SPACE, TRINITY AND CITY:
A THEOLOGICAL EXPLORATION

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ABSTRACT

The article addresses the neglect of space in theology. It is argued that any retrieval of space requires a transcendent referent and practical application. Hence, space is treated in relation to the doctrine of the trinity and the crisis of contemporary city life. The first part of the article attends to scholarly voices from various academic disciplines who made insightful contributions on the subject of space, and its relationship to trinity and the city. Informed by this groundbreaking work, the article offers in the final place a personal proposal of a trinitarian spatiology that might impact on the way social organisation in the city is approached. Especially the notions of *plurality*, *perichoresis*, *gifting*, and *beauty* are emphasised. The research is motivated by an ethical concern about the public relevance of theology.

1. INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM

Space has always been the Cinderella of theology. The article provides a rationale for asserting space as central to the theological agenda. This will be accomplished by interfacing three recent "turns" in academic discourse: the spatial interest in critical human geography, the recovery of the importance of the trinity, and the return of theological interest in the city. By linking space both to God as triune and to the crisis facing contemporary cities, space is given a transcendent frame of reference and an existential social application.

The well-known statement by Foucault (1980:70) on the devaluation of space in history is exceedingly applicable to theology:

> Space was treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile. Time, on the contrary, was richness, fecundity, life, dialectic.

The fixation on eschatology during the twentieth century is only one proof of this marginalisation. Whether this can continue is questionable. The coming of a global era and the crisis of social existence, as manifested in cities, necessitate a shift from time to space, from his-

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tory to geography. The neglect of space by theology, may raise the question about a possible explanation for theology's impotence in the face of urban reality. Recently the *Concilium* journal devoted an entire edition to "Christianity in Crisis?" At stake is "a crisis of Christianity regarding its capacity to respond to the demands of moral reason" (Sobrino & Wilfred 2005:9). The crux of the matter, according to the editors, is that poverty, injustice and oppression go against moral reason. Nowhere is this, arguably, more visibly instantiated than in cities. The apology for the retrieval of space by theology is *motivated* by a deep ethical concern.

The question could be raised about a real contribution by theology to the debate about space and eventually about the urban crisis. The basic thesis of this article is that only *if* theology conceptualises space trinitarianly could it aspire to make a contribution beyond the real advances offered by contemporary human geography. By relating space to God as triune, theology employs the grammar of its final truth: the identity of the Christian God. By undertaking this project of re-envisioning space in trinitarian light, the article is a conscious attempt at situating the discourse in a fruitful contemporary debate: relating all matters of human life to the truth of the Christian God. The conviction is that faith in the one God who revealed Himself as Father, Son and Spirit has implications for the way we represent space and ultimately how we think about city as a spatial ordering.

The argument will proceed by listening to a variety of scholarly voices in an effort to take note of the wider discourses about space, trinity and city. Thereafter a proposal about a possible spatiology will be offered as contribution to reasserting space into the theological agenda. The proposal will be explicitly trinitarian and will address the crucial issue of spatial ordering in the city.

2. LISTENING TO VOICES ON SPACE, TRINITY AND THE CITY

2.1 Human geography and the spatial turn

The recent publication of *Key thinkers on space and place* (2004), which features no less than fifty two major theoreticians, is ample expression

of a "spatial turn" in social theory, and evidence of the importance of taking space seriously in understanding social phenomena. Until about the 1970s human geographers perceived space as *mappable*, as straightforward and objective, a neutral container. Increasingly under the influence of Lefebvre's work, space has been understood as "always becoming, in process, and unavoidably caught up in power relations" (Hubbard, Kitchin & Valentine 2004:4f., 10). Two major geographers — Harvey and Soja — have been selected for treatment to highlight the importance of recent social thinking on space that could be relevant to theology.

2.1.1 Harvey and utopian spaces

David Harvey has established himself as one of the leading human geographers who calls for a geography that could study the world in order to change it along more socially just lines. He insists that space and spatial practices are never neutral in social affairs. The idea of a single and objective sense of space should be challenged.

As Marxist his work focuses on how capitalism builds a geographical landscape in its own image. Space is *produced* by capitalism and expresses the system's inner contradictions. The transformation of the earth's surface during the last two hundred years reflects precisely the free-market's restless and perpetual reorganisation of spatial forms (Harvey 2000: 177f.). Space matters to capitalism and is integral to any project to overthrow it.

