and how it is manifested in the world.

1. The Spirit as the Mystery of Jesus

The Spirit who is “God’s own power of creation” is also “the divine saving power” by which the messianic kingdom Israel anticipated would be established.⁷² It is precisely because everything in Jesus’ life, who he is and what he does, is predicated on the efficacy of the divine Spirit⁷³ that the Kingdom is appearing in Jesus. “The presence of the Holy Spirit,” says Moltmann, “is to be understood as the earnest and beginning of the new creation of all things in the kingdom of God.”⁷⁴ The resurrection as a proleptic event of the future is not limited to itself since the same Spirit by whose power Jesus was raised is the power in which he now is present in the world in anticipation of his parousia.⁷⁵

2. The Pneumatological Presence of the Kingdom of God

Because the Spirit present in Jesus is the same Spirit at work in the world, the concrete presence of the kingdom in Christ is intrinsically bound to the universal presence of the Spirit in the world.⁷⁶ But how is it so?

First, the concrete relationship between the two is grounded in the ascension and exaltation of the Son. Jesus, who in his earthly life existed from the power of the Spirit, sends, as the ascended lord of the Kingdom, the same Spirit into the world so he may be present to the world in the Spirit.⁷⁷ Therefore, the presence of Christ and of the kingdom that appeared in him “is experienced in the Spirit who is the giver of life.”⁷⁸ In this way the kenosis of the Spirit in the particular person of Jesus results in

⁷² *WJC*, 91-92.

⁷³ *WJC*, 73. See *WJC*, 91-94 for the basic facets of Moltmann’s Spirit Christology; cf. *THG*, 84.

⁷⁴ *CPS*, 191; cf. *HTG*, 77, *WJC*, 73, 92.

⁷⁵ See *WJC*, 241-45, on how Moltmann understands this as the process of resurrection.

⁷⁶ The presence of God in the Shekinah that rested with Israel in the land and journeyed with her in exile is in trinitarian terms the Holy Spirit whose Shekinah presence is seen most radically in Jesus where “the Shekinah is manifested as God’s self-surrender, and the Shekinah itself becomes capable of suffering and death,” revealing how God has entered his creation “so as to live in it, and that means to come to rest in it, and to remain there.” (*SW*, 122)

⁷⁷ *HTG*, 84.

⁷⁸ *WJC*, 41; cf. 77.

the expansion of the Spirit to the whole world;⁷⁹ the kingdom that appeared in Jesus in the power of the Spirit is now present in the world through the same Spirit.⁸⁰

Second, this movement from a pneumatological christology to a christological pneumatology of the kingdom must not be separated from the fact that the Spirit that appeared in Jesus is the same Spirit by whom God has given creation life and through whom he is present in it.⁸¹ Therefore, the history of the kingdom that appeared in Jesus must be understood within the whole history of how God is present to the world by the Spirit. While the history of the kingdom in Jesus makes God's purposes for humanity possible, it is itself set within the large story of how God created humanity and all nature for communion with Him and keeps them open to this future by the Spirit. Within this larger picture, the kingdom is present to the world in hidden and paradoxical ways in the power of the Spirit, turning it toward its future in God's life-giving communion. Therefore, "the kingdom of glory does not come unexpectedly and without any preparation, it is already heralded in the kingdom of the Spirit, where it already has power and is present."⁸²

3. The Process of Resurrection in the Spirit

As Moltmann considers the centrality of the resurrection as an event accomplished in the Spirit, history is not simply seen in the light of the resurrection but also as a process of resurrection. He says:

Seeing history in the perspective of resurrection means participating through the Spirit in *the process of resurrection*.... It means participating in the creative act of God. A faith of this kind is the beginning of freedom....Understood as an event that discloses the future and opens history, the resurrection of Christ is the foundation and promise of life in the midst of the history of death....In talking about Christ's resurrection we have therefore to talk about a *process of resurrection*. This process has its foundation in Christ, its dynamic in the Spirit, and its future in the bodily new creation of all things. Resurrection means not a *factum* but a *a fieri* – not what was once done, but what is in the making: the transition from death to life.⁸³

The resurrection shows that God's final purpose for all life that now comes to a deadly end is an eternal life-giving communion with him. Since the resurrection is wrought by precisely the power that is keeping all life open for this future, it is a process. While "death acts on this life and in it as the power of division and isolation

⁷⁹ WJC, 85, 93; cf. 94.

⁸⁰ WJC, 86.

⁸¹ WJC, 91-94.

⁸² SoL, 11.

⁸³ WJC, 240-41; cf. JCTW, 75-80.

... the resurrection actively penetrates life too, by virtue of hope, and cancels the results of death's power.”⁸⁴ The future the Spirit orients the world toward is made possible in the resurrection of Jesus. In the appearing of the kingdom in Jesus the way in which the Spirit is opening the world up to its future is made visible. In the power of the Spirit of the resurrection, men and women can participate in the process of resurrection. Seized by this process, they find the way of such a praxis in how the kingdom appeared in Jesus in anticipatory form.⁸⁵

4. The Pneumatological Manifestation of the Kingdom of God

When Moltmann turns to the presence of the Spirit in the world, he sees it “wherever life here is quickened and its living energies awake.”⁸⁶ Precisely because of this, the presence of the kingdom is not to be limited to the spheres in which Christ is confessionally known and where there is a community that intentionally follows him. The future of the kingdom is made possible by how it appeared in Christ by the Spirit, but since the Spirit that was at work in him is also the Spirit at work in the world, the presence of the kingdom is not to be limited to where he is known and proclaimed, but must be seen “in everything that ministers to life and resists its destruction.”⁸⁷ Therefore, those who confess Christ cannot lay claim to be the only heirs of the kingdom, but rather, with the knowledge of the kingdom they have received in their confession, they are to seek precisely those places and movements in which the power and presence of the Spirit of life are evident. Those who seek the kingdom must therefore affirm and join themselves to everything where “mortal life” is “quickened and its living energies” is unreservedly affirmed.⁸⁸

D. The Rule of God as Oriented toward Freedom

It is on basis of how the Trinity is revealed in the relationship of the Father, Son and the Spirit at Easter that Moltmann develops his understanding of divine rule,⁸⁹ what its purpose is, how its purpose is achieved, and what claim it lays on people.

⁸⁴ *WJC*, 264.

⁸⁵ *JCTW*, 75, 79-80.

⁸⁶ *WJC*, 264.

⁸⁷ *SL*, xi; cf. *CPS*, 196; *WJC*, 91; 253-54.

⁸⁸ *WJC*, 264.

⁸⁹ *TKG*, 197.

1. The Purpose of the Rule of God

God created creation within himself so that one day it may be the dwelling from which he exists, resulting in a perichoretic communion between God and creation that corresponds to the inner-trinitarian communion of God. If this is the case, then the rule of God does not exist at the expense of human freedom but is oriented toward the liberation of all for their mutual communion with God.⁹⁰ In Easter, the purpose of God's rule is revealed in negative terms as the redemption from death, from the bondage to transience, and in positive terms, anticipating how the Spirit preserves people for glory, as drawing people into the fellowship with the Father.⁹¹

Because in his rule God "calls the freedom of men and women to life, the trinitarian doctrine of the kingdom is the theological doctrine of freedom. The theological concept of freedom is the concept of the trinitarian history of God: God unceasingly desires the freedom of his creation. God is the inexhaustible freedom of those he has created."⁹² Therefore, God's liberation of humanity does not result in enslavement to God; rather, God's "sovereignty" is nothing other than his "sustaining fellowship with his creation and his people."⁹³

2. The Character of the Rule of God

As soon as we talk about the purpose of God's rule, what he aims to accomplish in it, we must also talk about the means by which He will accomplish this, i.e. what is the power by which God accomplishes his purposes. From the purpose of God's rule it is evident that its means cannot be coercive power. Rather, as most radically seen in the paradoxical power of the cross, "God acts in the history of nature and human beings through his patient and silent presence, by way of which he gives those he has created space to unfold, time to develop, and power for their own movement."⁹⁴ It is by this suffering with creation that God in the presence and power of the Spirit gives creation freedom to come into its own and in this process keeps it open for this future by unceasingly creating the possibilities for its life.⁹⁵ In

⁹⁰ TKG, 209-10.

⁹¹ TKG, 210.

⁹² TKG, 218.

⁹³ GiC, 241; cf. TKG, 203ff.

⁹⁴ "God's Kenosis," 149.

⁹⁵ "God's Kenosis," 149; cf. SL, 42.

opposition to the despots of the world, “it is his passionate, passible love that is almighty, nothing else.”⁹⁶ “The sole omnipotence which God possesses is the almighty power of suffering love.”⁹⁷

Adapting Joachim of Fiore’s trinitarian doctrine of the kingdoms,⁹⁸ Moltmann links the kingdom of the Father with the creation of the world and its preservation through God’s patience, the kingdom of the Son is linked with the liberation of humanity from “their closed-in-ness,” and the kingdom of the Spirit with how all living things are kept open to their future communion with God.⁹⁹

Corresponding to these strata of the kingdom is a stratified understanding of freedom. The freedom of the Father is the freedom to be a servant; those who are God’s “property” as his creatures are exalted to be his servants who, dependent on this Lord, are “completely free from other thing and other powers.”¹⁰⁰ However, in the kingdom of the Son, while the outward form of being a servant is preserved, “its inward quality is changed. The servants of the Lord became the children of the Father.”¹⁰¹ Having gained a filial relation to the Father, they are no longer his property but “joint owners of the father’s property.”¹⁰² In the kingdom of the Spirit, the inward quality of freedom changes again, as “the servants of the Lord and the children of the Father become God’s friends.”¹⁰³ This freedom of friendship received by the indwelling Spirit and experienced in friendship is what the freedom of the servant and of the child is oriented toward. God desires his servants and children to become his friends, so “the distance enjoined by sovereignty ceases to exist,” and “the boldness and confidence of friends, who share his rule with him” emerges.¹⁰⁴ It is this friendship, “a conversation in the freedom of love, that shares and allows the other to share,”¹⁰⁵ that will characterise the coming kingdom and is now anticipated in prayer.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁶ TKG, 197.

⁹⁷ TKG, 31.

⁹⁸ Rather than seeing the kingdom of the Father, Son and Spirit as three historical ages, he sees them as strata of the one history of the kingdom of God that have a forward thrust. For the importance of Fiore in recent theology, see Conyers 1985.

⁹⁹ TKG, 212-13.

¹⁰⁰ TKG, 219.

¹⁰¹ TKG, 219.

¹⁰² TKG, 220.

¹⁰³ TKG, 220.

¹⁰⁴ TKG, 221.

¹⁰⁵ TKG, 221.

¹⁰⁶ TKG, 220-21.

3. The Demand of the Rule of God

If the freedom that the rule of God is oriented toward is now experienced as “the intimacy, in which we call God ‘Abba’ … and know ourselves to be his child and friend,” Christians must adopt a way of life that corresponds to this and commit themselves to “wherever this future *happens* in history – wherever, that is, God gives his future of the kingdom *in advance*.¹⁰⁷ Their life, then, must correspond to the forward thrust of the rule of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.¹⁰⁸ Living under the rule of the Father, they resist every other formative power and conform to the way God orients creation toward him. As those who have become God’s children in the Son, this way of life is experienced in the intimacy of the relationship between parents and children, and is oriented toward becoming the friend of God, sharing in his life in the power of the Spirit. These strata of freedom correspond to the movement of the kingdom of God.¹⁰⁹

E. The Church as an Anticipation of the Kingdom

The above discussion has focused on the character of God’s rule, and on the christological and pneumatological logic of its presence. Now we move to the concrete question of how the church is related to this rule, looking at how the church of Christ exists for the kingdom, how as such she is an event, “a happening” in the promised presence of Christ, how on basis of this we are to understand the creedal confession of the church, and how this shapes her mission.¹¹⁰

1. The Church Between Christ and the Kingdom in the Spirit

Christ, who “represents in this transitory era of the world the God who is to come” in his Lordship and glory,¹¹¹ is the eschatological foundation of the church.¹¹² Because of this, “every statement about the church will be a statement about

¹⁰⁷ “The Liberation of the Future,” 266, 279.

¹⁰⁸ An experience of freedom is an experience of being the servant, the child, and the friend of God but also a trend from the first to the last because the freedom of the servant in its incompleteness strives toward the freedom of the children, and both push toward the freedom of friends; as “strata in the concept of freedom” they are on the one hand “transitions … present in every experience of freedom,” but also a trend in “the process of maturing through experience that are continually new.” (*TKG*, 221, 222)

¹⁰⁹ *TKG*, 222.

¹¹⁰ *CPS*, 122.

¹¹¹ *CPS*, 74.

¹¹² *CPS*, 70-75.

Christ.”¹¹³ Everything that is true about the church is only so because it is first a predicate of Christ and everything we know of Christ is of importance for the church and her life in the world. As such, the church is “the present realization of the remembrance and hope of Christ.”¹¹⁴

However, while the church is christologically determined, she does not exhaust who Christ is but rather finds her existence within his broad mission for the coming kingdom. As such, the church lives in the dynamic between Christ as her foundational centre and the horizon of the kingdom toward which she is oriented.

The existence of the church then is intrinsically bound up with the kingdom of God because the church’s reason for existence, what defines who she is, what she is to seek and how she is to live is predicated upon her existence in Christ’s mission of the kingdom. As the church of Christ, “the community of the cross,” it identifies with the suffering of the world that Christ entered into in his cross. From there it exists as “the fellowship of the kingdom” that in its exodus toward the kingdom “spreads the feast without end.” The church, if it is to exist at all,¹¹⁵ exists “as a factor of present liberation, between remembrance of his history and hope of his kingdom,”¹¹⁶ and as such is an anticipation of the kingdom.¹¹⁷ However, she can only exist as such in the power and the presence of the Spirit. Therefore, every facet of the church’s identity and existence is marked by how the Spirit keeps the world open to its future in God, and as such, “the whole being of the church is marked by participation in the history of God’s dealing with the world.”¹¹⁸

2. The Church as Event in the Promised Presence of Christ

If Christ is the foundation of the church that exists for the coming of his kingdom in the power of his Spirit, it can only exist where Christ is present in the world in the Spirit as the Spirit keeps the world open to its own future in the kingdom of Christ. As such, the church is not a self-determining entity but exists only as the “event” that binds itself to Christ where he has promised to be present in the Spirit.¹¹⁹

¹¹³ CPS, 6.

¹¹⁴ CPS, 144.

¹¹⁵ CPS, 133.

¹¹⁶ CPS, 75.

¹¹⁷ CPS, 196; cf. 24-26, 34, 191-92.

¹¹⁸ CPS, 65.

¹¹⁹ CPS, 122; cf. 23.

For Moltmann, the three “spheres” in which Christ promised to be present is in the apostolate, among the poor and in his parousia.¹²⁰

a. The Church in the Apostolic Presence of the Exalted Christ

When discussing Christ’s presence in the apostolate, Moltmann understands the Apostolate as “the medium of the proclamation through word and sacrament, as well as the persons and community of the proclaimers.”¹²¹ Since the Apostolate is not only the kerygmatic proclamation but also the community which proclaims the kerygma, it is not simply a message but an existence patterned after Jesus, it “has the bodily and social dimension of the passion, and the power of the resurrection.”¹²² However, this is not an intrinsic quality of the church but only what it receives as the apostolate takes “place in Christ’s presence.”¹²³ This ‘happening’ of the church is made possible in the Spirit who is the fundamental sacrament of the church. It is in the Spirit that the church experiences the presence of her exalted Lord, and it is by the power of the Spirit that the church is empowered for an apostolic existence in the world.¹²⁴

In the church’s uniting with Christ’s pneumatological presence in the apostolate, we see the particular identity of the church to the kingdom. The church’s identity as the church of Jesus Christ is defined by its kerygmatic role in the world, as the community that testifies to how the kingdom of God has appeared in the world in Jesus and how the fulfilment of this kingdom is what awaits the whole world. This kerygmatic role of the church is sacramental in character, it does not simply refer to her message but forms her existence, the kerygmatic church takes “on the form of Christ’s destiny.”¹²⁵ As they proclaim the Christ of the Kingdom and the hope for the kingdom, they suffer with the world in its passion as they seek the common future of both them and the world in the kingdom of God.

¹²⁰ *CPS*, 122-23; cf. Bauckham 1995:130.

¹²¹ *CPS*, 123.

¹²² This is especially seen in The Lord’s Supper and Baptism, the former is “the feast of his presence ... surrounded by the remembrance of his death and the expectation of his coming,” and in baptism people are “baptized into his death, so they may walk in new life, just as Christ has been raised.” (*CPS*, 124)

¹²³ *CPS*, 125.

¹²⁴ This dual emphasis is the structuring principle for the final two chapters of *CPS*.

¹²⁵ *CPS*, 124.

b. The Church and the Presence of Christ among the Poor

However, the church can only unite itself to and exist in the apostolic presence of the exalted Christ when it unites itself with those among whom the crucified one has promised to be present, with his hidden presence among the poor, only perceptible “in the path of suffering of the one who told the story: the way to Golgotha trodden by the hungry, thirsty, naked prisoner, the Son of man from Nazareth.”¹²⁶

It is only as such that the church can really be the church because “then ... with its mission” the church is “present where Christ awaits it, amid the downtrodden, the sick and the captives. The apostolate says what the church is. The least of Christ’s brethren say where the church belongs.”¹²⁷ Although traditionally often separated,¹²⁸ the vitality of the church is dependent upon that Christ’s kerygmatic presence in word and sacrament takes place in Christ’s hidden but anticipatory presence among the poor because “if the church appeals to the crucified and risen Christ, must it not represent this double brotherhood of Christ in itself, and be present with word and Spirit, sacrament, fellowship and all creative powers among the poor, the hungry and the captives.”¹²⁹ For the church to be the church its active apostolic mission, its proclamation of the world in the future of the risen Christ, must be united precisely with how the kingdom is present in the sign of the cross among the victims of the world in the power of the Spirit.

Thus, while the apostolate sets out the particular identity of the church in the world as it is based on Christ and exists for his kingdom, Christ’s presence among the poor shows how the church exist for the future of the whole world in a partisan way. It can only seek the welfare of all by seeking the justice for the victims with whom Jesus identified on the cross and among whom he is now present as the eschatological judge.¹³⁰ It is precisely here that the church then also unites itself to the places where the Spirit enters the fundamental contradiction of the world in order to keep the whole world open to its future in the kingdom.

¹²⁶ *CPS*, 126; see *CPS*, 126-30 on Moltmann’s view of Christ’s presence among the poor.

¹²⁷ *CPS*, 129.

¹²⁸ See *CPS*, 128-29.

¹²⁹ *CPS*, 129.

¹³⁰ *CrG*, 53.

c. The Church Oriented toward Christ's Parousia

Christ's promised presence in the apostolate and among the poor is his identification in history with something other than himself, both of which anticipate his promised presence in the parousia, when he comes in glory and is universally manifested in his own person.¹³¹ Although this coming in glory cannot be conceived of since it has not yet occurred, it can now be anticipated since it will be the fulfilment of what is experienced in the apostolate and among the poor.¹³² The church's apostolic proclamation among, with and for the poor receives its shape from the hope for the kingdom precisely because as it unites itself with how Christ is present in the world it is oriented toward his coming in the kingdom which is anticipated in his presence in history, and as such exists as "fragments and anticipations of his kingdom."¹³³

We note two implications of this for the church. First, it places the church in a dialectic relationship to the future coming of Christ. On the one hand, the provisional nature in which Christ is present to the church exists in a dynamic that is oriented toward his coming glory. On the other, precisely because of this, the coming one is present in an anticipatory sense in the apostolate and among the poor. In this way the church is always rendered in relation to the coming one but is also a real anticipation of his coming.¹³⁴ Second, precisely because it is oriented toward this future, it cannot limit its mode of activity to its own interests and preservation but seek the places where the Lordship of Christ is experienced and the activity of the Spirit is manifested. As such the church that receives its shape from the hope of the coming of Christ and the transformation of the world by the Spirit,

finds itself on the path traced by this history of God's dealings with the world, and it discovers itself as one element in the movements of the divine sending, gathering together and experience. It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfil to the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church, creating a church as it goes on its way.... If the church understands itself, with all its tasks and powers, in the Spirit and against the horizon of the Spirit's history, then it

¹³¹ On Christ's parousia, see *CPS*, 130-32.

¹³² It is crucial for Moltmann that future coming in glory is anticipated both in the apostolate and among the poor because without the latter the church "would not be able to expect the one who was crucified in the coming Lord" and without the former "the church would all too easily wait for the coming Lord as an apocalyptic angel of revenge on behalf of those who are oppressed on earth. The fellowship of Christ lives simultaneously in the presence of the exalted one and of the one who was humiliated. Because of that it expects from his appearance in glory the end of the history of suffering and the consummation of the history of liberation." (*CPS*, 132)

¹³³ *CPS*, 132.

¹³⁴ *CPS*, 132.

also understands its particularity as one element in the power of the Spirit and has no need to maintain its special power and its special charges with absolute and self-destructive claims.¹³⁵

d. The Apostolic Church of the One, Holy and Catholic Kingdom

The relational identity of the church, both her communion with Christ in the Spirit and the various relationships in which she stands in the world as she exists for the coming of his kingdom shape Moltmann's interpretation of the confession of her as "the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church."

Emphasising the location of this confession in the creed, Moltmann argues that the church receives her attributes from the activity of Christ in the working of the Spirit.¹³⁶ These attributes then are first christological and intrinsically related to his mission.¹³⁷ Therefore, they are also statements of hope, anticipating what the church is becoming as the Spirit opens her to her future in the kingdom, as well as statements of action, what the church seeks as it lives toward both hers and the world's future in the kingdom.¹³⁸

The first three are eternal designations of the coming kingdom. As such, they are not self-contained characteristics of the church but of the destiny of the whole world in the kingdom. Therefore, the church can only be the *one* true church as she, in solidarity with the poor, builds partnerships with others for their common future in the kingdom.¹³⁹ The church is one when she is united in the fellowship of Christ and strives for the coming unity of the world in the kingdom of God.¹⁴⁰ Therefore, she can only be *catholic*, whole, in partisan partnerships. Since her mission is one element in the broader mission of Christ, she must build partnerships with others other in her life for the kingdom, first with Israel, on whom her relationships with all others is patterned.¹⁴¹ But precisely because the way of the Lordship of Christ now present among the poor in the power of the Spirit, these must be partisan coalitions with and on behalf of the poor and oppressed.¹⁴² It is precisely in this life with the poor that the *holiness* of the kingdom becomes manifest in the church. As a *communio peccatorum*

¹³⁵ CPS, 64-65.

¹³⁶ CPS, 338.

¹³⁷ CPS, 338.

¹³⁸ CPS, ca. 339-40.

¹³⁹ CPS, 345-46.

¹⁴⁰ CPS, 342-47.

¹⁴¹ CPS, 350-51.

¹⁴² CPS, 351-52.

the church confesses her sin and guilt that are grounded in the world that is passing away but as the *communio sanctorum* it is oriented toward the redemption of the world when it is predicated on the holiness of God.¹⁴³ As such, the church is holy in her poverty. It is as she confesses her own poverty and engages herself among the poor that she is oriented in hope toward the holiness of God that will redeem the world.

While the unity, catholicity and holiness of the church are predicates of the kingdom, the apostolate is a designation *for* the kingdom.¹⁴⁴ As such, as we have already noted, it is a designation of the church's particular role toward the kingdom. It is her apostolic charge that defines her unique relationship to the kingdom. Her mission is, in her praxical witness, to reveal to the world how its future lies in the coming Lordship of the crucified one who was raised; by her following the fundamental movements of her own Lord in the world, she shows the world how its coming Lord is already being manifested in it. Precisely because of this, the church can never be the triumphalist partner of the victors of history but is always inescapably lead "into tribulation, contradiction, and suffering."¹⁴⁵ As such, she is not only determined by the hope of the coming of the raised one but also in the actual discipleship of the crucified one.¹⁴⁶

3. The Church in the Mission of the Kingdom

The unique role as well as the church's partnerships in the mission of the kingdom is especially well seen in Moltmann's understanding of interreligious dialogue. In distinction to what Moltmann calls the church's quantitative mission as planting churches and bringing people to the Christian faith, Moltmann emphasises what he sees as its qualitative mission.¹⁴⁷ In the latter, the church attends to "the qualitative attention to life's atmosphere."¹⁴⁸ This happens in the church's dialogue

¹⁴³ CPS, 354-55.

¹⁴⁴ See CPS, 357, on how Moltmann relates these.

¹⁴⁵ CPS, 361.

¹⁴⁶ CPS, 361.

¹⁴⁷ CPS, 152. Although he does not emphasise it, Moltmann cannot abandon this quantitative mission of the church. In a later essay, Moltmann first notes the tension he experiences between the life found in other religions and his own commitment to Christ (GSS, 226), and seeks to resolve this by proposing an inter-religious dialogue that is oriented toward discerning the possibilities for life in each others' religion, but, and this is not entirely clear, in such a way that each, within their own religious context, "is called by Christ, and loves life, and helps to work for the kingdom of God." (GSS, 243)

¹⁴⁸ CPS, 152.

with the religions, where the purpose of this dialogue is not to convert but the reciprocal cross-fertilisation of potentialities for the Kingdom. Since Christianity is only one movement toward the coming kingdom, her dialogue with other religions is a recognition of the “creative need for the other,”¹⁴⁹ that it is only as our eyes are opened up to the relationships of each other to the kingdom that we can attain to our common future in it. In this dialogue, as the church of the crucified one, the church will always seek to speak from the context of the vulnerable and the poor, those on the social margins.¹⁵⁰ The particular role of the apostolic church in this dialogue is to find ways in which it is reasonable for others, within the framework of their own religions, to embrace faith in Christ.¹⁵¹ However, since the religions have their own future in the kingdom, the church will seek to do so without trying to make them the church.¹⁵² In the same way it will seek to incorporate other religions’ potentialities for the kingdom without denying its own concrete relationship to the kingdom.¹⁵³

4. Conclusion

Drawing these strands together, what can we say about the church’s relationship to the coming kingdom and its paradoxical presence in the world? First, for Moltmann, the church cannot be seen as the presence of the kingdom in history but rather within the anticipatory forms it takes where the hidden presence of Christ and the Spirit is experienced. Second, in order to exist as such, the church must not only unite itself to the presence of the exalted Christ in the apostolate, but must carry out the apostolic charge with and on behalf of the poor among whom the crucified one is present. Third, as such, the church exists in the dialectic of Christ and his kingdom; she finds her identity in Christ as her eschatological foundation and therefore finds her whole existence oriented toward the coming of his kingdom. Fourth, since the church is only one of many movements of the kingdom, she can only attain to her confessional identity as she enters in partnerships with others who seek the justice of the kingdom in the world. Fifth, her unique relationship to the kingdom is the way in

¹⁴⁹ *CPS*, 159.

¹⁵⁰ *CPS*, 162.

¹⁵¹ *CPS*, 162.

¹⁵² *CPS*, 162-63.

¹⁵³ *CPS*, 163. See *CPS*, 163-89, on how he develops the church’s relationship to other political, social and cultural entities and movements in a similar way

which the promised hope of Israel is revealed to the whole world in her praxical witness.

F. Conclusion

Of Christian ethics, which of course cannot be seen in separation from the kingdom, Moltmann says that it is “christologically founded, eschatologically oriented, and pneumatologically implemented.”¹⁵⁴ Using this template, we will try to bring the various threads of the preceding discussion together.

If the cross revealed that God’s lordship over the world must be seen as the paradoxical power revealed in the cross through which God orients the world toward its freedom in communion with Himself, then the actual lordship is experienced in the present as the reign of Christ. It is in the incarnation of the Son that the kingdom arrives in the world, and in history it is then experienced as the lordship of Christ. Therefore, in history, those who have been infected by the kingdom, align their life according to the remembrance of how the kingdom appeared in and around Jesus. The Christian ethics of the Kingdom is founded christologically precisely because the reign of God in history is the reign of Jesus as the risen Lord.

The kingdom of God is present in the world eschatologically. This does not only mean that it is oriented toward its own future, but that its very presence is eschatological, i.e. it is not present as it will be but only as an anticipation of how it will come. “These anticipations, however, are not identical with the kingdom of God, but point beyond themselves to an always fuller presence of God and to the final eschatological fulfilment when God will be all in all.”¹⁵⁵ Thus, the dialectic between the future of the kingdom that cannot be identified as anything in the world, and a real anticipatory presence of it in the world is absolutely fundamental to Moltmann. Since it is a real anticipatory presence, we already experience the kingdom now in love “and creative discipleship. But as long as the dead are dead and we cannot achieve justice, love remains fragmentary. All its works remain in need of redemption.”¹⁵⁶ Therefore, an ethics based in the kingdom is always restless, constantly seeking new ways of actualising the ultimate in the provisional. As such, Christian ethics is

¹⁵⁴ *OHD*, 109.

¹⁵⁵ Rasmusson 1995:86.

¹⁵⁶ *OHD*, 109.

fundamentally eschatologically oriented because it is predicated on the eschatologically oriented kingdom of Christ.

The presence of the kingdom is pneumatologically implemented. It is by the Spirit that God can be present to his absence as revealed in the relationship between the Father and Son on the cross. This is the pneumatological pivot that defines the kingdom's anticipatory presence in the ministry of Jesus. If the cross was in God from eternity, then the paradoxical and anticipatory presence of the kingdom in the world is from beginning to end implemented by the Spirit of life who turns creation toward eternal life in God. Christian ethics is therefore fundamentally pneumatologically implemented and universal in its scope because it is predicated upon the way in which God's reign, his presence to his kingdom in the world, is pneumatologically implemented.

The presence of the kingdom of God in the world then must be seen within the "eschatological history of God," that history "which is aligned towards the future through God's calling and election" which finds its fulfilment in "the coming redemption of the world ... in the universal messianic kingdom of peace"¹⁵⁷ The future of this kingdom is free and reciprocal freedom in God, and its presence is the rule of God that makes men and women free from every conceivable bondage and orients them toward this eschatological freedom. To be caught up in this rule is to be seized by the process of resurrection where

to act ethically in a Christian sense means to participate in God's history in the midst of our own history, to integrate ourselves into the comprehensive process of God's liberation of the world, and to discover our own role in this according to our own calling and abilities. A messianically oriented ethics makes people into co-operators for the kingdom of God. It assumes that the kingdom of God is already here in a concrete, if hidden, form. Christian ethics integrates suffering and ailing people into God's history with this world; it is fulfilled by the hope of the completion of God's history in the world by God himself.¹⁵⁸

IV. The Contribution: The Presence of the Coming Kingdom in History

Some of the significant contributions of the relational aspect of the kingdom in Moltmann's thought emerge when one considers how they overcome recurring critiques levelled at the singularly eschatological focus of the *Theology of Hope*.

¹⁵⁷ WJC, 70.

¹⁵⁸ OHD, 111.

First, if the God of the kingdom is not “in us or over us but always only before us,”¹⁵⁹ then God’s future and his Kingdom is now only present in the exalted Christ while the world still exists in the cross, characterised by his radical absence.¹⁶⁰ Although Moltmann affirms in *Theology of Hope* that the kingdom has in Jesus broken into history,¹⁶¹ it is as he turns to its relational aspect that he shows how the kingdom is present as the hidden, paradoxical and anticipatory reign of God in the world. The cross does not only reveal the fundamental absence of God in the world, but also, precisely in doing so, reveals God’s paradoxical presence in it as he turns it toward its redemption.¹⁶²

Second, a closely related critique questions whether any real Christian praxis is possible if there is a radical discontinuity between the future and the present.¹⁶³ Moltmann accounts for this critique in his pneumatological understanding of God’s presence in the world. In the Spirit, the force that will transform the world is already present in it and is orienting it towards its transformation in the arrival of God’s uninhibited presence. Therefore, Christians who anticipate the future kingdom can actually ‘plan’ for it within the possibilities that are opened up by the presence of the Spirit. The praxis that finds its foundation in the hope revealed in the resurrection is also a participation in the process of resurrection that transforms the world.

Third, a common critique of not only *Theology of Hope* but of Moltmann generally is his often abstract understanding of Christian ethics¹⁶⁴ that tends to see leftist political ideals as self-evident.¹⁶⁵ Although this a weakness that runs through most of Moltmann’s writings, his discussions on how the kingdom has appeared in the person and history of Jesus provide an important internal corrective since this

¹⁵⁹ *TH*, 16.

¹⁶⁰ Schuurman 1987:46; Morse 1988:144-46; Fries 1967:368-75. This is also a common critique in two collections on his early thought. (Marsch 1967; Herzog 1970) Barth, in a personal letter to Moltmann, pointedly asks, “does your theology of hope really differ at all from the baptized principle of hope of Mr. Bloch?” (Bromiley 1981:175)

¹⁶¹ *TH*, 212, 216, 222.

¹⁶² *CrG*, 276-78; cf. “Homecoming,” 279.

¹⁶³ Although Moltmann claims in *TH* that the resurrection leads to a praxis that is oriented toward its future (223), he does not sufficiently account for how this is possible. (Gilkey 1976:234-35; Rasmusson 1995:66; Morse 1988:149; see Hart 1999 on a discussion of this dynamic in relation to the imagination)

¹⁶⁴ Chapman 1983:458-59.

¹⁶⁵ Rasmusson 1995:66-68.

christological strand in his theology informs ethics from the concrete biblical narratives.¹⁶⁶

In Moltmann's mature thought, the historical and relational aspects of the kingdom are intrinsically related. The hope for the kingdom as the goal of history is "the rule of God in the kingdom of God as a future transcending the system." This hope is what gives the divinely opened possibilities within the system their orientation and thus gives Christian praxis its direction. The kingdom's presence is the redemptive force of God within history that turns creation toward this future, "the kingdom of God in the liberating rule of God as a transforming power immanent in that system." Without this the future hoped for would be but "a powerless dream."¹⁶⁷ Precisely because of this, prayer and doxological anticipation for the future of the kingdom is inseparable from the obedience of faith that resists anything in history that counters the kingdom, its "godless and inhuman relationships."¹⁶⁸ Moltmann illustrates this dynamic in the image of a seed:

Being a seed, it is also *the object of hope*, but a hope firmly founded on experience and remembrance: the seed wants to grow, the one who has been found wants to return home, those who have been healed want to rise from the dead, and people liberated from some compulsion want to live in the country of freedom. Just because in the companionship of Jesus the kingdom of God is experienced in the present, its completion is hoped for in the future.¹⁶⁹

Precisely in placing the church in this dialectic of the kingdom, seeing the Christ in which it appeared as her central foundation and its future fulfilment as the horizon church exists toward, Moltmann is able to develop a dynamic ecclesiology in which the church is always christologically shaped but also constantly reformed by the hope for the kingdom. Since she receives her identity from another and her reason for existence in what is other than herself, she can never be self-serving or self-contained. Rather,

All inherent interests of the Church itself—maintaining the status quo, extending influence—must be subordinated to the interests of the Kingdom of God, otherwise they are unjustified. If the spirit and the institutions of the Church correspond to the Kingdom of God, then it is the Church of Christ. If they contradict the Kingdom of God, then the Church loses its right to existence and will become a superfluous religious community. The Kingdom of God orientation of the Church today consists of proclaiming the gospel

¹⁶⁶ See e.g. *WJC*, 126, on how he relates the Sermon on the Mount to Christian ethics. So Rasmussen 1995:70, although he is unduly sceptical about how this confessional strand in Moltmann's thought is able to function as an internal corrective.

¹⁶⁷ *CPS*, 190.

¹⁶⁸ *CPS*, 190.

¹⁶⁹ *JCTW*, 19.

of the Kingdom of God to all people and first to the poor in this world in order to awaken faith which lifts up and makes certain.¹⁷⁰

V. Problems

However, there are also some basic weaknesses in Moltmann's account of the relational aspect of the kingdom. Here we will first consider how the flipside of the transposition of the logic of redemption we observed in the last chapter is the kenotic way in which Moltmann relates God and his creation. Next we will consider how this has some unfortunate implications for his understanding of God's rule. We will conclude with certain flaws in how Moltmann relates the church and the kingdom.

A. Deepening of Transposition

As we turn to how God is present to his creation we see that the flipside of the transposition of the biblical logic of redemption is the kenotic way in which Moltmann accounts for God's relationship to creation. The god-forsaken place in which creation exists is a space God has ceded within himself. The contradiction in creation finds its counterpart in God's own kenosis for creation.¹⁷¹ The history of redemption is therefore the way in which God overcomes this double contradiction, how he who made communion with creation possible by ceding a space in himself for it orients himself toward the fulfilment of that relationship, when creation is transformed to be able to give God the space from which he will exist.

This has some significant implications for the problems we noted in Moltmann's transposition of the logic of redemption. First, the universalist trajectory in Moltmann's theology becomes a necessity in the end. Since all creation exists in God and its life-force is the Spirit of God, if anything is lost, then something within and of God is lost. And then God cannot be fully God.¹⁷² So, if God is to remain fully the God He is, in his coming, all that has ever lived must be vivified to its every lived moment.¹⁷³ In addition to the weak biblical and traditional basis for a necessary universalism, to make what is hoped for a necessity seems to rob humanity of

¹⁷⁰ "Jesus and the Kingdom of God," 16. It is within this dialectic that Moltmann's political theology is to be placed. Since the church exists for the future kingdom it cannot pledge its allegiance to any earthly kingdom; rather, as the church of the crucified one who identified himself with the victims of history, it must see her place "in the framework of the divine history of liberation." (CPS, 18) For an overview and critique of Moltmann's early political theology, see Hunsinger 1973a and 1973b.

¹⁷¹ *GiC*, 88.

¹⁷² *CoG*, 132.

¹⁷³ *CoG*, xiii, 294-95.

precisely the freedom that Moltmann is elsewhere eager to protect, it forecloses the possibility of the unthinkable, to reject grace. Therefore, although Moltmann rightly points us to the universality of the hope born out of the cross and resurrection of Christ, it is equally necessary to maintain that men and women can ultimately reject the hope opened up in the Christ event.¹⁷⁴ But in the way Moltmann postulates the God-world relation, this is a possibility that cannot be left open without God ceasing to be God.

Second, because the status of God as God is dependent upon his overcoming of the contradiction that he freely endures for the sake of creation, it is difficult to see how God is not in need of redemption and therefore contingent upon his creation. Although Moltmann at times shies away from this,¹⁷⁵ he elsewhere seems to affirm this is the case.¹⁷⁶ God, in order to be God, is contingent on the future of his creation. If this is the case, it becomes difficult to see how God's history is rooted in the freedom of God's love primarily and not at least equally fundamentally in God's own need. Moltmann seems to acknowledge this when he says that creation is "bound up with the process of God's deliverance from the suffering of his love."¹⁷⁷ Since Moltmann, within his kenotic understanding of God's relation to his creation, can at best, claim that this need in God is rooted in God's own deliberation, he cannot affirm God's freedom from creation unreservedly, that God remains God whether creation exists or not—or will exist or not.

This results in certain other problems as well. First, it is difficult to accommodate God's need of redemption, even if a voluntarily adopted condition, to any kind of notion of God's perfection. Just as he is unable to affirm the unqualified goodness of creation, so neither can he affirm God's perfection without qualification since God's eschatological perfection stands in contrast to and overcomes how he

¹⁷⁴ O'Donnell (1998:78-79) notes how von Balthasar strikes this balance by both affirming that in Christ's death for all the possibility of hell is taken away, "hell has been emptied", and yet "the frightening possibility of rejecting God's only Son" remains and therefore hell is a possibility. "God takes our freedom seriously and it is possible to say no to Christ. But we must hope that no one has done this. We must hope that all men and women are saved. So Balthasar does not teach that hell is empty but he does affirm that we must hope that it is."

¹⁷⁵ "God's Kenosis," 148.

¹⁷⁶ E.g. in *CoG*, 333, he says: "If the necessity of sanctifying his Name springs from God's primordial self-restriction, then God has made himself in need of redemption through human beings."

¹⁷⁷ *TKG*, 60.

now exists in a contradiction.¹⁷⁸ Second, the distinction between God and creation which Moltmann affirms seems to be diluted when the being and identity of God are dependent upon the fate of his creatures.¹⁷⁹ Third, in the kenotic way Moltmann interprets God and his relationship to creation from the cross, he so emphasises the passive way in which God suffers in solidarity with his creation that the at least equally strong emphasis on God's transcendent holiness that at times is actively set against the world is lost; he says

God acts in the history of nature and human beings through his patient and silent presence, by way of which he gives those he has created space to unfold, time to develop, and power for their own movement. We look in vain for God in the history of nature or in human history if what we are looking for are special divine interventions.”¹⁸⁰

This may indeed be one of the ways God acts but if the history of salvation takes its cues from the biblical witness, this is hardly the only way as a mere glance of Israel's history with her God bears abundant witness to!

B. The Disappearance of God's Sovereignty

Moltmann has been critical of language of rule and obedience throughout his authorship. From early on he has set his own social trinitarianism in stark contrast to what he sees as a “monotheistic-monarchical cosmology” where the one heavenly monarch corresponds to the one emperor and his universal rule.¹⁸¹ And although in *Trinity and the Kingdom of God* demand and obedience have a positive role, they do so only as the provisional form it takes in the freedom of the servant. It serves a

¹⁷⁸ A related question is whether the way he correlates the contradictions in God and creation renders God both co-temporal and co-spatial with his creation. On other problems in relation to space and time, see Torrance 1997.

¹⁷⁹ A related concern is how one can account for creation in the eschaton. If God has to cede a space within himself for creation to exist, then how can there be any place for it in the eschaton? Would it not cease to exist or be absorbed into God? If Moltmann's logic would lead to this it is difficult to see how the God-creation relation he affirms (cf. *GiC*, 89, 184) can be maintained. Bouma-Prediger (1997:80) says: “While Moltmann claims that the eschatological kingdom “does not imply a pantheistic dissolution of creation in God” (*GiC*, 89), it is not evident that his doctrine of creation actually allows him to preserve the otherness of God or affirm the integrity of creation.” (cf. Walsh 1987:75)

¹⁸⁰ “God's Kenosis,” 149.

¹⁸¹ Moltmann is heavily indebted in his critique of monotheism to Erik Peterson's “Der Monotheismus als Politisches Problem,” (Peterson 1951:145-147) whose basic thesis he adopts, that monotheism is fundamentally problematic because it functions to justify monarchical political power (“Dem *einen* König auf Erden entspricht der *eine* Gott, der *eine* König in Himmel und der *eine* königliche Nomos und Logos” [Peterson 1951:91]). Peterson claimed that this view of God was not native to Christianity but developed as an apologetic accommodation to the Roman empire, seen most clearly in Eusebius. (Peterson 1951:89). The formulation of trinitarian thought, especially as seen in the Cappadocians, forms an important corrective to this trend. For a brief introduction to Peterson's thesis, see Ruggieri 1985:17-18. For Moltmann's indebtedness to Peterson, see *TKG*, 192-197 (cf. “Christian Theology;” “Inviting Unity,” 50-57; cf. O'Donnell 1983:158).

temporary function in the relationship between God and his people which is oriented toward the experience of mutual friendship. In later writings, reflecting an increased sensitivity especially to feminist and ecological critiques of power, he has increasingly substituted such language for ideas of reciprocity and mutual communion.¹⁸² Thus, in his later work, although the Kingdom of God remains a pivotal symbol in his thought, talk about God's sovereignty and human obedience have all but disappeared.¹⁸³

These concerns are certainly not without biblical precedent. Israel's kingship was initially seen as a compromise of the ideal of Israel's existence as God's people (I Sam 8:1-9), a critique that functions to relativise the idea of kingship throughout the Old Testament (Deut 17:14-20). In the New Testament, before any functional structuring of the community, churches are first a band of brothers and sisters gathered around Jesus in which there is "no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28) and where hierarchical titles as Lord and Rabbi are abandoned (Matt 23:6-9).

However, this diminishing of God's sovereignty in Moltmann's theology has some significant problems of its own. First, although it can account for the egalitarian trajectories in Scripture, it does so in a very different way. The biblical vision of the community of the free, perhaps envisioned most strikingly in Rev 22:5 as a community in which all have become rulers and none are ruled is precisely predicated upon the absolute sovereignty of God. The critique of monarchy in I Sam 8 is based on that God is Israel's only true king.¹⁸⁴ Any form of human leadership is provisional and functional precisely because the position of absolute monarch is already filled by God. Similarly, the prophets severely criticised the tyrants of their own day on basis

¹⁸² See e.g. his very personal account on his interaction with feminist theology in *EiT*, 268-92; for his ecological concerns, in addition to *GIC*, see *GSS*, 92-116, where emphasises the link between modern notions of God's sovereignty and the present ecological crisis.

¹⁸³ See e.g. *SW*, 64-66.

