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**God the Creator:
Developing a Trinitarian Understanding of Creation**

"In the beginning..." are the three famous words opening the Bible (Gen 1:1). These words introduce the first creation story, which describes God creating the world as we know it. The doctrine of creation finds itself with an important place in Christian belief.

Yet there are some ambiguities which arise in this doctrine. Once confronted with a belief that the eternal, infinite, almighty God has created the universe and all that is in it, one may find oneself confronted with many questions. Why does God create the universe? To what purpose is the universe intended? Does God need to create the universe in order that God may be God? How can God be perfect prior to creation, then create, and still remain perfect? Why would God not make his creation perfect. Is everything God? or does everything become God?

The Gospel of John begins with those three familiar words: "In the beginning..." (Jn 1:1). Here the evangelist connect God's act of creation inseparably to Christ, who is described as "the Word" uttered by the Father through which all things were created. Creation is thus cast into a Trinitarian framework, which serves as its basis. It is within the Trinitarian understanding of God that these aforementioned questions can be dealt with in a way that is consistent with the Christian belief in an all powerful creator God.

Creation Based on the Trinity

The Trinitarian understanding of God tells us that God is love. This is so in that the Father loves the Son with infinite love, and the Son loves the Father back with this same infinite love, and the infinite, all powerful love between the two is the Holy Spirit, that unites them and makes them One. Within this relationship of infinite love arises the infinite freedom in which the members of the Trinity exist, and this freedom allows for infinite distance and distinction. Thus the allowance of infinite distinction between the persons, through which the roles of these persons are defined, serves as a manifestation of the infinite love that is in God, and *is* God.

This Trinitarian relationship of mutuality is seen as the basis of the relationship between God and creation, and between the members of creation and each other. Pannenberg's approach to creation follows these lines. He sees the self distinction of the Son from the Father as the basis for the allowance of a creation which is distinct from God:

As in the intratrinitarian life of God, the self-distinction of the Son from the Father is the condition of his unity with the Father through the Spirit. So creatures are related to their creator by their distinction from God and to one another by their distinctions from one another. (II, 31)

This distinction allows for a creation which is not God, and also for creatures that are distinct from each other. Diversity within creation is seen as a sign of the unity of creation, which finds its origin in the diversity which exists in the Triune unity. Pannenberg sees the diversity of all creatures finding its origin in the "productive principle of diversity" that dwells in the *Logos* (which refers to Christ as the Word, or complete expression of the Father, ref. Jn 1). Thus all creatures derive from this one *Logos*, which finds its ultimate expression in creation through the incarnation (II, 62).

This is how Pannenberg understands the role of the Son in the act of creation.

Balthasar's view is similar. He observes that, because of the love within God, there is within God the allowance that the Son not be the Father and the Father not be the Son without limiting the omnipotence of God (and in fact strengthening it); this is the necessary condition for a creation which is not God (O'Hanlon 54). Thus the freedom to create the universe dwells within the infinite space that exists between the Father and the Son, which permits infinite possibilities.

O'Hanlon, in his treatment of Balthasar's theology, speaks of this infinite space in terms of eternal consent, an eternal "yes." In this "yes," the Son agrees to be the Son, dependent on and receptive to the Father in everything, and lets the Father be God. In this "yes" the Father hands over everything to the Son, allowing the Son complete freedom. For Balthasar, this eternal "yes" is the basis for the "yes" which allows for the free decision to create. (52)

The dependence of the Son on the Father is then seen to be the root of the relationship between God and creation. As such, it is completely and utterly dependent on God for existence. As O'Hanlon puts it, the "world on its own is nothing - its power to be, to be distinct and to effect God comes from God." (55) The distinction between the Son and creation would then dwell in the fact that the Son freely accepts this dependence, and in doing so his role as the Son, whereas creation, existing in finite freedom, finds itself ontologically dependent on God.¹