A key contribution by Harvey to spatial thinking is his insistence that conceptions of space can be *theorised*: one can make substantive theoretical statements about the role of space in contemporary society (see Castree 2004:185). A broad logics is at work in the world. For Harvey capitalism displays such a spatial logics. For example, underlying the postmodern era with its pretence of difference and complexity, the same capitalist logics is at world: using the production of difference in the form of commodities as a means to make money. The "progressive monetarisation of relations in social life" is one of the outstanding features of contemporary life (Harvey 1990:228).

A fascinating feature of his more recent work is an attempt — against the grain of most social theory — to revitalise utopian thinking as a

force for social change. The "spatial play" of utopias gives expression to *socio-spatial alternatives* by offering a vast array of possible spatial orderings and possible social worlds. Harvey is quite realistic about the problems besetting utopian visions, but he stresses the *possibility* of utopian passions to galvanise socio-spatial change (Harvey 2000:195).

Changes in our conceptual apparatus and specifically in the representations of space can have material consequences for the ordering of daily life. Influence on the ways of representing space brings power over the materiality of spatial organisation itself (Harvey 1990:233). Any project to transform society should grapple with the transformation of spatial conceptions and practices.

2.1.2 Soja and Thirdspace

The American urban geographer and social theorist Edward Soja has become known for his insistence on the centrality of space in the constitution of society. The reassertion of spatiality at the centre of social theory is the *Leitmotiv* of his work. He acknowledges the profound influence on his thinking by Henri Lefebvre and especially his *The production of space* (1991), which he regards as the most important book ever written on the social significance of spatiality.

Soja is of the opinion that space more than time hides consequences from us today. The "making of geography" instead of the "making of history" is the imperative of our time. The spatial dimension of our lives has never been of greater practical and political relevance. He points out that the physical view of space has deeply influenced all forms of spatial analysis, imbuing it with an aura of objectivity and inevitability (Soja 1989:79). Especially two persistent illusions have dominated Western ways of approaching space: the "illusion of opaqueness" which reifies space, and the "illusion of transparency" which dematerialises space. Lost from view are the deeper social origins of spatiality and it relation to politics, power and ideology.

Certain standard expressions have come to characterise Soja's entire oeuvre: "socio-spatial dialectic", the "trialectics of spatiality", and "Thirdspace". A brief explanation will be given of each.

Social life should be seen as both space-forming and space-contingent; it is a *producer* of space and simultaneously a *product* of spatiality (Soja

1989:129). Social and spatial relations are dialectically inter-reactive. To counter a physicalist view of space, Soja prefers the term "spatiality" to convey this basic insight that space is socially *produced* (Soja 1989: 80 n.3).

The "trialectics of spatiality" is a conceptual attempt at redressing the neglect of space in ontology and social theory. Soja emphasises that the human being has always been historical, social and spatial. It is not only about history and society, but equally about geography. The purpose of trialectical thinking is to reassert the existential importance of spatiality (see Soja 1996:73).

The term "Thirdspace", which has become prominent in Soja's more recent work, builds on the widely known conceptual distinctions by Lefebvre (1991:33): spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces. In Soja's reworking these crucial distinctions in the spatial discourse have become First-, Second-, and Thirdspace. It refers respectively to *perceived* space as material contextual forms, to conceived space as ideas and discourses about space, and to *lived* space as strategic location which transcends the previous two. Thirdspace, viewed by many critics as too slippery (Latham 2004:272), is Soja's preferred concept "as an-Other way of understanding and acting to change the spatiality of human life" (Soja 1996:10). A Firstspace epistemology will focus on the objective and accurate description of surface appearances; and Secondspace epistemology on the subjective and philosophical explanation of spaces. A Thirdspace epistemology is deliberately open to re-definition and is guided by a desire to translate knowledge into action to improve the world (see Soja 1989:92, 130; 1996:22).

Soja is quite explicit that no social revolution can succeed without being at the same time expressly a spatial revolution. Human geography, or in other words human spatiality, is a competitive arena for struggle.

2.1.3 Contributions

The works by Harvey and Soja convey the following important insights:

- It confronts theology with the obvious fact — which has been neglected for too long — that space is *important* in social organisation. It is neither peripheral, nor neutral but interacts profoundly with our very existence as social beings.

• The truth of Soja's *socio-spatial dialectic* is inescapable: space is socially produced, but simultaneously produces social effects. This raises consciousness about the underlying ideology of all spatial ordering and its impact — positive and negative — on humans. This insight raises the discourse beyond facile notions of space as "empty containers", or space as a cognitive structure.

• Terminological distinctions, especially the *spatial triad* of Lefebvre refined by Soja, facilitate more fruitful discourse. For theology, the notions of "representation of space" and "space of representation", may be helpful to envision possibilities for its public role and task.