¹⁸⁴ Otto 2001:296 also notes that the reverse was the case, that although Israel's neighbours were polytheistic they had strong monarchical social systems. Otto, however, wrongly accuses Moltmann of seeing God as a "regulative idea to spur the transformation of contemporary inhumanity into future community." (2001:303, 302; cf. Otto 1992:86; Gilbert 1999:172, 78) That Moltmann's theology cannot be reduced to a regulative idea is precisely the fact that although he is perfectly capable of such demythologising (see e.g. "Zwölf Bemerkungen"), he never does so in regard to God, Christ and the resurrection.

of God's sovereignty.¹⁸⁵ This is the same logic we find in the preaching of Jesus when he instructs his disciples—they are not to call anyone Rabbi or Lord because God is the only true Teacher and the only true Lord. This seems also to undergird Paul's logic in his statement of the abolition of the privileging that is based in social, cultural, ethnic, and gender distinction; now all have equal status because they are one in the Christ who is the sole ordering authority of the community.¹⁸⁶ The Scriptural witness does not fit into and thus questions the dichotomy Moltmann sets up between oppressive structures warranted in God's absolute sovereignty and the 'democratic' communion informed by God's almighty love.¹⁸⁷

Second, while Moltmann's vision of the way God's rule is oriented toward the freedom of humanity rightly emphasises how Jesus radically turns notion of power and rule on their head in his proclamation and own example,¹⁸⁸ this, neither in the Gospels or elsewhere in Scripture, negates the fact that God not only asserts the right of a sovereign but also exercises this right in decisive acts of judgment and redemption. For the biblical witnesses the revelation in Christ that God's rule is

¹⁸⁵ O'Donnell 1988:22.

¹⁸⁶ In Gal 3:28, the social stratification implied in Paul's list are rendered invalid because "all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

¹⁸⁷ On the problems of Peterson's thesis that Moltmann relies on, see Ruggieri 1985:18-20 who notes that K. Hungar's and A. Schindler's extensive study on Peterson (Schindler 1978) has devastated his thesis, "of Peterson's historical argument, hardly one stone remains on another." (Ruggieri 1985:18) The most fundamental flaw in Peterson's thesis, Ruggieri argues, is that historically there simply is no easy divide between how monotheism and trinitarian theology have been used politically, the latter has also been used to justify the use of state power, and the former to precisely critique the absolutisation of political power, as seen both in Islamic mystical tradition and in thinkers as Buber. Wanting to retain the urgency of Peterson's concern, Ruggieri notes that Eusebius' problem was not his monotheism but his over-realised eschatology, that the hope of the prophets was seen to be fulfilled in the Roman empire, (Ruggieri 1985:20) and that "it is not monotheism as such, but a particular *use* of it that makes it a function of a view of society in which order and the common good are assured by a sovereign will (whether this be of a ruler, a group or a class)." Precisely because of this, no conception of the Christian God is immune from any ideological framework that seeks to tear it "from its mystical horizon and functionally" tie it "to an ethical outlook." (Ruggieri 1985:21) Ruggieri suggests that it is precisely through an apophtic corrective to our understanding of God that such reductions are avoidable. One wonders whether some of Moltmann's problem are precisely due to an over-confidence in what we can know of God's immanent nature. For example, in "Inviting Unity," 57-58, he suggests that in the revelation of the Trinity from the communion of Father and Son "the one-sided patterns of domination and subjection are replaced by forms of community based on free agreement." Now this may be an admirable ideal, but if we pose *our* ideal as a necessary corollary to what we believe is the case of Trinity we are close to the same problem that Moltmann critiques, we have rooted a historically contingent human ideal that may seem self-evident to us (and who today dares critique democracy?) in the nature of God.

¹⁸⁸ Consider, e.g., how in the context of his own approaching death, Jesus, in Luke 22, points to himself as the example of how the disciples are not to be like the rulers of the world, but rather as Jesus, the one who is placed high is the servant of all. The radical nature of Jesus proclamation here is contextually emphasised as Luke places this teaching around the very table where Jesus has just anticipated his own death as a death for them.

fundamentally oriented toward the fulfilment of human freedom does not negate that it nevertheless is a rule in which the sovereign orders the realm over which he rules according to his purposes, whether that is in judgment or salvation. For them, the centre of the divine rule as servanthood does not negate the universal horizon of that rule as the undisputed claim of a holy God to sovereignty over his creation. In chapter 6 of this thesis we will try to show how the centrality of the Passion and the sovereignty of God that demands obedience are not irreconcilable but belong intrinsically together.

Third, while Moltmann's account of freedom in the kingdom of God can account well for the provisionality of any form of authority as well as how it ought to function for the liberation of people, it cannot easily account for the actuality of this authority. That is, if God's rule in the end is simply reduced to his passion, his patient waiting for the other, it is hard to see how the conferral of any functional power to a provisional authority can ever be legitimate.

Fourth, the way in which Moltmann grounds the ideal of a reciprocal community in what he believes is the case of the inner-trinitarian communion seems to imply a necessary correlation between God and his creatures. However, if one views creation as the free creation of God and not as an emanation or necessary counterpart to God, then such a correlation between the inner life of God and the human community is not self-evident. What human beings are is not predicated first upon who God is but whom he has purposed them to be. Human beings as all other creatures are embodied intentions. This is not to deny that there are correspondences between God and humanity, the language of the *imago dei* calls for that, but that these correspondences are grounded in God's resolve. If the relationship between God and humanity, as well as the whole created order, is grounded first in His purposes, then the fundamental relationship between God and creation must be seen in the economy, not first in the immanent Trinity.¹⁸⁹ In chapter 7 of this thesis we will return to these questions, trying to show how the sovereignty of God can be emphatically affirmed without a diminishing of human freedom if we ground the God-world relation in the

¹⁸⁹ In a similar vein, Deane-Drummond (1997:223) notes that Moltmann "tends to indulge in too much speculation about the inner life of the Trinity in a way which does not seem to take account of the limits to our use of analogy in describing these relationships."

relationship between the two natures of Christ rather than in the inner-trinitarian communion.

C. The Non-Exclusive Relationship of the Church to the Kingdom

Although it is crucial for Moltmann that the church of Christ exists as an anticipation of his kingdom, it is equally important for him not to link the church with the kingdom in an exclusive way. As the Spirit of Christ is at work both within and outside the church, the kingdom is not limited to the church, but is present in the world just as it is present in the church.

A primary motivation for Moltmann's emphasis on the non-exclusive relationship between the church and the kingdom is the devastating triumphalism that this has often led to.¹⁹⁰ In order to overcome this Moltmann argues that rather than seeing a sharp division between the Spirit's "world-sustaining operation" and his "activity in redemption," the two should be closely linked together. If this is recognised, "co-operation with people of different religions and secular ideologies" is made possible without the loss of the church's identity nor the need to draw up lines of demarcation.¹⁹¹ Although Moltmann's concern to overcome Christian triumphalism in both the ecclesial and secular realm is laudable and necessary, the way he resolves this has also some fundamental problems. Here we will consider how these are evident in his understanding of mission.

First, there seems to be a fundamental tension between what Moltmann labels quantitative and qualitative mission. In its qualitative mission the church ought not to draw people into the church since this would fundamentally both compromise the nature of the inter-religious dialogue and deny the religions' own particular relationship to the coming kingdom. However, in its quantitative mission this is precisely what the church does, call people away from their former ways and let their life be fundamentally reoriented in a commitment to Christ within ecclesial communities gathered in his presence. While Moltmann's understanding of qualitative mission may seem comprehensible in places where the church is already established it seems to negate the validity of the missional approach that actually established the church there.

¹⁹⁰ See his criticism of political and clerical monotheism in *TKG*, 192-202 and of ecclesial millenarianism in *CoG*, 178-84.

¹⁹¹ *CPS*, 192.

Second, if the church consists of those who have come to faith in and commit themselves to the way of Christ, then how, as Moltmann also claims, can those of other religions who within their own frame of reference become convinced of faith in Christ not become part of the church.¹⁹² The iconoclasm of the cross that Moltmann so rightly aims at the church must have the same devastating but redemptive effect on the religions as well. While there may be much in them that is retained and which may enrich the church as it spreads in the world, any religion that finds faith in Jesus dies to itself and rises from the waters of its baptism into the living community gathered around Jesus, which is the church.

Third this leads us to a fundamental tension in Moltmann's christological and pneumatological accounts of the kingdom. Christologically he argues:

The peculiar feature of his proclamation of the kingdom lies in the fact that nearness to, entry into, and inheritance of, the kingdom are bound by him to the decision of the hearers and their attitude to his own person. The future of the divine lordship is immediately bound up with the mystery of his own presence.¹⁹³

This stands in tension to his pneumatological account where he kingdom in "everything that ministers to life," and therefore among all who do so.¹⁹⁴ It seems that if Moltmann is to maintain his position he needs to do some major adjustments to some of his core Christological confession since if these are maintained, it is hard to see how the church as the kerygmatic community committed to him is not also the only community that can lay an exclusive claim to be those who now constitute the anticipatory presence of his kingdom.

¹⁹² See Bauckham's critique (1995:146-50); he concludes: "...in gaining this messianic direction, why should they not also, without forfeiting their distinctive potentialities for the kingdom, come to believe in Jesus as the Messiah of the kingdom? But then, as liberating movements of the Spirit, oriented to the kingdom and confessing Jesus Christ as Lord, they will, by Moltmann's definition, be his church."

¹⁹³ *TH*, 217-18.

¹⁹⁴ This fundamental tension can even be seen within particular passages in Moltmann. E.g. in *CPS*, 153-54, he says: "Outside Christ no salvation. Christ has come and was sacrificed for the reconciliation of the whole world. No one is excluded. Outside the salvation that Christ brings to all men there is therefore no church. The visible church is, as Christ's church, the ministry of reconciliation exercised upon the world. Thus the church is to be seen, not as absolute, but in its relationship to the divine reconciler and to reconciled men and women, whatever religion." Although Moltmann rightly points out that the salvation those have found that are in the church is not the church's but Christ's, this passage contains some fundamental logical problems: 1) If Christ was sacrificed for the reconciliation of this world, 2) and if the church is the ministry of reconciliation exercised on the earth, then 3) how can there be reconciled men and women in religions outside the church? Moltmann may reply that the fundamental ministry of reconciliation in the church is the kerygmatic proclamation that Christ reconciles the world to himself. However, if this reconciliation means bringing those near who otherwise are far off in sin, how can such a reconciliation be seen apart from entrance into the community gathered around Jesus? The church's proclamation of reconciliation to the world necessarily implies the movement into the sphere in which that proclamation is pronounced from.

Fourth, however, as Moltmann rightly observes, the Synoptic gospels, not only tie the approaching kingdom to Jesus but also see entrance into the kingdom as dependent upon the reception or rejection of Jesus' message.¹⁹⁵ Although the rest of the New Testament seldom uses the language of the kingdom of God, it reflects the same kind of exclusive relationship between Jesus and those gathered in his name. Redemption is only found in Jesus and is only experienced in the communities that consist of those who have heard and received the message about him. If we understand the fulfilment of this redemption as "the kingdom of God," this would suggest that the church now is the people that experiences his kingdom and are a part of it. They are the 'sphere' in which the kingdom is present in anticipatory ways when Christ is the Lord who is present with them in the Spirit.

Thus, biblical tradition and even fairly important strands of Moltmann's own theology seem to go against his own view of the respective relationships of the church and the world to the kingdom. Precisely because of this it seems that the qualitative mission of the church must always have a quantitative element to it, not because the church believes it is something superior in itself but precisely because it believes that the relationship it stands in, and the only one in which it can stand and be the church, is qualitatively different in its relationship to the kingdom than any other relationship.

We are then lead right back to what Moltmann fundamentally wants to reject, that the church, as the congregations of believers that are gathered around Jesus and committed to and shaped by his person and history, stands in a qualitatively different relationship to the kingdom than any other human institution or social structure. But can such an exclusive relationship between the church and the kingdom be affirmed without relapsing into the triumphalism Moltmann so rightly critiques? If the church is the only "sphere" in which the coming kingdom is present, why should it not seek to enforce it now? And if the kingdom is only experienced in the church, is it not impossible to affirm anything outside it as the workings of the Spirit that orients the world toward its redemption? In our discussion on the relationship between the church and the kingdom in the book of Revelation, we will suggest that such lines of enquiry indeed can account for some of the excesses Moltmann points to without compromising the unique relationship between the kingdom and the church.

¹⁹⁵ WJC, 94ff.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE CRISIS OF THE KINGDOM AND THE BOOK OF REVELATION

I. Crisis and the Kingdom of God in Moltmann

Considering our discussion on the post-war context that forms the backdrop for the origins of Moltmann's theology, we can discern a two-fold crisis which he develops his understanding of the kingdom in response to. First, is the devastating failure of modern Protestant notions of the kingdom and their secular counterparts.¹ The dream that the kingdom of God was progressing to its fulfilment in European civilisation went literally up in flames in the two world wars. The enlightened dream of establishing the kingdom on earth with the newly found powers of humanity turned into a nightmare showed what happens when the hope for the kingdom of God migrates to the powers that are. In the second chapter of this thesis we tried to show how Moltmann responds to this crisis in the historical aspect of his understanding of the kingdom. The future of the world in the kingdom of God is not seen at the head of the progress of civilisation but in the resurrection of the crucified one. As such it is a hope in the ruins of history and hope for the victims of history. Second, the flipside of the demise of the kingdom of Cultural Protestantism for Moltmann was the apparent absence of God in the relentless suffering of the world. Where is the God of the kingdom when fire rains on Hamburg, when Hiroshima blows up in an atomic blaze, and when the first people of the kingdom are systematically exterminated in Auschwitz? Theology must come to terms with that "the suffering of a single innocent child is an irrefutable rebuttal of the notion of the almighty and kindly God in heaven."² For Moltmann, as is evident from our discussion of the relational aspect on the kingdom in the third chapter of this thesis, the answer is found in God's paradoxical presence in the cross of Christ. As God has overcome the fundamental condition of the world by entering death on the cross, God is seen to be present in the 'crosses' of history. He is present with the victims of history and precisely in being present to them, opens up the history of the whole world to its eschatological

¹ In the introductory discussion we saw how Moltmann's particular response to this was also responding to the often 'other-worldly' hope of traditional Christianity and the disengagement from history in existential theology.

² TKG, 47.

fulfilment in the coming of his kingdom. The coming of the kingdom of glory is anticipated in God's presence in the passion of the world.

II. Crisis and the Book of Revelation

A. Early Christianity and a Crisis of the Kingdom

Despite the obvious social, cultural and historical differences between the two, Revelation reflects a similar two-fold crisis of the kingdom as we saw in Moltmann.³ First, the emergence of Christianity occurs within an escalating crisis of first century Judaism which resulted in the cataclysmic events of A.D. 70.⁴ If Revelation was written toward the end of the first century, as most commentators assume,⁵ then John writes after the last vestiges of the physical manifestation of Israel as the geopolitical people of God have been demolished.⁶ While the devastation of Jerusalem and the subsequent dispersion of Palestinian Jews could be made sense of as judgment on the compromised state of the current political and religious leadership, the question remained why God would allow a Pagan empire to first occupy the promised land and eventually destroy its religio-political institutions. On one level this crisis was resolved for the early Christians as they believed that Jesus had anticipated the fall of

³ In the following introduction to Revelation, I will only touch on critical concerns of date, authorship, historical setting and genre as they relate directly to the concerns under consideration here. For recent and thorough discussions on various introductory matters, see Beale 1999:3-177 and Aune 1997:xvii-cxxi. For a briefer introduction that also contains a current overview of important works in Revelation research, see Witherington 2003:1-64. On the history of interpretation, see Wainwright 1993; Rowland 1998a:528-556; and Kovacs and Rowland 2004. For a recent survey of methodological developments in the study of Revelation, see Prigent 2001:1-22.

⁴ "The impact of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE on Christians as well as Jews rivals the issue of the Delay of the Parousia as a catalyst for the interpretation of early Christian writings." (Rowland 2002b:296)

⁵ Of the two most common proposals, placing the book either toward the end of Domitian's reign, around A.D. 95, or shortly after Nero's death, around A.D. 68-69, I prefer the former. However, although a Neronic date would change some of the particular ways I will develop my argument, its basic thrust would remain the same. For a succinct overview of the main proposals for the date of Revelation, see Collins 1992:700-701; for the Domitian date see Witherington 2003:4-5, and for recent extensive considerations of the question, see Aune 1997:lvi-lxx; Beale 1999:4-27.

⁶ Although Rev 11:1-2 is most likely to be read metaphorically, it likely also harkens back to the events of A.D. 70, a fact that may be suggested in how Jerusalem is identified as Sodom, another city that was destroyed for its sins. (Witherington 2003:4) Richard (1995:90) suggests that John with the measuring of the temple signifies that the Christian community receives what the temple hierarch could not provide, "save the community." Although the memory of the collapse of Jerusalem is likely in the background her, I find it unlikely that the imagery should be read in the overtly literal terms proposed by certain preterist interpretations of the text. (see e.g. du Rand and Song 2004)

Jerusalem as the consequence for rejecting him⁷ and since they believed that the kingdom was now centred in Jesus and was awaiting its earthly manifestation in his parousia. But on another level, this resolution also intensified the crisis for Christians. If Jesus was the Messiah who had won the pivotal battle of the kingdom at Easter, if he, as this one, was the one through whom the rule of God was exercised, and if the believers in Jesus were the people of this kingdom, why did they repeatedly find themselves on the religious and political margins of society?

Second, and closely related to this concern, is the question of the apparent absence of the rule of God. The reason why the early Christians do not find themselves in the socio-religious centre as befits those who have pledged their unyielding allegiance to the ruler of the cosmos is the lack of any geopolitical manifestation of the rule of God on earth. Although the modern context Moltmann speaks from and responds to often states this question abstractly or conceptually (how can we believe in a God in the midst of suffering?), it is not that different from the concrete question of the absence of an actual manifestation of God's kingdom. Both are deeply concerned with how we can affirm our confession about what we believe is true about God in the midst of a situation that seems to suggest otherwise. In Revelation, the deep pathos of this incongruence is seen in the cry of the martyrs: "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" (6:10)

B. Crisis and Kingdom Language in Revelation

Adela Yarbro Collins says "it was the tension between John's vision of the kingdom of God and his environment that moved him to write his Apocalypse."⁸ This claim is confirmed when we consider how the book employs both the βασιλεία word group⁹ and other political language.¹⁰ "Kingdom" language is used of two distinct

⁷ The transformation of Jerusalem into "Sodom and Egypt" in Rev 11 is closely associated with the death of Jesus in the city, perhaps suggesting that the judgment on Jerusalem is for rejecting Jesus as her Messiah. (cf. Luke 20:41-46; 21:5-36)

⁸ Collins 1984:106.

⁹ βασίλεια (1:6, 9; 5:10; 11:15; 12:10; 16:10; 17:12, 17, 18), βασιλεύω (5:10; 11:15, 17; 19:6; 20:4, 6; 22:5), βασίλευς (1:5; 6:15; 9:11; 10:11; 15:3; 16:12, 14; 17:2, 9, 12 (x2), 17:14, 18; 18:3, 9; 19:16, 18, 19; 21:24), βασιλισσά (18:7).

¹⁰ As we will note in a later chapter, not only do the titles and depictions of God and Christ have strong political overtones, but central to the whole book is a battle between God and the Dragon over the sovereignty of the earthly realm. See e.g. Bauckham 1993a:210-237 for an insightful discussion on the book as a Christian war scroll.

groups, God and his kingdom and the kingdom whose ultimate source of authority is the primordial enemy of God, Satan.¹¹

From the outset of the book God is assumed to be the Creator who is enthroned in heaven¹² and we are told that Jesus is “the ruler of the kings of the earth” (1:5). This picture is sustained throughout: Jesus is the king of kings (17:14; 19:16) whose ultimate rule over the earth alongside God¹³ is anticipated from the outset and is most fully described in the final visions (21:1-22:8).¹⁴ Although the eschatological kingdom covers the whole earth, the only ones who are identified with it in history are the churches to whom John addresses his book: the ἐκκλησίαι of Jesus’ followers are created in his death to be a βασίλεια to God (1:6; 5:9-10), and as God’s kingdom they are destined to rule the earth (5:10). Although the saints’ rule is not to be seen in the same terms as the co-regency of God and the Lamb, it nevertheless is seen as sharing in Christ’s dominion over the earth (3:21; 20:4-6; 22:5).¹⁵ Thus, Jesus as the co-regent of God is the king of all earthly authorities, and his followers both constitute a kingdom to God and are destined to share in his sovereignty.

However, the picture of the sovereignty of God and his Christ and the churches as the people of God’s kingdom stands in an unbearable tension to a rival kingdom that now holds sway over the whole world and whose ultimate authority is the arch opponent of God, Satan. This is assumed from the beginning of the book, and from chapter 12 onwards John gives a firm picture of this opposing power. The Dragon, the imagery used of Satan in Rev 12, has established his rival authority on earth by raising a beast, cast in his own image¹⁶ from the chaotic sea and has conferred his own authority to it. (12:18-13:1-2) Through this beast the Dragon is able to gain authority over the whole world (13:3b-4a), and through a second beast, raised from the earth, it solidifies its authority through a religious mystification of its

¹¹ βασίλεια and its cognates are almost exclusively used either of God, Christ and the saints, or of the Dragon and its cohorts. The only exceptions is 9:11 where we find Ἀρβαδών/Απολλόων as the king of the abyss who obviously is not seen as part of God’s court but yet is the ruler of the army who inflicts God’s punishment on God’s opponents.

¹² 1:4 anticipates the fuller depiction of God as the sovereign creator of heaven and earth in ch. 4.

¹³ God is also identified once in the book as δ βασίλευς τῶν ἔθνῶν (15:3).

¹⁴ That 21:1-22:5 depicts the ultimate reign of God and the Lamb is apparent in 21:24 where earthly kings acknowledge God’s sovereignty by bringing their glory into the city that is defined by and lives from the occupants of the throne at its centre.

¹⁵ That the saints remain God’s subjects when they exercise their rule is clearly seen in 22:3-5 where it is precisely the δοῦλοι of God who λατρεύουσιν him, who also are those who βασιλεύουσιν.

¹⁶ Note the strong parallels between the depiction of the beast in 13:1 and of the Dragon in 12:3.

power. The second beast deceives the inhabitants of the world through various miraculous signs to worship the first beast (13:12-14) and forces them to exercise all their commerce within the context of their allegiance to the first beast (13:16-17). Refusing to submit to this blasphemous usurpation of the honour and authority that rightfully is only God's comes at the risk of one's own life (13:15).

It is this beastly order that now holds the βασιλεία, the political authority, over the world. (cf. 16:10) The book identifies the geopolitical centre of its authority as Babylon. This is the great city that rides on the Beast (17:3), who identifies herself as a queen (18:7), and as the centre of geopolitical authority has a βασιλεία over the kings of the earth (17:18). While these vassal kings and their ruling elites fornicate with this queen-city as they enjoy her unjust wealth (17:2; 18:3, 9), the people who have pledged their allegiance to the Christ who is King of Kings and Lord of Lords (19:16; cf. 1:5) are killed by her (17:6).

This is the fundamental “tension between John’s vision of the kingdom of God and his environment” that Revelation responds to. While John paints the opposition the followers of Jesus face in the mythic language of Dragon, Beasts and Babylon, there is little doubt that he has Rome, its imperial power and cult in mind as the current manifestation Satan’s draconic power. Since the publication Leonard L. Thompson work, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire*,¹⁷ the claim that there was systematic persecution of Christians during the reign of Domitian has been challenged. However, more recently, some scholars have questioned the more benevolent picture of Domitian Thompson proposes, arguing that there indeed was a hardening of attitudes toward Christians during his reign.¹⁸ Considering this and the important religio-political function of imperial cults in Asia minor,¹⁹ the congregations John wrote to probably “experienced local harassment, ridicule, discrimination and oppression in the early 90s for their religious beliefs and customs,” even if there was no centrally orchestrated persecution.²⁰ Whatever the case might have been, Barr rightfully points out that “Pliny’s letter to Trajan shows that that

¹⁷ Thompson 1990; cf. Collins 1984 and 1986.

¹⁸ See Witherington 2003:5-8 for a review of recent critiques of Thompson’s hypothesis.

¹⁹ See Friesen 2001; he argues that John may indeed have used the common opposition of all the congregation to the imperial cults to address specific disputes among them (Friesen 2005). See also Kraybill’s extensive study of the Imperial cult in Revelation; for him the New Jerusalem is the final counterpart to the decadence and injustice of Rome and its imperial cult, and “John is willing to pay any social, political or economic price to be true to his Lord.” (1996:221)

²⁰ Slater 1998:241, as quoted in Witherington 2003:8.

situation in Asia Minor soon lived up to John's worst expectations.²¹ John saw clearly that the Christian rejection of calling anyone but Christ Lord and Saviour is on a head on-collision with the imperial cult that claimed the same for the emperor.²² In the end, whether Revelation was written in the context of actual or anticipated persecution, what remains is that it "represents a view from those who do not have access to political or economic power,"²³ and that "from John's perspective, 'Eternal Rome' could only translate as 'Eternal Oppression'."²⁴ And what John anticipates "is an impending battle between the Lamb and the monster," between, from the perspective of earth, a handful often disunited and compromised churches and "the political power and economic splendour of 'the great city that holds sway over the kings of earth' (xvii. 18)."²⁵

To link the symbolic imagery of Babylon and beasts with Rome and the nature of Roman imperial power in the latter half of the first century, however, does not mean that the one is the other,²⁶ but rather that for John, Rome is the present manifestation of what Babylon represents. As such, the prostitute "is Babylon transferred to Rome."²⁷ As such, the image of Babylon helps us to understand the true nature of what Rome is, and how John clothes Rome in the image of Babylon further develops the character of Babylon as the *topos* of the power that is antithetical to the kingdom of God. Babylon was first the prime enemy of Israel. As Babylon became the enemy of God in the way it took his people captive, this city was transformed into

²¹ Barr 1984:41.

²² Beale 1999:5. Witherington (2003:5-6) points out that although it is at times questioned whether Domitian called himself *dominus* and *deus*, the evidence points in the direction that he did.

²³ Gilbertson 2003:72.

²⁴ McDonough 1999:199, referring to Kraybill 1996:57-101. John "is not giving an objective evaluation of the accomplishments of Rome" but makes "clear-eyed" observations as he expresses "a radical and complete rejection from the perspective of the lowest and most tangential classes, that is from the perspective of the victims." (Wengst 1994:196, 197, 196)

²⁵ Caird 1984:xiii.

²⁶ N. T. Wright, building on Caird's observation that the mythic language used in Revelation was employed in both Jewish and Greco-Roman circles "for the interpretation of history in the interest of religious or political debate" (Caird 1984:xi), is in danger of doing this when he claims that apocalyptic "uses 'cosmic' or 'other-worldly' language to describe (what we think of as) 'this-worldly' realities, and to invest them with (what we think of as) their 'theological' or 'spiritual' significance." (Wright 1996:513) Elsewhere he claims "apocalyptic language uses complex and highly coloured metaphors in order to describe one event in terms of another, thus bringing out the perceived 'meaning' of the first." (Wright, 1992:282) Although Wright, like Caird, (Caird 1984:xv.) does not deny that the referent of apocalyptic symbolism may go beyond its historical referent, he so focuses on this referent that the larger cosmic conflict the historical reality is set in at times gets lost, thus binding the mythic symbol too tightly to one of its particular historical manifestations.

²⁷ O'Donovan 185:83.

a primary symbol of God's opposition on earth. When John employs the language of Babylon for Rome, he then both casts Rome in the role of God's arch enemy but also, precisely in doing so, expands the semantic field of the symbol itself. In this way, the symbolic imagery of the book is best seen as open and bounded at the same time.²⁸ Its referent is not arbitrary but must be read within the tradition of the symbol as it takes form in John's text. And this picture is enriched by how John likely related the symbolism of Babylon and beasts with the religious and political situation of his own day. But precisely because John did not identify Rome as Rome but employed the imagery of Babylon and beasts, the imagery cannot be confined to his own day but is always ready to be employed anew in new manifestations of the old evil in its conflict with the ways of God. What we noted about texts generally in the introductory chapter is especially true of the pensive symbolic world of John's vision, its imagery grows with the journey of its history in the world. While the porous boundaries of such language may frustrate the analytic mind, it extends a wealth of wisdom to those willing to receive it since

like the newspaper cartoons which make a political comment more tellingly than any editorial, however skilfully written, the resources of apocalyptic imagery can conjure in the imagination a grasp of reality and offer an instrument to understand reality with the result that the reader is stimulated to change it. It is a mode of discourse which taps deep wells of human responsiveness among those who through the experience of struggle, persecution and death have learnt what it means to wash their robes and to make them white in the blood of the Lamb.²⁹

As Israel in exile had to come to terms with what it meant to be God's people when held captive by the enemy of God, so John seeks to show how the people of the messianic Lamb can make sense of their own situation when oppressed by the power that fills the shoes of Babylon in their own day and so stimulate them to persevere in resistance to it. In the next two chapters of this thesis we will consider how John does this in his employment of kingdom language, ideas and imagery. But before we proceed, we will first look at how both the generic elements of the book as well as its use of spatial and temporal categories are fundamentally oriented toward both resolving the tension the crisis of the kingdom John and his readers experience while at the same time intensifying this experience.

²⁸ Humphrey (1995:20-21) reflects the same sentiment, noting that while the symbolism is "evocative, polyvalent, allusive and sometimes elusive" and thus is open to a range of readings, this does not mean "it can mean anything and everything."

²⁹ Rowland and Comer 1990:134-35.

III. The Formal Character and Spatio-Temporal Expansion of Reality in Revelation

The next two chapters frequently employ the language of spatial and temporal expansion developed by Michael Gilbertson in his study, *God and History in the Book of Revelation*, published in 2003. Since Gilbertson ties his own study closely with how he understands the composite generic form of Revelation, we will conclude this introduction to Revelation by considering both how Gilbertson believes the generic elements of the book and its use of spatial and temporal categories function in the overall purpose of the book.

As most recent commentators do, Gilbertson notes how apocalyptic, prophetic and epistolary features are combined in Revelation,³⁰ and he argues that this reflects a twofold dynamic: as “temporal and spatial horizons are expanded *outward*” there is also a “heavy *inward* concentration on the meaning of the text for the present.”³¹ Its apocalyptic features give the book “a universal scope of history and ultimate temporal and spatial perspectives.”³² However, that this is not the pessimistic escapism that apocalyptic at times has been accused of,³³ is reinforced by its claim to be a prophecy and its employment of epistolary features. These relate the apocalyptic horizon of the book to the present situation that John and the ecclesial communities he writes to face.³⁴ As a prophecy of the “inauguration of the end-time in the Christ event”³⁵ it

³⁰ For other excellent studies on the generic elements in the book, see Bauckham 1993a:1-23; Beasley-Murray 1979:12-29; 1997:1025-27.

³¹ Gilbertson 2003:79.

³² On apocalyptic literature and related concerns, see especially Collins 1998. While Collins adapts his earlier work (cf. vols 14 and 36 of *Semeia*) in light of Rowland’s critique that apocalyptic and eschatology are “two separate issues in Jewish Religion” (Rowland 1982:48), he still maintains that eschatology ought to be at least one basic elements in generic discussions on apocalyptic literature (1998:10).

³³ Consider e.g. von Rad’s sweeping generalisation of apocalyptic as a degeneration of Israel’s prophetic tradition which dispenses “with the phenomenon of the contingent.” (as quoted in Gilbertson 2003:74) Rowland offers a more measured assessment when he says: “The attitude towards the present age, such as we have it in the apocalypses, arises not so much from the conviction that the present world was too corrupt for the establishment of God’s kingdom, but from the frank admission that without God’s help the dominance of Israel and the coming of the new age could never be achieved.... The eschatology of the apocalypses may have looked to God at work in history as the only means of final salvation, but their authors expected a vindication of their righteousness within the world of men, not in some intangible, existence beyond the sphere of history.” (Rowland 1982:38) This aptly describes the situation John and his fellow believers face vis-à-vis Roman imperial power. Although, Revelation, as such, is deterministic in its expectation of the final accomplishments of God’s purposes in judgment and redemption, it leaves radically open who will fall on what side of the eschatological judgment. How one will fare in the eschatological judgment is contingent upon how one orients oneself toward the coming kingdom of God in history.

³⁴ Gilbertson 2003:79.

calls its hearers to situate themselves according to the light this event sets the world in, and as an apocalyptic-prophetic vision wrapped in a letter³⁶ it calls its readers to interpret the large, sweeping and universal language of the vision within their own concrete situations. As such, Revelation does not provide its readers with a chronology or philosophy of history but rather gives them a key to the dynamic of history, sets the difficult situation they find themselves in within a larger perspective that also spans past, present and future.³⁷

In order to do this, John sets his readers' present situation within a wider reality through a visionary expansion of both space and time. Picking up especially Rowland's claim that apocalyptic literature opens up a transcendent reality in order to meet the needs of the community it is written for,³⁸ Gilbertson argues that in John's spatial expansion of reality, he first places the present earthly experience of the churches (chs. 2-3) in tension with what is confessed in heaven (ch. 4). The rest of the book then sets out to resolve this tension in a set of movements from heaven to earth which culminates in the descent of the New Jerusalem to the earthly plane. However, John does not conclude his book with the resolution of the spatial dissonance in 22:5, but in his epistolary epilogue draws his readers back to the concrete situation they find themselves in. He calls them back to their situation where the dissonance between heaven and earth is acutely experienced. It is here they are to remain faithful to the vision they have heard. Thus, "the text has the effect of locating the present earthly experience of the reader within a framework of ultimate reality. It also, however, refocuses back to the hard realities of earthly experience, now seen in the light of that ultimate perspective."³⁹

Gilbertson argues that the book accomplishes basically the same things in the way it employs temporal categories. Although the sequence of the book cannot be set within any tight temporal scheme, whether chronological or as repeated

³⁵ Gilbertson 2003:79. See Fiorenza 1985:133-56 on a plausible context for Revelation in early Christian prophetic tradition. She argues this tradition was rooted in "early Christian apocalyptic experience and conviction" and that for John it was "his belief that the end time has been inaugurated in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, constitutes the heart and inspiration of his prophecy." (138)

³⁶ See Karrer 1986 on the epistolary features of the text.

³⁷ For a good discussion of how history has been read in the book, see Gilbertson 2003:45-57.

³⁸ Gilbertson 2003:81-82.

³⁹ Gilbertson 2003:108; similarly Beale (1999:151) argues that how the vision of "the sovereignty of God and Christ in redeeming and judging [which] brings them glory" intends to motivate the readers to persevere in worshipping God and obedience to his word.

recapitulation, it still displays an irreducibly temporal view of reality.⁴⁰ John places the present situation of his readers within a temporal framework that encompasses the primordial past, runs through the recent past, and expects the penultimate future that will usher in the ultimate future. Rome might claim to be the eternal kingdom but God and his Christ are the only ones who truly span all temporal categories. God's claim to sovereignty is based in his status as the creator of the cosmos and the certainty of his *de facto* rule on earth is established in the paradoxical victory of Easter. The penultimate eschatological events of the establishment of this kingdom are right around the corner for John's readers and are already making their coming presence known in the suffering they experience.⁴¹ Although these penultimate events mean an increased conflict between the people of God and his enemies, they find their ultimate resolution in the final victory of God and his Christ in the descent of the New Jerusalem which geopolitical centre is the throne of God and the Lamb.

The spatial and the temporal expansion of reality work together to accomplish John's theological-pastoral purpose. The resolution of the spatial tension set up in 2:1-4:11 is from ch. 5 onwards seen as a long process where this dissonance is first intensified before eventually being resolved in the descent of the new city, which in return is "also a starting point, from which the readers of the text must work as they face once again the present reality portrayed in the earlier visions."⁴² Although critiquing how L. L. Thompson sees the unitive vision of the book, Gilbertson quotes him in order to show how the intrinsic relationship between the book's temporal and spatial categories never allows the readers to escape to a heaven above them or a future in front of them. Says Thompson:

A radical transcendence which could sever heaven from earth is tempered by the future transformation of earthly into heavenly existence; and a radical transcendence which

⁴⁰ Gilbertson 2003:109. Rather than presenting a chronological sequence of events, the book employs a variety of ways to place the present of the reader in the light of the ultimate and penultimate past as well as the ultimate and penultimate future. In expanding the temporal situation of the reader both backwards and forward, John seeks to refocus his readers' on their present, in the dissonance between their present and their ultimate future in the New Jerusalem. (114) Similarly, Fiorenza 1985:47 notes that "Revelation does not describe ... a continuous development of events Rather Revelation consists of pieces or mosaic stones arranged in a certain design, which climaxes in a description of the final eschatological event." For a helpful overview of the basic implied narrative of Revelation, see Garrow 1997:103-17.

⁴¹ Rowland (1993:61) notes that "what must soon take place" in 1:1 and 22:7 "may refer to the imminent expectation of the end of the age, but more likely concerns the imminence (indeed reality) of the *presence* of the whole eschatological process in the midst of which the readers need to be aware that they are now standing."

⁴² Gilbertson 2003:109.

could sever this age completely from the age to come is tempered by the presentness of the age to come in heaven. Thus, the presence and interplay of spatial and temporal dimensions in transcendence prevent a thoroughgoing dualism in which the revelation of transcendence would become separate set of forces without present effect on everyday human activity.⁴³

Especially considering how we already have discussed the kingdom in Moltmann along similar lines, these temporal and spatial notions are a helpful way to organise the book's understanding of the kingdom. In the next chapter we will do this by looking at how the book envisions the ultimate future as a regime change that turns the readers' vision of the world upside down and calls them to live in light of the future where God and his Christ will assume the position of geopolitical authority that now is in the hands of the beastly order whose power is centred in Babylon. In chapter six, we will look at how this expectation is grounded in the vision's spatial expansion of reality where God, as creator, is revealed to be the true sovereign over both heaven and earth, how he and the Lamb already are established as the authoritative centre of the heavenly realm, and how the paradoxical victory of the Lamb on earth is now being extended to the world through the kerygmatic witness of the church in the power and presence of the Spirit. In the second half of these chapters we will enter into a dialogue with our discussion of the historical and relational aspect of the kingdom in Moltmann respectively.

⁴³ Thompson 1990:31. On the interlacing of temporal and spatial categories Gilbertson also refers to Howard-Brook and Gwyther 1999:120ff.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE FUTURE AS REGIME CHANGE

I. Introduction

Hope drives the Book of Revelation. From the outset it sets the present in the context of the urgency of the future¹ and it moves relentlessly toward the eschatological climax of the descent of the New Jerusalem (21:1-22:5).² God is depicted as the coming one (1:4, 8; 4:8) and the book expects the arrival of Christ from the beginning (1:7). Obedience and perseverance are encouraged with the promise of future rewards³ and evil and disobedience come with a warning of punishment.⁴

Rev 11:15-19 is the most succinct statement of Revelation's eschatological hope and it will form the basis of our exposition of how Revelation sees the future as a "regime change," the time when the powers that now have usurped the position of authority in the world will be defeated and when God will occupy the authoritative centre in the earthly realm that is rightfully his. In our analysis of this passage, we will begin by looking at a) how the martyrs' prayer for vindication (6:9-11) is a central theme in 8:6-11:19 and b) how the whole section anticipates the seventh trumpet (11:15-19) as containing the fulfilment of God's final eschatological purpose. Then, in a detailed analysis of 11:15-19, we will show how the seventh trumpet depicts this fulfilment as a regime change in which "our Lord and his Messiah" will replace the powers that now occupy the central position of geopolitical authority on earth. In the last two major parts of this chapter we will consider how central themes in 11:15-19 are developed in the rest of Revelation, and then place our exposition of "regime change" in Revelation in dialogue with the kingdom as symbol of hope in Moltmann.

¹ However one interprets ὅτι γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει in 1:1 and similar phrases (1:19; 4:1; see Beale 1999:152-70, 181-2, 216 on various views), it alerts the reader to something that is coming and impinges on his or her present situation.

² E.g., Both 20:1-10 and 21:5ff are anticipated in the addresses to the churches. (2:7, 11, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; cf. 7:14-17; 15:4)

³ 2:7, 10b, 11, 17, 26-29; 3:4-6, 9-13, 20-21; 7:14-17; 14:13.

⁴ 2:16, 21-25; 3:3b; 3:16; 14:9-12; 16:5-6, 19; 17:11; 18:2-8, 20. As sure as the establishment of God's eschatological purposes (10:6-7; 15:11; cf. 16:5, 7, 15; 19:9) is the inevitability of his judgments (20:11-15; cf. 21:7-8; 22:11, 12, 14).

II. The Seventh Trumpet: Heralding a Regime Change

A. The Function of the Trumpet Sequence

With the blowing of the seventh trumpet in 11:15-19 we reach the conclusion of the trumpet sequence that commences in 8:6. As in the sequences of the seals and the bowls, the seven trumpets focus on God's judgment on the earth.⁵ While the seals are likely an overture to the following visionary complex as a whole⁶ and the bowls depict God's final eschatological judgment of his opponents on earth, (15:1) the seven trumpets are concerned with God's acts of judgment on the world in history.⁷

First, we note two things: a) in the heavenly commissioning of the angels who blow their trumpets the prayers of the martyrs play an important role,⁸ and b) the first six trumpets are patterned after the plagues brought on Egypt.⁹ Since the prayers of the slain saints in heaven is for vindication (6:9-11) and since the purpose of the plagues on Egypt was to punish Pharaoh for his persistence in oppressing Israel and to liberate Israel, the trumpet punishments are probably meant to vindicate the saints and prepare for their final liberation from their oppressors.¹⁰ However, second, Richard Bauckham has convincingly argued that an equally important function of God's judgments in history is to bring the nations to repentance.¹¹ Thus God's punishment

⁵ Beale 1999:611; Bauckham 1993b:8. For the main views of the relationship between the three numbered series and how they function in the overall structure of the book, see Beale 1999:117-317 who argues for a "structure of recapitulation" but with a thematic intensification of the book's basic themes (cf. Beasley-Murray 1981:31); Bauckham (1993b:8) suggests that while the seventh of each series refers to the end, each new series approaches this end "from closer range, as it were."

⁶ Bauckham 1993:80; cf. Beckwith 1919:263-64; Campbell 2004:71. Against some commentators who see the content of the scroll as being unfolded with the breaking of the seals (Charles 1920a: 161; Aune 1998a:392), see Bauckham 1993b:250.

⁷ Bauckham 1993a:82 (cf. Beasley-Murray 1974:156; Caird 1966:112); similarly Beale 1999:472 but he sees the judgments wholly in negative terms.

⁸ The incense of the censers in 5:8 is the prayer of the saints. In 6:10 we see these are the martyrs' prayer for vengeance on those who have slain them. While 6:12-17 briefly anticipates the divine response, 8:1-5 makes clear that the trumpets will flesh out this concern, since the prayers play a significant role in the preparation for the blowing of the trumpets. (Aune 1998a:512-13; Bauckham 1993b:9, 55, 71, 75-76; Beale 1999:454-55; Beasley-Murray 1974:150-51; Harrington 1993:104; Witherington 2003:138-39) See Heil 1993:220-43 on the pivotal role of 6:9-11 in the book.

⁹ For the use of the Exodus plagues in Revelation, see Aune 1998a:499-508; cf. Harrington 1993:107; Prigent 2001:305-06.

¹⁰ Beale 1999:620 notes that in 1 Chron 16:4; Num 10:10 and Psalm 150 trumpets are blown to call Israel to thank God for how he has dealt graciously with them in the past. If this is part of the background to John's usage, it is perhaps in anticipation of how God will again save his people.

¹¹ Bauckham 1993b:257-58, 273-83; cf. 993a:82-88; Aune 1998a:628; Sweet 1979:189. Beale (1999:603-07) questions this interpretation, noting that fearing God in the OT is not always used of repentance. However, I follow Bauckham in seeing it referring to the possibility of real repentance. This, however, does not mean that Bauckham argues for a kind of universalism in Revelation (so Schnabel 2002). He makes very clear that John uses universal language, "without qualifying one by

does not have solely a negative purpose *vis-à-vis* the world but is administered in the hope that it will bring the nations to repentance, that they too will be followers of the Lamb in the pilgrimage to the promised kingdom.

However, we are faced with a problem: at the end of the sixth trumpet, the inhabitants of the world, despite the severe punishment of God, “did not repent” of their idolatry and injustice. (9:20-21) The sequences of intensified judgments are perhaps broken off here precisely because of the futility of punishment alone to bring repentance.¹² Instead, John is shown the place the church has in the task. It is as the churches are faithful in their role as witnesses, even to the point of death, that what the trumpets failed to do is accomplished, seen in how the resurrection of the two martyred witnesses brings the nations to repentance, “the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.” (11:13)¹³ This brings us to the seventh trumpet but before we examine it in detail, let us consider how it is anticipated in the text.

B. The Anticipation of the Seventh Trumpet

First, we are told in 8:13 that the last three trumpets signal woes on the inhabitants of the earth. Between the fifth and sixth trumpet and the sixth and seventh trumpet we then get statements about the woe that is passed and an anticipation of the woe/s that are still to come. (9:12; 11:14) Considering this, we are led to expect that the last trumpet, as the last of the three woes, will deal, at least in part, with God’s judgment on his enemies. Second, we are also led to expect it to contain the establishment of God’s final purposes since the great angel in 10:4 has announced that “there will be no more delay! But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished.” (10:7)¹⁴

C. The Seventh Trumpet

When considering the parameters for the passage or passages that cover the content of the seventh trumpet, we run into two problems, one minor and one quite

the other,” of both judgment and salvation, in order to leave the two eschatological outcomes open (Bauckham 1993b:104). This confusion may be due to that Bauckham, in his major essay on the issue (1993a:238-337), does not sufficiently clarify what he means by his assertion that the vision of salvation holds “theological priority.” (so Mathewson 2002:142)

¹² Bauckham 1993a:259.

