

Theology of Hope : the exodus of Jürgen Moltmann

*The concepts create idols,
Only wonder lays hold of something.
—Gregory of Nyssa¹*

S 57 Christ and Spirit in Twentieth Century Theology

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¹ Last lines of Moltmann's autobiographical note in A. J. Conyers, *God, Hope, and History : Jürgen Moltmann and the Christian Concept of History* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer, 1988). 223.

Introduction

Jürgen Moltmann is not embarrassed about how his personal experiences have shaped his theological development² and he frequently shares three stories that have profoundly shaped him and consequently his theology.³ Statements of personal encounter in an objective discipline like theology were (and I dare say still are) rare in academic circles which is an attitude it took some time for him to overcome.⁴

Theology of Hope doesn't bear the same vulnerability as his other works, probably due to it being his first major contribution into the wider academic community⁵ and while he is embarking on an exodus from the dominant theological approaches he is still very much under their shadow. Later in his career he has explained just how reliant *Theology of Hope* was upon his early formational experiences giving the book an almost therapeutic dimension.

Moltmann's belief that biography and theology are closely linked⁶ is a belief I share so I want to state from the outset the reason why I selected this essay topic. First, that I have had no hope in my Christian journey. Last year I preached a sermon on hope during the advent season and ended up somewhat confused about what hope is or what it might be in. For the last 10 years I have often been heard to say "Eschatology-shmeschatology" with my point being that it made no sense to be involved in the popular eschatologies in Christian circles today. Thinking about the afterlife didn't answer the despair of the now. As I have read through the

² Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology : Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, 1st Fortress Press ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000). xviii.

³ Almost every preface or essay in the Bibliography refers to at least two of these stories.

⁴ Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology : Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*. xviii–xix.

⁵ I use the word contribution for this is Moltmann's preferred understanding of what he has done with his work. Ibid. xvi.

⁶ "My own experiences with theological thinking have taught me that the two things belong together in Christian theology: the telling of God's history with us, and the argument for God's presence—biographical subjectivity and self-forgetting objectivity." Ibid. xix.

material for this essay, I can now say I have a glimmer of hope—a hope in participating in the promises of God. It has injected some vitality into my Christian journey. And ironically that’s probably what I’ve been hoping for all along.

This essay seeks to place *Theology of Hope* in it’s historical and biographical setting and critique it’s importance from within that paradigm. I want to suggest that this work was actually in a sense an unshackling for Moltmann, a reference point for when he could stake his own claim in the theological landscape. That this book is not so much an academic white paper, but a glimpse into the heart of a man broken by war and restored by hope.

Theology as Biography

WAR TIME

According to Moltmann, his faith was born out of a ‘despairing search for God’ and a struggle with the “dark sides of ‘the hidden face’ of God.”⁷ There are two stories that he shares from when he was a German soldier fighting for the Nazis, providing us with profound insights into both his personal spiritual journey and his attitude toward the German and global theological establishments.

The first story recalls defending his home during an air-raid over Hamburg. ‘Operation Gomorrah’ as the RAF called it, left 40,000 people burnt to death including one of Moltmann’s friends who was standing beside him when a bomb exploded nearby. Moltmann was left unscathed⁸. He cried out “ ‘My God, where are you?’ and the question ‘Why am I alive and not dead like the rest?’

⁷ Ibid. 3.

⁸ It is interesting to note that in an interview with Miroslav Volf in 1983, Moltmann says he was in fact wounded, but also recorded in another one of his books, *The Source of Life: The Holy Spirit and the Theology of Life* (London and Minneapolis, 1997) he uses the word unscathed also. Carlos A. Valle, "Communities of Faith and Radical Discipleship – an Interview with Jürgen Moltmann," *The Christian Century*, no. (1983), <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1689>. Either way though, the impact this event had on him was enormous.

has haunted [him] ever since.”⁹ Moltmann says this night of darkness was the moment theology began for him.¹⁰

The second story recalls when he was in a prisoner of war at Norton camp in Britain. As he was being ‘re-educated’ by the British for a better Germany, the British posted some photos of Auschwitz and Belsen on the hut walls without comment. As the prisoners worked through the suspicion of propaganda and comparative justifications, he describes their feelings:

“Slowly and inexorably the truth filtered into our awareness, and we saw ourselves mirrored in the eyes of the Nazi victims. Was this what we had fought for? Had my generation, at the last, been driven to our deaths so that the concentration camp murderers could go on killing, and Hitler could live a few months longer?”¹¹

This realisation plunged him into depression and he developed “a profound sense of shame at having to share in this disgrace” calling it a “stranglehold that choked” them.¹²

One the chaplains provided the POWs with bibles and, having forsaken Goethe’s poems as meaningless, Moltmann found tremendous comfort in the Psalms of lament, especially Psalm 39, and also the cry of the crucified Christ, “My God, why have you forsaken me?” The words spoke deeply to the despairing feelings of being exiled from Germany and they became the impetus for his idea of god-forsakenness being intrinsic to the faith journey.¹³ In these dying words Moltmann discovered the foundation for developing what would become the first pole of his dialectical ‘theology of contradiction’.

⁹ Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology : Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*. 3.

¹⁰ Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz, *The Kingdom and the Power : The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann* (London: SCM, 2000). 16

¹¹ Jürgen Moltmann, "Wrestling with God: A Personal Meditation," *The Christian Century*, no. (1997), <http://www.highbeam.com/library/docfreeprint.asp?docid=1G1:19721002&ctrlInfo=Round20%3AMode20b%3ADocFree%3APrint&print=yes>.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Müller-Fahrenholz, *The Kingdom and the Power : The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*. 17.

As he reflects on the three years in the Norton camp nearly 40 years later he recalls:

. . . I lost all hope. . . . We were broken men, some of us fell sick during that time and died out of hopelessness. *But I myself was gripped by a new hope which enabled me to survive.* That hope was the hope of Christ, to which some Christian fellow prisoners testified in conversations with me.¹⁴

Seeing the power that hope had over his previously hopeless life made hope a central object of his theological enterprise from that moment on. He would later see this process as analogous to the death and resurrection of Christ.

A third story provides insight into the second pole in his dialectic. He recalls meeting with his enemy at the first international Student Christian Movement conference in Swanwick, 1947. He was part of a group of POWs that had been invited and he recalls arriving with fear and trembling . . . his shame still dominant though he had found hope in Christ. He recalls, "We were welcomed as brothers in Christ . . ." A group of Dutch students then asked to speak with them officially and told them that "Christ was the bridge on which they could cross". They still shared their stories of Gestapo terror and destruction of their homes¹⁵. I suspect Moltmann's recollection of that detail springs from his understanding of theology and biography being inextricably intertwined. This first hand experience of the reconciliatory nature of the Gospel and person of Christ turned his life upside down.¹⁶

These experiences are what he calls his "first *locus theologicus*, and at the deepest depths of my soul, they have remained so."¹⁷

PASTORATE

" . . . beneath the shell of the professor . . . the pastor is probably lurking, and he is compelled to preach, counsel, inspire, and comfort."¹⁸

¹⁴ Emphasis mine. Valle, "Communities of Faith and Radical Discipleship – an Interview with Jürgen Moltmann,"

¹⁵ Moltmann, "Wrestling with God: A Personal Meditation,"

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology : Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*. 4.

16 years had passed and, after studying for a number of years under Otto Weber, he and his wife became pastors at the Reformed congregation of Bremen-Wasserhorst. This is where he began to “know *the theology of the people*, in their struggles for their families and efforts to make ends meet, in their memories of their dead, and in their anxieties about their children.”¹⁹ A new ‘hermeneutical circle’ grew out of this which was between the exposition of the text and the shared experience of the people. It became a shared theology of “believers and doubters, the oppressed and the consoled . . . I have been convinced if the common theology of all believers, and firmly believe that the remote and rarefied plain of pre academic theology is a desert.”²⁰ It was also during this time that their first child tragically died at birth.²¹ He was confronted by the suffering and the hope of the people he was ministering to.

Suffering it seems was a theme that could not be constrained to the horrors of war, but is a part of everyday life, as is hope during suffering. In sharing with the suffering of his ‘normal everyday space’ people, Moltmann encountered the need for a theology that mattered to them.