• The spatial imaginings of *utopian plays*, encouraged by Harvey, gives academic respectability and justification to similar ventures. Theology's alternative spatial proposals need not be inhibited for fear of intellectual irrelevance. Such spatial explorations may have the capacity for social transformation.

• Although Marxism as ideology has been discredited, it would be a grave mistake to brush aside the warnings of persistent thinkers about the *dehumanising commodification* of contemporary social life. For articulating its own public alternative, theology may do well to heed this concern.

2.2 Trinitarian Theology and the possibility of thinking God and space

The retrieval of the doctrine of the trinity as the "grammar" for speaking about the identity of the Christian God is an established and recognised fact in theological discourse. Grenz (2004:6), in a splendid overview of trinitarian thinking, regards the renewal of trinitarian thinking "as perhaps the greatest contribution of theology in the twentieth century". Contemporary theological work does not only give expression to the Renaissance of a Patristic doctrine, but something more drastic is underway: attempts to address contemporary challenges specifically and expressly from a trinitarian perspective (see Venter 2004a:220f. for some examples). Seeking for theologians who deal with space from a trinitarian angle the harvest is disappointingly poor. Fortunately, old masters never fail to guide: two theologians — Staniloae and Barth — have been selected to shed some light on the problem.

2.2.1 Staniloae and space as interpersonal relation

The potential strength of trinitarian theology is evident in the work of the Romanian Orthodox dogmatician Dumitru Staniloae. Before we can discuss creaturely space, the possibility of space in God should be addressed. Consequently, he raises the spatial problematic in his treatment of the attributes of God (see Staniloae 1994:171-184).[2]

Space can never be understood in an atomistic sense. A single human person would have no need of space. A unipersonal God would also not provide sufficient basis for the creation of space. Absence of persons from space renders it lifeless. Space for the individual alone would be tormenting. This leads to the crucial insight by Staniloae: space is closely connected with interpersonal communion; "Space, like time, is an interpersonal relation" (173). Space is the *form* of communion in movement towards perfect communion. As such, space is an existential reality. Space is the means of communication, the place of encounter and of interpersonal relation (176).

The possibility, origin, unity and end of space are to be found in the triune God. It is through the *distinctions* and *union* of the divine persons that space finds its origin and end (171, 172, 173). Without the reality of God *as triune* space could not have existed:

> God gave existence to space out of an inner possibility included in his Trinitarian life so that, after the pattern of the Trinitarian communion in which we are to grow, it might be for us a means of communion between him and us and, among ourselves, between one another (177).

Ultimately, space is for Staniloae, *distance*. Space enables the human being in freedom to draw near or to move away, to foster the desire for communion or for distancing.

In typical Orthodox fashion Staniloae conceptualises salvation as total communion. Unfortunately, his soteriology undoes his constructive work of situating space as trinitarian possibility and as interpersonal relationship. Time and again he refers to space which should be "overcome", "overwhelmed", "swallowed up" by total or perfect interpersonal communion (173, 174, 175, 176, 177). The final goal of communion is to

2   All references in parenthesis are to this work.

overcome the interval of space that separates, to find ourselves within the divine infinity (177f.).

2.2.2 Barth and the spatiality of God

The significance of the theological position of Karl Barth on God and space cannot be overemphasised. He strongly argues against the older view of God's non-spatiality, which is not only an error, but also a dangerous idea, because "Der christliche Gottesbegriff jedenfalls wird gesprengt und aufgelöst, wenn Gott absolute Raumlosigkeit zugeschrieben wird" (Barth 1940:527). Without space there is no distance, only identity.

The seminal discussion by Barth is part of his treatment of the perfections of God, and specifically the omnipresence of God, in *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik* II/1 (1940:518-551).[3] The traditional approach to view omnipresence (space) and eternity (time) as aspects of God's infinity, is not tenable for Barth. To posit infinity as God's essence is to fall into the Feuerbachian trap; speaking about God amounts then merely to contradicting what is actually human — finitude (522-527). The Christian doctrine of God should address questions put to it by the God who confronts man and not by man who confronts God. Barth offers then his alternative: God's omnipresence is primarily a determination of God's *love* (522) and defines space as "diejenige Form der Schöpfung, kraft welcher diese als von Gott verschiedene Wirklichkeit Gegenstand seiner Liebe sein kann" (523). Without love there could be no other, no universe beside God, and no divine omnipresence in relation to it.

Omnipresence implies presence, which is not identity, but togetherness at a distance. This applies first of all to God Himself: the togetherness of Father, Son and Spirit at the distance posited by the distinction that exists in the one nature of God. God is omnipresent in Himself (521); He is Himself distant and near in one being (519). Even if creation did not exist, proximity and remoteness would still be a divine perfection. For *this reason* God possesses space in Himself as triune (529). It is in this fact that God is love (520). Barth considers the truth of God's triune nature as decisive rebuttal for the erroneous view that God is spaceless. God is not a solitary being, but is unity and fellowship in Himself:

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3   All references in parenthesis are to this work.