¹³ Bauckham 1993a:273-83; cf. 1993b:84-88, 98-104; Harrington 1993:124.

¹⁴ The trumpet is “a projection into the future, when the kingdom has been established and the heavenly host offers praise in response.” (Beale 1999:611 613)

significant. First, in the debate on whether the passage starts at 11:14 or 11:15,¹⁵ it is perhaps preferable to see 11:14 as janus statements signalling the end of what has preceded and anticipating what is coming.¹⁶

Second, it is unclear how far the seventh trumpet is to extend. There is a definite break between 11:19 and 12:1,¹⁷ making 11:15-19 a pericope. However, this does not solve the problem as to how far the content of the seventh trumpet extends since 11:19 is not followed by a statement signalling the end of the third woe. A likely explanation for this omission may be that while John has concluded his discussion on the first two woes (9:12; 11:14),¹⁸ he has more to say on the third woe.¹⁹ Although the seventh trumpet and the third woe are closely linked, the woe is only briefly indicated in 11:15-19 and is developed in much greater detail from ch. 15 onwards, culminating in the portrayal of the cataclysmic fall of Babylon in chs. 17-18. And it is precisely in ch. 18 that we again find the language of the woe, when those who have grown rich with the city, the kings of the earth, the merchants and the sea traders, sing their woes over Babylon (18:10, 16-17, 19). Their three-fold repetition of οὐαὶ οὐαὶ over the city that persecuted the saints but whose privileges they enjoyed marks the conclusion of the third woe announced in 11:14. Those who grew fat with Babylon who slays the saints and destroys the earth, are also destroyed with her when she tastes the final judgment of God. Thus, although the content of the seventh trumpet is probably to be confined to 11:15-19, John's discussion of the woe it announces is not completed before the end of ch. 18.

In 11:15-19, as at the beginning of each trumpet passage, we are brought back to the heavenly throne room of God where the seven trumpet angels are located and

¹⁵ Caird 1966:140; Harrington 1993:125 while Beasley-Murray 1981:187-88 includes 11:14.

¹⁶ Similarly Beale (1999:609) sees it as a transition.

¹⁷ Against Aune (1998a:660-61) who sees a major break between 11:18 and 11:19ff, I follow most scholars in seeing the theophany of 11:19 as the conclusion of 11:15-19 (so Beale 1999:618-20; Beasley-Murray 1981:190-91; Beckwith 1919:274; Caird 1966:144; Harrington 1993:125; Witherington 2003:160).

¹⁸ Bauckham (1993b:11-12) suggest the first two woes signal how God's judgments in history alone do not bring repentance, something they can only do in connection with the witness of the church.

¹⁹ Most commentators link the third woe with parts of the following visionary complex although they disagree to exactly what. Aune 1998a:495, who links it generally to the seven bowls and specifically to 12:12, also notes the link to the three-fold woes in 18:10, 16, 19 (1998a:524; cf. Beale 1999:610 Beckwith 1919:274, 606-08; Beasley-Murray 1981:187-88). Here I build on a suggestion G. D. Fee has proposed (Fee 1999), linking the third woe with the songs of lament in Rev 18.

see the seventh angel blow his trumpet (v 15a),²⁰ but unlike the other trumpets it does not exhibit the same kind of action from heaven to earth as they do.²¹ It consists of a proclamation of heavenly voices (vv. 15b), a response of praise by the 24 elders (vv. 16-18), and a concluding heavenly theophany (v. 19).

1. The Transferral of a Kingdom (11:15b)

Immediately after the seventh trumpet is blown, a heavenly choir proclaims (v. 15b): ἐγένετο ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ κόσμου τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν καὶ τοῦ χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ, καὶ βασιλεύσει εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων. This serves as a summary statement of what the rest of the passage will describe in more detail.²² In the next chapter we will discuss the importance of this and the following verses for the book's understanding of God's sovereignty and its high christology, but here will focus on how it envisions the eschatological purpose of God as a regime change in which the central position of authority in a socio-political order is transferred from the powers that are to "our Lord and his Christ."

The first clause indicates a radical discontinuity between the coming and the present as is seen in the two genitival modifiers (*τοῦ κόσμου* and *τοῦ κυρίου...*) but it also suggests an underlying continuity since the genitives modify the same noun, *ἡ βασιλεία*.²³ Since *βασιλεία* signals the continuity between how things are and how they will be when God accomplishes his purposes, it is pivotal to determine what it signifies. It could simply signify the "realm" which is being ruled. Although we will later show that Revelation assumes just such a continuity, several factors, not least the close relationship between this passage and 12:10, suggest that "rule" is more likely in

²⁰ The introduction of the blowing of each trumpet is identical: Καὶ + number (1st, 2nd, ...) + ἄγγελος ἔσάλπισεν (8:7 [not stated but implied], 8, 10, 12; 9:1, 13; 11:15).

²¹ The spatial distance may indicate the temporal dislocation, the proleptic nature of the seventh trumpet. The action toward earth that is likely implied in the earthquake is not depicted before 16:20-21.

²² This is so for several reasons: 1) The following verses narrate both God's eschatological judgment and reward (v. 18) as well as the revelation of his presence (v. 19); 2) the expressed reason for the 24 elders song of thanksgiving is ὅτι εῖληφας τὴν δύναμίν σου τὴν μεγάλην καὶ ἐβασίλευσας (v.17); 3) the structure of the songs of this passage is very similar to what we find elsewhere in the book, where subsequent songs are an elaboration of an initial song or revelation (this causal link is explicitly expressed in 4:11; cf. 5:9. On the structure of 11:15-18 as a "two-part responsory hymn" see Aune 1998a: 635.

²³ Aune (1998a:633) suggests the noun is elided in the predicate position for stylistic reasons. Whether this is the case or not, the elision emphasises that the referent is the same in both nominative and predicate position.

view here.²⁴ However, this cannot simply be limited to the *activity* of ruling since this is precisely what changes.²⁵ It may be better to see it as rulership, “rule” as an *actual* position of authority over a concrete realm rather than simply as an *activity*.²⁶ As such, the position of authority cannot be separated from its relationship to the realm of which it is the ordering centre. If this is right, what is emphasised is that the position of geopolitical authority over the human community on earth that now is in the hands “of the world”²⁷ will be handed over to “our Lord and his Christ,” who then will commence their rightful and everlasting reign on earth.²⁸ As such what 11:15 depicts is a “regime change.” Here it is proleptically announced in a terse formulation but in

²⁴ Not only does 11:15b continue καὶ βασιλεύσει, but 12:10, a thematically and structurally closely related passage, places ἡ βασιλεία after ἡ δύναμις in a list of things attributed to God that now have been established in heaven and ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν is paralleled with ἡ ἔξουσία τοῦ χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ; cf. 5:10; 16:10; 17:12, 17, 18.

²⁵ The identification of the subject with the predicate by the elision of the noun in the predicate position indicates it cannot simply be the reign of a particular authority. In that case there would be two βασιλείαι under consideration, ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ κόσμου that is now experienced in the world and ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ κυρίου that will replace it, but the text accentuates that only one βασιλεία is under consideration.

²⁶ This more ‘substantive’ understanding of βασιλεία as a position of geopolitical authority seems to account well for how the term is used elsewhere in the book: The people who are constituted as a βασιλεία to God (1:6; 5:10a) are those who are destined to rule forever (5:10b); as such they are those who having taken the journey of Christ’s assumption to a position of sovereignty will be exalted to positions of authority on his throne (3:21), an expectation that finds its final fulfilment in 22:3-5 (cf. 20:4-6). It is precisely by seeing βασιλεία as referring to a position of authority that can make sense of the juxtaposition in 1:9, precisely in sharing in the Θάλψει and ὑπομονῇ which are in Christ, they also share in the present paradoxical position of rule Christ has on the earth. This stands in contrast to how Babylon now occupies the βασιλεία over the kings of the earth (17:18), how the beast confers positions of authority to its vassal kings in 17:12, 17. Note also the relationship between βασιλεία and throne language in 16:10—it is as the fifth bowl is poured on the θρόνος of the beast that its βασιλεία is darkened.

²⁷ The other two occurrences of κόσμος in Revelation (13:8; 17:8) refer simply to a realm. However, since in these verses it is part of a stock phrase καταβολῆς κόσμου (cf. Matt 13:35; 25:34; Luke 11:50; John 17:24; Eph 1:4; Heb 4:3; 9:26; 1Pet 1:20; Rev 13:8; 17:8) it should not necessarily govern the meaning of the term here. Since it stands in a parallel construction with τοῦ κυρίου... which obviously is a subjective genitive, it more likely refers here to “the human world that had been in opposition to God and in conflict with his purposes” (Aune 1998a: 638, who appeals to a similar phrase in Matt 4:8, αἱ βασιλείαι τοῦ κόσμου and the rabbinic expression מִלְוָה הַמְבָאָר, “nations of the world.”) The Scriptural allusions found here seem to point in the same direction. Beale 1999:611 points out that Daniel 7 is one precedent to this passage, in which the “kingdoms” that antagonise the saints will be replaced by “the reign of the Son of man and the saints.”

²⁸ Rowland 1998a:643 suggests that ἐγένετο should perhaps be simply translated “was” here, indicating that “the kingdom of this world has never belonged to anyone other than God.” Since I am not persuaded that γίνομαι can be consistently translated in Revelation as “was” or “is”, I follow Aune (1998a:638) in seeing the aorists in this passage as relating to the proleptic nature of the trumpet and therefore functioning as the *perfectum propheticum*. Similarly Moltmann describes the fall of Babylon in Revelation as “an anticipation of something that has not yet happened, but it is an anticipation in the mode of the narrated past of what must pass away.” (CoG, 141) However, this “need not mean that God did not reign as king previously; rather it could mean that his kingship has only now become effective over the world.” (Aune 1998a:643)

the following chapters we are first shown how this is accomplished in the heavenly realm (12:10) and chs. 15 and following then vividly describe how the powers of the world are removed from the position of authority and how God assumes this position that is rightfully his.

The discontinuity which 11:15 anticipates is then between the ruling elite that now holds the political power on earth and the one that will,²⁹ as well as the radical consequence the exercise of this office has for the whole world in which it is exercised.³⁰ This discontinuity is pivotal to the book: it is what turns every appearance on its head, promising the vindication of those who have suffered and died at the hands of evil and resolving the dissonance between the churches experience on the unjust periphery of Roman power and the confession that landed them there, that only God is κύριος and that they are his true βασιλεία. But the power of this discontinuity lies in its underlying continuity, the position of a central position of a geopolitical leadership remains. The implications of this is, as we will see below, that although transformed, there is a basic continuity between the irreducibly socio-political character of humanity in history and in the eschaton. If the central position within a politically ordered reality remains, so must the realm of which it is the ordering centre.

2. Taking a Kingdom (11: 16-18)

Rev 11:16-18 make it clear that the seventh trumpet is located in the heavenly throne-room. As the 24 elders responded to the four living beings in 4:8-11 and proclaimed God the creator as rightful sovereign, they now respond to the heavenly voices and proclaim how God the Almighty has realised this sovereignty.³¹

In v. 17 the 24 elders first repeat basically what the great voices have already told us, thanking God that he has exercised his power and begun to rule. Of special interest to us is first how what is anticipated in 1:4, 8 and 4:8 in the tripartite title of God as the one who is, who was and *who is coming* is here fulfilled: the God who is the undisputed sovereign of both heaven and earth comes and establishes his rule on earth. Just as this passage identifies the purposes of God as the realisation of God's

²⁹ As we will discuss below, this power is depicted in the imagery of Dragon, beast and Babylon whose “authority” βασιλεία refers to in 16:10; 17:12, 17, 18.

³⁰ Compare chs. 17-18 and 21-22.

³¹ “Their hymn is an amplification of that of v. 15.” (Beckwith 1919:609)

kingdom, so the tripartite title anticipates the dawn of his reign on earth.³² Second, we see a close relationship between this verse and the doxologies in chs. 4-5. Rev 11:17a uses exactly the same titles for God and in the same sequence as the living beings use in 4:9, “The Lord God”, “the Almighty”, and “the one was and the one who is and the one who is coming,” the only difference being the omission of ὁ ἐρχόμενος in 11:17a. In this way what the inner court proclaimed about God’s rule in chs. 4-5 is now realised, a point underscored by 11:17b.³³ What the elders proclaimed that God was worthy to do in ch. 4 because he is the creator who sustains all creation, they now praise him for having done. The elders here announce that the regime change proclaimed in 11:15 is nothing other than the realisation of what is ascribed to God in the doxologies of ch. 4 and anticipated in the doxologies of ch. 5.³⁴

c. The Dual Act of the Fulfilment of God’s Kingdom (11:18)

In v. 18 the elders continue their praise by describing how God has accomplished this, saying:³⁵ “that is,³⁶ the nations exercised their wrath but³⁷ your wrath came and thus³⁸ the time³⁹ to judge the dead, to give rewards to your servants, the prophets, the saints and those who fear your name, both small and great, and to destroy those who are destroying the earth.” Up till now the fulfilment of God’s purposes which 10:6b-7 said would accompany the seventh trumpet has merely been pronounced; now the elders’ song explains how this will happen, an explanation dominated by God’s acts of eschatological punishment and reward.⁴⁰

³² See the discussion on the tripartite title in the next chapter.

³³ Note the parallels between 11:17b (λαβεῖν τὴν ... τὴν δύναμιν) and 4:11 (εἴληφας τὴν δύναμίν σου τὴν μεγάλην).

³⁴ See the next chapter for how the doxologies of chs. 4-5 anticipate the expansion of God’s rule.

³⁵ This verse is one of the more complex sentences of the book and has faced commentators with some thorny exegetical issues (Beale 1999:615-18; Beasley-Murray 1981:189-90). We will deal with the exegetical issues that are of particular relevance to us as we come to them in the following discussion.

³⁶ Taking the initial καί as epexegetical, indicating that what is coming describes how God has taken his great power and begun to reign.

³⁷ Contrastive καί.

³⁸ Epexegetical καί.

³⁹ καίρος governing all three genitives (so Aune 1998a: 637), τῶν νεκρῶν being a genitival object of κριθῆναι.

⁴⁰ Beale 1999:615 notes that v. 18 can either be seen as temporally preceding vv 15-17 or “as the first expression of God’s beginning end-time reign.” The latter seems preferable, v. 18 explaining both the negative and positive aspect of what it means when God inaugurates his reign.

i. The Final Defeat and Punishment of God's Opposition

God's *lex talionis* punishment on the nations forms an inclusio in 11:18. The verse begins with how God meets the nations who exercise their wrath with his own wrath and concludes with how God destroys those who destroy the earth. The third and final woe which has been anticipated since 8:13 (cf. 9:12; 11:14) is now set before us.

First, as also anticipated in 10:6, this third woe on the earth forms a part of the accomplishment of God's final purposes on earth, of which divine punishment plays an important part. The nations who oppose him have amassed the fullness of their final fury but God meets them with his own fury.⁴¹ While the purpose of God's judgment in history was to bring the nations to repentance, the purpose of his eschatological judgment is their destruction, proleptically announced here and depicted in chs.15ff.⁴² If the *telos* of God's sovereignty is its full establishment on earth, the *telos* of the world in opposition to him is its destruction.

Second, however, this judgment is not arbitrary but the exercise of measured justice—*lex talionis*, punishment which accords with the crime: the nations who have exercised wrath meet God's wrath, the destroyers of the earth are destroyed.⁴³

Third, as the prayers of the martyrs in 6:10 are answered with the arrival of the ὀργή of God and the Lamb on the inhabitants of the earth (6:15-17), so now the answer to their prayers is seen in how God's ὀργή meets the nations that ὠργίσθησαν.⁴⁴ The full depiction of this is found in the destruction of Babylon. Although this is punishment for all their evil ways, it is the slaying of the saints that the book sees as the apex of the evil endeavours of the nations.⁴⁵

⁴¹ "The culmination of Gentile wrath against God ... is everywhere in apocalyptic writings a feature of the last fierce assault made upon God's power by his enemies; in our book it appears it appears in 16:13ff, 20:8f." (Beckwith 1919:609; cf. Beale 1999:615)

⁴² 14:10 anticipates how all who persevere in allegiance to Babylon will also drink what she will drink, the wine of God's ὀργή, an anticipation fulfilled in the depiction of the final destruction of Babylon in 16:19 and the treading of the winepress in 19:15. In this, Revelation picks up a later Jewish tradition which has its most likely roots in Ps 2 (a psalm Revelation alludes to at pivotal points), Ps 99; Ex 15:14 and other similar OT passages, and juxtaposes "the two motifs of the rule or reign of God and the tumult of the heathen" in the final eschatological scenario. (Aune 1998a:643)

⁴³ See Hirzel 1910:407-480 on the origins and history of the notion of *lex talionis*.

⁴⁴ In the only other occurrence of ὠργίζω in Revelation (12:17), we see that behind the raging of the nations is the Dragon who rages against the followers of the Lamb. The outpouring of God's and the Lamb's ὀργή (6:16, 17; 11:18; 14:10; 16:19; 19:15) is then not the outpouring of unmeasured and brute force but the proper and just response to the draconic wrath of the nations.

⁴⁵ It seems unjustified to equate τὴν γῆν with God's people as Beale does (1999:615) does since the reference to the destruction of the earth should not be limited to Jer 28:25 but also includes Gen 6:11-

Fourth, however, by delaying the answer to the prayer for vindication to now, John is able both to satisfy the expectation of justice as vindication, and to alter this anticipation by placing its fulfilment after his exposé on the purpose of the church *vis-à-vis* precisely those who now oppose them. Although the martyrs' prayer for vindication plays an important role in how God's justice is accomplished, this is not to be the focus of the church on earth. In heaven the martyred saints who have suffered the ultimate injustice pray for vindication, but although the saints on earth await the justice of the martyrs, they are now to apply themselves to the task given them by God, their prophetic witness that can convert the nations.

Fifth, in depicting this universal judgment as διαφθεῖραι τοὺς διαφθείροντας τὴν γῆν, an allusion to Jer 51:25 (LXX Jer 28:25), John anticipates how he will later depict the prime power under consideration as the arch enemy of God, Babylon.⁴⁶ For, John it is Rome that in his own day plays the role of Babylon.

Sixth, since the third woe, being part of the trumpet sequence, is closely linked to the vindication of the martyrs, and is closely linked to the laments of ch. 18, the final answer to the prayer for vindication is likely to be seen as the fall of Babylon. And so, the rest of the book first identifies the demonic power that makes war with the saints as two beasts that most likely representing imperial power and the imperial cult. (chs. 12-13) Then, after the role of Jesus in the eschatological complex is anticipated in ch. 14, chs. 15-18 are a tour de force of God's final punishment on Babylon. And so, as Babylon lies in ruins, the saints, apostles and prophets, are called to rejoice because "God has judged her [Babylon] for the way she treated you." (18:20) The vindication the martyrs prayed for in 6:10 has been accomplished.⁴⁷

In summary, the third woe is to be identified with God's final defeat over his enemies as he claims his right as sovereign over the earth. This defeat is also the final and just judgment of these enemies in which their punishment fits their crime. This

12. While the slaying of the saints reveals the true nature of evil (cf. 18:24), the destroying of the earth reveals evil's universal scope.

⁴⁶ Beale 1999:615-16, notes the strong parallels between the phrase here and as found in Jer 28:25 (LXX) (διαφθεῖραι τοὺς διαφθείροντας τὴν γῆν // τὸ διεφθαρμένον, τὸ διαφθεῖρον πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν), which is very similar to the corresponding passage in the MT (Jer 51:25) אֶת־כָּל־הַאֲרָץ כִּי־נָאַמְּרָת־לְךָ תְּהֻבָּה נָאַמְּרָת־לְךָ. If this then can be linked to Gen 6, then Babylon in Jeremiah and Rome as the power that plays the role of Babylon in Revelation are associated with the primordial generation that had so utterly destroyed the earth that the only thing God could do was to flood it, cleanse it off its evil and begin anew.

⁴⁷ In 6:10 the saints pray for God to judge (κρίνεις) on their behalf, and in 18:20 God is praise for having done so (ἔκρινεν δὲ θεός τὸ κρίμα ὑμῶν ἐξ αὐτῆς). (cf. Collins 1990:65)

just judgment is also the fulfilment of the slain martyrs' prayer for vindication. (6:10) Since John only puts the prayer for vindication in the mouths of the slain saints and since he postpones the proleptic description of this fulfilment until after his exposition of the role of the ecclesial communities in history, he qualifies the desire for vengeance. Although there is an appropriate place for vengeance, this is not what the followers of the lamb are to set their eyes on now. Leaving the prayer for vindication with the martyrs and its actual execution with God, the church is to seek the redemption of her enemies just as God seeks to bring them to repentance through his penultimate judgments on them.

ii. The Final Reward to God's People

a) The vindication of the saints

Although 11:18 is dominated by God's final punishment on his opponent, we see that God's eschatological judgment is not seen as wholly negative, but also includes the final rewarding of God's people. This final reward has been anticipated so far in the addresses to the seven churches,⁴⁸ in 5:10 and in 7:15-17 as the gift of life and sovereignty over the earth, and in 6:10-11 as the vengeance for the martyrs' blood.⁴⁹ Since the trumpets are linked with the prayer for vindication, in 11:18, John probably accentuates this last aspect by sandwiching the reward to God's people between his judgements on the nations. Although not limited to vindication,⁵⁰ that this is an important part of the reward is clear from the book's repeated claim that Babylon is judged because of her treatment of God's people.⁵¹

⁴⁸ 2:7, 10b-11, 17, 25-27; 3:4-6, 12, 21.

⁴⁹ For an examination on the background for Revelation's understanding of vengeance, see J. N. Musvosvi 1993, who emphasises the legal context of vengeance in Revelation.

⁵⁰ μισθός is only used here and in 22:12 in the book. While in 22:12 it may be construed positively or negatively, here it "is an umbrella term referring to the salvific benefits that God will bestow on the faithful in the eschaton." (Aune 1998a:644; on μισθός, see Smith 1951:54-73)

⁵¹ 16:5-6; 18:4-8, 20; 20:22-19:2. The close tie between the destruction of Babylon and the martyrs' prayer for vindication in 6:9-10 is especially evident in 16:5-6. Note the repetition of words and semantic parallels between these passages: in 6:9:10 the slain who stand ὑποκάτω τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου call on him who is δόξιος καὶ ἀληθινός to κρίνεις καὶ ἐκδικεῖς τὸ αἷμα ἡμῶν from the inhabitants of the earth; and in 16:5-7 the angel of the waters proclaims that God, δόξιος, is δίκαιος because ἔκρινας, he has given those who have poured out the αἷμα of the saints and the prophets αἷμα to drink. Responding to this, the altar proclaims God to be ἀληθινός and his κρίσεις to be δίκαιαι. For the significance of the altar in relationship to the martyrs' prayer, see 6:9-10; 8:3, 5; 16:7.

b) The inclusion of “those who fear his name”

But just as the prayer for just vindication was set in the broader context of the desire for the conversion of the nations, so the reward of vindication depicted here is qualified by this prior concern. God’s reward is given to the prophets, the saints, and τοῖς φοβουμένοις τὸ ὄνομά σου, precisely those who respond to the church’s witness in 11:13. Commentators disagree whether these signifiers refer to different groups or should be seen as one,⁵² but perhaps more important than the precise identification of who they represent is how they function in the book.

Prior to this passage προφήτης occurs in 10:7 where it refers to Israel’s prophets and in 11:10 to the church in her role as witness. Although probably not excluding the emphasis of 11:10, it is probably Israel’s prophets that are primarily in view here since 10:7 is tightly linked to 11:15-19 and since basically the same phrase is used in both passages to describe them.⁵³ As Israel’s prophets, in whose tradition John and the ecclesial communities stand, proclaimed what the seventh trumpet is the fulfilment of, so they also reap the benefits of its fulfilment.

We have already observed that every time of ἁγίοι (“the saints”) has been used up to this point is in connection with the martyrs’ prayer for vindication. (6:8-10) By identifying them as part of the recipients of God’s reward, John emphasises that their vindication is part of the eschatological reward given to his people. But that this is not gloating vindictiveness, is clear in the inclusion of “those who fear his name.”

Who are these who fear God’s name? Apart from the risen Christ’s injunction to John and the church in Smyrna not to fear (1:17; 2:10), neither the noun φόβος or the verb φοβέω occur before ch 11 depicts the church’s martyrological role in history. In 11:11-13 we are told that a great fear fell (φόβος μέγας ἐπέπεσεν) on the inhabitants of the world when the witnesses whose death they had gloated over were raised and taken to heaven. Those who are not killed in the subsequent earthquake were terrified (ἔμφοβοι) and “gave glory to God.” That this is to be interpreted positively seems clear from the injunctions in 14:7 and 15:4 to do exactly what those in 11:13 do, fear God and give him glory.⁵⁴ Because of this, it is probably these who

⁵² One of the most debated questions in 11:18 is how the four the dative clauses following καὶ δοῦναι τὸν μισθὸν are to be related to one another; see Beale 1999:616-18; cf. Beckwith 1919:610.

⁵³ τοὺς ἔσωτοῦ δούλους τοὺς προφήτα (10:7) // τοῖς δούλοις σου τοῖς προφήταις (11:18).

⁵⁴ Against Beale (1999:603-07), I follow Bauckham (1993a:273-83) in seeing this as an anticipation of a real conversion of the nations.

are most likely in view when τοῖς φοβουμένοις τὸ ὄνομά σου are included among the recipients of God's reward in 11:18.⁵⁵ They have experienced God's just punishment but also responded to the church's witness in repentance. Precisely because of this, the expectation for vindication must be tempered by the desire for the redemption of the enemy. The saints and those who respond to their witness will together enjoy God's reward.

Considering how φοβέω is used in the rest of the book, the inclusion of those who fear God's name here anticipates the positive side of God's reward.⁵⁶ This is especially evident when we consider the relationship of 11:15-18 with 18:20-19:9, a series of heavenly songs which first focus on the just punishment of Babylon in which those who have suffered under the great prostitute are vindicated (18:20-19:4) and then focus on the reign of God that will replace her (19:5-8).⁵⁷ Note how 19:5-6 is structurally and lexically linked to 11:15-18:⁵⁸

11:15-18	19:5	19:6
καὶ ἐγένοντο φωναὶ μεγάλαι ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ λέγοντες ...	Καὶ φωνὴ ⁵⁹ ἀπὸ τοῦ θρόνου ἔξηλθεν λέγουσα:	
καὶ οἱ εἴκοσι τέσσαρες πρεσβύτεροι λέγοντες· εὐχαριστοῦμέν σοι, κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ, ... καὶ ἐβασίλευσας.	αἰνεῖτε τῷ Θεῷ ἡμῶν	Καὶ ἥκουσα ὡς φωνὴν ... λέγοντων· Ἄλληλουιά, ὅτι ἐβασίλευσεν κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ.
... τοῖς δούλοις σου τοῖς προφήταις καὶ τοῖς ἀγίοις καὶ τοῖς φοβουμένοις τὸ ὄνομά σου, τοὺς μικροὺς καὶ τοὺς μεγάλους	πάντες οἱ δούλοι αὐτοῦ [καὶ] οἱ φοβούμενοι αὐτὸν, οἱ μικροὶ καὶ οἱ μεγάλοι	

However just as important as these strong links is the omission of the prophets and the saints in the call to worship in 19:5. These, though, play an important role in 18:20-19:4 where, with the apostles, οἱ ἄγιοι and οἱ προφῆται are called to rejoice over

⁵⁵ Against Beckwith 1919:610 I see this not as an epexegetical but as a copulative καὶ.

⁵⁶ That this is so seems to be confirmed by the way the verb φοβέω is used in the rest of the book. In 14:7 an angel who has the eternal Gospel to proclaim (14:6) exhorts the world to do exactly what the inhabitants of the world do in 11:13: φοβήθητε τὸν θεὸν καὶ δότε αὐτῷ δόξαν precisely because the final judgment of which those in 11:13 had only had a foretaste of is about to come. So also in 15:3-5 since 14:6-7 does not allow for a 'negative' interpretation there.

⁵⁷ Although 19:5-8 continues the heavenly praise commenced in 18:20, 19:4 signals a conclusion in the same manner as the heavenly worship ends in 5:13, suggesting that 19:5 begins something new, which is confirmed in a shift of focus from the city that has been judged to an anticipation of the reign of God in the new city (19:7-8 > 21:2, 9). Not many commentators note this break but see Caird 1966:233.

⁵⁸ Aune (1998a:642) notes how both 11:17 and 19:6 commence a response to a previous choir by affirming how The Lord God Almighty has commenced his reign. Caird (1966:233) and Harrington (1993:186) also note strong parallels to 11:15-19.

the fall of Babylon (18:20) and are the two named groups of all those on earth that have been killed by Babylon (18:24).⁵⁹ Although not mentioned in 18:20-19:4, those “who fear him” are called to worship in 19:5. While those who suffered Babylon are called to rejoice over her destruction, those redeemed from its evil by the martyrological witness of the saints are called to praise God because his reign has commenced. This reign is here symbolised as the marriage supper of the lamb for which his bride has made herself ready, which in return anticipates the fuller depiction of the New Jerusalem in 21:1-22:5.⁶⁰ The regime change anticipated in 11:15 is in the songs of 18:20-19:9 seen first as the vindication of prophets and saints in the destruction of the city that persecuted them but second also as the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth, where he will be the central ordering presence of all his servants, including those who fear his name. Thus, while τοῖς προφήταις καὶ τοῖς ἀγίοις in 11:15 functions within the martyrs’ expectation for vindication which dominates the trumpet sequence, τοῖς φοβουμένοις τὸ ὄνομά σου anticipates how those who will enjoy life in the everlasting community ordered around the throne of God includes precisely those who have heeded the saints’ prophetic witness and have come out of the evil city destined for doom (21:24, 26).⁶¹

3. The Final Return of God’s Presence among His People (11:19)

Rev 11:15-19 concludes with a theophany in which God’s heavenly temple is opened, revealing the ark of the covenant in it. Accompanying the vision are “flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm.” These two aspects of the theophany “correspond then with the two parts of v. 18,” the

⁵⁹ Note, how οἱ ἀγίοι and οἱ προφῆται are consistently used of how they either suffer at the hands of their enemies or in the defeat of these enemies. (13:7, 10; 16:6; 17:6; 18:20, 24; 20:9)

⁶⁰ In 19:7 we are told that the bride has made herself ready and in 21:2 New Jerusalem is “prepared as a bride beautifully adorned for her husband.” (21:2; cf. 21:9)

⁶¹ This possible conversion of the nations is also seen in how δόξα and τιμή are used in conjunction with each other in the book. The combination occurs six times in the book (4:9, 11; 5:12, 13; 7:12, 21:26), always in contexts of heavenly worship of God and/or the Lamb, except in 21:26, where it is the nations who bring their δόξα and τιμή into the city. Thus, in 21:26, the nations do exactly what the heavenly choirs do previously in the book, bring their honour and glory into the city whose radiance is the holiness of God. This is also precisely what those who fear God do in 11:13, and this stands in stark contrast to 16:9, where those who receive their just judgment because they refuse to heed the call to give God glory (14:7) blaspheme God. See Bauckham 1993a:307-09; 1993b:98-104 on the two fates that are open to the nations, depending on how they respond to the church’s witness.

expectation of God's final reward to his covenantal people (the ark) and the final judgment (the earthquake, etc.).⁶²

In the seismic and atmospheric aspect of the theophany, consistent with the focus of the whole passage, we are reminded of God's coming in final judgment on the nations who oppose him.⁶³ The expectation of God's judgment is also seen in the opening of the temple which already has been associated with judgement in 8:1-5 and does so again in 15:5.

However, by mentioning the ark of the covenant John also picks up on the positive aspect of the expected eschatological theophany of Israel's God.⁶⁴ Within Jewish hope the reappearance of the ark often played a significant role in the expectation of the restoration of the covenantal community in the kingdom of God.⁶⁵ Before the exile, God's presence was enthroned on the ark and it played a central role in the cultic maintenance of the people's covenantal life with God. The ark was lost during the Babylonian captivity, accentuating the judgment for Israel's sin since it signalled the departure of God's presence. Although a literal return of the ark was not commonly expected,⁶⁶ it nevertheless signalled what was hoped for, "God's gracious presence with his redeemed community and his provision of grace by atonement."⁶⁷ The brief appearance in 11:19 of the heavenly counterpart of the ark that had been lost on earth thus anticipates the day when the covenantal presence of God with his people will be restored. Considering that the ark and the throne of God are closely related since it was above the ark that God was enthroned in the temple, the appearance of the heavenly ark here anticipates 21:1-22:5, when instead of the ark, the throne of God and the Lamb descends on earth and becomes the ordering centre of the everlasting kingdom on earth,⁶⁸ when the σκηνή, "dwelling," of God σκηνώσει, "dwells," with

⁶² Beckwith 1919:611.

⁶³ See Bauckham 1993a:199-209 on how John alludes to the theophany in Ex 19 which was accompanied with similar phenomena, and how John combines this with the great earthquake in order to signal how God is coming in final judgment against the nations who oppose him.

⁶⁴ John's depiction of the ark departs from other early Jewish literature where the ark never features in the inventory of the heavenly temple (Aune 1998a:678, who also notes that the throne may be seen as its heavenly counterpart). See Beale 1999:618 on how John may be employing the song of Moses (Ex 15:13-18) here to indicate the final reward to God's people.

⁶⁵ Beale 1999:619; Beasley-Murray 1981:190-91; Harrington 1993:126.

⁶⁶ Beale 1999:619; cf. Charles 1920a:298; Aune 1998a:678.

⁶⁷ Beale 1999:619.

⁶⁸ The "presence of God without a literal reappearance of the ark is the idea in Rev. 11:19, which is expanded in 21:3, 22." (Beale 1999:619)

his people.⁶⁹ This eschatological appearance of God's covenantal presence goes far beyond his presence over the ark in the earthly temple—no longer veiled by a heavy curtain, humanity will “see his face.” (22:4) This vision is the final answer to “the cry of the martyrs under the altar – how long, O Lord?” But the vision does not only resolve this question but also intensifies it “because the resolution has been glimpsed in the foretaste of the new Jerusalem, but still not yet attained.”⁷⁰

D. Conclusion

11:15-19 depicts the fulfilment of God's eschatological purposes as a regime change (11:15) and anticipates how it will be accomplished (11:16-19). Negatively this is accomplished in God's final judgment on the powers that now hold the position of authority on earth which spells their final and utter demise. (11:18a, 18c, 19b) Positively, this means the arrival of God on the central throne of earthly authority; then he will reward his servants, those who have remained and become loyal to him. (11:18c, 19a). The negative aspect is a dominant theme in this proleptic pericope since it, as the seventh trumpet, is the climax of the trumpet sequence that is closely linked to the martyrs' prayer for vindication. However, John not only augments the expectation for vindication by placing it in the context of a prior concern for the conversion of the nations, he also anticipates their positive response by including those who do heed the church's witness among those who will commune with God in the eternal kingdom.

In setting this expectation of a regime-change within the context of the martyrs' prayer for vindication, in structurally linking the third woe with both the seventh trumpet and the destruction of Babylon in ch. 18, and in anticipating the reward that awaits the servants of God, 11:15-19 both tersely describes the fulfilment of themes that have dominated the book so far, and also anticipates themes the following chapters focus on: chs. 12-13 explain why the followers of the lamb should expect to be martyred by the powers that are; ch. 14. proleptically anticipates the primary role Jesus and the slain saints will have in the eschatological judgment; chs. 15-16 delineate the arrival of God's anger on the nations who exercised anger, a

⁶⁹ σκηνή is a common translation for “the Hebrew *mishkan* (tent), which was the symbol of God's abiding presence in the midst of Israel” (Caird 1966:203) and is here used to indicate the fulfilment of Lev 26:11 and perhaps Ez 37:27 (204; cf. Beale 1999:1046-47; Beasley-Murray 1981:311; Witherington 2003:255; Harrington 1993:207).

⁷⁰ Gilbertson 2003:141.

judgment further explained in chs. 17-20; and 21:1-22:5 contains the vision of the glorious regime that will replace the one that has been judged.

III. A New View of History in the Light of an Expected Regime Change

In our introduction to Revelation, we noted the unbearable tension between what the book confesses, God's undisputed sovereignty over his creation, and the present state of affairs, the irresistible reign of God's enemies on earth. Rev 11:15-19 resolves this tension by anticipating how the One Enthroned and Christ, whose sovereignty is established in heaven, will take over the βασιλεία that now is occupied by the powers of the world. Since βασιλεία in 11:15 does not simply refer to an activity but to the whole complex which is the concrete position of geopolitical authority, it can not be seen as a utopic "rule" divested of its geopolitical connotations but must be seen as actual political authority over a concrete realm which is exercised from a concrete centre. Rev 11:15-19 envisions a "regime change" in the earthly realm, and as such, is a gateway into the second half of the book.⁷¹ In the following discussion we will therefore look at how Rev 12-22 fleshes this out, how it portrays the order of the beast, how this order comes to its end, what the order of God and the lamb that replaces it is like, what the discontinuities and the continuities between the two are, and what understanding of history this produces. But first a note on terminology. While in the above exegesis we have focused on how βασιλεία and κόσμος are used in the book, in the following discussion "kingdom" and "world" will be used in a broad sense, the former of socio-political orders as a whole, and the latter of the human world, in distinction to the non-human creation.⁷²

A. The Kingdom of the Dragon and His Beasts

In Revelation, the kingdom of the world has a defined power structure, particular ways in which this power structure is maintained, all of which lends a fundamental character to this kingdom.

⁷¹ If chs. 1-11 as a whole "introduce and imply" what is developed in greater detail in chs. 12-22 (Beale 1999:622), the seventh trumpet seems to gather together the pivotal themes that will be explored in the rest of the vision.

⁷² So, e.g. in the following discussion, "kingdom of the world" and "kingdom of God" will refer to the human community organised as a political entity as it is defined by the rule of God's enemies and of God respectively.

The transcendental authority that stands behind it is the Dragon, identified in 12:9 as the arch enemy of God, the ancient serpent, Satan, the Devil whose purpose is to lead the world astray (12:9)⁷³, who desires to destroy the people of God (12:13) and makes war with saints of God (12:17). In order to accomplish his purposes the Dragon gains entrance to the earthly realm by establishing a beast in its own image as the geopolitical ruler on earth. (13:2)⁷⁴ This beast establishes its own authority through another beast who deceives the world to submit to the beast (13:11-17) as well as through a network of vassal rulers.⁷⁵ In the way John describes this regime he makes it clear that he has Roman power primarily in mind, the first beast most likely referring to imperial power as centred in emperors, the second to Rome's political religion, the imperial cult as a pivotal institution of maintaining imperial cohesion. Babylon, first introduced in 14:8 (cf. 16:19) and more fully depicted in chs. 17-18, refers to Rome as the geopolitical centre of the 'global'⁷⁶ empire which as such also represents the empire as a whole. However, precisely because John casts Rome in these mythological roles of God's primordial enemies, they should not be limited to Rome, but are transferable to every power that takes on the role that Rome played.⁷⁷

This draconic order maintains its power primarily by a willing submission of its subjects to the allure of the apparent invincibility of its power (13:3-4, 13-14)⁷⁸ and by an unjust distribution of goods and privileges to its elites.⁷⁹ However, it tries to subject those who resist it by brute force and with the fear of death. (13:9-10, 16)

⁷³ "The deceiver of the whole world appears to generalize the narrative of Genesis 3 and apply it to the race (cf. Wis. 2:24)." (Beasley-Murray 1981:202)

⁷⁴ Note how the first beast is cast in the image of the dragon. (12:3; 13:1)

⁷⁵ While the close connection between the city Babylon and vassal kings is made more explicit (17:2; 18:9), such associations are also made in relation to the beast (17:11-12, 15; 19:9).

⁷⁶ The beast is "given authority over every tribe and people and language and nation," (13:7; cf. 13:12; 17:2)

⁷⁷ "At the time when John was writing Rome had inspired his views, but because of the description of the city as Babylon the image can be of universal application, a symbol of military power, exile and, for those who witness to the ways of the Lamb, oppression." (Rowland 1997:185)

⁷⁸ See Bauckham 1993a:431-50 on the distinct use of the *Nero Redivivus* myth in Rev 13 and 17, the former of the consolidation of imperial power after chaos following the fall of Nero's and the latter to the belief that Nero had not really died but was gone into hiding and would return to take his vengeance on Rome. On the ironic way John employs the myth in Rev 13, Bauckham says: "Just as Jesus, crucified by Roman power, was vindicated by his resurrection, as Christians saw it, so the beast, struck down by divine judgment, was vindicated by his recovery, as the world in general saw it." (433)

⁷⁹ This is vividly depicted in ch. 17-18 where the ruling classes are able to live a life in unsurpassed luxury because of their intimate allegiance with the centre of power. (17:2; 18:2-3, 9-19) On the "unholy allegiance" of Rome's unjust economic structure to the imperial cult, see Kraybill 1996; he argues that one of John's primary pastoral purposes is to call Christian who might be involved in this economic structure "to sever or to avoid economic and political ties with Rome," (17) and as such

“Deception” is a catch-word Revelation uses to depict the basic character of this kingdom of the world.⁸⁰ First, this deception consists in a blasphemous claim to absolute power. Through the beasts, the Dragon tries to accomplish on earth what it failed to do in heaven, taking the dominion that properly belongs to God.⁸¹ Through the dazzling might of the first beast and its cultic mystification by the second beast, all “the inhabitants of the earth” are deceived to participate in this blasphemy, perceiving the draconic power as irresistible rather than a temporary aberration.⁸² In this way, the whole world is deceived to pledge its allegiance to the political order that is moving toward its own destruction in the eschatological judgment of God.⁸³ Second, this deception consists in the promise of wealth and luxury. For John, it is not the *pax Romana* that characterises the empire but Babylon the Great whore who with her abominable luxuries enriches those who fornicate with her.⁸⁴ This is her “magic spell” (*φαρμακεία*) by which all nations are deceived (*ἐπλανήθησαν*) (18:23; cf. 14:7). The kingdom of the world will be judged precisely for the dark underside of its dual deception, its draconic oppression of those who refuse to submit to its enticing power (13:9-10, 16-17; 15:4-7; 18:24) and its socio-economic injustice, the accumulation of wealth at the expense of “bodies and souls” (18:3, 7, 13).

In summary, the kingdom of the world is the socio-political reality which now holds the sway on earth. It is determined by the reign of God’s enemies who maintain their rule through deception (idolatry, power, and economic privileging) and it is characterised by gross injustice and persecution of those who remain faithful to the ways of God as revealed in Christ.

⁸⁰ “identified with the poor and marginalized because he believed Christians no longer could participate in an unjust commercial network thoroughly saturated with idolatrous patriotism.” (23)

⁸¹ Of the 8 times *πλάνω* occurs in the book, it refers four times to Satan as the one who deceives the world, twice of the second beast as it deceives the world to worship the first beast (13:14; 19:20) with its draconic voice (13:11), once of Babylon as she deceives the world by her magic (18:23), and once of Jezabel (2:20) (this suggests Jezabel advocates compromise with Rome; cf. Witherington 2003:65-66).

⁸² Having failed to destroy the messianic child (12:4-5), having consequently lost his place in the heavenlies (12:7-9), and having failed to conquer the woman who represents God’s people on earth, the Dragon begins to make war against her children (12:13-17).

⁸³ Within the spatial and temporal expansion of the book, this invincibility is but the last spasms of the dragon during the “short time” it is banished to earth (12:12), and this power is destined for doom, it will be cast out from the inhabitable creation with the dragon (18:21; 19:20; 20:10).

⁸⁴ Participation in the draconic order, no matter what one’s social status is, entails culpability in its blasphemy and injustice, and thus also entails the same judgment. (14:9-10; cf. 6:15; 16:2) “If the existing structures are sinful, participation in them is necessarily complicity with sin.” (Wengst 1994:198)

⁸⁴ See Bauckham 1993a:338-83 on Rev 18 and its critique of Roman economic structures.

B. The Fall of Babylon and the End of the Draconic Regime

The *lex talionis* judgment on this draconic regime anticipated in 11:18 is fleshed out in chs. 14 and following. Here two double motifs dominate: first, those who judge are both God and the Lamb (accompanied with an army of martyrs),⁸⁵ and second, the judgment focuses both on Babylon, the geopolitical centre of the draconic order, and on the beasts and all their allies.⁸⁶

Let us begin by considering two pivotal aspects of the fall of Babylon. First, its quick and catastrophic demise⁸⁷ is God's judgment on the city for its blasphemous ways, its injustice, and its culpability in the death of the martyrs as well as its other victims.⁸⁸ However, second, although God is seen as the agent of the city's destruction, both as it is anticipated and after it has been accomplished, 17:15-18 suggests His actual involvement is indirect. Probably drawing on fears associated with the *Nero Redivivus* myth, John anticipates how precisely one of the emperors who have occupied the position of the beast, accompanied with an alliance of other kings, will turn on its former centre of power and destroy it.⁸⁹ Babylon falls on the basis on which it is built. The Real Politik of brute force breeds the force that eventually will destroy it, and "the gospel reveals God's wrath in that the human culture based on violence is shown for what it really is."⁹⁰

Now let us consider the final judgment of the draconic order of the beast. First, just as God was seen as the decisive origin of the fall of Babylon, so Jesus, as a great warrior king accompanied with his army of martyrs, is seen as the agent who

⁸⁵ Throughout the impending judgment is attributed to God, often depicted as the fulfilment of God's δργή (14:10; 16:19; 19:15). The role of Jesus as eschatological judge begins to emerge in ch. 14 where he is first introduced as the Lamb accompanied with his army of martyrs (14:1-5) and as the agent of the double harvest (14:14-20). His victorious role in the final battle of the beasts and those allied to them is anticipated in 16:15, explicitly stated in 17:12-14 and depicted in 19:11-21.