¹The creature can however opt for independence within its finite freedom. However this would amount to that creature's denial of what it is, both essentially and existentially. It would be in a sense, opting for a lie. The creature can always reject its dependence on God, but it will still remain dependent on God regardless. On the other hand, if the Son, existing in infinite freedom, were to somehow reject his dependence on the

The Father then is the source of creation, as He is the source of the procession of the Son. Does God then have to create the world? With the understanding established above, the answer is no. Infinite love, although infinitely attractive must also be infinitely free, otherwise it is not love. Is then the creation as necessary a part of the Trinitarian life as the begetting of the Son? Once again the answer is no. "Unlike the Son, it [creation] is not in eternity the correlate of God's being as the Father" (Pannenberg II, 1). In fact, it is only with a Trinitarian understanding that one can understand God as being both love and being completely free to create the world, because the infinite love of God already exists and expresses itself completely *a priori* within the Trinity.

God creates with infinite freedom; in fact "creation from nothing" can be understood as a way of expressing that the act of creation finds its origin in infinite freedom (Balthasar 262). This free act can be distinguished from the free Act of love that exists within the immanent Trinity, which gives it its meaning.

However, this same act of creation must find its origin in the Act of love that exist in the Trinity. Creation is thus understood as an outward expression of God's being as love, and it is expressed freely *ad extra* (O'Hanlon 51). Pannenberg uses this language of an outward expression of God's Trinitarian love in describing the act of creation (II, 5).

Then why does God create the world? According to Balthasar, the Father created the universe in and through the image of the Son, so that he could hand the world over to the Son:

The world can be thought of as the gift of the Father (who is both Begetter and Creator) to the Son, since the Father wishes to sum up all things in

Father, then he would in doing so, truly cease to be the Son, for it is by this relationship of dependence and the Son's acceptance thereof that the Son's role in the Trinity is defined.

heaven and earth in the Son, as head (Eph 1:10); thus the Son takes this gift - just as he takes the gift of Godhead - as an opportunity to thank and glorify the Father. Having brought the world to fulfillment, he will lay the entire kingdom at his feet, so that God (the Father) may be all in all (! Cor 15:24,28); as for the Spirit, he is given the world by both: he is eternally the reciprocal glorification of the Father and the Son, but now he can implement it in and through the creation (Jn 16:13-15). (262)

The creation can thus be understood as a new way of expressing the love that exists between the Father and the Son. In doing so, the love that exist in God is revealed, and God is thus glorified. The existence of the world does not add to God, except in the sense that Trinitarian love is always expressing itself as "ever-greater". It is a further expression of the relationship of love that exists in the Trinity from all eternity (O'Hanlon 55). The Father does indeed create the world so that he can love it, however the Father loves the world in and through his love for the Son. Christ thus mediates the love of the Father, i.e. the Holy Spirit, to the world (O'Hanlon 62).

With this understanding, when can regard the Father as the source of existence itself. We will develop further the Son's role as the essential cause of existence, and the Spirit's role as the final cause, creation's being directed towards the infinite love that exists in God (Kelly 95).

Creation as the Image of the Son

The Son is the One Act, the One Word of the Father. The act of creation must then be included in this Word, be in the image of this Word, and be directed toward this Word.. It is with this understanding that we can speak of Christ as the necessary condition for creation, and as its goal.

John 1 speaks of all creation having been created through the Word, Christ (vs. 3,4,10), who was present to the world in the beginning (vs. 1,2).

In Col 1, Paul speaks of creation having been made possible in Christ, through Christ, and for Christ (vs. 16), who is the "first-born of all creation" as the "image of the invisible God" (vs. 15) and that creation continues in being through Christ (vs. 17). All things are reconciled to Christ through the blood of the cross (vs. 20).

Balthasar understands this along similar lines to what has been mentioned above. The finite freedom that exists in creation finds its origin in the infinite freedom that exists in the Trinity, and so finds its origin and meaning governed by the "infinite idea of the Son, which as the prototype of creation, [which] uniformly permeates it all, insofar as the creation is in dramatic motion." (II, 277) In this sense, the Word is the world's pattern, and its goal (ibid. 262).