Als der Dreieinige ist er lebendig und liebend und eben das ist die Begründung und die Urwirklichkeit des Raumes in Gott selber. Gottes Dreieinigkeit ist der Raum, der ausschliesslich sein eigener Raum ist, um eben als solcher der Raum aller Räume werden, zum Raum aller Räume sich selber hergeben zu können (535).

Operative at the basis of Barth's insistence of God's own spatiality is his well-known axiom: everything that God is in His relationship to His creation, is simply an external manifestation and realisation of what He is antecedently in Himself apart from this relationship (520). God does not do anything that He does not have and is not in Himself. He could not be as Creator the principle of space if He Himself is non-spatial: "… sondern er ist Prinzip des Raumes, in dem er selbst in der ihm eigenen Weise räumlich ist" (530). In virtue of the divine space, there is creaturely space. Created space as presence, as proximity and remoteness, as togetherness and distance, finds its *basis*, its *presupposition* and *possibility* in the triune God, because He is in Himself co-existence (521). Space implies thus presence, but distinction and *relationship*.

2.2.3 Contributions

The courage and creativity displayed by trinitarian theologians are often conspicuous; Staniloae and Barth are no exception to this exciting trend. The cursory treatment of their reflection reveals the following insights:

- The primary *locus* for addressing the question of space is the *doctrine of God*; only thereafter can it receive attention, for example, in the doctrine of creation. Most contemporary theologians who bother to deal with space at all, like Moltmann (1985:140-157), Pannenberg (1994:84-102) and Jenson (1999:29-49) continue to situate the discussion as part of creation.

- To argue for *God's own spatiality* opens perspectives on a transcendent *referent* for the origin, possibility, form and redemption of space.

- Space receives its reality from the truth of the intra-trinitarian relationships. This discloses the inner nature and dynamics of space: it is fundamentally *relational*. *Space is the very quality intrinsic to any relationship*.

- By grounding space in God's own being, a *normative* framework is obtained. Space finds it true nature in *communion*. The triune God, who has space, because He is tripersonal and relational, is in his divine nature communion.

- Space, as relational form between distinct persons, possesses a *dynamic* quality: potential movement of distancing or approaching. A trinitarian model displays mutual interpenetration, that is, unity without losing distinction.

2.3 Renaissance of theological responses to the city

It has become a truism to refer to cities that are in crisis. The vice-catalogues are known and endless: overpopulation, traffic jams, air-pollution, lack of housing, crime …. There are clear signs that this reality *as a challenge to theology* has dawned on many thinkers. Theology can no longer be silent. A recent edition of the journal *Interpretation* was entirely devoted to the theme of the city; in the introductory preface the editors remarked that a thread was to be discerned running through all articles:

> … the recognition that any city embodies two worlds, one of hope and promise, the other of despair and human degradation. The mounting concern is that the former is fast becoming a virtual world, nothing more than a façade (Brown & Carroll 2000:11).

This cynical observation confronts theology with the question whether it could offer "redemptive possibilities" (Jacobsen 2003:44) to our cities in crisis. Most theological involvement hitherto has been ecclesio-centric: it has been concerned with the continued existence of the church in the city under the rubric of "urban ministry". A second focus is critical and is most of the time amiss: to think theologically about the city for the sake of the well-being of her inhabitants (see Sparks III 2000:47f. for the twofold task). Fortunately, there are indications of a turning tide, evidence of capable scholars who have started to theologise on the city as reality, and who realise that earlier discourses, for example by Cox (*The secular city*, 1965) and Ellul (*The meaning of the city*, 1970) no longer suffice. Two such proposals have been selected for more detailed treatment: those by Ward and Gorringe.

2.3.1 Ward and the postmodern city of desire

The work *Cities of God* (2000)[4] by Graham Ward, British theologian and prominent participant in the Radical Orthodoxy movement, is a major intellectual attempt to engage in a postmodern climate with the reality of the present day city. The book displays vast inter-disciplinary learning and is an ambitious project to respond theologically to the crisis of contemporary urban living.

According to Ward, urban culture has experienced radical transformation since the late 1970's, so much so that he claims a new city-form is emerging (50f., 53ff.). Especially five factors have wrought this change: economic reorganisation of post-industrialisation, the demise of urban planning, a new order of simulation, globalism and the emergence of the network society. The modern sites of eternal aspiration and hope have become the postmodern cities of eternal *desires*.