⁸⁶ This double concern is evident in 14:8-11, where the angelic call to repentance in light of the impending judgment is followed first by an anticipation of the fall of Babylon (14:8) and second by the final judgment on the beast and its allies (14:9-11). While both of these concerns are evident in the bowl sequence, chs. 17-18 focus on the judgment of Babylon and 19:11-21 on the defeat of beast's regime.

⁸⁷ The swiftness is repeatedly emphasised in Rev 18. The chapter begins anticipating that her plagues will overtake her ἐν μιᾷ ἡμέρᾳ (18:8a), and in their three-fold lament, the city's vassal kings and merchants cry that her judgment came μιᾷ ὥρᾳ. (18:10, 17, 19)

⁸⁸ 14:8; 16:19; 18:5, 8b, 20, 24; 19:2.

⁸⁹ See especially Bauckham 1993a:407-31, who also notes that "redivivus" may be a mistaken term since it implies the belief that Nero has died, which is not a common motif in the myth; rather, people thought he had fled, "in hiding somewhere in the east, and would return across the Euphrates." (421; cf. Witherington 2003:177-79; Beale 1999:17-18, 877-78)

⁹⁰ Rowland 1999:607.

defeats the beast and its accomplices.⁹¹ Second, however, despite the strongly militaristic imagery of 19:11-21, this is not to be seen as a literal battle but as a legal judgment, where the draconic order of the beast is defeated by Him who is called “the Word of God” (18:13) and makes war with the sword of his mouth. Although this suggests that this battle is not won by conventional military means, this does nevertheless mean that it is a decisive and effective battle since the divine word accomplishes its purposes by merely uttering them.⁹² Third, this judgment may be depicted as a battle precisely to emphasise that before the kingdom of God can appear as the new geopolitical order on a transformed creation, the kingdom of the world, both its central elite and everything associated with it must be removed.⁹³ Fourth, precisely because the Messianic warrior is accompanied by the army of martyrs, this also suggests that just as the martyrs in history expose the fundamental weakness in the power of the beast and thus demonstrate that it is God and not the Beast who has authority over the natural world, so in the eschaton their way is vindicated. In the final demise of all violent pretence of transitory human power, the way of the martyrs who follow the lamb will stand.⁹⁴ Finally, and perhaps most importantly, how this judgment actually takes place is never stated. Considering how the actual fall of Babylon is depicted, it is tempting to see the demise of the beasts within the same self-defeating logic of violence.⁹⁵ At minimum it must mean that the way of the warrior on the white horse in Rev 19 cannot be inconsistent with how he as the Lamb

⁹¹ The judgment of Christ as the warrior on the white horse accompanied with his army of martyrs in 19:11-21 is first anticipated in 14:1-5 where Christ, as the Lamb, is introduced as standing on Mt. Zion with his 144.000, then in depiction of the treading of the wine press in 14:20, and finally Christ’s anticipation of his own coming as a thief is set in the middle of an anticipation of the final battle in 16:13-16. Against Collins 1976:224; Swete 1911:253, I follow Beale (1999:960) and others in seeing τὰ στρατεύματα as the saints (Caird 1966:244; Harrington 1993:191; Witherington 2003:243).

⁹² Just as it there symbolises the effectiveness of the kerygmatic witness (cf. 11:5), so here it represents the effectiveness of the word of judgment. Is this perhaps to be seen as a counterpart to the creative word in Genesis 1, the divine word that is effective simply in its utterance?

⁹³ Bauckham and Hart 1999:140-41.

⁹⁴ See Collins 1977 on traditions of resistance in first century Judaism, raging from active revolt to two types of non-violent resistance. Revelation stands within a synergistic tradition of non-violent resistance in which the suffering and death of the saints play an active role in the impending judgment of God on his enemies.

⁹⁵ See Bredin 2003:200-214 for a non-violent reading of Rev 19. Regarding the rule of the Lamb revealed at Easter Bauckham 1993b:64 says, “When the slaughtered Lamb is seen ‘in the midst of’ the divine throne in heaven (5:6; cf. 7:17), the meaning is that Christ’s sacrificial death *belongs to the way God rules the world* Christ’s suffering witness and sacrificial death are, in fact ... the key event in God’s conquest of evil and establishment of his kingdom on earth.” Similarly, Barr (1984:42) sees a reversal of militaristic imagery in ch. 19 like what is seen in 5:5-6. Ford (1984:67), in her unlikely reading of the rider of ch. 19 as the Memra, sees Revelation as “pacifist apocalyptic writing.” See Collins 1990:65-72 for counter arguments.

won the decisive victory at Easter.⁹⁶ However, since the text is silent on the matter, it is perhaps better to be agnostic about the mode of this judgment.⁹⁷ This silence may indeed be important since it can neither provide an eschatological justification of the use of coercive force nor foreclose the possibility that the exercise of such force may at times be appropriate.⁹⁸

While the focus may be on the judgment on Babylon and the Beasts, the regime change is not completed before the Dragon that has been banished from the earthly realm (20:1-2, 10) and humanity as a whole have been judged according to what citizen registry their deeds have landed them in (20:11-15). This ultimate legal action sounds the final death-knell to the kingdom of the world, both the powers behind it and the those who persist in allegiance to it, and paves the way for the appearance of the kingdom of God as the divine throne descends from heaven to the earthly realm, in which not a trace of the old order will be found. (21:8, 27; 22:15)

C. The Kingdom of God Centred in the New Jerusalem

When we turn our attention to the nature of the kingdom of God we see that the kingdom of the world is but a parody of what is true of God's rule.⁹⁹ In this way John highlights the stark contrast between the two.

First, the way the Dragon attempts to stave off its impending doom by establishing its own kingdom on earth through the astonishing power of the first beast and the religious dazzle of the second is but a poor imitation of how the one enthroned in heaven has won the decisive victory in the martyrological death and the glorious exaltation of the Lamb who now, in the Spirit, extends his victory through the world in the church's martyrological witness. Likewise, Babylon the Great, the earthly centre of the Dragon's power, who claims sovereignty of the whole world is proven to be but an unjust Prostitute that will collapse under the very logic by which she

⁹⁶ "All that is opposed to God's rule, we are to understand, has been defeated by the Lamb.... The continuing and ultimate victory of God over evil which the rest of Revelation describes is no more than the working-out of the decisive victory of the Lamb on the cross." (Bauckham 1993b:74-75)

⁹⁷ See Bredin 2003:25-35 for a helpful overview of ways in which the violent language of Revelation has been interpreted.

⁹⁸ This is a good example of how while the book has "an implied intense suspicion of the values of the surrounding culture and institutions," it nevertheless does not "set down precise rules of how one should exemplify the divine wisdom." (Rowland 1998:523)

⁹⁹ If Bauckham's and Hart's suggestion is correct that Jesus avoids making God the subject of βασιλεύω in the Synoptic gospels to emphasise that God does not rule like earthly kings do, (1999:164) Revelation might be seen as spelling out what this difference lies in. In Revelation, βασιλεύω is always used either of God (11:15, 17; 19:6) or the saints (5:10; 20:4, 6; 22:5).

hoarded wealth for herself in the light of the New Jerusalem that will descend on earth, brilliant in the dazzling glory and holiness of God and the Lamb that occupy its central throne.¹⁰⁰

Second, in contrast to the illegitimate rule of the Dragon and its earthly cartel, God exercises his sovereignty in a fundamentally different way and for a different purpose.¹⁰¹ While the rule of the Dragon is characterised by the deceptive threat of its dazzling force, God's just punishment only plays a limited role in his kingdom. In history they are exercised in order to bring people to their senses so they will not perish in the eschatological judgement. And even in this, they can only be successful in tandem with the witness of the church. The purpose for their respective rules is also diametrically opposite to each other. Babylon is structured to enrich the few at the expense of the many while the New Jerusalem exalts all God's servants so at the end all rule at no one's expense (22:5). And while Babylon's economy is centripetal, privileging the central elite at the expense of those who occupy the periphery,¹⁰² the flow of goods in the New Jerusalem is centrifugal, the river of life flows from the throne, feeding the sap of trees that heal those battered by history (22:1-2).¹⁰³ It is from this overflow of divine glory and life, that kings and nations respond by bringing their own honour and glory into the city. (21:24-26)

Thus, the Kingdom of God is the socio-political reality which has the one and only true claim for the whole creation as its realm. It is determined by the reign of God and is maintained by his justice and his life-giving presence. It is characterised by a peaceful order in which all God's human subjects are exalted to the highest position of honour. This stands in stark contrast to the kingdom of the world. It is

¹⁰⁰ See Rossing 1999:143 for an overview of what are likely intentional contrasts between the two cities. Kraybill (1996:207-14) argues that John uses Ezekiel and Isaiah in his portrait of the New Jerusalem in order to portray her as infinitely better than Babylon; in her, the economic justice of God will replace the injustice and violence of Roman power and commerce.

¹⁰¹ Revelation strongly affirms that God, as creator (4:11) and redeemer (5:10), both rightfully can and does exercise his sovereign rule. Although he seeks to draw all to his way, he will eventually enforce it in eschatological judgment and redemption.

¹⁰² "Luxury goods here gravitate to the centre to supply an insatiable need. This has the effect of making the rest of the world peripheral. Those on the periphery become merely means of supplying the needs of others." (Rowland 1997:186; cf. Richard 1995:137)

¹⁰³ Compare the centripetal logic in the laments of 18:9-19 (cf. 18:3, 7, 24) with the centrifugal wealth and glory of the New Jerusalem in 21:22-22:5 (cf. 21:6-7; 22:17) The cycle of centripetal worship and centrifugal grace is seen particularly well in 22:3-5 where it is precisely οἱ δοῦλοι αὐτοῦ who λατρεύσουσιν αὐτῷ (22:3) who will βασιλεύσουσιν εἰς τοὺς οἰώνας τῶν οἰώνων (22:5). For the background and appropriation of the idea of the saints participation in eschatological rule, see Roose 2004a and 2004b.

based on deception and brute force and maintains its order in order to enrich its central elite at the expense of its peripheral subjects.

D. What Fades Away and what Remains

In the above discussion of the regime change Revelation expects we discover some stark discontinuities but also some fundamental underlying continuities. The fundamental discontinuity between the future and the present is the agency which rules the earth and the implications this has for life on earth. This includes a replacement of the ruling elite, the political centre from which this rule is exercised,¹⁰⁴ and the citizenship of the realm, as well as the eradication of everything associated with the kingdom of the world with the arrival of God's just and life-giving kingdom.¹⁰⁵

However, intrinsic to the radical discontinuities are some underlying continuities. First, although the regime is replaced, the position of authority which structures the human community remains. The regime change is the correction of a temporal aberration on earth in which God assumes the position on earth that he already occupies in heaven. Second, the socio-geographical realm which is ruled remains the same, the ordered human social cosmos within its earthly concrete geographical and material context.¹⁰⁶ It is not another realm that is expected but its transformation as God occupies its shaping centre.¹⁰⁷ Since the kingdom of God will be populated by those who now live on earth and since entrance into the eternal kingdom is contingent upon allegiance to it in history, everyone is kept open to this

¹⁰⁴ The throne of God and redeemed humanity gathered around it in the New Jerusalem replaces Babylon and the order of the Beast. Note how while Babylon is geographically limited, the walls of the New Jerusalem stand at the borders of the inhabitable cosmos (cf. 21:8,27), perhaps indicating that in the eschatological order redeemed humanity as a whole enjoys the privileges limited to city elites in history.

¹⁰⁵ The exclusion lists in 21:8, 27; 22:15 function not to identify particularly “bad” sinners but rather refer to those who persist in allegiance to the draconic order (cf. Beasley-Murray 1981:314; Caird 1966:267; Gundry 1987:258; Richard 1995:166-68; Witherington 2003:256-57).

¹⁰⁶ Therefore, “Liberation theologians,” rightfully “note that it is the *form* of this world which is passing away rather than this world itself.” (Rowland and Corner 1990:135)

¹⁰⁷ Moltmann points out that the eschatological moment is the universal fulfilment of God’s radical identification with creation in the cross, “when the whole creation will become his dwelling, God’s cosmic temple. In the enduring presence of the living God, heaven and earth and all things will become new, and from this new creation death and pain will be excluded. That is the cosmic vision of Revelation 21: the world will become the living-space and the dwelling of the eternal God.” (*SW*, 123)

future, the ecclesial communities must persevere in order to enter it and the rest of the world can enter it if they change their allegiance.¹⁰⁸

Here we have considered continuities and discontinuities particularly in relation to the book's use of kingdom language but the same dynamic is seen in its expectation of the renewal of the earth seen in the use of Eden imagery in 21:1-22:5.¹⁰⁹ However, this ecological transformation is contingent on God's dealings with humanity. It is only as God defeats and judges human rebellion and restores humanity to its covenantal relationship with him that the whole created order is transformed.

E. The Upside Down View from the End

Revelation attempts to give meaning to the present suffering of the community not with reference to a divine plan of history, but with an understanding of the present from the horizon of the future, that is, from the coming kingdom.¹¹⁰

John's visions contradict experienced reality. At the time of his writing Jerusalem lay in ruins, occupied at best by animals, while the metropolis of Rome radiated splendour and delighted in its pulsating vitality. In his visions precisely the reverse is the case.¹¹¹

The view of history which emerges from how Revelation sees the future as a regime change does not rely on how things are or what one can hope to develop from the present state of affairs. Rather through an expansion of spatial and temporal categories what appears to be is revealed to be false. This expansion of reality encourages "readers to live faithfully and to avoid damaging compromise with the prevailing political, economic and religious climate of their times"¹¹² Apart from revelation, the kingdom of the world appears to be the indisputable power on earth, exploiting the earth for its own enrichment and oppressing the few subjects of the rival kingdom. However, within the spatial expansion of Revelation, God is revealed

¹⁰⁸ So while the churches are those whose future is in the kingdom, they will only enter it if they "hear" the messages the risen Christ gives to them by the Spirit in chs. 2-3, the peoples and nations that now stand under the judgment coming to the order of the dragon will enter the New Jerusalem (21:24-26) if they hear the Gospel and repent (11:13; 14:6-7; 15:3-4). Rowland (1990:137) rightly points out that although the "future triumph of righteousness is assured" in apocalyptic, human destiny is not foreordained, but is left open.

¹⁰⁹ Although 21:4 could be read as indicating a radical and absolute discontinuity between the present and the coming creation, a close reading of 21:1ff suggests not a replacement but a radical transformation of this creation. When God says, "I am making everything new" (21:5), this is best taken quite literally, he does not create new things but rather makes anew what already exists, transforms it, he "still works with the raw materials of the old cosmos. The new creation improves the old but does not substitute one cosmos for another" (Carroll 2000:255; cf. Beale 1999:1040; Caird 1966:265; Harrington 1993:208)

¹¹⁰ Fiorenza 1985:50.

¹¹¹ Wengst 1994:197.

¹¹² Gilbertson 2003:140-41; cf. Wengst 1994:197.

to be the rightful sovereign over both heaven and earth, who already has established his undisputed sovereignty in the heavenly realm and has already won the decisive victory for its establishment on earth. In the temporal expansion of the text, we are shown how God will establish his sovereignty on earth and be the life-giving centre of the human community within the earthly realm. Thus, within this temporal and spatial expansion the view of the kingdom of the world is transformed from the one inescapable power whose global expansion it is futile to resist to a temporary and fleeting order that will vanish at the appearance of the kingdom of God.¹¹³ In this vision, the followers of the lamb are transformed from a despised and marginalised sect on the Roman periphery to an army who through their martyrological suffering conquer the powers that are.¹¹⁴

Within a framework that expects the perpetual continuation of the present state of affairs, the only rational course of action is to submit to this order, prosper as well as one can by exploiting the possibilities it offers.¹¹⁵ However, this is turned upside down in the spatial and temporal expansion of reality in Revelation. How things are is the world ‘as it will not be’ while the vision of the kingdom of God is the world ‘as it is not yet’.¹¹⁶ Therefore, those who seek their own welfare by conforming to the way of the beast will share in the beast’s destruction while those who are now crushed by its ‘irresistible’ power will in the end remain standing.¹¹⁷ They are the victors because theirs is the future. This vision determines the true nature of historical reality as it reveals its end, how everything that opposes God will come to its end when his sovereign presence appears and transforms both creation and the human world that dwells in it.

In this upside-down view of reality, things as they are are revealed to be an illusion. However, this is not a denial of the concrete actuality of the present state of

¹¹³ On how the book uses expressions indicating 3 ½ years to signal the indefinite but short time of the last intensification of the power of evil in the eschaton, see Beale 1999:565-68; Beckwith 1919:252.

¹¹⁴ We will discuss this further in the next chapter.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Bauckham 1993b:36-38.

¹¹⁶ Similarly, Pannenberg notes how Ebeling understands the Word as “an ability to make what is hidden present, especially what is past and future. By making what is not there present, it frees us from bondage to what is there.” (as quoted in Gilbertson 2003:151)

¹¹⁷ It is precisely for this reason that worship is such a key feature of Revelation. Not only does it call attention to whom one should rightly pay homage, but in worship believers acknowledge and give glory to who God is from his viewpoint of reality, and as such worship works “to shape a strategy of resistance.” (Ruiz 1997:393) And so, in the structure of the book, the manifestation of the kingdom in worship is prior to the actualisation of it in narrative. (Barr 1984:47)

affairs. Beastly rule is as tangible as the slaying of each saint. The unreality of the kingdom of the world and the privileges it can confer to those who play by its rules are real enough. The illusion that is Beast and Babylon is first a relational one. The kingdom is false because it is based in a false claim to authority, separated from the only true sovereign, the One Enthroned in Heaven. And precisely because of this it is also a temporal illusion, an aberration in history, which from the divine perspective is a short-lived revolt.¹¹⁸ What makes the kingdom of the world illusory is its end, its eventual destruction. *Roma Aeterna* has but a broken time, 3 ½ short lived years.

Therefore, those made rich by Babylon are the poor who cannot escape the city's destruction.¹¹⁹ In contrast, the future of the kingdom of God is secure, although it now seems to suffer continuous defeat by the powers of the world. It is safe in the promise of God's coming sovereignty on earth. Precisely for this reason those who suffer now because of their allegiance to it are called to endure – theirs is the future.

This view of history then calls for a counter-intuitive praxis, an upside-down way of life, in which one does not conform to how things are but as they are purposed to become.¹²⁰ Instead of manipulating the present to fashion one's own desires, one seeks to anticipate this future within the possible. It is precisely ‘apocalyptic’ contexts as reflected in Revelation where this is most starkly revealed. They show the only rational praxis when “the possible” prohibits living from the future: if life can only be maintained by evil means it is better to resist and die than conform and live.¹²¹

IV. Interaction with Moltmann

Revelation's anticipation of a regime change and Moltmann's understanding of the kingdom as symbol of hope for humanity have some striking consonances but also a fundamental difference. Here, we will first look at how both articulate the expectation of the transformation of the world into the kingdom of God when God's unqualified presence arrives on the earth in similar ways, and how because of these

¹¹⁸ Prigent 2001:vi-vii sees Revelation providing “a complete conversion” of temporality, in which the actuality of the present situation “almost takes on the status of an appearance” by a greater reality where the future “has present undertones” and the present “is open toward eternity.”

¹¹⁹ So the exalted Christ proclaims as poor the Laodiceans who think themselves rich (3:17), and urges them to buy true wealth from him (3:18).

¹²⁰ “Eschatological vision and paraenesis have in Revelation the same function. They provide the vision of an alternative world and kingdom in order to strengthen Christians in their consistent resistance to the oppressive powers and persecution of the Roman Empire.” (Hellholm 1989:312)

¹²¹ Rowland 1998:522 notes that for Revelation “the only acceptable stances are resistance and withdrawal (18:4).”

similarities, Moltmann's messianic understanding of history may help us to read Revelation theologically within our contemporary situation. Second, we will focus on a pivotal difference, how Revelation's portrayal of the problem the history of the kingdom responds to stands precisely within the traditional trajectory that Moltmann rejects as insufficient. We will then try to show that the traditional understanding may indeed be preferable and can meet Moltmann's criticisms of it. We will conclude by suggesting how Revelation's focus on rebellion as the fundamental problem may sharpen and focus Moltmann's understanding of the kingdom as a symbol of hope.

A. Kingdom Consonances

1. Hope for the Kingdom of God

"Hope is clearly what the Apocalypse shows us: the affirmation of a counter-reality, but a counter-reality (not at all idealist or future) hidden in the present and of which hope can discern the signs, which never derive from a simple observation of an observable reality... Therefore, hope, manifested in the Apocalypse, is always that which declares to the present: "No, it is not the Kingdom of God, nor the reign of Christ"; but it demands that the Christian be situated in the present in terms of this Kingdom. Thus hope is the positive act in face of the too evident absence, which hope measures and knows but also recognizes (in the passage from faith to hope). Therefore the relation between hope and apocalypse is fundamental, but in a totally different sense from the simplistic one which spontaneously comes to mind."¹²²

Both Moltmann and Revelation see the future as the transformation of the world into the kingdom of God. At the heart of both is the expectation of a divine interruption of the present state of affairs which will transform everything. For both its arrival has been made possible in the paradoxical victory of Christ at Easter, and for both it is therefore the events of Easter that give a christological shape to the hope for the kingdom. For Moltmann it is because Christ has risen into the future of the kingdom he proclaimed, that his proclamation of the kingdom and the way it is related to his death and resurrection are the hermeneutic anchor for any theological exposition of the kingdom. In Revelation this christological foundation is based in Easter as the decisive victory in a cosmic battle. By his blood, Christ as the Messianic king reconciled a people from all the nations that now exist in rebellion and made them a "kingdom to God." It is in, from, and according to the lamb that people who now live in "occupied territory" can orient themselves toward the liberation of earth under its rightful divine ruler.

¹²² Eilul 1977:60.

For both, then, kingdom language is not only eschatological but also irreducibly political. Just as Moltmann reminds us that the hope for the kingdom makes politics eschatological and eschatology political, so the use of βασιλεία and other political language in Revelation reminds us that although the kingdom of God is now not politically manifested, it has lost none of its political force but has as its horizon the coming manifestation of God's geopolitical rule in the realm of the whole earth.

For both, this transformation of the world at the arrival of the kingdom involves both discontinuities and underlying continuities. The kingdom as the telos of human history is so only as an interruption of things as they are. As such, the light the coming kingdom sheds on the present state of affairs prophetically uncovers their true nature. However, underlying this discontinuity that places the present in the prophetic light of the future, is an equally important continuity, that the kingdom hoped for is not an abstract utopia, an idea without a place, but is intrinsically related to the concrete and actual socio-political realities that are now the ordering principles of human communities. Since, as Bauckham notes of Moltmann in particular but is true of Revelation as well, "it is hope for the future of this world, its effect is to show the present reality to be *not yet* what it can be and will be. The world is seen as transformable in the direction of the promised future. In this way believers are liberated from accommodation to the *status quo* and set critically against it. They suffer the contradiction between what is and what is promised."¹²³

Thus, against an influential strand in New Testament studies, ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ, at least in Revelation, does not refer to God's rule abstracted from its geopolitical implications.¹²⁴ Rather, it points to the eschatological location of this manifestation, and then seeks to extrapolate what is the appropriate political stance during the time when this kingdom is awaited but not yet geopolitically manifested, a point we will return to in the next chapter.

2. History as Seen from the End

From this future hope and the way in which they configure it, emerges for both a view of history in which the way things appear is turned upside down. For

¹²³ Bauckham 1995:10.

¹²⁴ See e.g. France 1984 (who draws on Perrin 1976); Beavis 2004.

Moltmann it is precisely those who are the victims of the history of the world that are the main subjects of the history of the kingdom of God, and for Revelation it is precisely those who now suffer at the margins of Babylon for their allegiance to Christ who now, in their paradoxical victory, push history toward its transformation. Referring specifically to Revelation, Moltmann sees the importance of apocalyptic to lie precisely in unsettling the *status quo* of the powers that are by revealing their eschatological instability, that “they will perish in the sea of chaos out of which they rose. ‘But he who endures to the end shall be saved.’ The eschatological message of the New Testament … is geared towards resistance, and against resignation.”¹²⁵

The hope for the kingdom depicts the world ‘as it is not yet,’ and the light this vision gives reveals the present state of affairs as ‘the world as it will not be.’ For both this results in a historical praxis that goes against the grain of the obvious; in light of the way the kingdom is revealed in Christ, one “is not brought into harmony and agreement with the given situation, but is drawn into the conflict between hope and experience.”¹²⁶ In Revelation, reflecting a context of socio-political marginalisation, this means faithfulness to the prophetic kerygma that proclaims the crucified as Lord and exposes the deceptive nature of the order of the Beast. Central to this proclamation is a refusal to engage in the idolatry and injustice of the draconic order, even if this means suffering death at its hands. Reflecting a context where ‘faith-full’ socio-political engagement is possible, Moltmann emphasises how this kerygmatic resistance involves a messianic mediation of history: Since Jesus brought the kingdom into history, the kingdom is the eschatological future that determines the present; therefore “we can already live in light of the ‘new era’ in the circumstances of the ‘old’ one.”¹²⁷ In this light, “set free from the power of the facts of the present time, and from the laws and compulsions of history,” Christians anticipate the kingdom within the world as it is, and in this way history becomes eschatological.¹²⁸

While Moltmann and Revelation share this eschatological perspective on history, Revelation also sets present earthly reality within a larger spatial context. The future of the world comes from above, it is the earthly manifestation of what is already the case in the heavenly realm. Revelation’s emphasis on how the

¹²⁵ *CoG*, 137.

¹²⁶ *TH*, 18.

¹²⁷ *CPS*, 192.

¹²⁸ *CrG*, 1; cf. *CPS*, 192.

sovereignty of God and the Lamb are already established as the *de facto* actuality of the heavenly realm, may suggest ways in which Moltmann can overcome the singularly temporal focus that characterised his early theology. Moltmann has more recently sought to complement this in paying increasing attention to spatial categories, especially in his doctrine of God and in his understanding of the relationship between God and creation. However, his discussion of “heaven” as the realm of God’s presence is still overtly abstract. It literally has no ‘room’ for concrete created realities since heaven is the realm from which their potential grows but not where they are actualised.¹²⁹ Despite the difficulty “heaven” poses to a modern cosmology, Revelation’s emphasis that it is not simply the realm of God’s presence but the place where God’s sovereignty is the ordering presence of the heavenly community, can provide Moltmann with “a wider, deeper reality within which present, earthly reality is to be seen.”¹³⁰ If this is granted, then the hiddenness of God does not have to be seen in only temporal terms. Rather, the true nature of reality is then revealed in a spatial expansion of reality and this perspective is verified in the vision’s temporal expansion.¹³¹

3. Reading Revelation through Moltmannian Lenses

The book of Revelation is written within a context where faithfulness to the gospel necessarily means social marginalisation. The positive ministry of the church to the world is seen solely in terms of its prophetic testimony to the alternative of the Lamb which includes both warning the world of how it moves toward a deadly end and calling people to a repentance that necessarily leads to marginalisation and possibly death. As such the book is always first the book of oppressed and persecuted Christians, empowering those rendered powerless, assuring them that the way of the kingdom will eventually defeat their oppressors.¹³²

¹²⁹ Although Moltmann calls heaven as “the kingdom of God creative potentialities” which have an ontological priority to “the kingdom of the world’s reality,” it nevertheless remains the realm of the potential, not the actual. It’s the realm of “potentialities and potencies” that due to their proximity to God’s presence “acquire almost no form of their own which could be defined.” (*GiC*, 166)

¹³⁰ Gilbertson 2003:178.

¹³¹ Gilbertson 2003:179.

¹³² Therefore, a crucial aspect of reading Revelation today is to consider how those who are located on social and geopolitical peripheries read it today; so Richard (1995:2) intentionally writes his commentary for the base ecclesial communities in their struggle in Latin America.; see also *JSNT* 25:2, a volume on the use of apocalyptic in Liberation theology, collected in the hope it “will allow a broadening of the process of dialogue.” (Nogueira 2002:126)

However, can the book also speak to Christians who occupy position of social and economic privilege, for whom political engagement is not only possible but often also a responsibility? It is precisely here Moltmann can give some insight. First, his messianic dialectic affirms what is central to Revelation, the church's kerygmatic proclamation. Whether one agrees or disagrees with how he develops this, Moltmann is a confessional theologian, one who seeks to articulate what it means to proclaim and live the apostolic kerygma within our contemporary setting.¹³³ And in doing so, he has continually emphasised what Bauckham sees as central to Revelation, to reject any allegiance to the status quo that benefits the powers that are and situate oneself with their victims. Bauckham says: "John's critique of Rome therefore did more than voice the protest of groups exploited, oppressed and persecuted by Rome. It also required those who could share in her profits to side with her victims and become victims themselves."¹³⁴

Second, his understanding of a Christian anticipatory praxis can help bridge Revelation's kerygmatic resistance into a context of engagement. As an example, let us return to the contrast between Babylon the Great and the New Jerusalem, focusing on the place of economic wealth within them. A basic question Moltmann would want to ask of the immense wealth associated with both cities is for whose benefit it exists?¹³⁵

Babylon's wealth is centripetal. The city enriches itself at the expense of others. This is implied in the pronouncement of her *lex talionis* judgment in 18:4-8—she will be punished according to the measure she has unjustly enriched herself—and is most poignantly depicted in the cargo list of 18:12-13. Through the trading system she controls, Babylon is able to draw every conceivable luxury into herself, even "bodies and souls of people." For John the *pax Romana* did not exist for the peace of the realm, but for the sensuous and material lust of Rome.¹³⁶ The power structure of the city exists precisely to maintain this unjust distribution of wealth. Babylon is a Prostitute queen who fornicates with the kings she has political power over. (17:2,18;

¹³³ So, in *TH*, 195, he says "the Christian consciousness of history ... is a missionary consciousness in the knowledge of a divine commission, and is therefore a consciousness of the contradiction inherent in this unredeemed world, and of the sign of the cross under which the Christian mission and the Christian hope stand."

¹³⁴ Bauckham 1993a:378.

¹³⁵ On Moltmann's view of theology as a critical theory informed by the cross, see *CrG*, 68-75.

¹³⁶ Babylon lives for ἐδόξασεν αὐτὴν καὶ ἐστρηνίασεν. (18:7)

18:3, 7) This imagery of sexual promiscuity is closely linked with the city's unjust economics, the kings' fornication is their participation in her sensuous luxury.¹³⁷ The ruling class amasses this wealth through a merchant class which enriches itself by providing the luxurious goods the city desires.¹³⁸ This ruling elite of the powerful and rich maintain the centripetal economics of Babylon not only by force, but also by keeping the masses of the city happy, letting some of the 'glory' they see trickle down to them.¹³⁹ The victims of this centripetal economy is the periphery, both the actual geographical periphery that is stripped of its resources and the social periphery, the slaves which this system relies on and those killed by its violence.¹⁴⁰

In contrast, the economics of the New Jerusalem is centrifugal. While Babylon seeks to glorify herself with the luxuries she draws into herself, the glory of God is the centre of the New Jerusalem and the wealth associated with God's glory is its constituent fact—the New Jerusalem has no need to rob other of wealth for she is wealth.¹⁴¹ Instead, her riches flow from the central throne of God and the Lamb out to those who need it: her citizens can freely drink of the river of life that flows from the throne and the trees that are nourished by this water bear leaves that are for the healing of the nations (21:6; 22:1-2; cf. 22:17). This centrifugal overflow of God's life-giving glory results in a centripetal response, when the glorious presence of God is the geopolitical light of the world, the nations and their kings bring in their own splendour, honour and glory into it (21:22-26). But this submission of the nations to the throne of God does not result in bondage but rather in exaltation. Those who submit unconditionally to centripetal attraction of the rule of God are drawn into the

¹³⁷ The association of wealth with her identity as a prostitute is first made in the way she is dressed in the wealth she amasses (18:4; note how all the things she is wearing in 18:4 is repeated in the cargo list of 18:12-13). 18:9 links the kings' fornication with their partaking in Babylon's wealth.

¹³⁸ While the ruling elite is able to gratify its material lust by power (note the phrase τῆς δυνάμεως τοῦ στρήνους αὐτῆς in 18:3), the merchants grow wealthy by their ability to satisfy this craving (thus, they grow rich from Babylon's power for self-gratification; 18:3; cf. 18:11, 17b, 19b).

¹³⁹ This is likely what John refers to when he uses various collective terms for the whole of humanity abs being intoxicated with Babylon's wine (13:14, 16-17; 14:8; 17:2, 8; 18:3, 23) Enthralled by her might and dazzling wealth even those exploited by her, "the ordinary people of the empire welcome her rule." (Bauckham 1993a:228-30)

¹⁴⁰ The real cost of Rome's economy is poignantly emphasised in the last items of the cargo list, σωμάτων, καὶ ψυχῶν ἀνθρώπων (18:13). See Witherington 2003:228-30 for a brief overview of the importance of slavery in Roman economy and society.

¹⁴¹ Note how the brilliance of the divine glory that shines from this city is likened to precisely the precious stones that Babylon dresses herself with (21:11: cf. 17:4; 18:12). Second, while Babylon amasses gold, precious stones and pearls that she clothes herself in by her power (17:4; 18:12, 16), these are the very stuff the eternal city is made of, her wall and foundation stones are various kinds of precious stones (21:19-20), the city and its streets are pure gold (21:18, 21b) and its gates are pearls (21:21a).

centrifugal grace of God; those who serve God forever are precisely those who will rule for ever. (22:3-5) Thus, while the order of the beast deals in the bodies and souls of men and women in order to enrich its own elite, the servants of God and the lamb are exalted to a position of authority where all rule and no one is ruled.

Barbara Rossing has convincingly shown that one of the primary reasons why John contrast these two cities as the choice between two women, is precisely in order to urge his readers to abandon the deceptive way of the prostitute, to come out of her (18:4) and orient themselves toward the other, to be those whose righteousness the Bride is clothed with (19:8).¹⁴² How may Moltmann help us heed this call today?

First, and not unlike the task John called his audience to do, it will consist in analysing particular power structures in light of this vision of the liberating authority of God.¹⁴³ In the political sphere, this means to unearth the often hidden motives within the structuration of society, uncover the reality beneath the rhetoric. For example, is our current economic and at times military export of Western democracy fuelled by a desire for others' freedom or an attempt to retain our own global privilege? Second, having done this, Christians need to seek a restructuring of economic life and the power mechanisms that maintain it, seek to turn centripetal tendencies into centrifugal possibilities. Christians, in their political praxis, must seek to establish a political system which exists to exalt its citizens, that is designed to struggle to create the context in which all flourish and everyone can enter the fullness of their personhood. This Moltmannian mediation of Revelation's vision into a context of political engagement is possible precisely because it accentuates what often has been denied or marginalised in both biblical study and theology, the concrete and this-worldly aspects of the language of the kingdom of God, that although the βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ is now manifested in hidden ways, its ultimate claim is the whole human community as it exists in the earthly realm.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Rossing 1999:140-44.

¹⁴³ In the next chapter we will consider in greater detail the actual differences between Moltmann's and Revelation's understanding of the liberating rule of God.

¹⁴⁴ Likewise, in relation to creation generally, Moltmann notes that if the last vision in Revelation anticipates the final "cosmic indwelling" of God in creation, this now necessarily means that we now see the earth as God's temple "and keep all earth creatures holy." ("Progress and Abyss," 314)

B. A Time for Rebellion and Sin?

No form of Christian teaching has any future before it except such as can keep steadily in view the reality of the evil in the world, and go to meet the evil with a battle-song of triumph.¹⁴⁵

Both Revelation and Moltmann want to meet “the evil in the world...with a battle-song of triumph” in their visions of the future kingdom that is the resolution to the apparent absence of God in history. However, they account for this evil and this absence in fundamentally different ways. For the former Evil has gained entrance on earth in human rebellion while for the latter human evil is symptomatic of a fundamental contradiction in creation. Picking up the critique of Moltmann’s position with which we concluded our analysis of his understanding of the kingdom as symbol of hope, we will now first try to respond to Moltmann’s misgivings about the tradition Revelation stands in and then we will try to show how it in return can better account for the weaknesses we saw in Moltmann’s own proposal.¹⁴⁶

1. Has Sin had Its Time?

Although ἀμαρτία occurs only three times in Revelation, its usage is significant: at the outset of the book we are told that Christ “freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom” (1:5b-6a), and in the depiction of defeated Babylon, God’s people are urged to flee the city in order not to participate in its sin and consequently share in the judgment for her sin (18:4-5). However, what Paul labels “sin” is more commonly depicted in Revelation as a rebellion of cosmic proportions.¹⁴⁷ The arch enemy of God, the Devil, has been able to gain entrance to the earthly realm through the earthly powers who have the authority over human societies and structure them. The rest of humanity is culpable in this rebellion as they submit to its deception.¹⁴⁸ This is the situation human beings need and can be redeemed from by shifting their allegiance to Christ who establishes them as “a kingdom to God” by his paradoxical and decisive victory on the cross. It is in the

¹⁴⁵ Aulen 1970:159.

¹⁴⁶ When Moltmann speaks of sin and death in Revelation, he only notes how it distinguishes between the first (physical death) and the second death (separation from death), and how it personifies death. (*CoG*, 82-83)

¹⁴⁷ On ἀμαρτία in Paul, see Gaventa 2004, who suggest that he understands sin within an apocalyptic framework in which Death gains entrance into the world in human sin, and as such reflects a similar idea as found in Revelation.

¹⁴⁸ Although Babylon is judged for deceiving the whole world (18:23), those deceived are culpable for their submission to the draconic order (14:9-10; cf. 18:4).

fulfilment of the history Easter is the centre of that the whole created order will be transformed in the arrival of God's sovereign presence on earth.¹⁴⁹ In the following discussion we will return to our earlier discussion on why Moltmann finds such a view insufficient and consider how Revelation may respond to these critiques.

a) Sin as the Fundamental Human and Pivotal Cosmic Problem

Moltmann's first objection was the impossibility to trace death and suffering directly to sin in light of what we know today about ecological history. However, although a strict causal relationship between sin and suffering is perhaps but certainly not necessarily implied in Revelation, the point accented is not the possible state of creation before the fall nor whether transience in an absolute sense is necessarily problematic. What is pivotal for Revelation, as well as for Paul in Romans 8, is the way in which human rebellion is *the fundamental problem* facing humanity, and how as such it is *the pivotal problem* for the rest of the created order.¹⁵⁰

As the fundamental problem of humanity, sin is a fissure in the relationship between God and humanity which corrupts all the relationship humanity stands in in history. In Revelation this is depicted as a fundamental and universal rebellion that has gained entrance in the human cosmos in and through the reign of the beast. Redemption is made possible precisely in a divine irruption, in the lamb's purchase of a people who are to be a kingdom to God.

However, there is a close relationship between this history of redemption and the transformation of creation. The fundamental problem in human history is also the pivotal problem in the history of creation. This is obvious in Paul, where the liberation of creation from its own bondage is dependent upon "the freedom of the glory of the children of God." (Rom 8:21)¹⁵¹ Although the consequences of the

¹⁴⁹ This does not preclude that God may have other concerns, as the references to "sea" and "curse," in 21:1-7 and 22:3 may indicate, only that the book focuses on the manifestation of the demonic rebellion in humanity and the radical implications this has for the whole cosmos.

¹⁵⁰ See Gowan 1985 on how apocalyptic consistently discusses creation as it is related to the fate of humanity. Also, even Paul may not see as a strict relationship with transience as such and sin as often assumed. Although the term he uses for "decay" in Rom 8:21, φθορά, refers commonly in Greek literature to the mutability and eventual decay of all material things, Jonathan Moo (personal correspondence, February 2005) suggests that Paul rather is appealing to Isaiah 24:1, emphasising the devastation of sin on the material order but without necessarily making a statement on the nature of transience as such. Paul's concern is not the metaphysical question of the origin of transience but the devastating effect human sin has had on creation and why God has allowed it. (Moo 2003)

¹⁵¹ So, the fundamental problem in creation is not the same as that of humanity but is contingent upon it, just as its liberation is.

corruption of human authority are not spelled out as in Rom 8:19-22, certain texts in Revelation imply a similar relationship: the displacement of God's life-giving presence during the history in which the draconic beast has usurped God's rightful βασιλεία on earth results in the devastation of earth. But when God finally takes the βασιλεία that is rightfully his, not only is humanity reconciled but the whole created order is transformed in the life-giving glory of his presence.¹⁵²

While this does not answer the origin of transience as such in creation, it makes a sufficient account for the pathologies of human existence in its relations before God within the realm of creation. What is significant for humanity is not the final cause of creation's transience but how their own condition impinges on creation, what happens to creation, for better or worse, because of the way humanity interacts with it.

b) Sin as Social Structuring and Personal Internalisation

Moltmann's second objection was that "suffering as *punishment for sin*" is only of limited value¹⁵³ and particularly inappropriate when considering the victims who suffer the violence of others.¹⁵⁴ However, Revelation's picture of sin as rebellion can both uphold the universality of human sinfulness and a differentiated understanding of how people, whether individually or corporally, partake in and experience the consequences of sin.

First, since the centre and source of the rebellion is in the demonic and idolatrous usurpation of God's position of sovereignty on earth, sin is logically a socio-political structural phenomenon before it is a personal and individual one. The blasphemous beast occupies the central structuring position in human society and as such corrupts the "social construction" of society.¹⁵⁵ As such, sin can be seen as the transpersonal power that is the systemic web that orders social practices, a web that "once ministered to life" but "now work for death."¹⁵⁶ It is through the socio-political

¹⁵² While the geopolitical manifestation of the dragon results in the destruction of the earth (11:18; cf. 18:2), the creation made new in the descent of God's presence (21:5) has a life-giving river and leaves that heal (22:1-2).

¹⁵³ TKG, 49-50.

¹⁵⁴ See CrG, 274-90, where Moltmann suggests panentheism as a response to Auschwitz.

¹⁵⁵ It is the beast that blasphemes God that has received the authority of the dragon "over every tribe and people and language and nation." (13:7)

¹⁵⁶ WJC, 184-85.

web of the Beast that the Dragon can deceive the inhabitants of the world.¹⁵⁷ However, second, unlike Moltmann, Revelation unambiguously sees a universal and culpable submission to this corrupting order.¹⁵⁸ All “the inhabitants of the earth” have submitted to the beast and as such have become like it, are marked by it. Borrowing language from sociology, sin is both the objectified social order which the ruling elite have externalised but also the way in which everyone who lives under that order has internalised it and made it their own.¹⁵⁹ As we will consider in the next chapter, this complex understanding of sin may be reflected in the two parallel statements on what Jesus accomplishes in his death (1:5-6; 5:9:10), in redeeming a people God both liberates them from their bondage to the corrupting order of the Beast and forgives them for their own culpability in submitting to it.¹⁶⁰ Therefore, rather than “having a limited value,” as Moltmann claims, the atonement of the Lamb for the sin of all human beings as the Lamb “laid down his life in sorrow and love” gives an “awareness of the depth of love involved in the atoning sacrifice” that even exceeds Jesus’ identification with the sufferings of the victims in the world.¹⁶¹

Although this means all are sinners, it does not mean that this proclamation and call come in the same form to all. First, to those at the centre of the draconic order of the beast the gospel comes as a warning: The order whose injustice they enjoy is a historical aberration, and in order to avoid perishing with its destined

¹⁵⁷ In 12:9 Satan is depicted as the Dragon that deceives the whole world ($\delta\pi\lambda\alpha\nu\omega\nu\tau\eta\nu\sigma\iota\kappa\omega\mu\epsilon\nu\eta\nu$ δλην; cf. 20:3, 8, 10), a deception which is accomplished through the earthly powers he works through (13:14; 18:23; 19:20).

¹⁵⁸ While Moltmann is best ambiguous on the universality of sin as an individual phenomena (seen best in his reluctance in seeing the poor as sinners) and unclear about an individual’s responsibility for their own sin, Revelation strongly affirms that humanity as a whole has been corrupted and is culpable for its corruption. (14:9-10; cf. 13:3-4, 7-8, 14; 18:4)

¹⁵⁹ See Berger 1967, ch. 1, on the dynamics of social construction as a process of externalisation, objectification and internalisation by which anomic chaos is held at bay by the construction of a social cosmos. However, in Revelation this logic is turned on its head. What is held at bay is the cosmos as intended in the creative purposes of God while the order that is internalised is the chaos of the beast.