UNIVERSITY YEARS

A final chapter in his life before writing *Theology of Hope* was embarking on his academic career and this was in spite of a deep suspicion he felt toward the German Theological academy since they had during the *Gleichschaltung* submitted to the Third Reich. Already he was politically left-leaning and had strong reservations about Church and State partnerships, especially having seen Paul Tillich and Karl Barth dismissed from their posts for not supporting the state.²² He was encouraged to go to a state-independent

¹⁸ Conyers, *God, Hope, and History : Jürgen Moltmann and the Christian Concept of History*. 204.

¹⁹ Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology : Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*. 5.

²⁰ Ibid. 5.

²¹ Müller-Fahrenholz, *The Kingdom and the Power : The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*. 28.

²² Ibid. 28–29.

university called the Kirchliche Hochschule²³. Now in 1958, he was able to teach in a church-oriented academic institution without any political hindrances and became increasingly inclined toward the political left.²⁴

Because of this freedom he and Wolfhart Pannenberg could express ideas that other German theological faculties could not where he says, “We were not obliged to pay reverence to any previous faculty. . . . In the established, time-honoured faculties, I might not have permitted myself this audacity.”²⁵ This freedom, combined with cynicism toward establishments, allowed him to express his thoughts independently, giving birth to the memes of *Theology of Hope*.

Two Key Ideas in *Theology of Hope*

BREAKING FREE FROM THE ACADEMY

While he was studying at Göttingen between 1948 and 1952, he was inspired by Otto Weber and his view on the Lord’s Supper where:

“The spatial interpretation of the happening of the Lord’s Supper is one-sided; for the primary problem is the problem of time.’ The presence of Christ in the feast is ‘the presence of the Coming One.’ The feast is ‘the first gleaming of the Eschaton’.”²⁶

In this statement are two of the key issues that *Theology of Hope* aims to deal with i.e. the idea of history not being interpreted correctly, and also the idea of hope, of the resurrection looking forward to the end.

Initially, as would be expected, Moltmann was heavily influenced by Barth²⁷ and takes his statement from 1921 as programmatic. “If Christianity be not altogether and unreservedly

²³ The school had been founded by the resisting Confessing Church in 1935 but closed the day after its opening.

²⁴ Müller-Fahrenholz, *The Kingdom and the Power : The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*. 29.

²⁵ Ibid. 7.

²⁶ Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology : Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*. 89-90.

²⁷ Christopher Morse, *The Logic of Promise in Moltmann's Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979).

eschatology, there remains in it no relationship whatever to Christ.”²⁸ In 1953, however, after being introduced to the Dutch theologian Arnold van Ruler, Moltmann was “freed from the impression that after Karl Barth there could no more be a new theology than there could be another philosophy after Hegel . . .”²⁹ The fact that Barth could be critiqued opened a whole new set of possibilities for Moltmann.

While Moltmann agreed in principle with Barth’s statement he questioned just what Barth meant by ‘eschatology’. Critiquing Bultmann and Althaus in the same way he saw that all of them were eschewing ‘transcendental eschatology’³⁰. Moltmann saw this eschatology as somewhat limited in scope and even suppressive³¹ as it forces eschatology into a non-specific ‘bonus package’ that has no bearing on our existence here and now. There can be no such thing as an intellectual knowledge of the ‘last things’, since these ‘objects . . . lie wholly beyond our field of vision’³².

It is a sentiment I can agree with having thought that the options were either an end times ‘joining the dots of history’ with heavy reliance on apocalyptic literature, or the safe option of acknowledging eschatology as part of our Christian landscape and it ‘will happen when it happens’. Transcendentally, eschatology does not necessitate anything but a speculative response from an individual since that future effectively occurs in another dimension. Moltmann suggests that the former is inadequate to ‘embrace the Easter appearance of the risen Lord [to the disciples].’ It in fact results in the risen Jesus having no further future or that he would necessitate any impact on the believers until they are risen too. In effect, history between now and the Eschaton becomes meaningless.³³

²⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope : On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, 1st Fortress Press ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993)., 39, quoting K. Barth, *Der Römerbrief* (2nd ed. 1922) :298 ; (ET by E.C. Hoskyns: *The Epistle to the Romans* (1933), 314.)