Theology is challenged to respond to insurgent social atomism and the celebration of virtual realities. Previous attempts are inadequate and necessitate a new theological approach. An adequate theological approach, according to Ward, will be one that will listen to the many postmodern voices, but also announce to the postmodern city its own vision of justice, peace and beauty (70).

Materially Ward's proposal focuses on the notions of *desire* and *body*. Christianity has to present its own alternative accounts of desire and of body. Although desire is fundamental to the human nature, it need not degenerate into lust to consume, own and accumulate (75f.). Ward's approach emphasises analogical relations between physical, ecclesial, sacramental, social and political bodies, arguing for the participation of all these bodies in the Body of Christ. Only a strong doctrine of participation can counter the social atomism.

Having finished reading the work with its magisterial frame of reference, one cannot escape the nagging feeling: something is drastically amiss. The work is devoid of an anchoring in the real world of dehumanising structures, poverty, crime, pollution and traffic. It is another postmodern discourse, trapped in fashionable postmodern jargon of desires and bodies. A basic comparison with another seminal study on the

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4   All references in parenthesis are to this work.

body and the city, Sennett's *Flesh and stone* (1994), will easily illustrate the problem. Sennett's work that traces the interaction between the human body and the changing spatialisation of cities through history bristles with sounds and smells of real life. May be there is something radically wrong with the Radical Orthodoxy project as such; this is a concern raised by a fellow British theologian:

> [A] theology that does not inhabit the Bible in lively ways is very unlikely to be more than a set of ideas unable to reach beyond a very limited "high culture" milieu (Ford 2001:398).

2.3.2 Gorringe and a Trinitarian ethic of the built environment

The recent work by British theologian Tim Gorringe *A theology of the built environment* (2002)[5] is a magnificent example of engaged and multi-disciplinary theology. This work is a successful trailblazing attempt at breaking the silence of theology about the built environment. What makes the work so impressive, is its acquaintance not only with theological trends, but also with discourses on urban planning, architecture, and human geography. It is a splendid contribution to a public theology and will remain the benchmark for quite some time.

Gorringe's work has been motivated by the conviction that Christian theology has at its core a vision of the human that is pertinent to the built environment. The Christian narrative can make a contribution to the common human story and have an impact on the public square (3, 242).

It is exciting to note that Gorringe realises that reflection about the built environment and subsequently on the city cannot bypass the question of space. His own reflection has been thoroughly informed by Lefebvre's work on space. Space is not a mere "container" or a category of human cognition, but is a social and ideological reality (39). Social relations are inscribed concretely in space. What is absent in contemporary society, is the dynamic of a transcendent referent (36).

The recovery of more creative forms of social space, will depend on a new vision of the human (36). For Gorringe this is only possible by thinking about space in terms of a God who has space: "to fully appre-

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5   All references in parenthesis are to this work.

ciate our own spatiality we need a theology of the 'eminent spatiality' of God" (40). Through a careful reading of Barth, Gorringe suggests a "trinitarian mapping of space" (48):

> The triune God is not to be understood simply as the negative of our experience of space and time, but as its creative origin and ground, and therefore as the possibility of its eschatological redemption (47).

For Gorringe a trinitarian theological ethic of the built environment should raise issues like *community*. The twentieth century's recovery of the idea that God is community in Himself, has implications for an understanding of human community and the built environment. Unfortunately, the dimensions he identifies for explicating his ethic for a Christian vision of community (185-192), for example honouring of memory and tradition and common purpose, have not been trinitarianly construed.

To materialise a vision for establishing an alternative social organisation, especially in terms of the built environment, remains the challenging part of any project of this nature. Gorringe suggests three approaches: education, spirituality and a set of criteria (for example, like sustainability and enchantment) (242, 250).

2.3.3 Contributions

A comparison of the books by Ward and Gorringe could be an interesting study. Despite the deep differences, the books share similar sensibilities:

- Something drastically is *changing* in human cities; this requires a *theological response* that transcends mere ecclesiocentric concerns. Theology should respond for the sake of the city herself, for the sake of humanity.

- Both Gorringe and Ward attempt a deliberate theological engagement in the pregnant sense: God should be related to the reality of the city. Ward's is christocentrically fashioned; Gorringe's in an exemplary way fully *trinitarian*. Christocentric approaches are commendable, but in final regard the trinity offers a more inclusive and productive horizon for theologising.

- Gorringe's proposal is explicitly *spatially sensitive*; Ward's not, but he operates with a controlling metaphor — the body — which is deeply spatial. Theological thinking about the city should be em-

phatically spatially oriented because cities are primarily spatial configurations.