Christ is then the eternal "idea" in which the creation is rooted, which embraces, facilitates and fulfills it (ibid. 267). As such, Christ then serves as the mediator in creation. The Father loves all creation through the love He expresses for the Son (Pannenberg II, 22). Creation gets caught up in the Trinitarian love, manifested most fully in the Christ event. According to Rahner, the incarnation is thus the condition of possibility of the creation (and not vice versa) (O'Donnell 162).

As such Christ is seen as the goal towards which all creation is directed. Through the saving acts of Christ, all creation can come to share in the love the Father expresses for him, and can then like the Son return it to the Father. We can therefore speak of the Christ event as the beginning of the completion of creation.

Moltmann points out that the creation tradition of Judaism arose through interpretation of its covenant history, and that this history has been reinterpreted in the light of Christ (*God in Creation* 94). Creation is then

seen as inseparably linked to salvation history. Creation is not to be regarded as a one time event, in which God caused the world to exist and then left it from that point on. O'Donnell writes, "Creation is the first step and an inner moment of God's historical action of giving himself totally to the world in Christ and leading the world through his Son back to union with himself" (161). God's continual involvement in the affairs of human history can be understood as a continuation of creation, which finds its completion in the person of Jesus Christ.

This understanding is consistent with a God who not only creates *in* time, but creates time. "The concept of creation contains more than a mere statement about the World's beginning. Each individual creature - indeed, each event, each moment - has its beginning in God's creation." (Pannenberg II, 43) Pannenberg see the initial "creation" as the first step in an ongoing creation, which is brought to completion in Christ. Although the reconciling action of God, which begins with the incarnation, is distinct from the initial creation, it leads to creation's consummation and therefore is also a part of the entire creative act (II, 9). Standing outside of time, God's act of creation and His act of preservation, His continually allowing the world to *be*, can all be understood as the same thing. Salvation history is then the logical extension of this idea, and the Christ event is the completion of God's act of creation.

This then leads us to ask: is all the cosmos then redeemed through the actions of Christ, or is salvation intended only humanity? Barth would suggest that creation is "the external ground of the covenant; [and] the covenant is the internal ground of creation." (O'Donnell 161) Creation is thus the external framework in which the Christ event is manifested for the sake of humanity. Moltmann however, arguing with Barth's view, sees

creation itself as a covenant with God (*The History of the Triune God* 128). Creation is the beginning of salvation history. Both he and Pannenberg (II, 73) refer to Eph 1:10 and Col 1:10, which speak of Christ reconciling not only humanity, but all creation, to himself. Christ's reconciliation is seen as the "anticipation of eschatological redemption" (ibid.). This is not to say that human redemption redeems all of creation, but rather that the Glory of God, as revealed in human history, is what redeems creation (ibid. 130).

While supporting this notion of the redemption of all creation, Kelly maintains that humanity still has a unique place in this redemption, through its capacity for self-transcendence. He refers to humanity as the "contact point" at which the communication and transformation occurs (97). As Kelly puts it, "in and through human consciousness, the whole cosmos comes to a new level of self-directive awareness: nature is taken up into the history of freedom" (ibid.).

What does creation need to be redeemed from? Creation as a whole is corruptible, finite, and temporary. Natural disasters and disease prevail in our world, and extend to all creatures, human and non-human alike. All living things die. Suffering exists not only in human history, but also in the ecology of the world. Most of this suffering cannot be understood as being a result of the sin of creation, for all creation has not sinned, only humanity. In Moltmann's discussion of Barth, he explains Barth's position that in the light of salvation history, [human] death is no longer to be regarded as a result of sin, but rather as a limit of finite being (*The History of the Triune God* 138). "Redemption then consists of the fact that God becomes the beyond for all human beings" (ibid.). This redemption, through which all finite creatures can be reunited to God in eternity can be shared with all creation. Moltmann writes:

Resurrection of the dead is just the personal side of the cosmic hope for the annihilation of death and the new creation without death. Without a new earth there is no hope of resurrection. So it is an incomplete description of Christian hope to say that only human beings will 'be eternalized and glorified' in God. (ibid. 139)

Moltmann neither considers death to a natural part of creation nor a result of sin. He refers to Romans 8:19f, which speaks of all creations "anxious longing" (ibid.). This sorrowful longing can then be understood as being a sign that creation is not yet complete. This observation can only be made in light of the beginning of the process of the completion of creation, which is manifested through the Christ event, and which unites all things into God through Christ.

So why did God not create the world perfect to begin with? Balthasar and Pannenberg both discuss this question, following the basic ideas of Leibniz's Theodicy. The freedom of human creatures is seen as a means of allowing humans to come to share in deification through consensual acknowledgment of God as God. God is willing to risk rejection on the part of humans, and in doing so actually reveals his love (Pannenberg II, 166,167).

Balthasar speaks of God's latency within creation, which allows for the exercise of finite freedom. God continues to be ever present in creation, but also allows for the possibility of ignoring that presence so as to permit creatures to participate most freely in a relationship with Him (II, 273). Through incarnation, in which the Son, the Word of the Father, takes on human flesh, the participation of God in human affairs and the affairs of all creation is manifested most fully. However, even then God remains latent within creation, and in way even more so than before, in that it is most fully manifested in the cross, the apparent weakness of Jesus, and absence of God.

Through this event, the latency of God actually proves to be a sign of his closest immediacy (ibid. 275-6).

Balthasar states that without a world that had finite freedom in a state of brokenness, the Son would have no opportunity to demonstrate his obedient love of the Father through the cross (ibid. 269). Thus:

There is nothing hindering us from extolling the world God actually chose as the best, *because* it has been chosen by God, in his freely obedient Son. (ibid.)

This argument can be extended over to all of creation. Through the *incompletion* of creation, its yearning for fulfillment in Christ, it gives Christ the opportunity to unite all things to himself. In doing so, he shows the Father's love of all creation and gives glory to the God.

So the world was created in the image of Christ, for Christ, and is directed towards Christ. It anxiously awaits its eschatological fulfillment, the completion of the act of creation, which has already begun in the Christ event, and is thus guaranteed. Receptivity, obedience, and sonship; these qualities which find their home in the Son are the goal of creation. All things will be united into Christ, and thus brought into the Trinity itself.

The Creator Spirit

The Spirit can be understood as the unitive love between the Father and the Son. It is then this Spirit of love, poured out from the Trinity, that both allows for a creation distinct from God, and allows for creation's realization within God. It is the Spirit that permits the infinite space between the Father and the Son, and in doing so, it is the Spirit that unites them. It is also through the Spirit that the love between the Father and the Son can be expressed in ever new ways. If creation, made up of distinct creatures and itself distinct from its creator, is going to be permitted to exist

and yet to be united to God, with each of its creatures united to each other, then it will only be so through the power of this same Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is referred to Biblically as the source of life. Genesis 1:2 speaks of the Spirit of God hovering over the face of the waters. Gn 2:7 refers to the breath of God, breathed into man, giving him life. In Jn 20:22, Jesus breathes forth the Spirit into the disciples. Breath, wind and Spirit are all understood as the same, all described by the Hebrew word *ruah*. Thus the life giving power of God is commonly attributed to the Spirit. Where inanimate objects are concerned, we can understand "life" in terms of "temporal existence", but also evolutionary tendency toward divinity. As Pannenberg puts it, the Spirit of God is the creative principle of life and movement, that directs creation toward its goal, in Christ (II, 79). It is in the sense of the Spirit's directing creation towards the *divine life* that the Spirit is understood as the principle of life in creation.