²⁹ Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology : Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*. 90.

³⁰ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*. 50–69.

³¹ Ibid. 40.

³² Ibid. 46, quoting I. Kant, *Zur Geschichtsphilosophie* (1784–1798) ed. A. Buchenau, (Berlin, 1947). 31.

³³ Ibid. 82.

Moltmann laments the resultant suppression of the voice of eschatology arguing that transcendentalism relies on the Greek thought of *logos* being an ‘epiphany of the present of being’ and hence revelation concentrates on the existing idea of *logos* and is measured against this. Moltmann wants us to critique the idea of revelation in terms of ‘what is to come’ and thus considers the real eschatological driving force, the “*promise* which has stamped the language, the hope and the experience of Israel.”³⁴ He elaborates:

Christian eschatology in the language of promise will . . . be an essential key to the unlocking of Christian truth. For the loss of eschatology—not merely as an appendix to dogmatics, but as the medium of theological thinking as such—has always been the condition that makes possible the adaptation of Christianity to its environment and, as a result of this, the self-surrender of faith.³⁵

The relationship of revelation to eschatology is important for Moltmann because our understanding of how God is revealed affects how we express mission.

Revelation, recognized as promise and embraced in hope, thus sets an open stage for history, and fills it with missionary enterprise and the responsible exercise of hope, accepting the suffering that is involved in the contradiction of reality, and setting out towards the promised future.³⁶

There is an inherent tension in promise between its vocalisation and its fulfilment. It is in this tension that we move forward, agitated³⁷ by hope and thrust into a steady momentum, participants in salvation history rather than its mere occupants. If God is revealed in his promise, Moltmann suggests that we will engage with His promises because they are promises for us. This provides the impetus both for mission and perseverance.

The intensification of eschatology propelled Moltmann to intuitively explore a new theological method where he subjected *everything* to its relationship to the end. As Stephen Williams says “

³⁴ Ibid. 41.

³⁵ Ibid. 41.

³⁶ Ibid. 86.

³⁷ Ibid. 324.

. . . it charged Christian theology with the task of conducting its entire reflection in the light of it and as an exploration of it.”³⁸

Bloch

There is debate over the role of Ernst Bloch’s *Principle of Hope* in contributing to *Theology of Hope*. Moltmann’s impassioned critique of the theological establishment might provide some context behind the accusation of Barth that *Theology of Hope* was simply ‘[Ernst] Bloch’s *Principle of Hope* baptised’.³⁹ Moltmann is very open about reading Bloch and being inspired by it so much that he couldn’t concentrate on anything else at the time,⁴⁰ but he maintains that there was a progression of theological events that led to *Theology of Hope*.⁴¹ *Principle of Hope* was a catalyst, but not the inspiration for *Theology of Hope* for after reading Bloch, Moltmann reflected with the important question, “Why has Christian theology allowed this topic of hope, which belongs so definitely to it, to be lost to it?”⁴²

Moltmann defends the contribution made by Bloch’s *Principle of Hope* with the following:

“From Bloch’s philosophy of hope I learned basic categories for [*Theology of Hope*], but without engaging with his atheism. I did not ‘baptize’ his *Principle of Hope*What I did do . . . was to initiate a deliberately parallel theological act. . . . my aim was to help the *hope* of modern times to come into its own, theologically speaking. I had no wish simply to write a theology *about* hope. My purpose was a theology *out of* hope—theology as

³⁸ Stephen Williams, *Jürgen Moltmann : A Critical Introduction* (Leicester: Theological Students Fellowship, 1987). 3.

³⁹ Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology : Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*. 92.

⁴⁰ Conyers, *God, Hope, and History : Jürgen Moltmann and the Christian Concept of History*. 207.

⁴¹ Barth’s comment, however, seems to have impacted Moltmann, as it still bears its sting in *Experiences of Theology* written some 35 years later. It wasn’t that it was an insult, But there was an element of condescension from Barth’s comment, as it undermined the significance of the quite separate biographical journey that built the foundations of *Theology of Hope*.