- To engage the city academically, is an inescapable *multi-* and *interdisciplinary venture*. Both Ward and Gorringe in their respective ways have impressively accomplished this demanding and sophisticated task.

- Both scholars are pronounced in their rejection of the *consumer mentality* of the postmodern city. This sense of discernment about the dehumanising effect of late capitalism cannot be ignored.

3. INTIMATING A TRINITARIAN SPATIOLOGY

To recover space as a prominent problem in theology, requires nothing less than developing a theological *spatiology* as such. To merely refer to space, for example, in the doctrine of creation is not adequate. Only a multi-layered view of space will be acceptable, and only in such a way could the practical import of space and the justification for giving it prominence be conveyed. It has been suggested in the introduction that at least two argumentative moves might be required for retrieving space as theme in theology: grounding it in the trinity as transcendent referent, and instantiating it in a potential materialisation, for example, in social organisation like the city. In this concluding section some suggestions will be given on how these two tasks might be accomplished.

For treating space comprehensively some initial tasks should obviously be accomplished. Some *conceptual* and *referential* distinctions may guide reflection with greater precision. The three-fold distinction by Lefebvre (1991:33) and its reworking by Soja, as briefly explained in paragraph 2.1.2, is quite helpful. The focus of theology is clearly on construing an alternative *representation of space*. Once this has been established it would become a *space of representation* from where social transformation could be advocated. A theological spatiology cannot do without the terminological refinements of Lefebvre and Soja.

A second distinction is crucial: between space as defined by theoretical *physics* and that by critical *geography*. The failure to do that has inhibited the work of scholars, even theologians like Moltmann (see 1985: 140-157; 2000:313-320), who has consciously tried to reassert space into the theological agenda does not make this distinction. Most theo-

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logical work, which marginally and as afterthought attends to space, is still in the grip of a physicalist notion of space; space is viewed as a-political, a-ethical and a-trinitarianly. To deal with space as a problem perceived by physicists (see e.g. the standard work by Jammer 1993 and Greene 2004), is obviously a relevant matter worthy of study, but the ethical challenges of our time, like the crisis of urban living, may render the social or geographical definition of space an imperative for reflection. One commendable exception is McFague (see, e.g., 1993:99-103) whose theological project clearly stands in the geographical paradigm; although she briefly discusses space, she connects it with justice and avoids the fruitless physicalist conundrums. Theology could do well by distinguishing the two approaches and give more attention to a human geographical notion of space.

After some conceptual and referential distinction, a theological doctrine of space should appeal to its normative source — the Bible; the disappointment here is as great as with Systematic Theology. Time has reigned sovereignly and its spell is still to be broken. A *biblical theology of space* is an outstanding task awaiting scholarly attention. In Old Testament studies the work by Brinkman (1992) is solid research, but its focus is too limited to inform a theological spatiology; his methodological conclusions are worth the read. The sensitivity in contemporary bibliological research to intra-canonical diversity could be fruitful for spatiological reflection; for example, a priestly notion of space (see Blenkinsopp 1995:110-114) and an apocalyptic one (see Howard-Brook & Gwyther 1999:126-135) do have distinctive contours. The socioscientific model of biblical interpretation may be a fitting approach for such a study. It could highlight the crucial insight that space is socially (and culturally) produced.

After these two foundational tasks have been completed, the challenge of developing a theological understanding of space moves to a critical phase: the choosing and employing of a *frame of reference*. The explicit thesis of this article is that the doctrine of the trinity provides the ultimate parameters for thinking about space. A Christian theology of space should be a *trinitarian spatiology*. The truth of the Christian God as triune, should inform a Christian notion of space. This requires a number of formal comments. By opting for a trinitarian theology of space, one resolutely and unapologetically assumes that the trinity is a "public

truth" (Newbigin 1997:1-8) and that it "is ultimately a practical doc-
trine with radical consequences for Christian life" (LaCugna 1991:1).
In most of the recent work on the trinity and in endeavours to employ
trinitarian logic to address critical challenges, one failure is conspicuous:
a failure to clearly describe *how* the referent "God" or "trinity" functions
in a differentiated way in theology. If this is not identified, constructive
trinitarian proposals may appear as mumbo jumbo argumentation. At
least six distinctive ways could be proposed when employing the word
"God" theologically (see Venter 2005:339): one could refer to God as a
causative Agent, a Personal Being, a transcendent model, a heuristic
principle, a critical personal truth and principle, and archetypical structure.
Corresponding to each sense, is a fitting human response. For example,
God as Personal Being challenges the human to faith as relational
response. For developing a detailed spatiology these distinctions are
extremely relevant. Each one would contribute a unique perspective to
the discourse. In the limited scope of this article, two of these will be
employed: the trinitarian relationships (processions and missions) *as model
and as heuristic principle* to think analogously about human spatial or-
ganisation. Employing the categories model and heuristics, is no attempt
what so ever to diminish or erode the objective reality of the living
God. The corresponding human response to these two references is
imagination; the specific usage of the referent God requires it. A trini-
tarian spatiology is a construction of trinitarian imagination (see
Venter 2004a:221f. for an explanation of this notion). At stake here,
and it may require explicit mentioning, is also the importance of the
reality of the immanent trinity. What is often regarded as esoteric think-
ing, may prove to be critical for theological work (see the thorough
study in this regard by Molnar 2002).