On the other side, the Spirit's role is to make the transcendent God present in creation. The Spirit, the love that exists in God, fills creation as it is poured out through Christ from the Father, and thus unites creation to God. It is through the Spirit that God participates in the destiny of creation, and even allows God to suffer with creation (Moltmann, *God in Creation* 97) through the mediation of the Son. Within the context of Mt 28:20, it is the Spirit that allows Christ to remain present in creation, and in the lives of each individual creature.

The Spirit acts in creation as the principle of transcendence, that power that brings the creature outside of itself to behold God. This work of the Spirit then works in creation, and directs it toward the incarnation of the Son. (Pannenberg II, 32) This is manifest in the "inner longing" of all creation (Rom 8:22) for redemption through Christ (Kelly 99).

Moltmann uses the language of the perichoresis of the Trinity in building his understanding of creation, and the Spirit's presence therein:

A perichoretic understanding of the relation of God to creation sees God's creating, forming, sustaining, enduring, receiving, accompanying, moving and suffering as an expression of the liveliness of his love. The coexistence of Creator and creature is also their mutual life, their cohabitation and influence on each other. The creator finds space in the fellowship of creatures. The creatures find space in God. So creation also means that we are in God and he is in us. (*History of the Triune God* 133)

This mutuality between God and creation is manifested through the presence of the Holy Spirit in creation. The space referred to above *is* this creative Spirit, empty in that it permits complete freedom, and yet full, in that it is comprised of the infinite love of God. Thus the Spirit permeates everything in the cosmos and gives it its existence, and gives it the freedom to choose to converge toward the Son.

The Spirit is also the unitive power within creation. The Spirit is the space in which creatures may remain distinct from each other and yet all created "good", in the sense of Gn 1. There are thus united in spite of distinction, a unity which originates in the Trinity. Pannenberg makes the analogy between the Spirit and classical fields of physics. Particles are continually in a state of interaction through the gravitational and electrical fields that exist between them, regardless of the distances that separates them. These force fields then bring the particles to motion. Pannenberg sees the work of the Spirit as like a force field, which causes all creation to be in a constant state of mutual interaction, and causes it to move towards its goal. (II, 82)

So the role of the Spirit according to Moltmann has four aspects: 1) it is the principle of creativity on all levels, that creates new possibilities of expressing love within God, 2) it is the unitive principle of creation within

itself, and of creation to God, 3) it the allowance of distinction within the aforementioned unity, 4) it is the alignment of creation towards its realization in God (*God in Creation* 100). Thus an understanding of the Spirits' role in creation permits us to view creation without it tending toward deism (in which the transcendence of God is exaggerated, and God is disconnected completely from the world) or toward pantheism (in which God's immanence is exaggerated, and God *needs* the world). The Spirit allows God to maintain his role as the omnipotent Creator Father, and as the ever present Son, in whom all creation is united.

Moltmann claims to reject pantheism in his theology of the Spirit. According to him, pantheism, in contrast to his theology, would not permit any distinction within creation (*God in Creation* 102). God is not reduced to being just creation. He writes "Everything is not God" (ibid. 103). Elsewhere he writes, "Any Christian natural theology is a secondary rediscovery of God in nature and presupposes the revelation of God in Christ" (*The History of the Triune God* 134).

Instead, Moltmann opts for *pan-entheism* : "God is everything" (*God in Creation* 103). Everything in the cosmos, in harmony is unified by the Spirit to be God. This is the eschatological realization to which the universe is directed.