¹⁶⁰ Such a dual emphasis may also be reflected in the books primary depiction of Easter as soteriological event. In 1:5b the Lamb’s act of liberation is depicted as $\lambda\omega\sigma\alpha\nu\tau\iota\eta\mu\alpha\zeta\epsilon\kappa\tau\omega\nu\delta\mu\alpha\rho\tau\iota\omega\nu\eta\mu\omega\nu$ λύσαντι ἡμας ἐκ τῶν δμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ, reflecting the cultic need for forgiveness for personal defilement by sin. However, in 5:9b Jesus ἤγόρασας τῷ θεῷ ἐν τῷ αἵματί σου a people, reflecting language used for ransom paid in order to free people that have been taken by an invading army (Fiorenza 1985:74). If this is case, then the constitution of the redeemed people as a kingdom to God is established both by liberating them from the transpersonal structure they are enslaved by and the defilement of their own sin.

¹⁶¹ Williams 1989:16.

destruction, they must change their allegiance.¹⁶² If they do, they can expect suffering but also an inheritance among the redeemed who will “reign forever and ever.” (22:5)

Second, to those who occupy the peripheral location of the social realm of the beast, the gospel comes as the promise that the order whose injustice they suffer is coming to an end.¹⁶³ However, unlike Moltmann, Revelation unambiguously affirms that those who have persist in the rebellion of the beast, no matter whether great or small, will share in its destiny (14:9-10; 18:4). Unlike Moltmann, therefore, the community of the poor do not by definition constitute one of Christ’s two “congregations.”¹⁶⁴ It assumes that even those who suffer under an unjust order are marked by its injustice, and that fundamental to their liberation is the repentance that reorders human thinking and praxis. This may, in the end, provide a better rationale to one of Moltmann’s own concerns, that the ‘counter-intuitive’ way of the Lamb goes beyond both accommodation to the order as it exists and the rebellion that merely reverses the positions of privilege and oppression but leaves the fundamental structuration of the order intact.¹⁶⁵

Third, although not an emphasis in Revelation, the promise that God “will wipe every tear from their eyes” (21:4) suggests also how such a view of sin as the universal problem redemption responds to can account for suffering that cannot be reduced to perpetuating or suffering injustice. There is suffering, deep suffering, that cannot be traced to anything but the painful absence of God’s life-giving presence on earth. While the ultimate cause of this absence is humanity’s primordial rebellion, such suffering does not have its basis in any particular sin but rather the condition sin produced. Therefore, the church must resist tracing such suffering to individual or

¹⁶² This is a warning directed as much to those inside the ecclesial communities as those outside as is evident in the addresses to the churches in chs. 2-3.

¹⁶³ In this, Moltmann’s pastoral concerns can accentuate what only exist in suggestive form in the text, how the promise of the gospel gives hope to all whose blood is found in Babylon. (18:24)

¹⁶⁴ Moltmann’s discussion of the “congregation of the poor” is heavily dependent on identifying the τούτων τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου τῶν ἐλαχίστων// τούτων τῶν ἐλαχίστων in Matt 25:40, 45 as the poor in general. This of course is a debated issue, several commentators seeing it as referring to the disciples (so Gundry 1982:514-15; Kingsbury 1977:76; Luz 1995:129-30; but against them, Davies and Allison 1997:428-29). Acknowledging that this is “the weight of exegetical opinion,” Rowland (1997:188-89) nevertheless opts against this “exclusive” understanding since the letter of the text does not demand it and since crucial to the text is that “it does not allow the reader to be complacent in the face of judgment.”

¹⁶⁵ Here, Christ’s command to the Laodicean community to buy wealth from him is suggestive: He calls them from their accommodation to the Roman way (3:17-18) by calling them to give place for the way of his messianic banquet (3:20), whose final fulfilment we find in the life of the New Jerusalem (note how 19:9 anticipates 21:1ff in the imagery of a wedding banquet), which is characterised by the free and gracious flow of resources. (21:6-7, 22:26; 22:1-5; cf. 22:17)

structural sin but simply walk with the sufferer, and in the darkness that suggests otherwise, hope for the eschatological verification of God's goodness.

c) Transformation: Restoration and Maturation

The last objection Moltmann has to the traditional understanding is that it leads to a conservative vision of a pristine primordial state corrupted by history. This, however, is not necessarily so; Revelation's vision of the future is both restorative and transformative: In its use of creation imagery, Rev 21-22 expects a *restoration* of humanity to its intended role which results in a *transformation* of the whole cosmos.¹⁶⁶ Such a vision does not only counter the charge of conservatism but is also politically more open than Moltmann's view. Since it contains both restorative and transformative elements it neither favours a return to an ideal past nor assumes that the new always bears the seeds of the preferable, which Moltmann tends to do since the old always inheres in creation's fundamental contradiction. If one is bound by the expectation of the *restoration* of humanity's relationship with God which will *transform* all things, one is radically free when seeking to discern what mixture of restoration, preservation and innovation a particular situation calls for.¹⁶⁷

2. A Time for Rebellion?

Having shown how the understanding of sin depicted in Revelation can account for the criticism Moltmann levies against it, we will now consider how it avoids the weaknesses we saw in Moltmann's own view.

a) The Goodness of Creation and the Cataclysm of the Fall

We have argued that Moltmann in the end cannot affirm the goodness of creation because he postulates a fundamental contradiction in its very structure which must be overcome if it is to be liberated. However, one way of understanding the relationship between *creatio originalis* and *creatio nova* that allows for movement, where telos and origin are not identical, but nevertheless avoids postulating a

¹⁶⁶ In the final vision, humanity is not only restored in its covenantal relationship with God (21:3) but the return of God's presence as this relationship is restored effects a transformation of the created order that goes far beyond the original creation (21:1b, 4).

¹⁶⁷ Similarly, Gilbertson (2003:199-201) argues that the vision of the New Jerusalem may transcend the difference between Moltmann and Pannenberg since it envisions both the transformation (Moltmann) and completion (Pannenberg) of the present.

fundamental contradiction in creation is the notion of maturation in which humanity plays a pivotal role as the *imago dei*.¹⁶⁸

First, although *creatio orginalis* is intrinsically good, it is so in a similar way as a well-formed new born. It is good as it is but an essential part of its goodness is its potential for maturation, and therefore cannot be seen apart from its telos.¹⁶⁹

Second, humanity was created to play a pivotal role in this history of the created order. They were to be God's rulers of the earth¹⁷⁰ through whom the earth flourishes and all who live in it find a meaningful place in the community of the living. As such, although humanity on its own is mortal and creation transient, they were purposed for immortality and intransience as humanity lived in life-giving communion with God and mediated his life-giving presence to creation.¹⁷¹ However, both these were contingent on obedience, free will being a condition for human freedom.¹⁷² Apart from humanity growing into its own maturity to freedom, creation cannot attain its own completion. Within this logic, the goodness of creation can be unambiguously affirmed because it, in its pre-fall condition, does not require an interruption in its basic constitution in order to mature into its own fulfilment.

Third, it is when we consider how humanity, as God's vice-regents, were purposed to order creation towards its telos within God's life-giving presence, that the cataclysmic effect of sin becomes explicable. In their rebellion, absolute death gains entrance on earth, and through humanity spreads throughout the earth as the final horizon which creation moves toward.¹⁷³ This does not mean that before the fall creation was intransient but that it has been cut off from the kind of intransience it was destined for through the mediating agency of humanity.¹⁷⁴ This is the cosmic

¹⁶⁸ The idea of both the maturation of creation and humanity is primarily associated with Irenaeus.

¹⁶⁹ Such a notion of movement may indeed be imbedded within the creation narratives themselves, both in the notion that humanity as those created in the *imago dei* are to be the stewards of the earth and are commanded to fill it, and in the image of Adam as the one who tills the temple garden of God.

¹⁷⁰ See Wenham 1987:27-32 for an insightful exegetical study on Gen 1:26.

¹⁷¹ Says Lossky of Maximus the Confessor: "It was the divinely appointed function of the first man, according to Maximus, to unite in himself the whole of created being; at the same time to reach his perfect union with God and thus grant the state of deification to the whole creation." (Lossky 1991: 109) However, I would not follow Maximus' unitary notion of perfection. (Lossky 1999:110)

¹⁷² Walsh, "Theology of Hope," 64, who suggest freedom gives creation a "structure ... open to two directions, viz., obedience or disobedience."

¹⁷³ For a suggestive exploration of how Paul may understand sin in precisely such a way, see Gaventa 2004.

¹⁷⁴ This leaves the questions also open whether transience as such is necessary problematic and suggests it is perhaps only problematic relationally, i.e. transience is only problematic in regard to that which was purposed to be or become intransient. Within biblical faith, this seems at minimum to

fissure creation suffers in the fall of humanity, it has lost its orientation toward life and moves relentlessly toward barrenness and eventual disintegration. This leaves pre-lapsarian suffering unanswered, the “shocking [fact that] … wherever a number of different animals live together, for example in a marshy lake or in the open sea, each kind of animal is the terror of the others!”¹⁷⁵ However, it does explain what is significant for humanity, its own relationship to creation in both creation and redemption. Perhaps this restoration of humanity’s place in creation is what the visionary complex of Revelation ends with, humanity gathered around God’s throne as his servants who rule a transformed creation that is bursting with life. (22:1-5)¹⁷⁶

Fourth, we can now more clearly understand both the restorative and the transformative elements in Christian hope: Humanity is *restored* to its proper place in the created order. But this does not constitute a return to a pristine primordial order. Rather, this restitution *transforms* humanity from being the destroyers of the earth (11:18) to those in whose guardianship creation not only attains its own fulfilment in the life-giving presence of God but also becomes the creation that can heal humanity from the wounds of its sin-battered history (22:2). Against Moltmann, it is perhaps better to follow Paul who sees the groaning of creation “in terms of Adam’s sin, not the inherent structure of creaturliness, and promises liberation for that same creation when redemption is manifest in the appearing of the ‘children of God, the ‘redemption of our bodies’.”¹⁷⁷

b) An Anthropocentric Concern for Creation on Its Own

Our second criticism of Moltmann’s adaptation of the logic of redemption was that, against his intentions, it anthropomorphised creation. But have we not done exactly the same in the view proposed here? It certainly is anthropocentric in its focus on human history and its assumption that human history plays a central role in the destiny of creation.¹⁷⁸ But it is not anthropomorphic precisely because creation is

include humanity and the created order as a whole, leaving the question open what other creatures are destined for eternal life.

¹⁷⁵ Heim as quoted in Gowan 1985:86.

¹⁷⁶ Since themes from Gen 1-3 are a dominant factor in Rev 21:5-22:5, how the final vision in Revelation concludes may well be John’s anticipation of the fulfilment of Gen 1:28. (so Gundry 1987:264)

¹⁷⁷ Walsh, “Theology of Hope,” 64

¹⁷⁸ Although Revelation and apocalyptic literature generally has a higher view of creation than often is assumed (Carroll 2000:259; Gowan1985:101) its discussion of the state of creation is closely linked with its concern with the history of humanity (Gowan1985:100).

contingent on humanity's salvation. While humanity and the rest of creation are cast in parallel terms in Moltmann's understanding of the cross and resurrection, here it is only humanity that needs forgiveness and is redeemed in the cross. Creation's liberation is indirectly related to the cross; the cross makes its liberation possible because it reconciles humanity with God and in this way restores humanity to its proper role in creation. It is only as this communion is restored, as the kingdom of God descends on earth, that creation finds its own fulfilment in the life-giving presence of God's rule mediated through his priestly servants who will rule forever.

Since this central human role in creation and history is ultimately grounded in a theocentric vision, it ought to resist a utilitarian view of creation. A critique of just such a utilitarianism may be discerned in Rev 11:18b, where the enemies of God are not only punished because of their persecution of the saints but also because they have destroyed the earth. Humanity's stewardship of creation cannot simply be for its own benefit but must fundamentally involve nurturing the creation God deemed very good.

When viewing the central role of humanity in creation within a larger theocentric vision, we can develop an appropriate Christian response to the ecological crisis we face today:¹⁷⁹ a) negatively, the current devastation of the creation is the result of human sin and is intrinsically linked with its abuse of its position of authority in creation;¹⁸⁰ b) as we now see the devastating effects of our ecological sin, we must resolve to reconsider what our appropriate place in the created order is; c) for Christians, a pivotal part of this reassessment is the conviction that when God reconciled humanity to himself in the cross, he did it not simply for their own sake, but also so that through them his purposes for creation may be fulfilled;¹⁸¹ d)

¹⁷⁹ The contemporary urgency to recognise creation's integrity on its own is ironically anthropologically grounded. While many of our ancestors also disregarded the natural order, or even despised it, their detrimental influence was local and limited. However, now our impact on the ecological order is universal and potentially irreversible and therefore a new "tradition-building" is paramount. (Gowan 1985:102) For an example on the potential of neglected NT nature text for developing a responsible ecological theology, see Bauckham 1994, a study on Mark 1:13, where Bauckham argues that the terse phrase *ἵνα μετὰ τῶν θηρίων* depicts the messianic restoration of humanity's relationship with the wild animals in the person of Jesus.

¹⁸⁰ Seen in this light, Paul's depiction of the relationship between sin and the plight of creation seems to be more relevant today than when he first penned Romans 8. If one questions how Paul relates sin and the plight of creation, as Moltmann does, the fact remains that today, more than ever, the ecological problems facing the earth are directly linked to how humanity relates to it.

¹⁸¹ As Douglas Moo (2003) says in an unpublished essay, "God is at work bringing blessing not only to his people but to the physical cosmos itself." When we are freed from our modernistic presuppositions, Bauckham (1994:4) argues, we can "read the New Testament differently. We can recognize that, in continuity with the OT tradition, it assumes that humans live in mutuality with the rest of God's

therefore, if Christians believe the cosmic implications of the cross and resurrection they proclaim, they must anticipate the coming healing of creation by tending to its wounds now.

In the end, then, such an anthropocentric view of creation does not come at the expense of creation but rather points realistically to the role in creation we cannot avoid having. The attempt to heal creation's wounds and help it to come into its own is no less anthropocentric than the exploitation and disregard for creation. As such, it is precisely a robust but differentiated understanding of how the cross responds to sin and its cosmic effects that can provide a theological foundation for precisely the kind of ecological responsibility Moltmann calls Christians to today. While it leaves questions that yearn for an answer unanswered, it gives a sufficient account of the ecological crisis as it relates to humanity's interaction with creation.

c) Hope without the Loss of Divine and Human Freedom

A traditional understanding also avoids the problem we saw in Moltmann's universalism. If the cross responds primarily to sin, the history of redemption is not the necessary overcoming of the double contradiction in God and creation. Rather, it is the history of His free love. Therefore, although God desires the salvation of all His children, they are free to embrace or spur the gracious invitation of the cross. God remains God in his love and freedom as he extends his grace, and humanity remains free to respond to this grace. Hope remains universal but the human embrace of the grace that hope is grounded in is left open.

d) Conclusion

Re-appropriating sin as the fundamental human problem God responds to in the history of redemption and as the pivotal concern in the liberation of creation provides an importance corrective to the often weak, diffused and marginal place sin has in Moltmann's thought. Revelation locates the problem both politically as the demonic rebellion that has gained access to the earthly realm through its centres of power and also personally as the willing submission to the corrupt order these powers spin around the world. It sees this rebellion as the fundamental problem that explains

creation, that salvation history and eschatology do not lift humans out of nature but heal precisely their distinctive relationship with the rest of nature." For a recent attempt to do precisely this, see Bouma-Prediger 2001.

why God's rightful rule and presence is not actualised on the earth now and how the displacement of his presence and rule has devastating effects on the earthly realm, both for its human but also its non-human subjects.

3. Redrawing Moltmann's Hope around a Cosmic Rebellion

If we accept the logic of sin and redemption reflected in Revelation, we need to modify Moltmann's understanding of the kingdom as symbol of hope.

First, the "kingdom of God" can still be seen in one important sense as the mediating symbol of hope between the individual's hope of "eternal life" and the cosmic hope of "the new heaven and the new earth." The former must be seen within the expectation of the redemption of the human community and the latter refers to the context in which redeemed humanity will exist.

Second, however, against Moltmann, it is also the primary symbol of hope. Both personal and cosmic hope is contingent on the redemption of humanity in the kingdom of God. It is only as God descends to earth as king over his people that creation can exist from his life-giving presence.

When augmented in this way, Moltmann's vision of the kingdom can indeed help Christians live their faith in the challenges their own contemporary setting faces them with. With this focus, Moltmann's concept of a messianic mediation of history helps Christians to live the book's call to a kerygmatic resistance within the challenges their own contemporary setting faces them with, and thus more successfully enable Christians as they "go to meet the evil with a battle-song of triumph."

CHAPTER SIX: THE PRESENCE AND REIGN OF GOD IN HISTORY

"We suffer on account of God's patience. And yet, we need his patience. God, who became a lamb, tells us that the world is saved by the Crucified One, not by those who crucified him. The world is redeemed by the patience of God. It is destroyed by the impatience of man."¹

I. Introduction

In the last chapter we considered the eschatological aspect of the kingdom of God in Revelation, which the book sees as a regime change, the time when God and Christ assume the position of geopolitical authority that is now occupied by the enemies of God. Now we turn to the relational aspect of the kingdom. In the first major section of the chapter we will consider how the book understands divine rule. Second, we will turn to how the church is constituted as a kingdom to God and how this kingdom now is manifested in ecclesial communities. Lastly, we will place this discussion in conversation with Moltmann.

II. The God of the Kingdom

As 11:15-19 depicts how God will assume the position of authority on the earth *de facto*, it does so by describing Him as the one who is already sovereign *de jure*.² Not only is he identified as κύριος ἡμῶν but, as we noted in the previous chapter, by patterning vv.16-17 in strong thematic, structural and lexical parallels to the doxology in ch. 4, John emphasises that the fulfilment that the 24 elders proclaim here is precisely what God is worshiped as in the heavenly throne room in 4:8-11. The God who will assume the position of sovereignty on earth is the one who already is the rightful sovereign over creation; "the great power" he takes is the power that is already his. Thus, 11:15-19 both affirms the constancy of God as the true sovereign over heaven and earth but also sees the exercise of this sovereignty within a certain narrative framework. Our discussion on divine sovereignty will first focus on two titles for God that are used in 11:17 that reflect this dual focus, "the Lord God Almighty" and "the One who is, who was, and who is coming."³ Next we will consider how Jesus is the divine agent through whom this sovereignty is exercised. We will conclude with a discussion on the role the Spirit plays in the rule of God.

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, Inaugural Sermon, 24 April 2005.

² Caird 1966:141.

³ Below we will discuss why the last element, "he who is coming" is omitted here.

A. The Constancy and Narrative of God's Undisputed Sovereignty

As is the case with most titles for God in Revelation, he is identified as both “the Lord God Almighty” (1:8) and “the One who Is, who Was, and who is Coming” (1:8) in the prologue.⁴ In 1:8 John binds these two titles together, placing the latter within the former, κύριος ὁ θεός, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἔγενος, καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, ὁ παντοκράτωρ.⁵ In the following discussion we will first show how “the Lord God Almighty” functions within the presentation of God as the only true and almighty king of creation who is present and worshipped as such in the heavenly realm,⁶ and second how the tripartite title emphasises the narrative of God’s sovereignty in relation to the earth, how he will establish *de facto* on earth what he is already *de jure*.

1. The Lord God the Almighty: The Constancy of His Sovereignty

Of the seven occurrences ὁ κύριος ὁ θεός ὁ παντοκράτωρ⁷ in Revelation, all occur in doxologies set in heaven, except the first and the last one. The title is first used to identify who it is that says: “I am the Alpha and the Omega.” (1:8) This merism emphasises the constancy of God as the eternal one.⁸ By linking this self-designation to “The Lord God Almighty,” Revelation emphasises who God is as the first and final word, namely the sovereign Lord who is the almighty. We meet the title for the last time in 21:22 where it depicts the eschatological establishment of God’s eternal sovereignty on earth: “The Lord God Almighty” and the Lamb are the temple of the New Jerusalem, the socio-religious centre of the eternal kingdom. What the first occurrence establishes as a fundamental part of who God is in his eternal constancy, the last occurrence describes as the defining fact of the eschatological reality.

⁴ Titles mentioned or anticipated in the prologue are “the Alpha and the Omega” (1:8), “the One who sits on the throne” (anticipated in 1:4), and King (anticipated in 1:6). The only other title, ὁ δεσπότης (6:10), is a functional synonym for ὁ κύριος (ὁ δεσπότης is a common translation for the imperial titles *dominus* and *princeps*, and might be used in 6:10 to contrast God with Caesar [Aune, II, 407]).

⁵ So also Bauckham 1993a:30. The two titles are not only closely linked here but the tripartite title is always linked closely to ὁ κύριος ὁ θεός ὁ παντοκράτωρ (note that 1:4 forms an inclusio with 1:8).

⁶ Although βασιλεύς is most commonly used of the rulers of earth in their enmity to God and allegiance to the Draconic order (6:15; 16:12, 14; 17:2, 9, 12 (x2), 18; 18:3, 9; 19:18, 19—but note the positive depiction in 21:24), this is contrasted with God’s rightful rule when he is identified as βασιλεύς τῶν ἀθνῶν (or possibly αἰώνων).

⁷ The full title occurs in 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 19:6; 21:22, and variations of it 4 times (ὁ θεός ὁ παντοκράτωρ in 16:14 and 19:15 and κύριος ὁ Θεός in 18:8; 22:5; 22:6).

⁸ “These merisms express God’s control of all history, especially by bringing it to an end in salvation and judgment.” (Beale 1999:199)

Elsewhere, the title occurs in heavenly worship. God is constantly praised as “The Lord God Almighty” in the inner court of heaven (4:8),⁹ and in 19:6, the last time the title occurs in worship, a great multitude in heaven worships him as such because now his rule has extended from heaven to the earth (19:6). In the three intervening occurrences, the 24 elders proleptically praise God for having assumed the position of authority on earth that is rightly his (11:17), the slain martyrs anticipate how the nations will come and worship God when his just authority is revealed (15:3), and the heavenly altar praises God for having vindicated the saints in judging Babylon (16:7).

Taken together, the Lord God Almighty speaks of God’s absolute sovereignty of the whole cosmos: he is the sovereign creator and sustainer of all things, and as such can and will bring about his rightful sovereignty on earth, a sovereignty revealed in His final acts of judgment¹⁰ and redemption, in which people share the destiny with the power to whom they have pledged allegiance. The doxological depiction of “the Lord God Almighty” who is enthroned in heaven is an important counter image in Revelation to the way in which the imperial cult was used as a pivotal tool to organise space and time, centring space in Rome and organising time primarily around Augustus as well as the achievements of other emperors.¹¹ As space and time are expanded in vision and worship, Rome is displaced and the heavenly throne of God is seen as the true centre of the cosmos and the time of Rome is seen as an aberration between the Easter victory of the Lamb and the arrival of God’s city on earth.

The Lord God Almighty, the creator and sustainer of all things, is the one eternal sovereign who both has the power and right to exercise his absolute sovereignty. However, the doxologies also assume a narrative of God’s sovereignty, that which he is *de jure* awaits its *de facto* establishment on earth. It is precisely this

⁹ Note how the worship of the living beings and the elders in 4:8-11 is closely linked together structurally and lexically as an eternal round of praise.

¹⁰ Judgment is in view when παντοκράτωρ occurs on its own, first in the anticipation of the final battle in 16:14 and in the actual depiction of it in 19:15.

¹¹ See Friesen 2001 for a detailed analysis on how the imperial cult functioned to both order time around significant events in the lives of the Caesars and space around Rome. Whereas “The Lord God the Almighty” points to his sovereignty as such, δὲ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου indicates the central location of God’s sovereignty, how it functions as the ordering centre of the heavenly realm (note how chs. 4-5 organises everything in relation to the throne), as the source of the divine activity that prepares the way for the establishment of the throne on earth (8:3; 14:3; 16:17) and as the central location of the eschatological presence of God on earth: when the throne of the Beast has been judged and its kingdom darkened (16:10; cf. 13:2), the throne of God and the Lamb will be the central reality of the New Jerusalem and the glorious light of the eternal kingdom (21:23; 22:2-3).

dual emphasis on the eternal constancy of God's sovereignty and the narrative of how God exercises this sovereignty that John combines when he sandwiches ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος between κύριος ὁ θεός and ὁ παντοκράτωρ in 1:8. God's self-designation, "The Alpha and Omega," points us to the eternal constancy of the sovereignty of the creator while the tripartite reminds us of the dynamic narrative by which he establishes his sovereignty on earth.

2. "...and the One who is Coming": The Narrative of His Sovereignty

Although not the most frequent title for God in the book, the tripartite title is the most prominent title used of God in the prologue¹² and plays a crucial function in the book's depiction of the narrative of God's sovereignty. The full title occurs three times (1:4, 8; 4:8¹³) while the last element, καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, is omitted in 11:17 and 16:5. Most commentators agree that the tripartite title is an interpretation of the divine name¹⁴ and that the last element is anomalous—instead of a future form of εἰμί we get καὶ ὁ ερχόμενος. Although the tripartite title may allude to the eternity of God, how he is both Lord over time and not contingent upon it,¹⁵ this anomaly suggests that John's primary concern is with what God does in time. Therefore, many commentators rightly point out that the title is closely linked with the eschatological expectation of the book.¹⁶ McDonough sees the incorporation of the expectation of God's coming salvation into a divine title, especially as it is closely linked with the

¹² It occurs twice, as the first title ascribed to God in the book (1:4), and as one of the titles by which God identifies himself in the book (1:8). For a comprehensive study on the Greco-Roman and Jewish background to the tripartite title and how it is used in Revelation, see McDonough 1999.

¹³ The first two elements are reversed here, perhaps because the context emphasises God as creator. (McDonough 1999:212)

¹⁴ McDonough 1999:201-202 has convincingly shown that the primary background for the tripartite title is Ex 3:14, which in later Jewish tradition was at times expanded in a three-fold temporal phrase; he also notes that it may also have a secondary polemic significance since such phrases were also used of Zeus. (197-98) On how other titles in Revelation allude to the divine name, see Aune 1997:57; Bauckham 1993b:27-28.

¹⁵ See McDonough 1999:208-209 for a helpful distinction between "hard line" understanding of timelessness, and the "soft line" reflected in Revelation, which simply affirms, without making any claim on what this means metaphysically, that as Creator God is Lord over time. If John has not simply what God does in time in view but also alludes to who he is by designating him as ὁ ἦν, it may be significant that in 17:8, 11 the beast is depicted as οὐκ ἔστιν, perhaps indicating its un- or anti-reality. (McDonough 1999:206, 227, 229)

¹⁶ Beale 1999:188; Beasley-Murray 1981:54; Sweet 1979:65; Fiorenza 1985:49; Caird 1966:141; Swete 1911:5; Charles 1920a:10.

book's christology, as "one of John's supreme theological achievements."¹⁷ But what does it achieve?

We have already noted that in the prologue (1:4, 8) the title is closely associated with the affirmation of God's sovereignty. This dominates also the context in the last occurrence of the full title in 4:8. John has patterned the worship of the four living beings after the doxology in Isa 6:1ff but with one significant alteration, in 4:8 after the affirmation "Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty" we do not get Isaiah's "the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isa 6:3) but "the one who was, who is and who is coming."¹⁸ We will return to the significance of this alteration but will first look at the two instances where καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος is elided (11:17; 16:16).

In the context of the proleptic depiction of the future in 11:15-19, the 24 elders respond to the heavenly voices' proclamation of the regime change: "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the one who is and who was," and now instead of "the one who is coming" they say "because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign." This suggests that what καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος anticipates is precisely the arrival of God's sovereignty within the earthly realm, the moment when what is true of God and which is established in heaven will also be established on earth.¹⁹ This is depicted in 11:15-19 as God assuming the position of geopolitical authority that is now occupied by the powers of the world.²⁰

It is the negative aspect of God's assumption of his reign that is at the fore when the title is used in 16:5. Here, the third bowl in which the rivers and springs of water are turned to blood is seen as the just answer to the martyrs' prayer for vindication in 6:10. Here God is called "you who are and who were, the Holy One." Perhaps John replaces ὁ ἐρχομένος with ὁ δσιος here in order to indicate the covenantal relationship between God and his people.²¹ If this is the case, then 16:5

¹⁷ McDonough 1999:214.

¹⁸ The order of the first two designation may have been reversed here because John now focuses on God as creator. (So Sweet 1979:120)

¹⁹ Bauckham 1993b:32.

²⁰ See previous chapter. As we noted there, the seventh trumpet emphasises how this means the vindication of the saints and judgment on God's enemies, precisely what the prophets anticipate at the coming of the Day of the Lord. (McDonough 1999:215)

²¹ In the LXX δσιος is most often used as a translation of תָהַל, and most often refers to people, of their holiness as those who fulfil their duties in their covenant relationship with God. But it can also be used of God when describing his covenantal activity with Israel, as e.g. in Ps 99:3 where God is proclaimed holy in the context of establishing his justice in Zion (so also Ps 111:9; cf. Beckwith 1919:675)

emphasises that when God comes in final judgment on his enemies, this is part of his covenantal faithfulness to his people.

The positive aspect of John's use of covenantal language reaches its apex in the depiction of God's dwelling with his people in 21:3-5. And it is in the vision of the New Jerusalem that precisely that element in Isaiah that the tripartite title replaces in 4:8 comes into full prominence. In 4:8 John omits "the whole earth is full of his glory" (Is 6:3) because at the beginning of the vision the glorious presence of the sovereign Lord is only present in the heavenly realm but absent on earth.²² In its place is a title for God that anticipates how what is already established in the heavenly realm is what God purposed to establish on earth as well. By describing God as "the one who is, who was and who is coming" the living beings anticipate the day when what is true in the heavenly realm, that it is full of the glorious presence of God, will be realised on earth.²³ And this is precisely what 21:1-22:5 depicts, the descent of the New Jerusalem which centre is the throne that God and the Lamb occupy, whose glory is the light by which all its inhabitants walk. (21:11, 23-24)²⁴

When John describes God as "the one who is coming" instead of as "the one who will be" he has embedded into one of his major titles for God the anticipation that runs throughout his vision, namely the realization of God's proper rule on earth. The incongruence between the confession of God as Sovereign creator and how things appear on earth is resolved in the depiction of the constancy and narrative of the sovereignty of God within the vision's spatial and temporal expansion of reality. God has always been the true sovereign over heaven and earth, he has established this sovereignty in the heavenly realm, and he will come and establish it on earth. On the

²² McDonough 1999:225 rightly notes that John reads Isa 6:3 with other OT passages, such as Ps 72:18-19, that anticipate how "God's glory will fill the earth."

²³ Moltmann, therefore, correctly observes that the basic eschatological question is "when will God show himself in his divinity to heaven and earth?" and the fundamental answer is found "in the promise of the coming God: 'the whole earth is full of his glory' (Isa. 6.3)." (*CoG*, xvi)

²⁴ Moltmann then is right when he says this title for God in Revelation "already sets present and past in the light of his eschatological arrival, an arrival which means the establishment of his eternal kingdom, and his indwelling in the creation renewed for that indwelling." (*CoG*, 23) However, against Moltmann, the way the title is used in Revelation does not suggest that God comes to us from the future and the future therefore "must become the theological paradigm for transcendence." (*CoG*, 24; cf. *GiC*, 132-35) If anything, the opposite seems to be the case in Revelation: since God who comes, comes from the heavenly realm, transcendence is the paradigm for the future—but not transcendence as the eternal moment that can meet us at any moment, but as the realm where God's sovereignty is already established, and from which he will come to establish it on earth.

crucial role this title plays in the interplay between the temporal and spatial expansion of the text, Gilbertson says,

God, the coming one, brings about a transformation of the earthly present (chs. 6-19) in order to achieve the consummation of chs. 21-2. The process does not grow out of earthly reality: it comes from the ultimate to transform the earthly present. Thus, spatially, the process consists of the extension of manifest divine rule downwards from heaven to embrace the rest of the cosmos. Temporally, the process consists of the transformation of the present, via the penultimate future, to bring it into line with the peace and justice of God's kingdom in the ultimate future.²⁵

B. The Divine Mediator of the Kingdom of God

Although God is the sovereign creator from whose throne both judgment and redemption proceed, the book sees Jesus as the primary agent through whom his sovereignty is exercised. Although there is a whirlwind of angelic agents and activity in the book, Jesus is the fulcrum on which everything turns and is held together, and it is in his appearing in victory and salvation that God comes to the earth. Here we will consider how Jesus is depicted as such, and how this portrayal includes Jesus in the divine identity.

1. Jesus as Agent of God's Sovereignty

a. Easter and the Establishment of God's Sovereignty on Earth

Rev 1:5b-6 and 5:9-10 establish Jesus as God's paradoxical Messiah,²⁶ as the Lamb through whom God's purposes are accomplished. These two passages are structurally, lexically and semantically closely tied together²⁷ and depict Easter as the possibility-making event in which Jesus accomplishes the fundamental victory which paves the way for God's assumption of the position of sovereignty on earth. Intertwining messianic expectation with the image of the slain lamb John establishes Jesus' death as the pivotal victory through which God's purposes will be accomplished. The book sees this as the defining moment of Jesus' messianic role. It is on basis of his death and what it accomplished that Jesus is exalted to the highest

²⁵ Gilbertson 2003:174.

²⁶ In Rev 5:5-6 we find perhaps the most astonishing transformation of imagery in the New Testament where Jesus as Israel's Messiah (5:5) is depicted as a slain lamb (5:6). "A more complete reversal of value would be hard to imagine." (Barr 1984:41) Here John juxtaposes what his readers would expect and what is the case in a hear-see formula, where what is seen reinterprets what is heard (see also 1:10-12; 7:4-10; 21:9-10; and 12:6-12 where the order is reversed).

²⁷ Both are set in context where Jesus is presented (1:5a) or depicted (5:5-6) in his paradoxical messianic role, are structured in closely parallel ways, share semantically pivotal terminology ($\epsilon\nu\tau\hat{\eta}\alpha\mu\sigma\tau\iota\omega\alpha\theta\tau\omega$, ποιέω, βασιλεία, ιερεῖς, τῷ Θεῷ) and both depict what Jesus accomplishes in his death in two parallel movements.

position of authority, as he is given a place on the divine throne in heaven.²⁸ As such, the death of Jesus is the defining centre, and so, not surprisingly, the Lamb is the most common designator for him in Revelation.²⁹

But what does the death of Jesus accomplish that makes it the pivotal messianic event? In a movement of separation it liberates people from the condition they are in and in a movement of incorporation it constitutes the liberated as a new community.³⁰ This is a people, as we will see in our discussion on the church below, that are delivered from their culpable bondage to the draconic deception of the order of the Beast to become a priestly kingdom to God who are destined to rule the earth.

As this complex event, Easter is the possibility-making event of the kingdom of God. By establishing a people as a kingdom to God in the territory now occupied by the forces of the dragon, Jesus' death is the beginning of the accomplishment of God's purposes on earth. Easter reveals Jesus as the possibility-making agent of God's sovereignty. Now we turn to how he is also the pivotal agent in the history of God's sovereignty between Easter and the parousia.

b. Jesus and the Exercise of God's Sovereignty in the World

In the first extended description of Jesus in the book he is called "Jesus Christ, the faithful witness,³¹ the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler³² of the kings of the earth." If the first title here identifies Jesus as the Messiah of God,³³ if the second

²⁸ 7:17; cf. 7:9; 22:1, 3.

²⁹ In 28 of the 29 occurrences of *ἀρνίον* in the book it refers to Jesus, and in the one exception, the second beast is seen as a parody of the Lamb (13:11). This is also a title that is fairly unique to Revelation (elsewhere, it is only used of Jesus in John 21:15). In this way the reader is constantly reminded of how it is in his paradoxical paschal role (the allusion to Ex 19:5-6 makes clear that ἐν τῷ αἵματι σου has paschal overtones) that Jesus establishes the purposes of God on earth. Against Malina who interpreters *ἀρνίον* as a symbol of power (see Malina 1995:101-04), I follow Johns (2003:204) and most commentators in seeing the lamb as a symbol of vulnerability. Although there may be tradition of a warrior ram that John could have alluded to (cf. Slater 1999:64; cf. de Moor and Staelduine-Sulman 1993 on the possibility of a Jewish messianic ram tradition), Johns shows that *ἀρνίον* was most commonly used to indicate vulnerability not only in Jewish tradition but also generally in the Ancient Near East, including in the first century Greco-Roman world. That Revelation has the latter in mind is indicated by the fact that the Lamb is slain and in the juxtaposition of images of power and vulnerability in 5:5-6. "Such vulnerability is no weakness; instead, it proves triumphant over the powers of evil and exposes the weakness of violence." (Johns 2003:204)

³⁰ In both 1:5b and 5:9b the καί (following διαπάντι ἡμῶν and ἐσφάγης respectively) is epexegetical while those preceding ἐποίησεν and ἐποίσας respectively are copulas.

³¹ NA 27 reads δὲ μάρτυς, δὲ πιστός. However, it seems better to omit the minor stop since in 3:14, which recalls 1:5 the are obviously seen as one title. (So Beckwith 1919:427)

³² On the messianic overtones of ἄρχων, see Beckwith 1919:428.

³³ John identifies Jesus as Χριστός from the outset of the book (1:1-2, 5) and at other significant points in the book (he is identified as the Lord's Christ in passages that speak of the arrival of God's kingdom

presents him in his paradigmatic martyrological role, and if the third focuses on the central event of his messianic victory, then the fourth title anticipates who he will be manifested as when his messianic purposes are fulfilled. As the one who will rule with God forever, Jesus is also, as we saw in the previous chapter, the agent of the final events that usher in the ultimate future. As the king of kings he is both the warrior that defeats his opponents and their final judge in history.

While Easter points to how Jesus has exercised God's sovereignty on earth³⁴ and the image of the warrior king and judge anticipates how he will again exercise it on earth,³⁵ the book sees Jesus as absent from the earth between these two points. Rev 12:10-12 makes clear that while the initial victory of Jesus entails the expulsion of Satan from heaven and entails the arrival of "the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God" in heaven (12:10), the realization of this victory does not extend to the earth yet, but rather results in an intensification of Satan's presence and fury (12:12). In this draconic time when Jesus is absent from the earthly realm, in this Holy Saturday of the world, he is present pneumatologically as Lord in the ecclesial communities, especially seen in 1:9-3:22.³⁶ The introduction to the addresses in chs. 2-3 constantly emphasise that this exalted Christ of 1:12-20 is he who speaks to the churches. In the heavenly realm Jesus is the centre of the lampstands that represents the churches on earth, and on earth he is present to them by the Spirit.³⁷ As this one, he directs the churches, comforts them, challenges them, warns them of impending judgment and promises them eschatological reward. As such, he orders the churches so they become and persevere in being proleptic anticipations of the kingdom, and in

(11:15) and God's Christ (12:15) and in 20:4, 6 in the context of the martyr's reign with Christ). There are also several other messianic allusions in the book, not the least 5:5 where he who will be revealed to be a slain lamb is said to be ὁ λέων ὁ ἐκ τῆς φυλῆς Ἰούδα, ἡ ρίζα Δαυΐδ.

³⁴ 1:5b; 5:9-10; 12:4-5 refer to Easter.

³⁵ Note how both 14:14-20 and 19:11-20 depict an action of Jesus that is initiated in heaven and is effected on earth, although the actual movement of Jesus to the earth is more prominent in the latter.

³⁶ Many commentators naturally make a break between 1:12-20 and chs. 2-3 because the discussion moves from the exalted Christ to the churches he addresses. However, although they definitely are two distinct segments, these belong together as one visionary complex that first introduces Christ as the Lord who is the centre of seven lampstands that represent the churches in the heavenly realm, and second consist in his addresses to the churches conveyed on earth by the Spirit. (cf. Beckwith 1919:433; Richard 1995:48) The disadvantage of separating these two sections is seen well in how Gilbertson (2003:87-92) discusses them separately when considering the spatial dynamics of the text. If Gilbertson had discussed these together he could have brought out more clearly the important spatial dynamics between its two segments.

³⁷ See discussion on the Spirit below.

doing so, enables them to be the communities through whom his Lordship spreads to the world.³⁸

Jesus then is the agent through whom the eschatological fulfilment of the kingdom is made possible at Easter, who extends the divine rule in the earthly territory occupied by the Dragon in his Lordship over the church, and who as warrior and judge will lead the final assault on God's enemies on earth that precedes the arrival of God sovereign presence on earth. This narrative of Jesus' exercise of the divine sovereignty is not only anticipated in the titles attributed to him in 1:5a but seems also to be implied in the doxologies of the heavenly throne-room scene that heads the main visionary complex (4:1-22:5). In Rev 4, "the One who sits on the throne" is only worshipped at the heart of the heavenly court. (4:8, 11) But after the confession of why the lamb can open the scroll (5:5-7), this worship begins to spread out. The central 'court's' song to the Lamb as redeemer (5:8-9) spreads to the angels who surround the heavenly throne (5:11-12)³⁹ and to every living creature in the cosmos who worship both God and the Lamb (5:13).⁴⁰ In the beginning what is true about God and his rule is confessed in heaven because it is only known there, but as the knowledge of the paradoxical victory of the Lamb extends to the farthest reaches of creation, the worship of both God and the lamb resounds through creation. The new song of the lamb is the desire of the cosmos.⁴¹

2. The Lamb and the Divine Identity

How then does the book see the relationship between God the Father who is sovereign and his Son as the agent of sovereignty?⁴² Most commentators agree that

³⁸ Thus, it is not surprising that the book so extensively deals with the ecclesial health of the seven churches which the book is addressed to before the vision proper begins. It is not grounded simply in a concern for the churches but for the world since the health of the churches has crucial significance for the fate of the world.

³⁹ The lamb receives all the accolades the One Enthroned receives (*δόξα, τιμή, δύναμις*) as well as *πλοῦτος, σοφία, ἴσχυς, and εὐλογία.*

⁴⁰ They now receive together what has been attributed to them separately in the previous doxologies, *δόξα* and *τιμή*, as well as a "power" word not used so far, *κράτος*.

⁴¹ As an aside, we note it is precisely as the central character of the book, the one through whom God will establish his sovereignty over the earthly realm, that Jesus is the primary revelatory agent of the whole vision. (1:2; 5:1-7; 22:16) Jesus has the authority to reveal the secrets of God because he is the agent through whom they are made possible and are accomplished. He is bound to the message he bears: As the main actor of the vision he reveals, he is the protagonist of the message he gives.

⁴² *πατήρ* occurs five times, always referring to God as the Father of Jesus (1:6; 2:28, 3:5; 3:21; 14:1).

Revelation reflects a high christology.⁴³ Here we will only consider how this christology emerges from the book's depiction of Jesus as the agent of sovereignty.

The inclusion of Jesus in the divine identity in Revelation is intrinsically bound up with the exaltation of Jesus to the throne of God. Jesus' exaltation to God's throne is based on his Easter victory (3:21; 12:2, 4b-6, 10; cf. 2:26-28),⁴⁴ and it is as the one who shares the throne of God that he is recognised as sharing the divine identity⁴⁵—both as agent of divine activity⁴⁶ and as recipient of worship.⁴⁷ However, although the book's high christology develops from its depiction of how Jesus is exalted to the divine throne, it is not an adoptionist christology. The Jesus who is revealed to share the divine identity with God in his role in the narrative of God's sovereignty is also confessed to be as God, “the Alpha and the Omega,” the one through whom everything is created and will be brought to conclusion.⁴⁸

What then is the fundamental relationship between God and Jesus as they together are the plural unity that will establish their rightful sovereignty on earth?⁴⁹ The conclusion our discussion so far leads us to is Jesus as the divine agent through

⁴³ For a recent and brief discussion on the book's high christology, see Witherington 2003:27-32. See Carrell 1997 on the christology of Revelation and first century Jewish angelology.

⁴⁴ Note how John carefully distinguishes between the exaltation of Jesus and the victorious saints in 3:21-22.

⁴⁵ It was “because Christians owed salvation to Jesus Christ that he was worshipped.” (Bauckham 1993b:62)

⁴⁶ This is seen in how titles that emphasise divine sovereignty are used of both God and the Lamb, e.g. κύριος (both God and Jesus are in parallel ways and in close proximity called the Lord of the saints (11:8, 15; cf. 4:11; 14:13; 22:20) and Βασιλεὺς (of God in 15:3, of Jesus in 17:14 and 19:16).

⁴⁷ So, at the forefront of the worship of Jesus is precisely his paradoxical victory as the slain Lamb. (5:9-10, 12, 13) In Revelation the worship of God and the Lamb on the throne is then set in contrast to the false worship of the beast; see Bauckham 1999 and Hannah 2003, who, although they differ slightly on the tradition of the theme, both show how unique Revelation's depiction of Christ sharing God's throne is in early Jewish thought, the only other instance being 1 Enoch 45:3.

⁴⁸ This is seen in how the three parallel designations attributed to Jesus in 22:13 (*τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ω, ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος*) are a combination of titles attributed to Jesus and God elsewhere in the book (1:8, 17; 2:8 21:6). We then see in Revelation a similar movement as in Phil 2, in which the exaltation of Jesus from his sacrificial death points to a prior exalted state. In 3:14 Jesus is called ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ, ἀρχὴ likely referring to Jesus as the origin of creation, since this is the usage in the only other occurrences (21:6 and 22:13) (Bauckham 1993b: 56).