These "prolegomena like" comments lead inevitably to the heart of
the matter: *spatial ordering* in a Christian sense. What would be the dis-
tinctly *Christian features* of a trinitarian spatial imagination? What is the
Christian alternative to contemporary utopian plays? The suggestive
and fundamental work by Barth and Staniloae should now be carried
to its logical conclusions: if God in light of his own intra-trinitarian
life is spatial, then the *relational character* of divine spatiality should
inform heuristically the quality of human social spatiality. Human spatial
ordering is fundamentally a matter of *ordering relations*, that should re-

flect, echo something of its divine ground and origin. From the quality of divine personal relations flows the constructive and creative imagining of alternative human spatial organisation. Specifically my proposal identifies four such qualities: *plurality*, *perichoresis*, *gifting*, and *beauty*. These qualities are descriptive of the divine nature as triune, although in no way exhaustive, and should as such be normative for human spatial relations and consequently social organisation. My proposal differs from the one by Gorringe, which is commendable in all respects, except that his "criteria" for urban planning or the built environment have not been imagined trinitarianly. A trinitarian spatiology should move materially beyond positing God as the mere ground and origin. The life of God should inform materially what our social life should look like. Nothing but an elaboration of the *Imago Dei* motif is at stake here: its spatial materialisation as social organisation. Human social organisation cannot escape the norm of the *Imago Trinitatis*. The Christian alternative spatial ordering as a configuration of plurality, perichoresis, gifting, and beauty is undertaken with the conviction that no humanist or Marxist proposal can offer such a compelling vision. The reason is obvious: the absence of faith in a triune God who is also the inspiration to human life. A short description may be required to explain the proposal:

a.   Trinitarian faith counters exactly the tyranny of fixed pre-conceived models that littered history. Because God in his very being is differentiated personal life, difference and *plurality* is no postmodern luxury; it belongs to the very ontological structure of reality. Especially feminist trinitarian discourse raised consciousness for this: trinity is interpreted as a challenge to "philosophies of the One" (Soskice 2002: 140). *Otherness* is constitutive for divine nature as such. The trinitarian project of Von Balthasar, with its starting-point in Holy Saturday that stresses the inexhaustible otherness between Father and Son, is another resource for underlining this fact (see Williams 2004:38, 40f., 43, 47). The divine life as gift of "otherness" frees the Christian spatial imagination to advocate experiments of boundless variety. The hegemony of homogenous spatial structures cannot be tolerated. A Christian proposal should insist on spatial creative play of endless variety.

b.   This insistence is no anarchic endeavour: *perichoresis* of intra-divine relations is protection against this. Originally used in Christolo-

gical sense, it was employed as category to safeguard distinctiveness and unity simultaneously. Analogously, perichoretic spatial ordering promotes *identity* and *community* at the same time. Perichoretic thinking makes it possible to conceive of community without uniformity, but also of personhood without individualism. Humanist thinking has failed in both regards. The increasing pluralising of the contemporary globalised and postmodern society has lead to atomisation and loneliness; at the same time the commodification of social life has lead to obliteration of uniqueness. A trinitarian view respects rich diversity, but not at the cost of relatedness and community. Moltmann's view (2000:318f.) is worth mentioning in this regard; he explicitly conceptualises *perichoresis* in terms of space: a perichoretic understanding of person means "every trinitarian Person is not merely *Person*, but also *living space* for the other".

c.   Divine life is pre-eminently shaped by dynamic ex-stasis: an outward movement of *Gifting*, whether immanently as processions or economically as missions. Downey (2000:48) puts it succinctly: "The doctrine of the Trinity is a grammar of gift." The trinity as Christian identification of God says emphatically that God is inexhaustible Gift, Given and Gifting (Downey 2000:43). This is the Christian alternative to the dehumanising monetarisation of contemporary life, an alternative to the logic of capitalist exchange. Inherent to a trinitarian spatiology is a critique of contemporary economic life. Trinitarian Gifting is excessive and hyperbolic and as such disregards the critical question of the return of the gift: it initiates an economy of gifting, of sharing and of pleasure in giving (see the magnificent treatment by Webb 1996:139-158). "Gift" implies related notions of justice and hospitality. A Christian view of spatiality should embody these qualities.