Is this going too far? I believe that it is. In my opinion Moltmann's theology here tend a little too much towards Hegelian philosophy. To suggest that the universe is God, or even becomes God, is to forget that the distinction between creation and God still remains, even in, and *especially in* its eschatological realization. Is it not true then to say that the universe is united to God? It is still true, but this union of creation to God through the Spirit is directed towards Christ. In its fulfillment, creation's place in the

Trinity is in Christ.. All peoples become adopted sons and daughters of God, but only through their union with Christ, who is the One Son of God. In the same way all creation is indeed united into Christ, and as such, all creation, and particularly humanity, is adopted into the Trinity through the mediation of Christ. The role of the Spirit is then simply to bring everything to fulfillment in Christ, who exists prior to creation. As stated earlier, the union of creation to Christ does not add to Christ, except in that the Trinitarian love expressed in the redemption of all creation is yet another new and greater way of expressing itself (O'Hanlon 55). This distinction between creation and Christ must therefore be maintained, and easily can be, in that it is yet another manifestation of the self-distinction that exist within the Trinitarian God, supported through the power of the Holy Spirit.

As Pannenberg puts it, the Son's and the Spirit's work together in creation are inseparable. He writes:

Through the Logos, then, everything acquires its appropriate form and place in the order of creation. In this regard the Spirit mediates the working of the Logos in creation as also in the incarnation. (II, 114)

The Son cannot act, except under the power of the Spirit, which allows the Son to maintain his connection to the Father. Kelly observes this inseparability along similar lines, when he writes, "The Word is the expression of the divine understanding whence the Spirit is the love that proceeds from such an understanding" (97). He later adds, "Through the incarnate Word and the indwelling Spirit, creation tends through faith, hope and love to its fulfillment in God" (99).

The Spirit directs everything towards the Father and the Son. In creation, this link is especially apparent. God creates and participates in creation through the power and presence of the Spirit, which is mediated by the Son. When the Son enters into creation, he keeps his link with the Father

through the Spirit. Because Christ participates fully in creation, particularly its suffering and death, the Spirit can then fill creation in its entirety. By the power of the Spirit, Christ is made first-born from the dead, and so too, resurrection by God through the Holy Spirit is extended through Christ to all creation, completing it. Thus through the Spirit Christ has "reconciled all things into himself", and the Spirit has thus directed all things to their intended destination, in Christ.

Conclusion

Creation can be understood as being in the image of the Trinity, and particularly the love that exists in the Trinity. It is within the infinite love that exists in the Trinity that creation comes to be. God creates in order to love His creation, and in doing so, in order that He may be glorified. It is not that the Father needs to create the cosmos so that He may love. Rather, it is in loving the Son that the Father loves creation. The Father loves creation through the Son, who mediates this love of the Father to the world. The world then gets caught up in this infinite love between the Father and the Son, that is caught up in the Spirit.

The love between the Father and the Son is then fruitful, in that creation arises from it. This is because the infinite freedom that exists in God allows for continually new ways of expressing this love. The Father creates the world for the Son, and by the working of the Spirit, the world passes over to the Son, in whom creation is completed. The Son then returns the world to the Father, so that the Father may truly be God.

The cosmos finds its completion in Christ. Creation is then not to be understood as a one time event, but as the continual participation of God in the universe, through the Spirit. The Christ event, particularly the

resurrection, is in a sense "the beginning of the end," the first step in the finishing off of God's creative act. The Spirit now acts to complete all of creation, causing it to follow in the footsteps of Christ. By the power of the Spirit, the Father raises all creation up into Christ, and thus into the eternal love that exists in God.

It is here that the finite freedom, which originates within the infinite freedom of God, finds its fulfillment. However, this finite freedom is not passive. Rather it must be receptive to the transformative work of the Spirit, and thus willing takes on receptivity and obedience to God. God creates the world with freedom, so that it can *truly* be Trinified, in that all may freely consent to accept God as God, just as the Son does to the Father. Rather than being turned in on itself, and opposite to God, the creature's response is then thanksgiving (O'Donnell 163).

Creation then is understandable within a Trinitarian context. Within it, one may be inspired in hope, in that the Christ event expresses a kind of guarantee that all things will come to completion within the infinite love of God. Thus the "inner groanings" of our world are only temporary, as the work of the all powerful God comes to fulfillment.

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