⁴⁹ This plural unity may be indicated in 11:17 if both δέ κύριος ἡμῶν and δέ χριστὸς αὐτοῦ are to be seen as the implied subjects of the singular βασιλεύσει. Although Aune (1998a:639; cf. Ford 1975:181) suggests the inconsistency might be due to an interpolation of τοῦ χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ, Bauckham (1993a:139) notes how a singular form is also used of both in 6:17 (preferring αὐτοῦ over αὐτῶν since it is the harder reading) and 22:3-4. Beckwith (1919:609) notes that if “τοῦ Χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ were an editorial insertion, ...the interpolator would hardly have failed to change the vb. to the pl.” (cf. Beasley-Murray 1981:189; Carrell 1997:115; Charles 1920a:294-95; Harrington 1993:125-26; Swete 1911:142)

whom the sovereignty of God is exercised.⁵⁰ So, while the book emphasises that the fulfilment of God's purposes is to be seen in how he will come and establish on earth what he is and always has been, what the book expects and prays for is the coming of Jesus.⁵¹ It is in the coming of Jesus that God comes to the world.⁵² This seems also to be the operating logic in the imagery of 21:22-24. Here we are told that the New Jerusalem needs no light ἡ γὰρ δόξα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐφώτισεν αὐτήν, καὶ ὁ λύχνος αὐτῆς τὸ ἀρνίον. Here we see what is true of the relationship between God and Jesus throughout the book: Jesus is the agent in whom God becomes present, and thus through whom the activity of God is accomplished.

C. The Spirit: Agent of Divine Presence

1. Introduction

Although Revelation's pneumatology is not as extensively developed as its christology, references to the Spirit play a pivotal role in the book:⁵³ 1) as “the Seven Spirits,” the Spirit is included in the epistolary greeting at the head of the book (1:4) and is closely linked to God (1:4; 4:5) and to Jesus (3:1; 5:6); 2) the whole visionary

⁵⁰ Garrow 1997:39. Beale 1985:618-19 notes that Rev 17:14 may intentionally allude to Dan 4:37 (LXX) in order to express “the absolute deity and kingship of the messianic Lamb” that defeats eschatological Babylon. (cf. Slater 1993:159-60; cf. Stott (1965:70) who argues that this anti-Roman polemic in the depiction of Christ may already start with the reference to κυριακῇ in 1:10)

⁵¹ Considering the number of times ἔρχομαι is found in the mouth of Jesus as a promise of his coming (16:15; 22:7, 20a; cf. 2:5, 16; 3:3, 11) as well as in two instances as an expectation of his coming (1:7; 22:20b), it is surely not incidental that God is called ὁ ἔρχομενος (1:4, 8; 4:8). Commenting on this close relationship, McDonough says: “John cannot utter the name of God without at the same time invoking the person of Christ.” (McDonough 1999:233) Roloff 1993:24 argues that the title “interprets the coming of Jesus as the event in which God’s power over history is visibly achieved.” Such a relation is also suggested in the close link between the tripartite title and the self-depiction of Jesus in 1:18, καὶ ὁ ζῶν, καὶ ἐγενόμην νεκρός καὶ ίδού ζῶν εἰμι εἰς τοὺς οἰωνας τῶν οἰωνῶν; note also how the similar depiction of the Beast in 17:8, 11 forms a parody on this. (Bauckham 1993a:431-41; Beasley-Murray 1981:254; Caird 1966:215-16)

⁵² “The sovereignty of God and the authority of his Christ are strictly equivalent, although the theology of both Old and New Testaments would suggest that the former is exercised through the latter.” (Beasley-Murray, 202)

⁵³ Bauckham 1993b:109. While John’s pneumatology is not as developed as that of Paul (see e.g. Fee 1994) it suggests precisely two pivotal aspects of the development of a ‘high’ pneumatology, the Spirit’s close relationship to both God and Jesus without equating his agency to either one of them. How τὰ ἐπτά πνεύματα are to be understood is debated. Aune 1997:33-35 notes three main views, they are 1) the Holy Spirit, 2) the seven arch angels who stand before God (cf. Rev 8:2), or 3) as seven astral deities. Aune dismisses the third one and claims that the first one is an unlikely anachronism of later trinitarian thought. He opts for the second view because of the way angels are depicted in a similar way in the Qumran literature. (cf. Giblin 1991:71-72; Witherington 2003:75) However, considering how reference to the seven spirits functions in a similar way as other epistolary greetings in the NT and how it is related to Zechariah 4, I follow the majority of commentators and see it as a reference to the Spirit. (Bauckham 1993a: 162-63; 1993b:25, 110-15; Beale 1999:189; Beckwith 1919:424-27; Caird 1966:15; Sweet 1975:65)

complex is experienced ἐν πνεύματι (1:9; 4:2; 17:3; 19:10); and 3) the Spirit is seen as the agent in whom Jesus addresses the churches in chs. 2-3,⁵⁴ a concern also reflected in the two times the Spirit speaks in the book (14:13; 22:17). In our discussion on the role of the Spirit in the book's understanding of the kingdom of God, we will look at how the book uses τὰ ἐπτὰ πνεύματα and τὸ πνεύμα to articulate two aspects of the Spirit's crucial role "in the divine activity of establishing God's kingdom in the world."⁵⁵

2. "The Seven Spirits" as the Power of God in the World

In 1:4 and 3:1 τὰ ἐπτὰ πνεύματα are first closely associated to God and Jesus respectively, and in 4:5 and 5:6 the significance of this designation for the Spirit is developed in clear allusions to Zechariah 4 in 4:5 and 5:6, first to Zech 4:2 describing τὰ ἐπτὰ πνεύματα as "seven lamps burning before the throne" and then to Zech 4:10 describing them as the seven eyes on the horns of the Lamb. Between these two references in Zech 4 a word is given to Zerubbabel, the completion of the temple will "not be [done] by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit," a power strong enough to make the mountain before Zerubbabel a plain (4:6-7). In placing the seven eyes on the seven horns of the Lamb John seems to read these three elements in Zechariah together—τὰ ἐπτὰ πνεύματα represent the Spirit as the power through whom God establishes his purposes on earth.⁵⁶ τὰ ἐπτὰ πνεύματα represent the Spirit as the effectual power in which the divine purposes which originate from God are accomplished through the slain Lamb, a stark contrast to precisely the draconic forces that one day will be decisively defeated by the power of the Lamb.

Revelation focuses on the pivotal role the churches play in how τὰ ἐπτὰ πνεύματα spread the victory of the Lamb. Not only are τὰ ἐπτὰ πνεύματα closely linked to Jesus' relationship to the churches (3:1) but the depiction of the church's prophetic ministry in Rev 11 recalls 4:5 and 5:6 since it too is heavily dependent on Zech 4.⁵⁷ The seminal victory of the Easter Lamb is now marching through the world

⁵⁴ 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22.

⁵⁵ Bauckham 1993b:109. The following discussion is largely drawn from Bauckham 1993a:150-73; 1993b:109-25.

⁵⁶ Bauckham 1993a:164, who notes that 2 Chron 16:7-9 also reflects such an idea.

⁵⁷ Although Rev 11 does not mention "the Seven Spirits," perhaps because it would conflict with the image of the 2 lampstands there (So Bauckham 1993b:113; cf. Beale 1999:577-78), the ministry of the

in the prophetic witness of the churches by the same power that was at work in the Lamb, τὰ ἐπτὰ πνεύματα of God sent into the world. However, this does not mean that God is not present in the world apart from the churches, as is evident in but should not be confined to the depiction of God's judgments on the earth.⁵⁸ But it does seem to suggest that the way we discern the presence of the Spirit in the world is by the way it is active through the church.

In summary, the Spirit as τὰ ἐπτὰ πνεύματα is the divine presence on earth, the power in which God's purposes are accomplished in the world. Since Jesus is the agent of the sovereignty of God, the Spirit is the power in which Jesus accomplishes his paradoxical victory and the power in which the effect of this victory is extended into the world.

3. “The Spirit” and the Seven Churches

If τὰ ἐπτὰ πνεύματα refers to the work of the Spirit in the world, τὸ πνεύμα focuses on the Spirit's presence in the church. At the end of each of the seven addresses to the churches in chs. 2-3 the formula ‘Ο ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις identifies the words of Jesus to the churches as an admonishment from the Spirit to hear and abide by.⁵⁹ The Spirit is the agent of Jesus' Lordship in his churches. By the Spirit, Jesus, now exalted in heaven, is present to the churches whose Lord he is and whom he corrects and consoles, warns and promises.⁶⁰ Considering how the Spirit functions in the addresses to the churches as the agency through which the messages of the exalted Jesus are mediated to the churches, this would suggest that ἐν πνεύματι in 1:10; 4:2; 17:3 and 21:10 does not simply signal the ecstatic state in which John receives the vision but rather to the Spirit as the agent

two witnesses depicts how the church extends the victory of the Lamb in the world, “not by might nor by power” but by the Spirit.

⁵⁸ Before the book starts its relentless depiction of the judgments that proceed from above, it confesses God as the one who has created and sustains all things. (4:11)

⁵⁹ Beale (1999:236-39) argues John's use of the Isaianic hearing formula (Isa 6:9-10) at the end of each address may suggest that “like Israel, the church has become compromising and spiritually lethargic and has entered idolatrous allegiances.” This is suggestive but should perhaps not be pushed to far as it is not only used of the compromising communities but also in the address to those churches in whom the risen Christ finds no fault.

⁶⁰ So, in the two places the Spirit speaks in the book, the Spirit promises rest to faithful saints who die (14:13) and in 22:17, it calls with the Bride, for the coming of Jesus, the coming which signals the establishment of the kingdom on earth.

in whom John receives the vision.⁶¹ As such, τὸ πνεύμα is consistently used of the Spirit in Revelation to signify the Spirit's role vis-à-vis the churches, as the Spirit opens the church to the greater reality of God which is otherwise hidden. The Spirit is the agency in which reality is expanded both spatially and temporally, so that the churches, in their particular temporal and local nexus can live in light of how God and the Lamb are revealed to be sovereign over all creation and how they will establish their sovereignty on earth.⁶²

As such, the distinct way the Spirit is at work in the churches as τὸ πνεύμα and τὰ ἐπτὰ πνεύματα are closely interrelated. The messages to the churches that are what τὸ πνεῦμα says to the churches are the words of the exalted Jesus who holds τὰ ἐπτὰ πνεύματα in his hands. As this one, Jesus addresses the churches in the Spirit and prepares them to be those through whom τὰ ἐπτὰ πνεύματα spread the victory of the Lamb to the world.

D. Conclusion

In the previous chapter we showed how the Kingdom of God as a symbol of hope is developed in the book of Revelation primarily as a regime change: the establishment of God's kingdom on earth signals when the βασιλεία, the position of geopolitical authority that now is occupied by the forces of the dragon will be transferred to God and his Christ. So far in this chapter we have moved from this eschatological axis of our concern to the relational axis, to who holds the divine sovereignty over both heaven and earth and how this now is present on earth: 1) God is enthroned in heaven and worshiped as creator and rightful sovereign of the whole cosmos and his purpose is to establish *de facto* on earth what is revealed to be his *de jure* in heaven, the fulfilment of which is seen as he and his heavenly order descends upon the earth in chs 21-22. 2) Jesus is seen as the primary agent through whom God's purpose to establish his kingdom on earth are accomplished, his death and resurrection make it possible by redeeming a people to be a kingdom to God, and his eschatological coming as the king who is both warrior and judge obliterates the

⁶¹ So Jeske 1985:452-66. In 1:10 and 4:2, in strongly parallel statements, the vision as a whole, and its major parts (1:10-3:22; 4:1-22:5) are introduced as occurring ἐν πνεύματι, and so are the visions of the two contrasted cities, Babylon and the New Jerusalem (17:3; 21:10).

⁶² The parallel visions of these two cities are pivotal in the admonishment to the churches since they starkly contrast the fate of those who pledge their allegiance to the beast, and of those who persevere in their faithfulness to the lamb. See Rossing 1999.

presence of the draconic order that now covers the earth and in this way makes room for the heavenly divine order to replace it. 3) As the book depicts Jesus as the agent through whom the sovereignty of God is accomplished, he is included in the divine identity that possesses this sovereignty, and therefore the ordering centre of the eschatological kingdom of God is the throne which is occupied by both God and the Lamb. 4) The Spirit is the presence in and through which this is accomplished. As the book depicts the Spirit, it distinguishes between how it is the agent through which Jesus is present as the sovereign Lord who orders the life of the churches, and how, primarily through the churches, the Easter victory of the Lamb is now spread through the world.

Throughout this discussion we have seen how in Revelation this divine rule is intimately connected to the churches. As we now proceed to move from the divine rule to the question of where this rule is present, what its ‘realm’ is, the role of the churches becomes the central focus.

III. The Church as an Anticipatory Presence of the Kingdom

In our discussion on the relationship between the church and the kingdom, we will first look at how the church is constituted as a kingdom to God at Easter and how it exists as such in paradoxical and ambiguous ways in ecclesial communities. Second, focusing on Rev 12, we will show that although the church has this exclusive relationship to the kingdom, between Easter and the Parousia it does by definition not exist in the geopolitical form of a kingdom.

A. The Claim of the Church: An Anticipatory Presence of the Kingdom

1. The Easter Foundation of the Church as a Kingdom

We now return to how 1:5-6 and 5:9-10 to establish the followers of the Lamb as the covenant people of God’s kingdom, now existing as an international people; as such they are fundamentally a political entity destined to rule the whole earth.⁶³

Easter is the church’s foundational event because Christ in a dual act establishes it as people to be βασιλείαν ... τῷ θεῷ (1:6; cf. 5:10).⁶⁴ The first aspect

⁶³ Fiorenza’s magisterial study (1972) is still the most extensive study of these texts.

⁶⁴ That this is the church, understood as those who have pledged their allegiance to Christ who are now ordered by his Lordship and who persevere in this allegiance is evident by how John includes himself

of this dual event is the deliverance of the people from the state they are in, which in 1:5-6 is seen as a cultic redemption from sin⁶⁵ and in 5:9-10 as a political redemption from slavery.⁶⁶ Considering our earlier discussion on the complex understanding of sin in Revelation, John might have the structural aspect in view in 5:9-10 and the personal in 1:5-6.⁶⁷ the people purchased to God are those who have been freed from their enslavement to the corrupting order of the Beast and have been forgiven of their own culpability in submitting themselves to this order in the first place.⁶⁸

Having been liberated and forgiven, this people are constituted anew, as a kingdom and priests to God. In understanding what this means, the OT background is crucial. Both structurally and lexically it is clear that John here has Ex 19:6 in view:⁶⁹ following the logic of God's redemption of Israel from Egypt, John sees this people to be constituted⁷⁰ as Israel was then, as a priestly kingdom to God. The people bought and cleansed by the Lamb in Revelation are created to play the same role as Israel was intended to do, to be God's kingdom among all the nations on earth.

The new kingdom for God created by Christ through redemption is the realm and community where God is already on earth acknowledged as king. As the kingdom for

and his audience as this people in 1:5-6 (where ήμᾶς occurs 4 times) and in 5:9 broadens this to people ἐκ πάσης φυλῆς καὶ γλώσσης καὶ λαοῦ καὶ ἔθνους.

⁶⁵ Fiorenza 1985:72.

⁶⁶ Fiorenza (1985:74) argues that ἀγορίζω probably is a "reference ... to the ransom of prisoners of war, who were deported to the countries of the victors and who could be ransomed by a 'purchasing agent' of their country."

⁶⁷ Since 1:5-6 and 5:9-10 are part of parallel passages, since these verses in particular display a strong parallel structure, and since the 1:6 and 5:10 clearly refer to the same "act", it is reasonable to see the first elements as different expressions or perhaps better different aspects of one act:

a) 5 Τῷ ... λύσαντι ήμᾶς ἐκ τῶν ἀμφιτιῶν ήμῶν ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ,	a) ἡγόρασας [] τῷ θεῷ ἐν τῷ αἷματί σου ἐκ πάσης φυλῆς καὶ γλώσσης καὶ λαοῦ καὶ ἔθνους
b) 6 καὶ ἐποίησεν ήμᾶς...	b) 10 καὶ ἐποίησας αὐτοὺς...

⁶⁸ Fiorenza 1985:68-76 rightly notes the distinct personal/anthropological and theological/political emphasis of the two passages. However, in light of how John elsewhere in the book emphasises both the structural evil of Beasts and Babylon and the personal culpability of those who submit to it, I do not follow her in seeing the latter as a reinterpretation of the former. Rather, the two mutually interpret one another.

⁶⁹ Although there are slight differences between 1:5b-6 and 5:9-10, the vast majority of commentators agree that Ex 19:6 is alluded to in both cases. For the possible traditions John draws on here, see Aune 1997:47-48.

⁷⁰ Fiorenza (1985:72) notes that in the LXX ποιέω is commonly used for the installation of kings and priests, and therefore in 1:6 most likely is to be seen as referring to dignity persons receive when Christ installs the redeemed to be a kingdom and priests to God.

God, the Christian community is understood in political terms as the alternative community to the Roman empire They are the anti-kingdom to the Roman empire.⁷¹

Considering how John then in the rest of the book contrasts this people to the draconic order of the Beast, the implication is clear: In view of the universal domination of the Dragon, this people is to be the divine alternative to the kingdom of the world. Although the Beast now holds the position of geopolitical authority bequeathed to it by the Dragon, it is this redeemed people that are destined to occupy it,⁷² a fulfilment depicted in 20:4-6 and in 22:3-5 ultimately as the elevation of redeemed humanity as a whole to positions of authority in the divine ‘court’ gathered around the throne of God and Lamb.⁷³ However, now this kingdom is not a particular nation in a limited geographical realm but is constituted from all peoples of the earth.⁷⁴

However, although there is a basic redefinition of who constitutes the people, Fiorenza has shown that this does not mean a spiritualising of the political function of the people,⁷⁵ a fact emphasised in how 5:10 concludes, καὶ βασιλεύουσιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.⁷⁶ Although as we shall see, John sees the saints as already exercising this rule, the full geopolitical implication of this language is evident in the vision of chs. 21-22: within the eschatological expansion of reality in the book, it is clear that what John envisions is a real geopolitical reality which realm is the transformed earth, its

⁷¹ Fiorenza 1985:75, 76.

⁷² “Als das königliche Volk Gottes stehen die Christen dem Römischen Reich als Alternative und Kontrast gegenüber.” (Giesen 2000:72)

⁷³ As in 11:15, I take βασιλεία in 1:6 and 5:10 not simply as rule (Beckwith 1919:429) but as a position of political authority, the exercise of which is indicated by βασιλεύω.

⁷⁴ See Bauckham 1993a:326-37 on how fourfold phrases as found in 5:9 are used to express humanity in its most universal sense. The expansion of the people is also depicted in a hear-see construction in 7:4-10: John first hears an angel speak about the 144.000 that will be sealed from all the tribes of Israel (7:3-8) but then sees an enumerable crowd gathered from all peoples standing before the throne (7:9-10). (cf. Gundry 1987:260) For a review on the debate on the relationship between 7:3-8 and 7:9-10, see Aune 1998a:440-47; cf. Smith 1990:116-17.

⁷⁵ Fiorenza 1985:73-76; see Fiorenza 1972 for the full development of her thesis that in 5:9-10 John modifies the baptismal formula he has cited in 1:5-6 in order to draw out the theological and socio-political aspects of the installation of the people as a kingdom to God, something they are already now but which earthly geopolitical manifestation awaits the descent of the throne of God and the Lamb to the earth.

⁷⁶ Against NA²⁷ (cf. Fiorenza 1985:70, 77), I follow Beale (1999:362-63) in seeing the verb as present rather than future. While neither reading can be favoured on the basis of the textual evidence alone, the present is the harder reading. However, with Fiorenza and Roose (2004a:2007) and against Giesen (2000:71-72), I see it as referring to the actual co-reign of the saints in the kingdom, but in the coming kingdom but also in the way they now partake in Christ’s paradoxical rule on earth. (cf. Bovon 2000:699)

subjects the priestly servant royal rulers gathered around the throne of God and the Lamb, and its ordering centre the divine throne.

An aspect of the people that space does not allow us to develop fully here, is that they are a *priestly* kingdom, as the strong allusion to Ex 19:4 in 1:5-6 and 5:9-10 makes clear.⁷⁷ While this should not be limited to a political function in general, it seems that it is the religio-political aspect of priesthood that is at the fore for John. Just as God and the Lamb are the religio-political centre of the kingdom of God that is now established in heaven (chs. 4-5; 12:5, 10) and will come to earth (chs. 21-22), so the people constituted by the Lamb are a religio-political people.⁷⁸ The visionary complex ends with the fulfilment of this their identity. Redeemed humanity is those who give priestly service to God and the Lamb in the eternal kingdom, and who as such will rule forever.⁷⁹

If the Church, understood as those who have been redeemed from their sinful bondage to the order of the Beast, is the way the priestly kingdom of God exists now and who, as such, is destined to be God's kingdom on earth, how is this kingdom manifested in history? In a context where the present manifestation of the draconic order has ransacked and destroyed the last vestiges of Israel's geopolitical authority, where is the kingdom located, where is its realm?

2. Churches as Paradoxical and Ambiguous Presences of the Kingdom

The church that is the kingdom is now present on earth in churches.⁸⁰ So, in 1:12 – 3:22 Jesus is depicted as the exalted Lord of the seven ecclesial communities, who is present to them in the Spirit, and who rules them. However, that said, this presence of the Church that is the Kingdom within the churches must be carefully qualified since it is both paradoxical and ambiguous.

⁷⁷ For John's interpretation of these passages, see especially Fiorenza 1972. (cf. Gelston 1959)

⁷⁸ Not only does 1:5-6 and 5:9-10 state that they are constituted as a priestly kingdom, but the reference to the stars, sun and moon that the woman is clothed with in Rev 12 may pick up an interpretive tradition where the priestly vestments of Ex 28 and 39 were depicted as the heavenly luminaries. (Beale 1999:626)

⁷⁹ Although λατρεύω is not the technical term usually employed in the LXX for priestly service, the liturgical setting of the 22:3 is confirmed by the obvious “temple” setting when this scene is anticipated in 7:15. Both Swete (1911:103-04) and Harrington (1993:101) note that John may have used λατρεύω instead of the technical λειτουργέω in order to emphasise that it is the mass of redeemed humanity that gives priestly service to God and not an exclusive priesthood. Note also the close relationship between how the worship of redeemed humanity is depicted here and the worship of the elders in 4:11 and 5:8-10. It is precisely these priestly servants who will rule forever. (22:5)

⁸⁰ Although Revelation sees those bought by the Lamb as one people (1:5b-6; 5:9-10), they exist on earth in a multiplicity of communities (chs. 2-3). (cf. Swete 1911:101-02)

First, we note how the book portrays the manifestation of the kingdom in churches paradoxically: the communities that are commended for their faithfulness to Jesus are precisely those who now are economically poor and socio-politically marginalised (2:9; 3:8), while those churches who are economically successful and enjoy a relatively privileged social position are seen to be so compromising that their status as one of the communities gathered around Jesus is in danger (3:1b-2, 15-16). If the kingdom is to be seen in political terms in history, it is in a paradoxical way.

Second, the presence of this kingdom in the churches is ambiguous. Although John sees himself and his audience as being the people who are created to be a kingdom to God, only two of the seven churches, Smyrna and Philadelphia, are seen to accord with the kingdom (2:9-10a; 3:8, 10), and even their ecclesial status as those who will inherit the kingdom is contingent upon their perseverance in faithfulness (2:10b; 3:11).⁸¹ Two of the churches, Sardis and Laodicea, exist in such a compromised situation that they are about to lose their ecclesial status (3:1b-3, 15-16), while the other three churches exhibit characteristics that are both consonant with their identity as communities of the alternative kingdom (2:2-3, 6, 13, 19) and indicate abdication to the way of the Beast (2:4-5, 14-16, 20-23).

To the extent churches live their allegiance to their Lord, they are places where the kingdom of God is present in the world. Inclusion among the people who constitute the kingdom of God is determined by allegiance. Thus, although ideally the ecclesial communities are actual manifestations of the kingdom as the communities of those who have been bought by the Lamb to be the priestly kingdom to God, their actual existence as such is always contingent on their faithfulness to Christ and their prophetic resistance against the all-pervasive social, religious and political force of the Beast. The churches, as the “realm” in which those who are a kingdom to God now exist, are the earthly “sphere” in which the rule of God can be experienced in history, and through whom the kingdom spreads to the world.

B. The Form of the Church: The Kingdom in Exile

I have frequently been threatened with death. I ought to say that, as a Christian, I do not believe in death without resurrection. If they kill me I will rise again the people of El Salvador. I am not boasting, I say it with the greatest humility. I am bound, as a pastor, by a divine command to give my life for those whom I love, and that is all Salvadoreans,

⁸¹ This is of course the case for each of the churches, as seen in the repetition of a final admonition to hear the Spirit and the promise to the victors.

even those who are going to kill me. If they manage to carry out their threats, from this moment I offer my blood for the redemption and resurrection of El Salvador. Martyrdom is a grace from God which I don not believe I deserve. But if God accepts the sacrifice of my life, then may my blood be the seed of liberty, and a sign of hope that will soon become a reality. May my death, if it is accepted by God, be for the liberation of my people, and as a witness of hope in what is to come. Can you tell them, if they succeed in killing me, that I pardon and bless those who do it? But I wish that they could realize that they are wasting their time. A bishop may die, but the church of God, which is the people, will never die.⁸²

Considering the woman in Rev 12, we will now try to show how although the churches have a claim to the kingdom, they do not exist in the geopolitical form of a kingdom. However, this does not make them apolitical. As Israel lived toward the Promised Land in the desert, so the churches live toward and according to their own fulfilment in the eschatological kingdom.

1. The Collective Identity of the Woman in Revelation 12

Rev 12:1-17 is a pivotal vision in the book⁸³ whose main characters are a heavenly woman and a Dragon. The vision is held together by the Dragon's failing attempts to foil God's purposes: first it is thwarted in destroying the woman's son who is destined to rule the earth (vv. 1-6), and then, as a consequence of that failure it loses its place in heaven and is flung down on the earth (vv. 7-12), where, after having failed to destroy the woman, it starts to pursue her offspring (vv. 13-17).

Most of the characters are clearly identified in the vision, the Dragon is identified as the primordial enemy of Israel's God, the primordial accuser whose purpose is to deceive the whole inhabitable world (12:9),⁸⁴ the male child the woman bears is identified as the Messiah in an allusion to Ps 2:9 in 12:5,⁸⁵ and the woman's other offspring are clearly the saints, those "who obey God's commandments and hold

⁸² Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador, two weeks before he was assassinated, as quoted in Rowland 1993:101.

⁸³ Most commentators note the interpretive importance of ch. 12, Collins (1976:231-34) calling it the "paradigm of the book of Revelation." Rev 12 depicts the messianic victory that dethrones the Dragon/Satan from his place within the heavenly realm, Rev 13 then goes on to describes the temporally limited battle between the Dragon and the messianic community on earth before Rev 14 anticipates the final messianic battle against the Draconic forces and the final messianic judgment.

⁸⁴ For the development of Satan as the arch demonic figure, see Beckwith 1919:617-18; Aune 1998a:696-98, 700-01.

⁸⁵ While the reference to the raging nations in 11:18 alludes to the eschatological fulfilment of Ps 2, the snatching up of the male child who will ποικίνειν πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἐν ρεβδῷ σιδηρῷ to the throne of God refers to how this eschatological reign is already fulfilled in heaven. (cf. Sweet 1979:192-93, 197)

to the testimony of Jesus" (12:17). The interpretive crux of the vision is vv. 7-12.⁸⁶ Here, the snatching of the messianic child to the throne of God (12:5b) is first seen as resulting in a battle in heaven in which the Devil and his army lose their place in heaven and are thrown down on the earth (12:7-9). Then, in an auditory section, Satan's loss of his accusatory role in heaven is interpreted as both the establishment of God's salvation and undisputed sovereignty in heaven (12:10, 12a) but also as the intensification of his draconic force during the short time he is consigned to earth (12:12b).⁸⁷ In this way John shows that although Easter is the pivotal victory which makes certain the establishment of God's kingdom on earth, it for a brief while means an intensification of the demonic opposition to God's people on earth. However, this escalation of evil signals not the dragon's victory but its defeat, that it "has been decisively overthrown."⁸⁸

If this is the case, how are we to interpret the woman in the sky who is the mother of both the Messiah and the saints now persecuted by the Dragon? Although the description of the woman may partly allude to an individual woman, Eve and perhaps Mary,⁸⁹ most modern scholars see her collectively, as representing the messianic community, both as faithful Israel among whom the Messiah arose and now as those who are gathered around the Messiah.⁹⁰ But what is the significance of this? We will try to show that she is Zion-Jerusalem as she represents the church as she journeys through a geopolitical 'desert' toward the coming kingdom. We will do so by comparing her to how other collective women function in the book and by looking at the mythological and Jewish themes used to describe her.

⁸⁶ Questions on the unity of ch. 12 focus on these verses. Although this is likely an insertion, John has incorporated it as a pivotal interpretive of the whole vision. For discussions on the unity of the chapter, see Beckwith 1919:620. For the vision's possible redaction history, see Aune 1998a:663-66.

⁸⁷ As we noted in the previous chapter, 3 ½ as a measurement of time (for John, years) was an apocalyptic image of the final escalation of evil. Here John interprets this escalation not as a sign of an actual accumulation of evil power but rather as an implication of its temporary restriction.

⁸⁸ Beale 1999:623. "The sovereignty of Satan has been terminated at source, even if externally it has achieved its summit." (Sweet 1979:192)

⁸⁹ If, as Sweet (1979:196) considers likely, the woman recalls Eve (cf. Beale 1999:625), this may suggest why the imagery is elastic enough to be broadened from referring only to Israel to include all those constituted by the Lamb as a people to God. See Bruns 1964 for an argument for a partially mariological understanding of the woman on basis of how a likely reference to Eve suggests the woman is to be read both corporately and individually. For a more negative assessment of mariological readings of the woman, see Brown et al 1978.

⁹⁰ Beale 1999:627; Beasley-Murray 1981:197-98; Beckwith 1919:621; Sweet 1979:203.

2. The Socio-Political Character of Collective Women in Revelation

In addition to the woman in ch. 12, there are two other collective women in the book, the Great Prostitute in ch. 17 and the Bride in ch. 21 (cf. 19:7-8).⁹¹ They symbolise two socio-political centres that represent their respective political orders, Babylon the Great Prostitute represents the actual order that now holds political authority on earth and the New Jerusalem the Bride of the Lamb represents the eschatological order that will replace it.⁹² As the actual cities in which the ruling elites can and do enforce their way over their respective realms, and as the cities who therefore characterise the fundamental nature of their particular political orders, they do not only represent themselves but also the whole political orders of which they are the centre. For John, Babylon is Rome as the geopolitical centre that represents the whole empire,⁹³ and the New Jerusalem represents the coming kingdom of God, the eschatological geopolitical order gathered around the throne of God and the Lamb.⁹⁴

Considering the role of these two collective women in Revelation, it ought to at least raise the question whether the woman in ch. 12 functions in an analogous way. Is she too, in some pivotal sense, a city that represents the kingdom it is the centre of?

3. The Journey of The City of God in the Wilderness

That John sees the woman here in similar political terms as the women in chs. 17-18 and 21-22 is evident in how ch. 12 is patterned after the Leto-Apollo-Python

⁹¹ The only other woman mentioned in the book is Jezabel in 2:20, where it refers to an individual person and is not used collectively. Feminist critiques of Revelation focus particularly on the depiction of the two women in chs. 17-18 and 21-22. (see e.g. Kim 1999; Pippin 1992a, 1992b; Selvidge 1992; Stichele 2000) Barbara Rossing (1999:13), however, questions Pippin's and others' singular focus on the modern reader and the reduction of "desire" to sex and violence, neglecting economic, political and spiritual desires. Rossing argues that John clothes his critique of empire and his own alternative to it in the imagery of two women because he employs an ancient tradition of representing an ethical choice as a choice between either a lascivious or a virtuous woman. By linking this *topos* to the two cities, John transforms this *topos* to a political choice. However, when we have sought to read the gendered language of the book within its own concern, Fiorenza (1985:199) rightfully points out what I have perhaps not sufficiently done in this thesis, that we need to translate the androcentric language of the book into forms appropriate for our contemporary "rhetorical situation."

⁹² The Bride of the Lamb is first introduced in 19:7-8, but it is not before 21:2, 9 that we are told that she is to be identified with the New Jerusalem.

⁹³ Although John links the Beast and Babylon closely together (17:3, 7-8), there is also an important distinction between them: while the former represents Rome's political-military power that dominates by force, the latter corrupts by the deception of economic affluence.

⁹⁴ In contrast to Babylon, The New Jerusalem is depicted as covering the whole realm (although the city has a wall, it seems to be 'located' at the borders of the inhabitable cosmos since those who are excluded from it in 21:27 are precisely those who have no place in the new creation [cf. 20:15; 21:8]), perhaps to accentuate how here privileges are not limited to a central elite but extended to all.

myth, and the way in which John uses his Jewish heritage identifies her as Zion-Jerusalem.

In Rev 12 John employs a mythical *topos* that has deep roots in the Ancient Near East and bears striking resemblance to a popular version of this myth in the Roman world where the goddess Leto is pregnant with Apollo who is destined to slay the Great Dragon Python.⁹⁵ Python pursues Leto in order to kill her unborn son before he has time to slay him. However, Poseidon keeps Leto out of Python's reach by protecting her on an island that he sinks into the sea. There Apollo is born as an adult, and after four days seeks Python and kills him. John probably patterns his own vision intentionally after this myth because of the way Rome was cast as the goddess mother of Apollo, who in return was identified with the emperor.⁹⁶ As such, she was the city of the divine emperor who held anomic chaos at bay. John turns this on its head, Rome is now the earthly manifestation of the villain, while the Messiah of the woman in the sky is he who both conquers the dragon and its earthly manifestations.⁹⁷ Employing one of its own cherished myth, John portrays Rome as the villain bound for destruction.⁹⁸ If John has employed the Leto-Apollo-Python myth intentionally to contrast the woman in the sky with the false claim of the goddess Roma, this would suggest hers is also a fundamentally geopolitical identity. She is a contrast city to Rome, the centre of a political alternative to the Roman empire.

Although the overall structure of ch. 12 draws on the Leto-Apollo-Python myth, the details of Rev 12 are steeped in Jewish tradition, not least the depiction of the woman.⁹⁹ First, most commentator agree that John recalls Zion-Jerusalem as he

⁹⁵ See especially Yarbo Collins 1976:57-65 (cf. Aune 1998a: 667-74) Most scholars note the likely allusion to this myth, although note the objections of Prigent 2001:16, 64-68, who thinks the parallels are too broad and that it is unlikely that John would employ a pagan myth. In reply we can note that the parallel structure is remarkable and the political reason for employing it is all but insignificant. It seems perfectly reasonable for a writer steeped in Jewish tradition to pick up the stories of his opponent and turn them on their head!

⁹⁶ Witherington 2003:165-66. This may also be one of the reason why John clothes the woman with sun, moon and stars as a contrast to how the emperors at times saw themselves as sons of a mother goddess, reflected in sun-moon emblems for Rome. (Beale 1999:628; cf. Caird 1966:148)

⁹⁷ John's employment of this myth is one example of how John "used pagan imagery and practices as part of a broad apologetic assault on Graeco-Roman culture itself." (Aune 1987:481)

⁹⁸ Cf. Richard 1995:101-02.

⁹⁹ For extensive discussions on the Jewish background of this vision, see Beale 1999:625ff.

depicts the woman.¹⁰⁰ In its symbolic significance Jerusalem had by the time of Jeremiah and Ezekiel become a synecdoche for Israel,¹⁰¹ “the great hopes associated with the chosen people seem now to be linked with the fate of a city, the very name of which is in the way of becoming a symbol.”¹⁰² Considering this and how John sets this woman in intentional contrast with the way Rome saw herself, this woman probably represents the city of God, Jerusalem, as she symbolises the whole kingdom of which she is the political centre. Thus, before John has depicted the order of the Dragon, its beasts and its city, he has closely identified the followers of the Lamb with the central city that is the light of the whole world.

Second, Greg Beale and others have shown that the way John alludes to Zion-Jerusalem he emphasises in particular how she represents the faithful remnant of Israel as she suffers from oppression and anticipates God’s redemption.¹⁰³ This, the centrality of the Messianic child, and the likely reference to Eve and her seed provides John the elasticity he needs to identify the people the woman represents:¹⁰⁴ she is the faithful messianic community, first as the faithful Jewish community that expected the one seed of Eve, the Messiah, and among whom he emerged (12:2, 5) and then the international community of the Lamb who also are her seed (12:17).¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ See Isa 66:7-11 (cf. 54:1-3; 61:9-10; 65:9, 23; 4 Ezra 10) for how Israel is represented as Zion, as a mother with seed (Beale 1999:631). Elsewhere in the NT, this tradition is picked up in Gal 4:26-27.

¹⁰¹ Humphrey 1995:21; cf. Beale 1999:676-8 who notes that female Zion always represents the many people of Israel (Isa 49:14-25; 50:1; 51:1-3, 16-20; Ez 16; Hos 4:4-5).

¹⁰² Porteous 1967:97.

¹⁰³ “The woman’s birth pangs represent the persecution of the covenant community and the messianic line during OT times and the intertestamental period leading up to Christ’s birth.” (Beale 1999:629; cf. Aus 1976:268) He notes that although the image of a woman in birth pain is often used of punishment (Isa 13:8; 21:3; Jer 13:21; 22:23), here it picks up another tradition, “of the suffering of the ideal city of God resulting from oppression.” (Beale 1999:637; cf. Isa 26:17-18; Mic. 4:9-10; 5:3; Hos 13:13) Ford (1975:189) notes how βαστάζω and its cognate noun are used sixty times in 4 *Maccabees* of the suffering of the martyrs. Cf. Matt 8:6, 29; 14:24; Mark 5:7; 6:48; Luke 8:28; 2 Pet. 2:8.

¹⁰⁴ Aune 1998a:708-09 notes that σπέρμα here is highly unusual since it normally is used of a male progenitor, and suggests the reason for this might be because it is an allusion to Gen 3, to the woman’s seed that will make war with the seed of the Serpent. (cf. Farrer 1964:142-43) This would make good sense both of the seed of the woman in the singular being the messianic figure that signals the defeat of the serpent, and the ensuing war between the siblings of the messianic figure and the beastly order of the Dragon in ch. 13. If this is the case, then the city of God is represented as an Eve figure from whom both the messianic victor and his fellow warriors come, while the beasts who the Dragon conjures up out of the chaotic sea are associated with the city that deceives the world represented as a Prostitute. Beale (1999:677) notes how “the equation of singular “male” with plural “children” and collective “seed,” all alluding to the same offspring from Zion” in Isa 66:7-10 “is virtually identical to the phenomenon in Revelation 12 of the Jerusalemitic woman bearing a male and also having plural seed.” (cf. Fekkes 1994:185)

¹⁰⁵ John does similar movements in 1:5-6 and 5:9-10 where he uses the language of Ex 19:6 to describe the people constituted at Easter; similarly in 7:4-10 he uses a hear-see formula to identify those gathered around the Lamb with Israel; cf. Beckwith 1919:628.

Third, if the woman in Rev 12 is clothed in the language of Jerusalem-Zion as she represents the faithful people of God, what is the significance of her journey in the “desert” (12:6, 14)? The “desert” is an ambiguous biblical symbol, sometimes used to indicate the desolation of sin and judgment¹⁰⁶ but also as a place of protection from evil forces.¹⁰⁷ This positive role of the desert has of course deep roots in Israel’s story as the place of the people’s journey from the bondage in Egypt to their establishment in the promised land.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, although the desert imagery is used for God’s judgment on Israel, it is also used to depict the protection of Israel in exile¹⁰⁹ and the expectation of Israel’s return from exile.¹¹⁰ This is the rich tradition John alludes to here when he depicts how the woman is protected from the onslaught of the Dragon by being taken on the wings of an Eagle into the desert where she is nourished by God.¹¹¹ This is where she will reside during the time the Dragon has on earth.¹¹²

What picture can we draw from this? Although this woman, like the women in chs. 17-18 and 21-22, represents a city that is the defining centre of a kingdom, unlike them, she is not manifested geopolitically. Between Easter and the Parousia, in the limited time the Dragon is confined to rage on earth, God’s earthly Jerusalem is

¹⁰⁶ Of judgment on Israel: Jer 9:10-15; 12:10-12; Ez 6:14; Joel 2:3; of Jerusalem in particular: Jer 6:7-8; 7:34; of judgment on Israel’s enemies: Isa 13:20-22; 34:10-15; Jer 50:39-40; Ez 29:5; Joel 3:19; Mal 1:3.

¹⁰⁷ Beale 1999:646 notes how Deut 8:14-16 brings this dual emphasis of the wilderness together. See Williams 1962 for an insightful study on the motif of the wilderness in biblical literature. As the uninhabitable “Unsown” land it was often associated with chaos and judgment (Jer 25:38). However, for Israel it was also an important motif in her covenantal life with God (as the place where God provided for her as well as “the place of testing and tutelage” (15) and as a place of refuge). See Williams 1962:22-27 on how the NT writers use wilderness as an exodus imagery.

¹⁰⁸ Ex 16:32; Deut 2:7; 8:2-3, 12-16; 29:5-6; 32:10; Josh 24:7; Neh 9:19-21; Ps 105:37-42; 136:16; Hos 13:5-6.

¹⁰⁹ Beale (1999:625-26) notes how later Jewish literature used passages as Cant. 6:10 to “emphasize Israel’s faithfulness to God either in the wilderness wandering or in exile.” For a similar notion of the desert as place of protection in the NT, see Matt 24:15-26; Mark 13:14-22; Luke 21:20-24.

¹¹⁰ A common motif in the expectation of the return from exile is not simply the journey through the desert but also the transformation of the desert into fruitful inhabitable land where the human community flourishes (Isa 32:14-15; 35:1; 40:1-5; 41:18; 43:19-20; 51:3; Jer 31:2; Ez 34:25; Hos 2:14-20). On the transformation of the desert, see Williams 1962:14. Beale 1999:643 notes that the desert community of Qumran saw itself as the first stages of the fulfilment of this last exodus.

¹¹¹ If John alludes to Isa 40:31 (cf. Ex 19:4; Deut 32:11-12) here, (so Ford 1975:191-92; Harrington 1993:136; Swete 1911:158) this is another example of how he uses end-time exodus motifs to portray the woman’s time in the wilderness. (cf. Beale 1999:669; Beasley-Murray 1981:205)

¹¹² The 3 ½ years that designate the short period in which the Devil manifests its draconic power on earth through the order of the Beast also designate the period that the woman is protected in the desert, a time period 12:6, 14 suggests lasts between Easter and the Parousia. (See Sweet 1979:46 on how references to 3 ½ bind chs. 11-13 together; cf. Beale 1999:647 who notes that the reference to 42 months echoes the forty two years Israel spent in the desert according to Num 33:5-49)

protected in the desert.¹¹³ This is a time that God's people suffer under the political rule of their oppressors, just as they did in Egypt and Babylon. However, this does not mean that they have lost their political identity. Although their city, their *polis*, has now been robbed of its rightful place, it has not disappeared. It is protected, kept alive by God outside the political structures, in the "desert." So, for John, the loss of Jerusalem as the political centre of the kingdom of God is not a sign that God's promises have been defeated but that their fulfilment is near at hand.¹¹⁴ At Easter, the end-time Exodus has commenced as the Dragon and all its demonic forces have lost their place in the heavenly realm, and now the city of God is on its journey through the desert, protected from the ragings of the Dragon, waiting for its homecoming. This is the exodus now "experienced not in Egypt but in the heart of the Roman empire."¹¹⁵ The kingdom of God is not defeated, but the church, as it exists as an anticipation of the kingdom in ecclesial communities, "advances toward the heavenly Jerusalem and consequently she lives in hope."¹¹⁶ Thus, just as the New Jerusalem is the heavenly-eschatological counterpart to Babylon, so this woman-city in the desert is its earthly counterpart. She, who is all light, waits for her true manifestation when the kingdom of the Beast has been darkened, she who is now protected in the desert waits for her own rightful place when the woman who occupies the centre in the desert of history will be deserted, made desolate (17:16).

¹¹³ See Humphrey 1994:107 on how the desert *topos* is employed to connect and contrast the woman in ch. 12 and Babylon.

¹¹⁴ One wonders if this is John's response to the destruction of Jerusalem and the dissolution of Israel as a geographical entity in A.D. 70. Although Jerusalem may be judged for rejecting its Messiah, this is not the end of the kingdom of God. Rather the death of the Messiah has cemented the victory of God's eschatological purposes and the present community of the Messiah is now God's kingdom that lives for and toward the re-establishment of the kingdom as a geopolitical reality which will cover the whole earth. As such the destruction of Jerusalem and the dissolution of the nation is not the end but the decisive beginning of the fulfilment of God's hope. It is a sign that the end of Satan and his powers is drawing near. The disappearance of a visible manifestation of God's kingdom on earth during the broken time of the Dragon is merely a 'brief' phase of the final battle before its undisputed establishment on earth. The time of this woman in the desert is the time between what Fiorenza (1985:56) has labelled the first and second step of the establishment of Christ's reign over the cosmos. In the first, at Christ's enthronement, Satan loses his place in heaven and is consigned to the earth, in the second, at the parousia, Satan is banished from the earth, and in the third and final establishment of the kingdom, Satan is destroyed.