d.   All theology in the twenty-first century would inevitably be post-Von Balthasar theology: *Aesthetics* is no incidental and luxury theme in theology. For too long our obligation to beauty has been abdicated to artists and philosophers. The good news is that a shift is underway: proposals are being offered that ground beauty in the divine trinitarian life (see the magisterial work by Hart 2003: 153-249). This is contra to Von Balthasar's own hesitance, who emphasised that divine glory is found in the incarnational *form* of

Christ (Davies 2004:134). Beauty emerges necessarily from God as a perichoresis of love, whose life is eternally one of shared regard, delight, fellowship, feasting and joy. God is beautiful in his relationships; true beauty is to found in the dynamism of the triune life (Hart 2003:177). Beauty constitutes authentic human life; human spatial ordering should be beautiful.

These four trinitarian shapings of space in society and specifically of the city form together the Christian alternative. Formally the Christian vision is informed by God's triune life; materially it assumes the contours of *plurality*, *perichoresis*, *gifting*, and *beauty*. The simultaneous configuring of these perspectives establishes the radical uniqueness of the Christian vision. By pursuing the materialisation of this vision, theology may regain some public credibility in terms of the ethical resources inherent in its faith. By embracing space as socially produced and imagining it consistently in trinitarian light, theology will contribute to address the "Crisis of Christianity". The future shape of our cities may be an arbiter about the truth of the Christian faith.

The unavoidably question should be addressed: Can these utopian visions be materialised? The fact is that *alternative* spatial orderings *are being materialised*; for example, developments in art (see Dunning 1991) and the increasingly changing position of women in society as establishing womanist's space and place (see McDowell 1999) are evidence of it. What about the built environment as expression of spatiality as social organisation? A twofold answer should be given: the *possibility* has been intimated in the history of ecclesial architecture, and in a theological understanding of materialisation. In constructing buildings of worship space has always "mattered" (Witvliet 2005:5) for the church. Impressive church structures are proof that spatial orderings are possible according to deep-seated convictions. *Mutatis mutandis* it is also in principle possible to re-visualise, to re-image, cities. This is no attempt to belittle the immense hurdles facing any embodiment, but a firm conviction that space is and could be socially produced as the geographers have alarmed us.

It is more important, than pointing out empirical examples, to insist that thinking about materialisation should be a *matter of theology*, and not of strategy. It is fine to say we should "turn our attention to poli-

tics at a municipal level" (Jacobsen 2003:164), but a deeper engagement is required. Three perspectives should be noted.

The same problem that confronted Liberation Theology is present here: What is the relationship between liberation and the Kingdom of God, or for our purview — what is the relationship between renewed cities in history and God's final New Jerusalem? Should the former be abandoned by Christians because they do not have an enduring city, but are looking for the city to come (Heb. 13:14)? This will condemn "society to playing out its nihilistic and self-destructive drive" (Ward 2000:70). Gutierrez's answer (1999:34) to critics of Liberation Theology is applicable to Christian involvement in urban renewal: historical renewal is only an expression of the final eschatological city, not its advent. Construing alternative spatial orderings and by labouring for its construction is a deed of obedience to eschatological hope. Some sign, some form of approximation should be erected to reflect our ultimate hope.

Materialisation of alternative spatial orderings is intrinsically redemptively informed. As such this becomes part of *God's work*. What is usually said about mission is applicable here. The materialisation is part of the *Missio Trinitatis* (see Venter 2004b:757f. for this notion). What has recently come to be known as "urban mission", should be broadened to include this very task of re-envisioning urban spatial ordering as part of God's movement to invite his creation into communion with him. As trinitarian work, it will reflect the cross, the resurrection and the free movement of the Spirit. To implement new and redeeming spatial orderings will take place with struggle, but shall be met, albeit partially, with unexpected surprises.

All attempts at materialising new spatial organisation should be *motivated* by the ultimate eschatological metaphor: the vision of the New Jerusalem. In the end space will be *redeemed*, and not be terminated (see Volf 2000:277 n. 87 for this crucial insight). The final vision of God's intended *telos* is fully spatialised: it is a triune vision that is amazingly urban, material, inclusive, integrated and beautiful. The four elements of *plurality*, *perichoresis*, *gifting*, and *beauty* will find their fulfilment there. In the end God will invite his redeemed creation into the beauty of his hospitable space.

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