¹¹⁵ Richard 1995:77. Similarly Williams (1962:25) sets the woman, as "the new Jewish Christian Israel," within the conflict with Rome.

¹¹⁶ Ellul 1977:55. Noting the prevalence of exodus imagery in the book, McDonough not unjustifiably claims "John's book may be fairly described as a "New Exodus," as God delivers his people from their oppressors." (McDonough 1999:200)

Bringing these various strands together, we conclude that the woman in Rev 12 is likely to be seen as the collective identity of the messianic community that exists as the alternative to the draconic order of the Beast that now holds the position of geopolitical authority in the world. As such, the woman is depicted as Jerusalem-Zion as she represents the kingdom of God than now exists in a kind of ‘exile’, i.e. without an actual geopolitical manifestation.¹¹⁷ The messianic community are the citizens, the children of the city which has been taken outside the geopolitical structures of the world into the desert to be protected by God during the time the Dragon rages on earth.¹¹⁸ Because the city is hidden away during its time of protection while her children are being persecuted, many commentators see her as the “spiritual” identity of the church, the heavenly perspective on the church during history.¹¹⁹ This is correct if one simply refers to the hidden-ness of this aspect of God’s people in history that is only revealed in the vision’s spatial expansion of reality—that the churches that are now constantly threatened by internal conflict and external pressure are also the manifestation of the Kingdom which future is certain since its central reality, its city, is being protected by God, out of reach by the Dragon who rages against her (12:14-16). But if this is what we mean by the “spiritual” identity of the woman, then she has lost none of her political identity. Revelation’s “utopia is political and unfolds in history,” not “beyond history, but beyond oppression and death in a new world, where God’s glory becomes visible over all the earth;” it is “a reconstruction of the Exodus at the heart of the Roman empire.”¹²⁰ What has been taken away by the forces of evil (11:1-2) is kept safe by God until the day these forces themselves are defeated, and

¹¹⁷ Whether Jews at the time of Jesus saw themselves as existing in exile is of course a hotly debated issue. See Bryan 2002:72 for a measured exploration of how exile functioned metaphorically for some Jews “to interpret the contemporary experience of the authors and to express their hopes. If John’s depiction of the woman appeals to such imagery, his point is not what N.T. Wright argues in relation to Jesus, that the return from exile is happening in the kingdom ministry of Jesus (Wright 1996). Rather, for him, Easter both intensifies exilic experience, but precisely this intensification is a sign that the final redemption of God has begun; although in a hidden way, the people of God already find themselves in the desert, on their way out of exile, their eyes firmly set on the promised city.

¹¹⁸ Commentators disagree on how the plural offspring of the woman in 12:17 is to be related to the woman. Against Beale 1999:676; Beckwith 1919:619-20 and Sweet 204-05, I do not want to see it as a distinction between the church as seen ideally or spiritually from the heavenly perspective and the suffering of the people on earth. Rather, the former is a depiction of the kingdom of God in exile, and thus refers to the collective identity of the people, while the latter refers to the people themselves as the citizens of this city and focuses on their plight in history, during the time of their ‘exile.’

¹¹⁹ So Beale 1999:648-650; cf. 676.

¹²⁰ Richard 1995:3-5.

then the city that now sojourns through her end-time exodus will find her fulfilment in the New Jerusalem that descends from heaven

4. The Homecoming of the Kingdom in the New Jerusalem

This naturally leads us to the question about the woman in ch. 12 and the Bride of the Lamb.¹²¹ Most commentators agree that there is a close relationship between the two, they are in some way “to be seen synoptically.”¹²² Edith Humphrey argues the glorious woman in chapter 21 is a transformation of the woman in chapter 12 whose glory is hidden during her time of persecution.¹²³ As such “both figures” represent “God’s faithful people (18:4).”¹²⁴ While Humphrey rightly rejects Yarbro Collins strong distinction between the two,¹²⁵ it may be better, considering the earthly location of the former¹²⁶ and the heavenly origin of the latter, to see them as two distinct but closely related images that both refer primarily to the collective identity of God’s people as his kingdom.¹²⁷ Rev 12 focuses on the existence of this community in the history between Easter and the Parousia. As such, this woman depicts how the kingdom now exists in exile. The woman in chapter 21 refers to the New Jerusalem that is the heavenly counterpart of the earthly people, in which the earthly people finds its fulfilment when it descends to the earth.¹²⁸ As the true political order whose

¹²¹ Noting the prominence of the two women at the beginning and end of chs. 12-22, Barr (1984:44) argues that they “dominate the last half of the book.” See Humphrey 1995:103-04 on how in virtually every proposed structure of the book these two women play a pivotal role.

¹²² Humphrey 1995:104; cf. Sweet 1979:302.

¹²³ “The Apocalypse describes the persecuted mother in the wilderness who is really Queen of Heaven, and who becomes the Bride, the New Jerusalem.” (Humphrey 1995:21)

¹²⁴ Humphrey 1995:109.

¹²⁵ See Collins 1976:132. The weightiest of her objections is that there are no internal textual cues for a close connection between the two. However, Humphrey (1995:108) points to that elsewhere Collins (1976:28) argues for certain such links as the open-ended nature of 12:17 anticipates a later fulfilment, how the New Exodus motif in ch. 12 anticipates the new conquest in 19:11-21, and the new fulfilment in chs. 21-22. See Humphrey 1995:109-110 for other inner-textual relationships between the two. For a response to Collins’ other objections, see Humphrey 1995:105-109.

¹²⁶ Some commentator place the woman in heaven, as the church’s heavenly counterpart, since the vision occurs ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ (12:1) (e.g. Beasley-Murray 1981:197-98). However, although she is seen in heaven, the vision locates her firmly on earth (12:5, 6, 13, 14, 15), a fact made evident in her absence in precisely that part of the vision that takes place in heaven (12:7-12). This vision is not about the church’s heavenly identity but her earthly political identity as symbolised in Jerusalem.

¹²⁷ Farrer (1964:215) seems to suggest such a distinction when he says: “For though the mother of Messiah is not, as such, the bride of Christ, both figures are allegories of the same reality, the ‘daughter of Zion’, the congregation of God.”

¹²⁸ Humphrey, then, is right in seeing a transformation of the earthly woman since she finds her fulfilment in the arrival of the heavenly one (cf. Harrington 1993:128). But this identity is the eschatological unification of the heavenly and earthly city. In history the woman in ch. 12 represents the earthly counterpart of the heavenly city. Perhaps John uses γυνὴ in 19:7 instead of νύμφη (cf. 21:9) precisely in order to recall the woman in ch. 12, thus making a close connection between the two.

centre is God, the woman in Rev 12 is clothed in every source of cosmic light (12:3), but in the time before the rule of the Dragon has been darkened on earth (16:10) she does not exist in the form of a kingdom. Nevertheless, in her exile her central religious and political identity is protected by God (11:1-2) while she awaits her fulfilment in the city whose source of light is God's glory (21:11, 23)¹²⁹ and whose borders extend to the whole earth.¹³⁰

There are three important implications of our discussion of ch. 12 on how the people made a kingdom to God in the events of Easter exist as such. First, the church, understood as the communities of believers gathered around the Messiah, stands in an exclusive relationship to the kingdom, it is the only people that have a future in the kingdom. This assertion, though, does not mean that the Kingdom can be identified with particular ecclesial communities without qualification. The ecclesial communities are the manifestations of the kingdoms since they are where God's rule is exercised by Jesus in the Spirit.¹³¹ However, they can only be such manifestations of the kingdom if their life is ordered according to and in communion with their Lord.¹³² The church is the kingdom of God in anticipation of its fulfilment, and the churches are presences of the kingdom in the realm in which the rule of the kingdom is not yet established;¹³³ to the extent they are faithful to their Lord and his mission

If this is the case the identification of the woman's βύσσον with the righteous deeds of the saint (19:8) may point to how the subjects of the "Jerusalem" the woman represents only find their fulfilment in the New Jerusalem as they persevere in faithfulness to the God and the Lamb. (Rossing 1999:140 notes that the linen in 19:7 is not to be identified with the woman but rather signals "that the bride embraces and validates their righteous deeds [of the saints].") It is precisely in the political image of the city that the dicothemy between the city as people and place reflected in Gundry's study (1987) on the New Jerusalem as people can be overcome.

¹²⁹ Humphrey 1995:110 notes the relationship between how the woman in Rev 12 is clothed in light and how the glory of God is the light of the New Jerusalem. This stands in contrast to the Beast and its kingdom that will be darkened when the fifth bowl is poured on its throne. (16:10) This may be an intentional contrast since Isa 60:1-3, a passage that lies behind Rev 21:23-26, contrasts the darkness that covers the earth and its peoples with the light of God's glory that will dawn on God's people and which will attract the kings of the nations.

¹³⁰ In history it is only the central religio-political identity of the kingdom that is marked for protection (11:1-2) and is protected in the desert, while 'the horizon' of its geopolitical realm is now occupied by the forces of the Dragon (12:6, 14-16); in contrast, the angelically marked borders of the New Jerusalem extend throughout the whole habitable cosmos (21:15-17) and the glory and honour of the nations and their kings will stream into it (21:24-26). (cf. Humphrey 1995:110)

¹³¹ Thus, Jesus who addresses the churches in chs. 2-3 is depicted in 1:12-20 as the exalted Lord at the centre of the lampstands that represent them.

¹³² Note how a common theme in the warnings to the churches in chs. 2-3 is the risk of losing their ecclesial status. (2:5, 16; 3:3, 16; cf. 18:4)

¹³³ The relationship between the church as the one people and its pluri-form manifestation is perhaps best seen in the image of the woman in Rev 12. The woman refers to the one corporate identity of the church that awaits its earthly manifestation, while the children, who gather in ecclesial communities,

they are the children of Jerusalem, and to the extent they do not they partake in Babylon.¹³⁴

Second, although the church has an exclusive *claim* to be the kingdom of God, she per definition does not exist in the *form* of a kingdom,¹³⁵ she is not manifested now as a geopolitical entity, has no earthly centre of political power which orders an actual socio-political human community within a geographical realm. As such, the woman in Rev 12 is both linked to the ‘old’ and the New Jerusalem, the city that once was the actual geopolitical centre of God’s rule on earth and the city that one day will be the centre of the whole habitable cosmos. What distinguishes her from her origin and her telos is not that she is apolitical but that she is in a political exile. Because of this, although the church, as this woman-city, does not exist in a geopolitical form, she nevertheless has lost none of her political identity.

Third, because of this exilic existence of the kingdom, the church’s political praxis is radically transformed and yet nevertheless remains fundamentally political.¹³⁶ The ecclesial manifestations of the church do not rival the draconic order by establishing their own centre of power in the world but in their prophetic existence in the world.¹³⁷ In Revelation, reflecting a context of marginalisation, this exists in resisting the way in which the Beast forces people to pledge their allegiance to the draconic forces, unearthing the fundamentally idolatrous and unjust ways of the draconic order, and proclaiming the messianic way to the alternative kingdom, to the New Jerusalem that will descend from above when Babylon and all who are like her are but smouldering ashes. This is the way in which the saints “rule” in history.

are the individuals this people exist in. If the woman is the church as the city of God, her seed are the ‘exiled’ citizens of the city that now gather in expatriate communities.

¹³⁴ Note how the call “to come out of her” (18:4) suggests that the earthly people have some of the character of Babylon, the very city they are contrasted to, in themselves. (So Humphrey 1995:115)

¹³⁵ Similarly Roose says, “Johannes differenziert damit zwischen einem gegenwärtigen Zustand, der darin besteht, dass die Christen zu einem Königreich und Priestern eingesetzt sind (Status), und der Verheißung, dass sie im neuen Äon herrschen werden (Funktion).” (Roose 2004a:207)

¹³⁶ “The church is a social and political reality that does things differently from other institutions, because it is eschatologically different, which means that the basis of its being and authority are also radically different.” (Gunton 1999)

¹³⁷ In Revelation, it is not only the New Jerusalem and Babylon the Great that are set in contrast with each other, but also the activity of the powers of the Dragon and the followers of the Lamb. Note e.g. the way the depiction of either the activity or destiny of the Draconic forces is consistently followed by an exhortation to the saints: a) 13:1-8 > 13:9-10 (1 beast’s temporary authority over saints > perseverance), b) 13:11-17 > 13:18 (2 beast’s deception and persecution > calculate number; cf. 17:9), c) 14:6-11 > 14:12 (the 3 angelic pronouncements, incl. Babylon’s fall, and judgment > call for patient endurance); cf. 18:1-3 > 18:4-8 (announcement of the fall of Babylon > call to leave and judge her); 18:9-24 > 19:1-4 (lament over and depiction of the fall of Babylon > call to rejoice at her destruction).

Those who in the eschaton will occupy the central court of the eternal kingdom and as such rule forever,¹³⁸ rule now in their prophetic witness. The prophetic witness, most vividly depicted in Rev 11, is the exercise of actual and effective ‘political’ power, it accomplishes radical changes in the world which either are seen as punishment on the world as it resists the way of the kingdom of God or as an actual ordering of the world toward the future kingdom. And Rev 12:11 points to how the eventual demise of the kingdom of the world is unavoidable as the churches continue the campaign of their king and extend his paradoxical victory in their own martyrological existence. As such, in following his way, the church shares both the fate and the victory of Christ: risking death, they uncover the false logic of unjust power. Its martyrs are the undertow of God’s kingdom: as they are swept from the earth, they join the heavenly army that one day will rush back to the earthly realm; then, the unassailable power of the forces of evil will be but sand castles that leave no trace of their existence as the evening tide washes them away.¹³⁹

IV. Interaction with Moltmann

A. Consonances

The above discussion of the reign of God and how churches are the places in which the kingdom now exists in exile is consonant with significant aspects of how Moltmann sees the dialectic between the future of the kingdom and its presence in history, the dialectic between the kingdom as the horizon and Christ as the centre, and how he places the church between Christ and the Kingdom.

¹³⁸ Roose sees Ex 19:6 LXX, Ps 2, Dan 7 and Mt 19:28/Lk 22:28-30 as the primary background from which John develops his understanding of eschatological co-rule. (2004a:207)

¹³⁹ Note first how when slain in the realm in which the Dragon attempts to cut them off from their allegiance to the Lamb, the martyrs are caught up to the heavenly realm where the kingdom is now established (compare 7:15-17 with 21:1ff). In this their own journey is patterned after Jesus’ (3:22; 12:5; 14:4). Second, note how it is precisely their defeat at the hands of the draconic forces that constitutes their victory (12:11; cf. Bauckham 1993b:70-7188-94). Third, note that it is precisely these martyrs who make up the Lamb’s army that inflicts the last defeat on the forces of evil in history (14:1-5; 19:14). As such, the victory of the Beast over them is their defeat over it and the Dragon behind it, since in their death they both enter the heavenly counterpart of the eternal kingdom and populate the army at which hand all draconic forces on earth will meet their end. In this way the martyrs are the paradigm for the whole church: “One conquers through persevering fidelity to God, and in John’s world that means active, though non-violent, resistance to the Roman system even to the point of surrendering life itself. Conquest, that is, comes not by wielding coercive power, not by submitting to its claims to authority, but by resisting out of undying allegiance to God who—despite all appearances—is sovereign.” (Carroll 2000:254)

1. The Dialectics of the Kingdom

We noted earlier that as Moltmann turns to his relational understanding of the kingdom, he can account for the critiques placed against the singular focus on eschatology in *Theology of Hope* but in such a way that the earlier eschatological force is not lost. As such, the hope for the kingdom as the goal of history is “the rule of God in the kingdom of God as a future transcending the system,” while its presence is the redemptive force of God within history that turns creation toward this future, “the kingdom of God in the liberating rule of God as a transforming power immanent in that system.”¹⁴⁰ Both are needed because “without the counterpart of the future of the kingdom, which transcends the present system, the transforming power immanent in the system loses its orientation. Without the transformation immanent in the system the future transcending the system would become a powerless dream.”¹⁴¹ Hope produces a form of praxis that is consistent with the way the rule of God hoped for is present in the world in anticipation—since the hope for and presence of the kingdom belong together, “in actual practice the obedience to the will of God which transforms the world is inseparable from prayer for the coming of the kingdom. The doxological anticipation of the beauty of the kingdom and active resistance to godless and inhuman relationships in history are related to one another and reinforce one another mutually.”¹⁴² While Moltmann develops this logic in fairly abstract terms at times, there is an important strand in his theology that can provide it with positive and concrete content, namely the dialectic between Jesus as the centre and the Kingdom as the horizon. This, as we noted is already evident early in his theology but is perhaps developed most fully in *The Way of Jesus Christ*.¹⁴³

The understanding of the kingdom in Revelation reflects a very similar dual logic. The eschatological kingdom is not a future that replaces the present but is rather the transformation of both the human community and the earth when God will assume the central political sovereignty on earth that is now in the hand of his enemies. As such, the eschatological kingdom is “the future transcending the system”

¹⁴⁰ CPS, 190.

¹⁴¹ CPS, 190. Moltmann grounds this distinction in this discussion by noting that in the New Testament βασιλεία can refer either to the present and actual rule of God in the world (which is disputed and manifests itself in hidden ways) or to the universal goal of divine rule (which is eschatological, universal and undisputed). Cf. JCTW, 19.

¹⁴² CPS, 190.

¹⁴³ So also Rasmussen (1995:376), who thinks *WJC* is the apex of Moltmann’s development of the church as a contrast society that “witnesses to an alternative social and political practice.”

that gives the present its “orientation;” the depiction of the future of both Babylon and the New Jerusalem calls the readers to abandon any allegiance with the former and throw their lot in with the latter.¹⁴⁴ As the city that awakens the aspirations for the kingdom of God, the New Jerusalem suggests fundamental aspects that should inform the social imagination of those who do pledge their allegiance to its Lord. This calls for a this-worldly praxis—the call to move out of Babylon is not a call to abandon this world for the coming but a call to engage in a messianic war for the future of this world in the New Jerusalem.¹⁴⁵ This praxis, as in Moltmann, is christologically informed. Although the vision of the New Jerusalem orients believers toward the coming kingdom, how they actually live toward it is shaped by how their risen Lord has gone ahead of them and shown them the way of participating in the messianic victory for the kingdom of God.¹⁴⁶

While Revelation, depicting a context where every other venue is foreclosed, shows us how prophetic resistance is fundamental to the posture of Christians in society, Moltmann can help us to read the book in context where other modes of social engagement are possible without compromising one’s faithfulness to God. To see this better, let us turn to a second similarity between the two.

2. The Church in the Mission of the Kingdom of God

All inherent interests of the Church itself—maintaining the status quo, extending influence—must be subordinated to the interests of the Kingdom of God, otherwise they are unjustified. If the spirit and the institutions of the Church correspond to the Kingdom of God, then it is the Church of Christ. If they contradict the Kingdom of God, then the Church loses its right to existence and will become a superfluous religious community. The Kingdom of God orientation of the Church today consists of proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom of God to all people and first to the poor in this world in order to awaken faith which lifts up and makes certain.¹⁴⁷

This programmatic statement in *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* would not be an inappropriate summary for the basic thrust of Rev 2-3. For example, in the

¹⁴⁴ “John builds on hundreds of years of tradition to present Jerusalem and Babylon as opposing figures in the most thorough economic, political, religious, and ethical appeal of his time, calling believers to come out of the whorish city and to take part in the glory of a bridal vision.” (Rossing 1999:1)

¹⁴⁵ Not surprisingly, Revelation with its this-worldly hope and unmasking of the veil the powerful cast over reality is a crucial biblical text in various liberation theologies. (Rowland and Corner 1990:133)

¹⁴⁶ “The pivotal role which the history of Jesus plays in the Apocalypse does not detract from but rather reinforces, the eschatological outlook of the book. The corollary of eschatological hope in the Apocalypse is certainly not the meaninglessness of present existence. The present takes its meaning from the redemption already accomplished (1:5; 5:9) which guarantees the future hope, defines its content (the coming Lord is Jesus who was crucified, who was dead and is alive for ever: cf. 1:18) and also provides the model for positively living towards the *parousia* meantime.” (Bauckham 1993a:171)

¹⁴⁷ Moltmann, “Jesus and the Kingdom of God,” 16.

address to the church in Laodicea, their capitulation to the social and political pressures of Rome is contrasted with their potential exaltation in the kingdom of God. Laodicea is in danger of losing its ecclesial status (3:16; cf. 2:5) because it has contradicted the kingdom of God in the way it has amassed the wealth of Rome.¹⁴⁸ The church had elevated its own self-preservation above the interests of the kingdom and was losing its right to existence. In contrast to this, Christ as the community's foundation and Lord, calls them to repentance. If they do so, the congregation will share his destiny and be elevated to his throne in the Kingdom of God. (3:21-22)

Revelation, within its context of social isolation and impending persecution constantly draws us back to what Moltmann also sees as fundamental to the church, namely the kerygmatic nature of how the church is to be faithful to Christ in its existence toward the eschatological kingdom. Its faithfulness to and proclamation of the way of Christ to the coming kingdom is its fundamental service to the world. This is basic in Moltmann's theology¹⁴⁹ and Revelation depicts this as the way in which the church exists and participates in the battle of God against the forces of evil, and as such is intrinsically political. Because of the radical context Revelation is set in, the book very clearly sets out the contrast between capitulation to the forces of evil and perseverance in the kerygmatic faithfulness to Christ. As such, Revelation is pivotal for Christians who live on the underside of today's global society, it gives them the hope that the justice of God will not leave things as they are, no matter how set in stone they seem.¹⁵⁰ However, precisely because divine justice is at the heart of the book, it is a book for all Christians, and Moltmann can help Christians who occupy positions of privilege to read it in at least two important ways.

First, Moltmann's emphasis on the church's interested engagement with the world as it exists for the whole, gives the reader an appropriate context from which to read the book. Whatever one makes of Moltmann's proposed solution for the contemporary context of global economic injustice, he forcefully reminds Christians today that they cannot occupy a neutral position and that they have an obligation to

¹⁴⁸ Similarly Sardis has a reputation to be alive but from the vantage point of the exalted Christ is dead. (3:1-2)

¹⁴⁹ Noting that God's kingdom "does not simply lie in readiness in the future" but must be sought if it is to be found, Moltmann adds, "[One] must seek this future, strive for it, and already here be in correspondence to it in the active renewal of life and of the conditions of life and therefore realize it already here according to the measure of possibilities." (RRF, 218)

¹⁵⁰ While this is a concern throughout Moltmann's theology, he develops it specifically in relation to his ecclesiology in *CPS*, 168-76.

seek the welfare of the poor in the globalisation of Western market economics. So, when Western Christians read how Rome was the Babylon of its day partially because of the unjust flow of material goods (18:3, 9-19), Moltmann reminds us that today we must read such text in light of the way the Western world is getting drunk of the intoxicating wine of the luxuries it drains from the rest of the world. Christians who participate in these processes without a concern for the justice for the poor are shifting their allegiance from Christ to the Dragon and its contemporary beasts. Faithfulness to the Gospel does not only mean rejecting every form of idolatry but also an orientation toward the rule of God in which those who suffer injustice now are exalted to the throne-room of God.¹⁵¹ The call “to *come out* of her” for them is to *enter more consciously into* these processes in order to change the flow of goods.¹⁵² As we do so, we must not only attend to how the book comes to us from the periphery but must also learn to read it with those who occupy the periphery.¹⁵³

Second, while Moltmann’s political iconoclasm is perhaps what is closest to Revelation’s portrait of its own socio-political climate, his emphasis on the potentialities for the kingdom in the human social processes may also help us to highlight a less accentuated emphasis in Revelation, the possibility of the nation hearing the kerygmatic proclamation of the church and giving glory to God. It is understandable that the book itself, considering the social context it portrays and its dominant battle motif, does not spend much space on what this would look like in the here and now. However, Richard Bauckham has convincingly shown that it holds out the hope that although the order of the beast that now deceives the whole world will come to a final and decisive end, there is the possibility that the nations will repent.¹⁵⁴ Crucial for Christian people who can engage in the cultural, political and economic processes of society without compromising their faith is to know how one can appropriately form a society that is informed by the justice of the coming. Revelation leaves the door open for such engagement in its vision of the New Jerusalem as the

¹⁵¹ This has been a constant emphasis in Moltmann’s authorship, seen most recently in the extensive interaction with various forms of contextual theology in *EiT*, 183-299.

¹⁵² Fernandez (1997), in an insightful study of the religio-political economic dynamics of Rev 18 that is set with the backdrop of contemporary economic injustices, rightly points out that the call to come out of the city is the refusal to take advantage of an unjust system that oppresses the poor; as such, even an actual separation if that is necessary is not an act of sectarian escape but of active resistance.

¹⁵³ See e.g. Richard 1995. Although I am more confident than Steve Moyise (2001:181-94) that Revelation holds its own correctives against oppressive readings of it, his observations on how Revelation can and has been read as such is to be heeded.

¹⁵⁴ Bauckham 1993a:238-337.

alternative city to Babylon, and Moltmann can in many ways point us in the direction of how we can enter through this door. While we will shortly question how Moltmann relates present political and social structures other than the church to the coming kingdom, his constant attempt to discern the present situation, its pathologies and its possibilities, in light of what Christians hope for the whole world, is laudable. Since the church exists on the foundation of Christ and for his kingdom it must always be drawn beyond itself; because its Lord is the creator of the whole cosmos it cannot exist in communities that live for themselves, and because the purposes of its Lord are *for* his creation, its children must never escape life on this earth in hope for another but must always

enquire about still closer political correspondences to the lordship of Christ, to the messianic mission and to the church's existence in a world-wide context....The politically responsible concept of the church ... leads to the church that suffers and fights within the people and with peoples, and to an interpretation of this people's church in the framework of the divine history of liberation, whose goal is the new creation in peace and righteousness.¹⁵⁵

In this Revelation unflinchingly reminds of the indisputable place that Christ has as the Lord of the church and that the church can never involve itself in the world in such a way that it compromises his Lordship, but Moltmann can help us to see how the nations that now get drunk with the deception of Babylon may become the nations that enter the New Jerusalem.

B. Differences

However, this discussion on the consonances between Moltmann and Revelation also brings us to two fairly important differences between the two, one that circles around how they understand the rule of God, and the other in how they see the relationship between the church and the kingdom.

1. The Sovereignty of God and the Egalitarian Community

a. The Sovereignty of God and the Human Community

In a previous chapter we discussed how Moltmann has grown increasingly weary of theological language of divine rule and human obedience because of the hierarchical notions of power distribution it connotates, a concern at the heart of his

¹⁵⁵ CPS, 18.

critique of Monotheism and the way he understands the God-world relation.¹⁵⁶ For him, emphases on God's absolute sovereignty become the tool of the powerful to substantiate their own unjust rule. Thus, in his later work, although the Kingdom of God remains a pivotal symbol in his thought, talk about God's sovereignty and human obedience have all but disappeared in favour of an emphasis on the reciprocal relationship between God and creation which forms the basis for a human society of the equal and free.

However, we also noted that Moltmann's own position had some fundamental problems, a notable one being that the biblical visions of the egalitarian community Moltmann appeals to precisely ground their ideal in the kind of divine sovereignty Moltmann rejects. This raises the question whether the categorical dichotomy Moltmann sets up is valid. According to Moltmann's logic the vision of God's sovereignty in Revelation should produce a vision of a highly hierarchical political society; however, precisely the opposite is the case, the vision of the eschatological community in Revelation is radically egalitarian precisely because it anticipates the arrival of God's undisputed sovereignty on earth.¹⁵⁷ Considering this and how we also questioned Moltmann's necessary correlation between God's inner communion and his economic relations, his one-sided use of biblical tradition and his inability to account for the proper exercise of power in history, we will now first briefly consider a different way of constructing the God-world relation, second, hone in on how the rule of God as well as human freedom can be understood within it, and third consider what advantages this view may have over Moltmann's, how it both can maintain the ideal of the egalitarian community without compromising God's sovereignty and how it can provide the positive content for the provisional but necessary structures of human power in history.

¹⁵⁶ "If the concept of community, mutuality, *Perichoresis*, comes to the foreground in the understanding of God, and takes up, relativizes and limits the concept of one-sided rule, then understanding of the determination of human beings among each other and their relationship also changes." (HTG, 181)

¹⁵⁷ In 22:3-5, after the enemy is finally defeated and every vestige of its social, political, economical and cultural vestiges have been eradicated, redeemed humanity is first depicted as those who serve God (22:3) and who as such constitute those who rule forever. Here, humanity as a whole are exalted to the highest social position possible. When, Moltmann, in fact, does discuss this passage, he completely ignores the clear distinction made between God and his servants, and interprets the language of service and rule as "rule through the mutual give and take of power." (CoG, 319)

b. Christological Perichoresis

In a master's thesis that deserves wider publication, David Höhne has convincingly shown that the way perichoresis is used in the Cappadocian and Byzantine Fathers often diverges significantly from the way it is used among contemporary theologians who claim to revive them.¹⁵⁸ Höhne argues both the Cappadocians and the Byzantines who followed them used the term first and primarily to express how the two natures in Christ are hypostatically united and possess co-inherence (*περιχώρεσιν*) but without confusion or dissolution.¹⁵⁹ They achieved this by seeing the relationship between the two natures in a fundamentally asymmetric and dynamic way. In this asymmetric dynamism the movement is always from the divine through the human and "the human nature only penetrates the divine in so far as the divine nature penetrates itself with the human."¹⁶⁰

Although later the Byzantines used the term in a different way for the inner-trinitarian communion¹⁶¹ and although John of Damascus saw the perichoresis of Christ's two natures as based in the inner trinitarian communion,¹⁶² when the Fathers related perichoresis to the redemption of humanity it was as it is patterned in the relationship between Christ's two natures. "The Greek Fathers wrote of perichoresis as the result of the hypostatic union and the dynamic that underlies the doctrine of

¹⁵⁸ Although Höhne (2003) focuses on how Colin Gunton appropriates the concept of perichoresis, many of his observations are as relevant for Moltmann's use of the term. For Moltmann's appropriation of John of Damascus' notion of perichoresis, see *TKG*, 174-76.

¹⁵⁹ Höhne 2003:72. Although sometimes accused of Monophysitism in their use of Perichoresis in the incarnation, Höhne points out that "What the Byzantine Fathers described was theosis not Monophysitism. They wrote of the gracious restoration of the nature of humanity to its true participation in the nature of God brought about in the incarnation through the Perichoresis of the two natures and the hypostatic union." (Höhne 2003:78-79)

¹⁶⁰ Höhne 2003:54; cf. 56-57. Pseudo-Cyril says: "The penetration (*περιχώρεσις*) was not of the flesh but of the deity. For it is impossible for the flesh to penetrate through the divine: but the divine nature was able having once penetrated (*περιχωρήσασα*) through the flesh to give ineffable penetration toward itself to the flesh." (*De Sancta Trinitate* xxiv, PG 77.1165 C, as quoted in Höhne 2003:54). This contrasts to how Moltmann sees the divine as the centre of the human nature and therefore experiences and is affected by everything the human nature experiences. (see *CrG*, 227-35) The asymmetric notion of the Byzantines seems to be able to account for the divine's nature's intimate involvement with the human nature calls for but without having to resort to the mutual effecting Moltmann thinks necessary.

¹⁶¹ When the Byzantine understood the communion within God as perichoresis, they retained the idea of mutual containment and interpenetration but whereas the perichoresis between the two natures of Christ is both asymmetric and dynamic, the perichoresis in the Trinity is seen as symmetric, complete and is described in static terms. (Höhne 2003:62, 79)

¹⁶² However, for John of Damascus, this does not mean they are to be seen in strict parallel terms, the inner communion remains symmetric and static while the relationship between Christ's two natures is asymmetric and dynamic (Höhne 2003:79, 127, noting *Contra Jacobitas* 52.35-37)

theosis.”¹⁶³ God’s purposes for humanity are being brought into fulfilment as men and women are deified in Christ. Adopted into Christ, Christ by the Spirit enters into them, transforms them, and in this makes them able to penetrate into the divine. As such, perichoresis is indeed useful for considering how we are to see the relationship of God with creation and most immediately with humanity. But its usefulness lies not primarily in how creation’s life with God is patterned after the inner trinitarian relationships but in how the incarnation shows God’s purpose as entering into communion with his creatures.¹⁶⁴

c. Perichoresis and the Rule of God

Although it is outside the remit of this thesis to work out how this way of seeing the relationship between God and creation may respond to all the problems we noted in how Moltmann accounts for this relationship, we will focus on the one question that is central to it, namely how it affects an understanding of God’s sovereign rule in his kingdom.¹⁶⁵

First, negatively, since it not only grounds our perception of God’s rule in the economy but also understands it within the economy, this view avoids the analogies Moltmann too readily makes between what may be the case for the immanent Trinity and what therefore should be true of God’s relationship to the world.¹⁶⁶ Basing God’s rule in the asymmetry of the incarnation takes seriously that God’s resolve always

¹⁶³ Höhne 2003:84.

¹⁶⁴ Höhne 2003:123, concludes that when we interpret the “in” language of John perichoretically, “we conclude that perichoresis is what God *does* for us to empower us to *be* like him.”

¹⁶⁵ A response to the other problems we saw in Moltmann’s understanding could be developed along the following lines: 1) In this model, both God’s intimate involvement with creation and His self-sufficient freedom from creation can be maintained since in the asymmetric perichoresis the movement is always from the divine nature and only from the human to the divine as the human is enabled by the divine, the human is radically transformed but without the divine being changed. 2) This can respond to Moltmann’s critique of the apathetic God since although God in no way is shaped by creation, He nevertheless is intimately involved with and knows the human predicament. If the divine nature does not abrogate but completes Christ’s human nature, one could argue this is possible only because God as creator must fully know what it means to be human, including the capacity for love, anger, joy, suffering and so on. 3) Precisely because the redemption of humanity does not have a counter ‘need’ in the being of God, the universalism that seems necessary within Moltmann’s framework loses its force. Although God desires the redemptive transformation of his people, He himself is not dependent on it. Because of this, the human possibility to either embrace or rebel against communion with God is a real possibility. Hope remains universal but the rejection of what is hoped for remains a real possibility.

¹⁶⁶ Although Moltmann construes his understanding of the perichoretic union within God from the economy, he nevertheless uses this construal as a transcendent that governs his understanding of the God-world relation. Since this understanding is deduced from the economy but not intrinsically bound to it, it easily looses its moorings in the economy and is easily carried far beyond what the ‘economic facts’ can bear.

precedes any correlation there may between God and humanity. Communion with the triune God is grounded in God's resolve as revealed in the incarnated Son.

Second, positively, this model may suggest how we may resolve the perceived tension between how the centre of the divine rule as revealed in the Passion radically turns notion of power and rule on their head¹⁶⁷ and how the horizon of that rule as seen in God's *acts* of judgment and redemption unambiguously affirms that God asserts the right of a sovereign—the creator who gives himself for his creatures does nevertheless not relinquish his undisputed authority over creation. Both of these strands are unambiguously affirmed in Revelation. The God who exercises his sovereignty through the slain Lamb is nevertheless also he who in the eschaton will not only judge those who persist in rebellion against him but also excludes them from the eternal kingdom. And so, the sacrificial victory of the cross and the final messianic judgment and battle form a part of the same cloth in the book. This dual affirmation is clearly seen in how the Christ who liberated a people to be a kingdom to God is also presented as the undisputed sovereign who has the right to order the life of communities of this kingdom in history. Moltmann, because he sees a fundamental incompatibility between the two, tends to either neglect the authoritative horizon or so reread it that it all but disappears. But if we consider the service of the passion and the rule in God's mighty acts within a model drawn from the perichoresis of the two natures of Christ, this perceived tension dissipates.

The descent of the divine into the human is a radical 'service' to humanity in which humanity is enabled to become what it was created to be, but it is also a process that is initiated and determined throughout from the divine, the formative movement is still from God and is oriented back toward God. As the first among many, the perichoresis of the Son reveals God's purpose for all humanity. As such the Son's servanthood is an exercise of God's sovereignty and God's sovereignty is the Son's servanthood in praxis. Within this framework God's sovereignty and human freedom are not mutually exclusive but the latter is dependent upon the former. It is only as people submit themselves unconditionally to the divine rule that they can be truly free, can enter that wide space where they can truly be themselves, where every

¹⁶⁷ Consider for example of how Jesus points to himself as the leader unlike the rulers of the earth in Luke 22. Jesus urges his disciples to model the way he, as the leader among them has been the servant of them all. This teaching is radicalised when one considers that it takes place at the very table where Jesus has just anticipated his own death as a death for them.

relation, action and thought are truth because they drink from the deep wells of the divine wisdom that rules them.¹⁶⁸ If people submit to God's rule, they will be oriented toward redemption but if they reject it, they will incur for themselves the deadly consequences of being cut off from him. A creature's freedom is entering that mode of existence for which it was created, and therefore cannot be seen apart from the shaping force of the creator, from both God's rule and the way He makes conformity to His rule possible.

Although it is the Gospel of John and perhaps the Johannine epistles that most evidently lead us toward a perichoretic notion of the relationship between God and Jesus,¹⁶⁹ the exaltation language in Revelation can also be seen through this lens. The one who is the origin of God's creation (3:14; cf. 1:18; 2:8)¹⁷⁰ is the one who as he took on the condition of humanity and most radically gave himself for humanity in his death is exalted to the divine throne (3:21; cf. 12:5).¹⁷¹ As the one who has gone through this movement, Jesus is the one who promises a similar 'theosis' to his followers, just as he was exalted to the Father's throne, so they will be exalted to His throne (3:21). This is to be seen as already fulfilled both in heaven and also paradoxically in history,¹⁷² and the whole vision ends with the eschatological fulfilment of this promise as humanity is ordered as the servants of God around his throne and rule forever.

If God's rule is seen in this way, certain aspects of Moltmann's understanding of freedom must be corrected. "The individual's right to self-determination" which is central to Moltmann's notion of freedom,¹⁷³ plays only a limited role. In Revelation, freedom is not ultimately the possibility to form society in dialogue and without coercion¹⁷⁴ but rather most fundamentally the liberation from the deception of the

¹⁶⁸ Although Moltmann emphasises how we arrive at our true freedom, to our true selves in communion with the coming God, he avoids the language of unconditional submission to God since it stands in conflict with the importance of self-determination in his understanding of freedom. See Rasmussen 1995:89ff.

¹⁶⁹ Höhne 2003:120.

¹⁷⁰ Against Beale (1999:298), I follow Witherington (2003:107) in seeing ή ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως as "an explicit reference to Christ's preexistence." (cf. Beasley-Murray 1981:104; Beckwith 1919:488 Caird 1966:57; Harrington 1993:73; Sweet 1979:107; Swete 1911:59)

¹⁷¹ As such, Revelation's depiction of the incarnation resembles a similar logic as seen in Phil 2.

¹⁷² The Kingdom is established unambiguously in heaven (12:10) and is present paradoxically on earth in the kerygmatic witness of the church (12:11).

¹⁷³ GSS, 35.

¹⁷⁴ The importance of the dialogue of the free to form true communities is seen throughout Moltmann's corpus. (see e.g. in *TKG*, xiii)

dragon as well as its corruption and to enter that community in which people are shaped by the reign of God. People are not free to “determine” themselves but they have the possibility, by the grace of God in Christ, to choose whom they will be “determined” by, whether by the order of the dragon that is going toward its destruction or by the rule of God in Christ in which they will move into the fullness of life around the throne of God.

If this is the case, Moltmann’s three-layered stratification of freedom must be re-ordered. Here freedom is not a movement from servanthood toward friendship, but exists as servanthood and friendship, each mutually enforcing the other. The more one is the friend of God the more radically one is his slave. The more one is God’s slave, i.e. yielding to the perichoretic penetration of the divine Spirit, the more one is God’s friend since the more fully one is brought into communion with the divine. And while for Moltmann the freedom of the child of God is a mediating stratum between the freedom of the servant and of the friend, here it is the fundamental condition that one can be both God’s servant and God’s friend. It is only as one is adopted as a child of God in the Son, that one in the first place can become the servant that yields to the transformative power of the Spirit and in the same Spirit enters communion with God.

d. The Absolute Rule of God and Provisional Human Authority

There are at least two great advantages in understanding the divine rule in this way. First, when we consider God’s rule and human freedom within an asymmetric dynamic perichoresis, the fulfilment of humanity in the community of equals is inseparable from the confession of God’s unquestioned sovereignty. Christians cannot rightly justify any kind of absolutism precisely because it is only God, as creator and redeemer, who has the claim and ability to move into the human and transform it toward its created potential. Every human vision of ordering society, every religious or ideological utopia, is rendered provisional in the expectation of the arrival of the New Jerusalem from above. Since it is only in the coming city that the throne of God is found, every legitimate form of human power structures in history is rendered provisional.

However, second, in the absence of the divine throne on earth in history, forms of structuring the human community must be found. While Moltmann

eloquently discusses the provisionality and the freedom orientation of every kind of position of human authority, this is precisely what his understanding cannot give an adequate account of. However, a robust understanding of God's sovereignty not only relativises all human authority and renders it provisional but also points to the parameters of how this humbled authority is to be exercised. Positively, it gives it orientation—it is to be oriented toward the mutual communion of all in the kingdom—and it informs its praxis—although those entrusted with “the sword” may at times have to use it, the exercise of their authority must be first and always a radical service in which the good of the whole is sought. Negatively, precisely because its authority is rendered provisional and the good to be sought is not necessarily self-evident, such authority ought always to be exercised among the people and seek ways to inculcate it against any deification of its own power. While Moltmann would agree, a robust understanding of God's sovereignty provides a firmer theological rational for such a stance.

2. The Provisional Relationship of Church and State to the Kingdom

Although there are some significant and mutually informative correspondences between Moltmann's and Revelation's understanding of the relationship between the church and the kingdom, there is also a pivotal difference: for Moltmann the church is a people of the kingdom that anticipates the future kingdom, for Revelation the church is the kingdom in an anticipatory and paradoxical form. In this, Revelation makes a close and an exclusive relationship between the church and the coming kingdom which Moltmann would reject. While for Moltmann the various religious, cultural and political institutions and processes in the world have their own unique future in the kingdom, for Revelation the whole world exists in a disjunctive between its present reality and its future in the kingdom, and the church is the community of conversion in which this disjunctive is overcome. Here, we will first look at how the claim/form distinction we developed in relation to Revelation's depiction of the church as the kingdom in exile may be a safeguard against precisely the triumphalist danger Moltmann sees as inherent in placing the church in an exclusive relationship to the kingdom. Then, second, we will try to show how this may overcome basic tensions in Moltmann's own understanding of the kingdom in the world, tensions between his pneumatology and Christology, and in his missiology.

a. The Kingdom without Triumphalism

The church cannot assume political authority because although it is the only people who can make a claim to be the kingdom, it does not exist in the form of a kingdom. Intrinsic to the church's political identity is her exile: before the throne of God arrives on earth, during the time the Dragon is confined to the earth, the kingdom is in the desert.¹⁷⁵ Therefore, the church's political praxis must be consonant with her political exile. Her life is political, it is the anticipatory presence of the kingdom in history; as such, ecclesial communities are now ordered by the rule of God and exist to draw the world into the community that one day will be the geopolitical reality that covers the earth. But since the throne that determines its identity and praxis has not yet arrived on earth, its political praxis is not exercised through geopolitical means but as a prophetic proclamation that uncovers the deception in any power, be it political, economic, cultural or religious that tries to place itself in the position that only belongs to God. The only true Christian 'triumphalism' is the one manifested "not through fighting but through martyrdom."¹⁷⁶ This means that for Revelation, the church's politics is its prophetic existence as the alternative community of the coming kingdom, rather than Moltmann's mediation of the church's particular relation to the kingdom to the common relationship of all to the coming kingdom.¹⁷⁷ That said, Moltmann's concern to seek "certain trends and lines of Christian action" in society without ecclesiasticizing it in order "to resist the power of death as well as the deadly powers"¹⁷⁸ and his notion of the Exodus church that exists for and moves toward the kingdom¹⁷⁹ has much to contribute as churches seek to find ways to live as this alternative society in their own social contexts at this point in history.¹⁸⁰ As they do

¹⁷⁵ As Moltmann rightfully points out, the problem of the early church, and especially in the post-Constantinian grasping of political power, was not the delay of the parousia but an over-realised eschatology, an assumption that the reign of Christ had arrived before either he or the throne of God had arrived on earth. (*CoG*, 153-54, 161-62)

¹⁷⁶ Bauckham 1993a:228.

¹⁷⁷ See Rasmussen 1995 who proposes the theological politics of Hauerwas as a more adequate account of the church's political existence than Moltmann's. He says: "While Moltmann constantly wavers between claiming the public nature of the Christian convictions and practices and accepting the primacy of the political reason of modernity..., Hauerwas consistently claims the public nature of Christian practice and theology." (1995:378)

¹⁷⁸ CPS, 168.

¹⁷⁹ TH, 325-338.

¹⁸⁰ A corrective to the 'revolutionary' emphasis in Moltmann may be found in Yoder's exposition of how Christians can live as a contrast society according to the freedom of God's coming kingdom within the social structures they find themselves; he notes that in Rev 13:10 "the key to the obedience of God's people is not their effectiveness but their patience." (Yoder 1972:238; cf. 189-192)

this, Moltmann reminds the churches that they have to do so avoiding the triumphalism that has beset churches throughout history, and Revelation's image of the kingdom in exile will always stand at a critical distance to any Christian attempt to enforce the way of the church in the political sphere.¹⁸¹

The church as the kingdom in exile has not only no place for ecclesial triumphalism but neither can it legitimise any other political power as the present instance of God's rule on earth,¹⁸² because no state, however much it conforms to a Christian vision of a just society, can make a claim to be the kingdom although it exists in the form of a kingdom. Therefore, since the telos of any political entity is not its fulfilment in the kingdom of God but its replacement by the throne of God and the lamb, there can be no kind of messianic triumphalism in the secular realm.¹⁸³ Rome filled the shoes of Babylon in John's day not only because of its idolatry and injustice but also because it claimed to be the eternal kingdom, and thus usurped a position only belonging to God. Because of this, churches, although they certainly should call the state to act justly, can never place their stamp of approval on a particular state or political philosophy¹⁸⁴ but must always stand at a prophetic distance

¹⁸¹ Our reading of Rev 12 would suggest that whenever the church has seized and seizes political power for its own end, it places itself in danger, of having its lampstand removed (2:5), be spewn out of the mouth of its Lord (3:16). To the extent the church assumes the right to exercise the authority of the kingdom of God in the political sphere it ceases to be the kingdom and becomes the Beast that usurps the position of authority that only belongs to God and his Messiah. Commenting on how Revelation suggest that some Jews have placed themselves outside the community of the kingdom by rejecting Jewish Christians (2:8; 3:9), Bauckham adds, "using Revelation's own conceptuality, it would have to be said of later Christians who played the beast's role against Jews, that they say they are Christians but are not." (1993a:125)

¹⁸² Chiliasm triumphalism, in both ecclesial and national guise, is one of the fundamental problems Moltmann sees in the history of the church. (*CoG*, 3-6, 159-84)

¹⁸³ Although this means that there is no direct continuity between the nations as they now exist as geopolitical entities and the kingdom of God, it does not mean that there is no relation between their present and the future kingdom. Those who wield political power in the nations can have a future, are not necessarily destroyed in the destruction of Babylon, but they only have a future as they relinquish the position of authority they held in history to God and the Lamb. When the kings of the nations that enter the New Jerusalem enter the city they bring their own glory and splendour into this city that will order the whole earthly realm. (21:24-26)

¹⁸⁴ Although Christians can applaud modern democracy for, among other things, its inbuilt checks and balances on power and its protection of the freedom of conscience, Western Christians, perhaps especially in the United States, must be careful not to legitimise the present export of our particular forms of democracy, usually wed with market economics, as the way in which the world will be free. Not only is it questionable whether such forms of government are appropriate for all contexts, but precisely by making such an absolute claim, the West has become oppressive as it seeks by both military and political means to impose its own political structure on the majority world. One suspects that part of the present drive to 'democratise' the world is the maintenance of the West's global economic interests.

to political power, always a reminder that no state is an end in itself or the mean to the end but can only seek to shape itself in light of the end.¹⁸⁵

b. The Church and the Mission of the Kingdom

Having shown how Revelation's depiction of the exclusive relationship between the church and the kingdom has no room for the triumphalism Moltmann rightly rejects, we now turn to how it may resolve the tensions we saw in Moltmann's own view.

Earlier we noted that there is a fundamental tension between how Moltmann accounts for the kingdom christologically and pneumatologically. On the one hand he links not only the presence of the kingdom closely to Jesus but also entrance into the kingdom to an embrace of his person and history. On the other hand he sees the kingdom as present in everything that ministers to life since the Spirit that sustains all creation is ordering it toward the eschatological kingdom.¹⁸⁶ However, if the kingdom is seen to stand in an exclusive relationship to the church in history, the work of the Spirit as it orients the whole creation toward the kingdom cannot be separated from the Spirit's work in and through the church, and as such is intrinsically related to the work of Christ as he exercises the Father's sovereignty.

However, considering how Revelation sees the expansion of the kingdom through the prophetic ministry of the church, does this mean that there is no presence of the Spirit in the world apart from the church? No, but it does imply one has to account for the work of the Spirit in the church and the world differently from how Moltmann does it. Revelation's differentiated pneumatology may indeed point to how this may be accomplished. While τὸ πνεύμα is used of the Spirit's work in the ecclesial communities, τὰ ἐπτὰ πνεύματα is used of how the Spirit is the power of the church's prophetic ministry to the world, is the divine presence of God and the

¹⁸⁵ Cornelison (1993:112) notes how this is a fundamental aim in the political theology of both Moltmann and Baptist Metz. In addition to its fundamentally provisional 'ontology,' the state is also rendered epistemologically provisional. Precisely because the global manifestation of the kingdom as a geopolitical reality is future, when form and claim are united in one political reality, neither the church as the institution that can lay a claim to be the kingdom or the state that exists in the form of a kingdom, can fully know what the kingdom will look like. While Israel as a concrete but geographically and ethnically limited manifestation of the kingdom and the church as it exists in voluntary communities ordered by the Lordship of Christ may be lights that suggests how to order a just society, every image is always necessarily a provisional anticipation, it always contains an "it will be otherwise" because it is always an image formed within the "not yet."

¹⁸⁶ SL, xi; cf. CPS, 196; WJC, 91; 253-54.

Lamb who have not yet established their throne on earth.¹⁸⁷ Because of the particular geopolitical context in which the book is set, the work of God in the world apart from the church is primarily seen as judgment. However, considering the book's hope for the nations, the divine activity in the world should not necessarily be limited to judgment. Here, Moltmann's emphasis on discerning what accords with the kingdom in the world can helpfully augment the mostly one-sided emphasis in Revelation. But such a view calls for certain modifications in how Moltmann sees how the Spirit is at work in the church in its mission to the world and how the church in light of this discerns the Spirit in the world.

Several commentators have noted how Moltmann's account of the work of the Spirit in the world is configured so broadly that if it is not assumed to be self-evident it is nigh impossible to actually discern what is a sign of the work of the Spirit,¹⁸⁸ resulting perhaps in a certain privileging of one's own contemporary sensibilities.¹⁸⁹

However, if the particular way the church participates in the Spirit's work in the world is the way in which the Spirit enables the church's own ministry of the

¹⁸⁷ Bauckham 1993b:112-113.

¹⁸⁸ Farrow (1998:432) rightly notes that the problem with Moltmann's expansive view of the Spirit is precisely that it is too broad to provide a criteria by which to judge "which movements in human history are 'shot through by the Spirit'." Although we perhaps ought "to understand the Spirit as *the creative energy* of God and *the vital energy* of everything that lives" (WJC, 91; cf. 253-54), as the holistic "principle of creativity on all levels of matter and life" that keeps creation open to and aligns it toward its eschatological potentialities (GiC, 100-01), the perception of what is to be interpreted as this work of the Spirit must either be self-evident or can only be understood within a soteriological paradigm. Thus, for Christians, the work of the Spirit is either noetically self-evident or it must be interpret through how the work of the Spirit is revealed in the person and work of Jesus and the story of salvation in which he and his continuing ministry is embedded. (Rasmusson 1995:58, McIntosh 2000:247) If the latter is the case, the only way to perceive the Spirit's work in the world is through the story that Christ is the centre of.

¹⁸⁹ Rasmusson argues that precisely because of Moltmann's tendency to privilege certain trajectories in modernity, his critical theology is not critical enough, it is not capable of unearthing precisely the weaknesses of the modern viewpoints Moltmann tends to adopt. (1995:57-62) It is true that although Moltmann is highly critical of certain aspects of modernism, he nevertheless sees the Enlightenment as a product of Judeo-Christian messianism and therefore, as "one in a series of revolutions of freedom driven by an outbreak of messianic hope for a better future," a hope that was secularised because the church had forgotten it in its defence of the status quo that favoured the privileged classes. Therefore, Christians should not reject the modern human attempt to overcome suffering. Rather, discerning how the Spirit works in the modern project, they should seek a "fusion of horizons" between Christian hope for the coming of the Kingdom and modern hopes for emancipation." (Schweitzer 1998:19, 20) or as Moltmann says, to "open its [the modern understanding of self and the world] eyes for, the eschatological outlook in which revelation is seen as promise of the truth." (TH 44; cf. RRF, 21-35, TH, 291-303 on how Moltmann situates himself within the modern consciousness of history) However, this does not mean a capitulation to modernism, and, against Rasmusson, the confessional strand in Moltmann's theology can provide an internal critique of Moltmann's tendency to over-privilege certain aspects of modernism. Where Rasmusson's critique is relevant is in Moltmann's pneumatology, which is unduly coloured by a modern emancipatory notion of universal history. (Rasmusson 1995:375-77; cf. 42-49, 57-60)

kingdom for the world, the church will always discern the work of the Spirit in the world according to its own mission to the world. What is fundamental to the church, and what therefore is fundamental to her life in the world, is the revelation of how Christ has created the kingdom to God that is the alternative to the order of the world. As such, pivotal for the church is not every way in which the Spirit may be at work in the world but the way the Spirit's work in the world is related to the church's own mission in the world.

This results in a pivotal shift from Moltmann's political theology. For Moltmann, political theology is the mediation from the *concrete* manifestation of Jesus' 'Lordship' in the church to his universal 'Lordship' over wider society, how the *particular* manifestation is *universally* relevant.¹⁹⁰ However, if it is only the church that can make any claim to the kingdom in history, the mediation is not from the concrete to the universal, but from the concrete manifestation of the eschatologically universal to the historically but provisionally universal. That is, the kingdom that now exists in exile within the ecclesial communities exists for precisely the "realm" that it one day will cover but which it as of now exercises no authority over. So it is not a matter of the mediation from a particular confession to a universal context but of the provisionally eschatological into the historically provisional. The proclamation is the proleptic manifestation of the eschatologically universal within the distortions of history. As such, the church redescribes society in light of its confession rather than remoulds its confession in light of the urgencies and sensibilities of the day.¹⁹¹ Although it must rightfully seek what the appropriate form of that proclamation is within the context that is not the kingdom, that never will be the kingdom and that will be replaced by the kingdom, it nevertheless must remain its proclamation.

¹⁹⁰ See Rasmusson 1995:42-48 on the mediating method of Moltmann's political theology. For Moltmann all theology is "mediating theology," a "mediation between the Christian tradition and the culture of the present is the most important task of theology." (*ThT*, 53) For him "political theology designates the field" in which this should happen, which in the modern world is the experiment to shape history toward the ideal of a human society. (*EH*, 102-03) As such, as Rasmusson notes, this constitutes a move from the particular "history of Israel and Jesus" to the universal "interpretation of reality in general," a move made necessary "because the eschatological horizon of the Christian faith implies that this particular history anticipates the future of the whole creation." (Rasmusson 1995:47).

¹⁹¹ Rasmusson sees this as one of the fundamental differences between Moltmann and Hauerwas. Hauerwas' adoption of the theology of the Radical Reformation "leads him to try to redescribe reality from a Christian perspective rather than to redescribe Christianity in the light of current social movements and perspectives." (Rasmusson 1995:377)

If this is the case, how is the church to discern the work of the Spirit in the world? First, one must make a distinction between that the kingdom cannot be present without the work of the Spirit and that the presence of the Spirit does not equate the presence of the kingdom. The kingdom is not primarily defined by God's pneumatological presence in the world but by where God resolves himself to be present as the ordering presence of the community he has made a covenant with.¹⁹² Second, the work of the Spirit in the churches is then the way in which God is at work in shaping the churches to be communities of the kingdom that now exists in exile. Third, the work of the Spirit in the world, both as it sustains the life of all who are created through its power and as it is the power in which those who persist in opposition to God are judged, must be seen as the divine activity in which the geopolitical realm that does not exist as the kingdom of God is prepared for the day when it will be the realm of his kingdom. As the church then turns its eyes toward the world, it will discern the Spirit's work in the world not in general terms "in everything that ministers to life,"¹⁹³ but concretely as that which seems to turn the world, under the conditions it exists, toward what it believes to be true of the kingdom, as revealed in Israel's story and in the person and history of Jesus, as well as in light of its hope for the arrival of the kingdom to the earthly realm.

Considering the exclusive relationship between the future kingdom and the church in Revelation and the understanding of the work of the Spirit in both church and world, how can we respond to the basic tension we saw in Moltmann's qualitative and quantitative understanding of mission. First, it would call for a more nuanced understanding of the two aspects of the church's mission. If we use Moltmann's own terms, the quantitative mission of the church is related to its fundamental kerygmatic task, to proclaim the Gospel so men and women may be freed from their bondage to the draconic forces and may enter the community that now exists as a kingdom to God.¹⁹⁴ This is a quantitative mission since it necessarily involves the call to become a part of the church that is the kingdom to God as it is manifested on earth in ecclesial

¹⁹² Just as Israel's identity as God's people did not preclude God's involvement with the nations, so the Church's relationship to the kingdom does not preclude the presence of the Spirit in the world.

¹⁹³ *SL*, xi; cf. *CPS*, 196; *WJC*, 91; 253-54.

¹⁹⁴ A pivotal difference between Moltmann and Revelation then is that while both affirm that the church's "special vocation [is] to prepare the way for the coming kingdom in history" (*CPS*, 150), Moltmann sees this as finding ways in which the religions can find the path to their own future in the kingdom (*CPS*, 159), Revelation insists that it is only the church that has a future in the kingdom.

communities. While the call to the kingdom would involve both quantitative and qualitative aspects, the church's interaction with the social, cultural and political contexts in which it lives is only the latter since it does not seek to make present geopolitical realities the kingdom of God (which they by definition are not) but seeks to point to how these can be informed by the light of the coming kingdom.

Second, within such an understanding these two aspects of the church's mission are in praxis inseparable from one another. The church that is not of the world but in the world cannot exist apart from calling people into the kingdom that is now not manifested geopolitically on the earth but will be. But in doing so it cannot help but let the light of the kingdom shine on the world as it is and therefore suggest ways in which the temporary geopolitical orders that now exist in the world can reflect the justice of the coming kingdom that are appropriate within them as entities that per definition are not this kingdom.¹⁹⁵

Third, does this not foreclose the inter-religious dialogue fundamental to Moltmann's understanding of the church's qualitative mission since, as Moltmann claims, this dialogue cannot exist when one party seeks to convert the other?¹⁹⁶ However, here Moltmann seems to set up a false juxtaposition between persuasion and mutual understanding and appreciation. Although a blind and insatiable desire to prove oneself right is detrimental to dialogue, this does not mean that every attempt to convince others of what one has come to believe is. Persuasion, as one element in the dialogue, is not closed to appreciate the other, learn from the other, and importantly, to be proven wrong by the other. A Christian who believes entrance into the kingdom is dependent on allegiance to the Lordship of the Lamb will always try to persuade his or her dialogue partners to adopt the same viewpoint but ought also always give space to the other to do the same. What is fundamental to a Christian understanding of inter-religious dialogue is not seeking common ground but the love commandment to treat the other as one would like to be treated. In such a dialogue, whether religious or not, what is crucial is a keen ear and space for difference. If one wishes to be heard one must seek to understand the other on their own terms, and if one reserves the right to judge the other wrong one must give space for the other's "no" to oneself. Indeed,

¹⁹⁵ Although I have here questioned how Moltmann relates the church and the kingdom, one of his great strengths is how he constantly seeks ways of seeing the concrete social, economic and cultural situation in which he finds himself in the light of the coming kingdom (see e.g. *CPS*, 163-189)

¹⁹⁶ *CPS*, 160-61.

it seems difficult to see how any true dialogue could exist without this. One should seek consonances and convergences, find ways to incorporate the insight of the other in one's own and vice versa, but if this is the sole purpose of dialogue, then there is no place given for real difference, but every exclusivist claim, whether Christian or other, must by definition be excluded. But giving space for each other's categorical "no" while seeking each other's wisdom leaves the dialogue truly open, where nothing is foreclosed in advance. The church understood as a manifestation of the kingdom in exile is well equipped for such a dialogue since it must never coerce but only seek to persuade. And since the way of the kingdom is not yet self-evident it must not only give space to the other's "no" in history but it must also consider whether their "no" may show ways in which the church has misconstrued its existence as the kingdom in exile.

Fourth, although fundamental to the church's mission within this framework is to extend the invitation to enter the kingdom of God and to gather as exilic communities of this kingdom in local churches, this does not necessarily mean a homogenisation of the richness and diversity in the cultural heritages of the peoples to which the gospel of the kingdom is preached, an issue Moltmann is deeply concerned with.¹⁹⁷ Although it does mean that any god, idea or power that has assumed the position that is rightfully only God's must be dethroned and that Israel's story and how the arrival of the kingdom in Jesus is embedded in it will become the new foundational story, it does not mean that the wisdom of Hinduism, Buddhism or any other ancient tradition or modern ideology must be outright rejected, just as neither Zeus or Thor were forgotten in Europe although they have lost their divine status.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ See e.g. *GSS*, 226.

¹⁹⁸ The preservation of the good of the particular cultural context from which people come into the kingdom may perhaps also be explained within the asymmetric perichoresis of the two natures of Christ. Just as the divine nature did not make the human Jesus other than who he was, i.e. he didn't become a universal human prototype but remained a particular Jewish man as he was the human for all, so those of other religions when they enter the church do not lose the particularity of the tradition from which they come while at the same time being transformed into the fulfilment of what they are meant to be. They are caught up into the messianic history of God that has its abiding origin in the history of Israel but without losing their own particular history. Is it perhaps precisely through such a paradigm we may be able to read the entrance of the nations into the eschatological city that is shaped by God's story with Israel and the apostolic community?

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS AND ANTICIPATIONS

We have come to the end of our exploration of the kingdom of God in Moltmann and the Book of Revelation and it is time to both look back on what we discovered and look ahead at what further questions this thesis raises.

I. Retrospective

As the particular consonances and differences between Moltmann and Revelation on the kingdom are readily apparent in the previous two chapters, I will here only briefly summarise them before returning to an observation made both in the introduction to Moltmann and Revelation, how they respond to similar crisis situations and how their understanding of the kingdom displays a similar interplay between historical-temporal and relational-spatial concerns.

A. Consonances and Differences

There are some pivotal similarities between our discussion in chapters 2 and 5 on how Moltmann and Revelation see the kingdom as a symbol of hope for the future of the world. Although they develop their understanding in different (but not incompatible) ways,¹ they both emphasise the future as the arrival of the kingdom of God on earth, the time when both the social world of humans as well as the whole created order will be transformed in the arrival of God's presence. For both, this results in a complete reorientation toward the present. The present should not be judged according to how things appear to be nor by the ideas and values of the powers that are. This reorientation includes for both a Christian praxis that sets itself against everything that contradicts the light the coming kingdom sheds on our present existence. However, there is a pivotal difference between what they believe is the problem the coming kingdom resolves. Moltmann rejects the traditional understanding of sin as the basic problem in God's history with the world; although the cross responds to sin, it more fundamentally overcomes the transience that makes sin possible. Noting some significant problems in Moltmann, I suggested that

¹ Moltmann develops his understanding primarily from the dialectic between the resurrection and the cross ("which is at the heart of Moltmann's theology" [Bauckham 1986:55]), and Revelation from the expectation of the final establishment of the victory of the Lamb, depicted in 11:15-19 as a regime change.

Revelation's depiction of human rebellion, both as a structural and personal phenomena, can more sufficiently account for the basic problems humanity faces in relation both to God and to the rest of creation.

As we turned to the relational aspect of the kingdom in chapters 3 and 6, we again saw that although they develop it in different ways,² there are some remarkable similarities between how Moltmann and Revelation see God's rule as present in the world. For both, it is a paradoxical presence in the realm otherwise characterised by the absence of God, Moltmann emphasising how in the cross God has become present to the realm characterised by his opposite, by death, and Revelation emphasising how in the ecclesial life of the earthly communities of the exalted Christ the rule of God is now present in the realm where the forces of the Dragon have usurped the position of geopolitical authority that only belongs to God. For both, the rule of God is oriented toward freedom, to the time, as the vision in Revelation concludes with, when humanity as a whole 'rules' but no one is ruled. And both see the church as standing in a fundamental relationship to the kingdom. The churches do not exist for themselves but are predicated on the lordship of Christ and are oriented toward the coming of his kingdom. Therefore, churches can only remain churches as they remain faithful to their Lord and his mission. A pivotal part of this is a critical stance to the powers that are—for John, a church cannot be a church without 'coming out of Babylon' and for Moltmann a church loses its reason for existence if it functions to maintain the status quo of the state. What Moltmann says of the church is as true for the perspective we find in Revelation: "If the spirit and the institutions of the Church correspond to the Kingdom of God, then it is the Church of Christ. If they contradict the Kingdom of God, then the Church loses its right to existence and will become a superfluous religious community."³

However, here we also noted some differences, both in how they understand the relation between God's rule and freedom, and how they relate the church to the kingdom. While Moltmann emphasises the mutual communion between God and creation in his defence of the vision of the egalitarian community, Revelation bases the egalitarian vision in the undisputed sovereignty of God. Noting problems in

² Moltmann takes his clues from the pneumatological presence of God's rule in the cross and life of Jesus while Revelation from the paradigmatic function of the martyrological witness of Jesus.

³ "Jesus and the Kingdom of God," 16.

Moltmann's view of freedom and how he grounds it in his perichoretic kenoticism, I suggested that if we see the relationship between God and the world in the asymmetric and dynamic perichoresis between the two natures of Christ, the supposed contradiction between the absolute demand of God and human freedom dissipates and that the one cannot actually exist without the other. Noting that one of the primary reason Moltmann rejects an exclusive relationship between the church and the kingdom is the devastating history such claims have often resulted in, I tried to show that Revelation avoids the violence of triumphalism although it makes such a claim. While churches, as communities of conversion, are the only earthly communities that can make a claim to be the present manifestation of God's kingdom, they do not exist in the form of a kingdom in history. The advantage of this view is that it gives a theological rationale against both ecclesial and political triumphalism. Just as churches deny their own identity when they assume geopolitical powers, so political entities lose their reason to exist when they deny their own provisionality.

B. Moltmann, Revelation in the Context of Crises of the Kingdom

In order to bring out more clearly one particular contribution of Moltmann's and Revelation's view of the kingdom, let us return to the crises they respond to in their respective portraiture of the kingdom. Although the dialogue between Moltmann and Revelation I have sought to construct here does not depend on it, one of the main reasons why the two are such fitting dialogue partners, is the similarity between the contexts they respond to. Questions of the kingdom, both where it is to be located and how God's rule is to be understood, are key to their thought precisely because the origin of their work is in contexts where the kingdom had in some way been rendered questionable. While Moltmann, during and in the aftermath of the Second World War, intimately and painfully experienced the collapse of the evolutionist notion of the kingdom in Cultural Protestantism, John wrote Revelation in the aftermath of the demise of the religio-political nature of Second Temple Judaism.⁴ Despite their differences, both these contexts naturally raise the question of what the true nature of the kingdom is. We also noted that the flipside of this crisis is the question of the absence of God in contexts where nothing but evil and suffering

⁴ Even if Revelation was written during the reign of Nero, it is written within a context when the religio-political aspects of Second Temple Judaism is severely limited and is rapidly approaching its cataclysmic end.

seem to rule. While Moltmann approaches these questions from his own experience of suffering during the war, from the inexplicability of the suffering of Jews in the holocaust and the atheistic protest against a God who allows such unspeakable suffering, Revelation sees this concern in the concrete question of the incongruence between the confession of God as sovereign over his creation and the apparent universal geopolitical reign of his arch enemy on earth. For both, however, the answer to this question is found in how Easter shows God and his rule as present in the earthly realm in hidden and paradoxical ways.

Both Moltmann and Revelation respond to this double crisis by developing an understanding of the kingdom in which historical-temporal and relational-spatial aspects of the kingdom are intrinsically bound together. For heuristic purposes we discussed these two aspects separately but sought also, in places, to show how they are interrelated. For Moltmann the hope for the coming of the kingdom is merely an escapist dream if divorced from the “liberating rule of God”⁵ within history. However, the experience of the latter becomes a blind force when separated from the former since it loses its orientation toward its eschatological homeland. The church of Christ exist within the dialectic between how the paradoxical presence of God’s liberating rule is revealed in the cross of Christ and how the future of the kingdom has been opened up to the world in his resurrection. Therefore, Christian praxis, while bound by the possibilities the present offers, seeks the transformation of the present in the light of the future of the crucified one who was raised. As such, the church is bound by the horizon of the kingdom, and “if the spirit and the institutions of the Church … contradict the Kingdom of God, then the Church loses its right to existence and will become a superfluous religious community.”⁶ We see a very similar dynamic at work in Revelation. Its expectation of the eschatological regime change cannot be seen apart from how God is already confessed as the sovereign over heaven and earth and how he now, in Christ and by the Spirit, is already orienting the world toward its coming transformation. And it is precisely this hope and how it has been made certain in the paradoxical victory of the slain Lamb that is now the motivating

⁵ CPS, 190.

⁶ Moltmann, “Jesus and the Kingdom of God,” 16. Elsewhere he accounts for this interrelationship christologically, the church’s “remembrance of Jesus, his mission, his self-giving and his resurrection is past made present and can be termed ‘remembrance in the mode of hope’. Its hope of his parousia is future made present and can be termed ‘hope in the mode of remembrance’.” (CPS, 75)

and shaping power of the martyrological praxis of the followers of the Lamb in the world. As in Moltmann, it is within this larger canvas of the kingdom, that the church is to be understood in Revelation. As is made abundantly clear in Rev 2-3, the ecclesial communities ought and can only exist as the earthly communities of the kingdom when they orient themselves toward the coming city according to how Christ has paved the way for them.

C. The Concrete Identity of the Displaced Kingdom

In the way they correlate the temporal and relational aspects of the kingdom, both Moltmann and Revelation point us away from seeing the kingdom in purely abstract terms. This is one of their great contributions to our understanding of the kingdom. It is common in both theological and exegetical discussions to first note how $\beta\alpha\sigma\iota\lambda\epsilon\iota\alpha\tau\bar{\omega}\theta\epsilon\o\bar{\omega}$ does not refer to the realm of God's kingdom but rather to his rule, and then proceed to interpret this in purely abstract terms.⁷ Moltmann's early theology was a sustained attack on how such notions were individualised and existentialised in especially the theology of Bultmann, and more recently he has critiqued the trend in Protestant theology "to interpret $\beta\alpha\sigma\iota\lambda\epsilon\iota\alpha\tau\bar{\omega}\theta\epsilon\o\bar{\omega}$ solely as the present rule of God," which usually results in moralistic reduction of the symbol.⁸ The thrust of his political theology is to reclaim the public relevance of the kingdom of God, to show how the confession of Christ the centre cannot exist apart from worldly horizon of his kingdom. Our discussion of Revelation suggest that this

⁷ In a recent article, Mary Ann Beavis (2004:92, appealing to Duling 1992; Chilton 1984 and 1994; and Willis 1987) notes that most scholars do not see $\eta\beta\alpha\sigma\iota\lambda\epsilon\iota\alpha\tau\bar{\omega}\theta\epsilon\o\bar{\omega}$ in "primarily 'spatial, territorial, political, or national'" terms. Similarly France (1984:32) claims that as a reference to God's rule, the kingdom of God "is the abstract idea of God being king, his sovereignty, his control of his world and its affairs," and as such, functions "to evoke a whole complex of ideas, even emotions, relating to the deeply rooted belief that God is king." (38). Although this may be the case, it is hard to see how it can have any effective power if it is not more concretely, although eschatologically, located in the hope for the actual geopolitical rule of God. Barbour 2000:370 notes that G. Dalman's study (1902) has been particularly important for the emphasis on "rule" separated from any notion of "realm" in the interpretation of the kingdom of God in the New Testament. Although this distinction has persisted, a greater variety of perspectives on what the phrase actually means has emerged (Duling 1992:65) Interestingly, at least half of the scholars Beavis mentions as seeing a political reference in $\eta\beta\alpha\sigma\iota\lambda\epsilon\iota\alpha\tau\bar{\omega}\theta\epsilon\o\bar{\omega}$, Beasley-Murray, Caird and N.T. Wright, have a particular interest in apocalyptic and/or have written extensively on Revelation. Whether Beavis is correct or not that the expansion of the referent of the kingdom to include non-Jewish people had already occurred in Jesus or not, this expansion has occurred in Revelation. However, against Beavis (2004:102-06) this does not suggest that the utopianism of the kingdom "emphasized the 'no-place' ($\o\bar{u}\cdot\tau\bar{o}\bar{p}\bar{o}\bar{s}$) character of the $\beta\alpha\sigma\iota\lambda\epsilon\iota\alpha$." (105)

⁸ WJC, 98.

emphasis was not simply a matter of theological urgency in the late 1950's and 1960's but has deep roots in the biblical tradition itself, or at least in Revelation.

Considering our discussion of βασιλεία in Revelation, we concluded that it eschews any neat “reign-realm” distinctions that are often assumed in biblical studies. As we discovered in our discussion on 11:15-19 βασιλεία refers to the position of geopolitical authority that orders the social world around it. And since this is not an abstract notion but a concrete actuality, how this βασιλεία shapes the social realm ordered around it cannot be separated from it. 11:15-19 anticipates when the powers in the world that now occupy this central position of geopolitical authority will be replaced by the political rule of God and his Christ in the earthly realm.

It is precisely when we consider βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ in this richly textured and eschatological sense that we see how it retains its full political meaning although it is not geopolitically manifested now. The ‘a-topic’ character of the kingdom of God in history is not grounded in some ‘u-topic’ existential or ethical concept of the rule of God in the world. Rather, as we explored in our discussion of the woman in Rev 12, the kingdom of God does not have an actual *place* in the world now because it has been *displaced*. It is not that the reign of God does not have a claim to an actual earthly realm but that the position of geopolitical authority that rightfully belongs to God is now occupied by his enemies. Since God’s purpose is to reclaim this position, the *placelessness* of the kingdom of God is a temporal anomaly. Seen within the spatially and temporally expanded vision of Revelation, the concrete location of the political rule of God is now in heaven but its eschatological destiny is in the descent of the heavenly city to the earth. As such, “the church can demonstrate the reality neither of her kingship nor of her priesthood during the time of her pilgrimage,” but “the great moment of Christ’s revelation will bring what she really is to light.”⁹

Although the present manifestation of the kingdom per definition does not appear in a political form, Rev 12 makes clear that it has lost none of its political significance. During the time of the Dragon, the earthly city of God has migrated to the wilderness, where it is being protected by God and prepared for its exodus from its geopolitical desert into the eternal city of God. This is crucially important because although the emphasis of the placelessness of the kingdom of God in history is crucial

⁹ Rissi 1972:34.

in debunking any kind of Christian ecclesial or political triumphalism, if left on its own, it can also lead to a Christian apathy in relation to the political situations Christians find themselves in. The kingdom is not simply an existential re-orientation of the individual who experiences the reign of God but the end toward which all social worlds ought to be reoriented. The church, since it does not exist in the form of a kingdom, must not take on political power, but because it is the heir of the kingdom it must form a contrast society, an expatriate community of the coming kingdom in the middle of the kingdom of the world.

While Revelation unflinchingly reminds us that fundamental to the church's political praxis is resistance to any participation in the world that compromises the way of the Lamb, Moltmann can help us to translate this vision into situations where we not only can but have a responsibility to take an active part in the social processes of the world without denying the lordship of Christ. So, for example, when Western Christians read how Rome was the Babylon of its day partially because of the unjust flow of material goods (18:3, 9-19), Moltmann reminds us that we must read such text in light of the way the Western world is getting drunk on the intoxicating wine of the luxuries it drains from the rest of the world. Christians who participate in these processes without a concern of justice for the poor are shifting their allegiance from Christ to the Dragon and its contemporary beasts. Faithfulness to the Gospel does not only mean rejecting every form of idolatry but also an orientation toward the rule of God in which those who suffer injustice now are exalted to the throne-room of God.¹⁰ For privileged Christians, the call "to *come out* of her" means also to *enter more consciously into* these processes in order to change the flow of goods. Likewise, although not a major focus in the book, we noted how Richard Bauckham has shown that the book holds out the hope that the nations themselves will repent of their allegiance to the Beast.¹¹ In this way, Revelation leaves the door open for the actual transformation of present social structures. Moltmann can in many ways point us in the direction of how we can enter through this door as we seek to

enquire about still closer political correspondences to the lordship of Christ, to the messianic mission and to the church's existence in a world-wide context....The politically responsible concept of the church ... leads to the church that suffers and fights within the people and with peoples, and to an interpretation of this people's church in the

¹⁰ This has been a constant emphasis in Moltmann's authorship, seen most recently in the extensive interaction with various forms of contextual theology in *EiT*, 183-299.

¹¹ Bauckham 1993a:238-337.

framework of the divine history of liberation, whose goal is the new creation in peace and righteousness.¹²

II. Prospective

Having looked at some pivotal aspects of what this thesis sought to accomplish, it is now time to make a few forward looking notes on questions it poses.

A. The Situatedness of the Authorial “I” and the Limitations of the Present Study

In this thesis I have attempted to construct a dialogue between Moltmann and Revelation. Since these are the two dialogue partners that actually appear in the text, it can be easy to forget that there is a third partner in the dialogue, who although hidden on the page is embedded in the text, namely me, the author, who constructs the dialogue. In contrast to an in the flesh, live dialogue, a literary dialogue always involves the author as the interested convener of the dialogue. In this thesis, I have chosen who will speak to whom, what they will speak about and whose voice will be privileged. Although hopefully I have given sufficient reasons for why I have constructed the dialogue as I have and although I have sought to let each voice speak in its own notes, it still remains the dialogue *I* have constructed. As such the dialogue is coloured by my own ‘situatedness’. This situatedness comes perhaps closest to the surface in my critiques of Moltmann and in the way I have consistently privileged what I perceive to be the voice of Revelation over Moltmann’s. Without going into any detail, this both suggests my high view of Scriptural authority and my posture of trust toward basic trajectories of traditional Christian dogma.

Having confessed elements of the subjectivity that has guided my own judgments, the question remains, can this thesis still be seen as a real dialogue, both as I have constructed it between Moltmann and Revelation, and my own interaction with them? I think it can and am convinced it cannot be done otherwise. Being aware of and making known where we come from enables us to give a better account of where we situate ourselves. In such a dialogue, if it is truly to remain a dialogue, we must always be open to hear the other, whether that be in voicing the perspective of the other or evaluating how it challenges our own. As such, if we are truly going to hear the challenge of the other, we must be willing to give reason for our own

¹² CPS, 18.

perspective and not impose it on the other as what is self-evident. For example, although I have privileged the voice of Revelation in this dialogue, I have sought to do so, whether successfully or not, by trying to reason why my particular interpretation of Revelation points in a better direction than Moltmann. So, in my critique of Moltmann's understanding of sin I tried to show how Revelation's depiction of the fundamental problem as rebellion both can account for Moltmann's critique of traditional understandings of sin and can better account for some of Moltmann's core concerns.

Precisely because one must both hear the voice of the other and give account of one's own, a fundamental aspect of such a dialogue is giving space for one another. If a dialogue is to happen between two that may hold potentially irreconcilable positions, it is simply not enough to try to understand one another and seek a common consensus, one must also give space for the other's rejection when stating one's own "no."

This reflection on the *partial* nature of the dialogue I have constructed in this thesis also reminds us that it can only be seen as a *part* of a larger whole if it is not to lose significance as merely another arbitrary academic exercise.

The limitations of this present study are first seen in light of my self-confessed situatedness. If I claim to have a high view of Scriptural authority, that the Scriptures provide us with a foundational and authoritative perspective of the world in which Christians are to construct their view of reality, then this particular study can only be seen as a part of a much larger canonical task. It needs to be placed within a context where other Scriptural voices augment the particular view of the kingdom I have developed here. And if I truly believe that it is in ecclesial communities that the kingdom is present by the Spirit, the present study cannot rest with my analysis of how John understood the kingdom in the first century and how Moltmann understands it in our own era but must be seen within the long history of how the church, in its multiple institutional and social manifestations, has struggled with making sense of what it means to live for and be shaped by the coming kingdom of God.

What I have briefly claimed about the basic posture necessary for such a dialogue to be possible turns us to a second set of concerns that the present study can only be seen as one small part of. If I am not only concerned with making sense of the kingdom within my own particular ecclesial location but want to see it within the

larger context of the church, the present dialogue can only be seen as a contribution toward a larger ecumenical dialogue which includes other voices different from my own. Although the present study does this partially as it highlights the difference between myself and Moltmann, it will benefit further from being set in dialogue with other traditions, both perspectives it would situate itself critically against (e.g. the Catholic claim that the See of Rome is the visible manifestation of the unity of the church or the national-territorial claims made by many Orthodox churches) and perspectives it would share many affinities with (such as the Mennonite shaped perspectives of Yoder and Hauerwas). A particular important ecumenical context that this particular study should be placed in is with how the kingdom of God is understood by those who occupy the margins of the church and who find themselves on the socio-economic margins of society. Revelation is written from a context of those socially and economically ostracised because of their faithfulness to the Lamb and Moltmann has consistently emphasised how the kingdom comes first to the poor. This naturally leads to the conclusion that an examination into the reality of the kingdom of God cannot find rest before it is seen in the context of those who now suffer most acutely for it. Also, even if this exploration into the kingdom is seen primarily within a larger Christian ecumenical task, it must not close its ears to the questions and critiques that those outside this context raise. Therefore, as one seeks to place the present study within a larger ecumenical theological context, one must also listen to the voices that protest against it, and always be ready to give an account of the hope for it with these critics in mind.

B. Millenarianism and Jewish-Christian Dialogue

In addition to these broad concerns within which this thesis should be seen, there are two particular issues that space has not allowed us to explore here that would be of interest in further research on the role of the kingdom in Moltmann's thought and in Revelation, namely millenarianism and the relationship between Jews and Christians.

Although millenarianism has only existed on the fringes of the Christian tradition after Constantine and was usually eyed with suspicion, Moltmann stand within a new stream of interest in the this-worldly hope of early Christian

millenarianism.¹³ For him the expectation of the messianic *interregnum* not only provides a robust refutation of the triumphalist assumption of the millenarian vision in historical institutions or structures, but it also provides the motivation for a historical praxis that anticipates the coming of the *interregnum* in history.¹⁴ For this reason, Moltmann reads Revelation 20:1-10 as an anticipation of the fulfilment of the kingdom of Christ within the conditions of history. How Revelation 20 is to be read is of course a contested issue.¹⁵ It seems to me if the dialogue between Moltmann and Revelation I have constructed here would be extended into this issue, some of the questions one may level against Moltmann's reading are as follows: 1) Does Rev 20:1-10 function to provide such this-worldly hope or is it simply an anticipation of the vindication of the martyrs? 2) If the passage anticipates an actual messianic *interregnum* that encourages a this-worldly historical praxis, how are we to interpret the seemingly pessimistic view of its end?¹⁶ 3) Since 21:1-22:5 expects not only the transformation of the earth but also the fulfilment of God's covenantal life with his people in history, and since this vision seems to have an unambiguously positive place for the nations (21:24-26), might this final vision not provide a better motivation for historical praxis than a possible *interregnum* in Rev 20?

In addition to the reasons stated above, Moltmann sees millenarian hope as crucial to Jewish-Christian dialogue; he says, "there is no affirmative community between the church and Israel without the messianic hope for the kingdom... [and therefore] no adequate Christian eschatology without millenarianism."¹⁷ This is an important concern in our present appropriation of Revelation for a very simple reason—although the vision John receives is steeped in Jewish tradition, for most of

¹³ "In this type of outlook," says Rowland, "there is the conviction that the present moment is one of critical significance within the whole gamut of salvation history, in which action is necessary, as it is no ordinary moment but one pregnant with opportunity for fulfilling the destiny of humankind." (Rowland 1988:3; cf. 3-4, 10-12)

¹⁴ As Moltmann rightfully points out, the problem of the early church, and especially in the post-Constantinian grasping of political power, was not the delay of the parousia but an over-realised eschatology, an assumption that the reign of Christ had arrived before either he or the throne of God had arrived on earth. (*CoG*, 153-54, 161-62) For Moltmann, it is then not only the promise millenarianism holds for a this-worldly praxis that is important, but precisely also its critique of any triumphalist historical assumption of the 1000 years reign.

¹⁵ For an overview of various interpretations of Rev 20, see Mealy 1992:15-58 (cf. Grenz 1992). For a debate between Moltmann and Bauckham on Millenarianism, see Bauckham 1999b and "Hope for Israel."

¹⁶ Although there is global peace for a 1000 years, as soon as Satan is released he is able to deceive "the nations in the four corners of the world" to make battle against "the camp of God's people, the city he loves;" there these nations come to a blazing end in an inferno sent on them from heaven (20:8-9).

¹⁷ *CoG*, 197; cf. 196-99; *CPS*, 138-39, 149-50.

its history it has been received in non-Jewish and often anti-Jewish contexts.¹⁸ This is a particular acute question for the argument I have developed, since I have consistently assumed that John transforms and expands “Israel” to identify the people of the kingdom as the international crowd gathered around the Lamb. However, this raises the question whether there is any place for Jews as Jews within the people of God? Although this ‘expansionist’ view of the imagery does suggest that there is only one people of God, this does not necessarily mean an obliteration of national and ethnic distinctives within this one people. Further research in this area would pay particular attention to the pluri-form way in which John describes the one people, that they come from every tribe, language, people and nations. (5:9; 7:9; cf. 10:11; 14:6) That Israel, as the first covenant people of God, plays a distinct role within this community of nations, is perhaps suggested by the names of the twelve tribes on the gates of the New Jerusalem (21:12).¹⁹ Perhaps it is only when Israel’s particular role in the economy of God (which, in the perspective I have developed, cannot be separated from faith in Jesus as the Messiah for Jews) is fulfilled that the other nations can enter the one eternal city.²⁰

If one were to consider Revelation in light of the urgencies Moltmann sees in Jewish-Christian relations, an important dialogue partner would be precisely a group that is usually excluded from such conversations, messianic Jews. They are often seen as an anathema in such dialogue—they are impure because they have broken precisely the boundary that has defined the difference between Christian and Jews over centuries, they insist that one can remain and has an obligation to remain a Torah observant Jew while professing faith in Yeshua as the Messiah for both Jews and

¹⁸ Klaus Wengst notes “it is a bitter irony of history that, as I have indicated, the church in the course of its further development abandoned Israel and let itself be defined in terms of Rome.” (1994:202)

¹⁹ Although Mathewson (2003:487-98) rightly points out that the multi-ethnic population of the New Jerusalem is now based on the testimony of the apostles (21:14), he does not sufficiently consider what the significance of that the names of the twelve tribes are associated with the city’s gates (21:12).

²⁰ David Rudolph (2005b) suggest that something like this is at work in Paul’s thought: “In Paul’s thought, the church was a prolepsis of the royal commonwealth of Israel.... [He] appears to have viewed the prophetic depiction of Israel and the nations in the Messianic era as a Scriptural ideal and the body of Jews and Gentiles in the church as the ‘already but not yet’ manifestation of this ideal.... The implications of this nuanced reading are significant. Whereas supersessionism leads to erasure of the Jew/Gentile distinction and the formation of a ‘third race,’ and dispensationalism leads to dualism, the commonwealth model uniquely emphasizes unity between Messianic Jews and Gentile Christians without loss of their respective identities, a vision consistent with Paul’s ‘rule in all the churches’ and the apostolic decree (1 Cor 7:17; Acts 15).”

Gentiles.²¹ Although Moltmann emphasises that the Jewish “no” to Christ is an important and lasting reminder that Israel’s messianic hope is still awaiting its final fulfilment,²² there are some particularly good ‘Moltmannian’ arguments for including messianic Jews in the dialogue. In *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* Moltmann argues that in inter-religious dialogue Christians should not seek to convert but seek reasons for faith in Jesus within the other religious traditions themselves,²³ and he argues that the relationship of Christianity with other religions must be patterned after the church’s first partner for the Kingdom, Israel.²⁴ Messianic Jews, standing at the end of a long history where Jews have been persecuted or assimilated into ‘Christian’ cultures, have actually found a way to do precisely what Moltmann calls for, find a way to believe in Jesus as the Messiah for the whole world without losing their own particular tradition.²⁵ From within a Moltmannian perspective may this not suggest that it is precisely from this group of the first people of the kingdom that we might find a pivotal key for how Gentiles and Jews can together live toward the kingdom. And is it from them that we may learn new models of spreading the Gospel in cultures and traditions foreign to our own without moulding emerging ecclesial communities in our own image?

²¹ This is clearly seen in the recent decision of the Presbyterian Church USA to withdraw funding and ties with Avodat Yisrael, a messianic congregation in Philadelphia. As one of the primary reason for the decision, Rev. William Borror noted the congregation’s use of distinct Jewish liturgical practices within a PC USA context, seeing e.g. its use of Torah scrolls in worship as “a nonnegotiable.” Reflecting a the same sentiment, Burt Siegel of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Philadelphia, believes the decision “is a clear indication of an increased understanding on the part of the Presbyterian leadership that churches that claim to incorporate aspects of both Judaism and Christianity are inherently inauthentic.” (Remsen 2005) A more sympathetic portrait of Avodat Yisrael is found in a recent cover story in *The Christian Century* (toward the end of April 2005a); unfortunately it was taken off the web when I was looking for bibliographical references for it.

²² WJC, 32-37; cf. CPS, 136-37, 148-49.

²³ CPS, 162.

²⁴ CPS, 135.

²⁵ For a defence of the position of messianic Jews in Jewish-Christian dialogue, see Rudolph 2005.

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