⁴² Conyers, *God, Hope, and History : Jürgen Moltmann and the Christian Concept of History*. 207.

eschatology, theology of the liberating kingdom of God in the world.”⁴³

Further to this in an interview with Miroslav Volf who asked the question, “Were do you see parallels and differences between Bloch’s book and your *Theology of Hope*?”, he replied

Commonality and parallels between the two books exist wherever Bloch thinks Jewish or messianic. . . . We clarified our differences once in this way: In [*Principles of Hope*], Bloch speaks of transcending, but without transcendence; in *Theology of Hope*, I speak of transcending with transcendence.⁴⁴

The point of difference between he and Bloch—which became more obvious as they diverged over time—is Bloch’s atheism i.e. first that there is a revelation from God, and second that this revelation is grounded in God’s promises throughout history. For Moltmann, promise and hope are woven into the fabric of eschatological history. Bloch has no eschatological horizon in the redemptive sense since his atheism cannot allow for this. His is a hope during existence, Moltmann’s is a hope encompassing existence.

VIEW OF HISTORY

Moltmann expends a great deal of effort in exploring the philosophy of history. His conclusion is that history is also about the future, that because of the nature of promise and hope, future is inherent in the past. And rather than the present be despairingly lodged between the past and the future (as Pascal envisioned⁴⁵), the present instead takes on a new positive mode as it anticipates what has been promised in the past. God’s promises “disclose the horizons of history”—where horizons are boundaries that move as the observer moves.⁴⁶

This is ultimately demonstrated in the contradiction of the cross and resurrection which he explores more fully in *The Crucified God*. Neither has meaning without the other—even the time in between has no meaning without the promise of the resurrection.

⁴³ Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology : Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*. 92–93.

⁴⁴ Valle, "Communities of Faith and Radical Discipleship – an Interview with Jürgen Moltmann," .

⁴⁵ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*. 18–19.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 106.

The anticipation, though perhaps lost on the disciples, held history to ransom and would have agitated the sealed fate of a crucifixion with the hope of the possibilities inherent in the resurrection. These contradictions provide the driving force for humanity. He concludes that the church in history should be animated by this contradiction saying that “a Christian concept of history takes the form of mission.”⁴⁷

Promise

At the heart of Theology of Hope is the idea of *promise*. Moltmann is here influenced by Gerhard von Rad and Ernst Käsemann⁴⁸ and their biblical theology though his starting point in his argument is from Victor Maag’s observation that “Nomadic religion is a religion of promise. The nomad does not live with the cycle of seedtime and harvest, but in the world of migration. . . . Here existence is felt as history.”⁴⁹ Though he sees Israel in a different category to the nomad as they are promised a land to which they will settle, Moltmann shows that the ‘nomadic’ became subordinate to the promises of God with the result that “Land and life are . . . understood as a piece of history in the vast course of the history of promise.”⁵⁰

All too aware of this a potentially utopian understanding of the promises of God, especially when the Bible records Israel’s national history as replete with disappointment and apparent lack of fulfilment of God’s promises, Moltmann explains the peculiar characteristics of the promises of God i.e. neither the unfulfilled or fulfilled promises were ‘liquidated’, rather they were given “a constantly new and wider interpretation.”⁵¹ So fulfilment is not the main concern of God’s promise, it is His revelation within that promise. He suggests that disappointment experienced through lack of a promise’s fulfilment results from “regarding the promise as a

⁴⁷ Conyers, *God, Hope, and History : Jürgen Moltmann and the Christian Concept of History*. 87.

⁴⁸ Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology : Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*. xxi.

⁴⁹ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope.*, 97, quoting V. Maag, ‘Malkût Jhwh’, *VT Suppl.* VII (Congress Volume: Oxford, 1959). 139.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 104.

legal abstraction apart from the God who promises.”⁵² Ultimately this idea of revelation as promise will “draw us onwards—not upwards—into situations that are not yet finalised but still outstanding.”⁵³

Finally his conclusion to the importance of promise:

The God who is present in his promises is for the human spirit an object in the sense that he stands opposed to . . . the human spirit until a reality is created and becomes knowable which wholly accords with his promises and can be called ‘very good’. Hence it is not our experiences which make faith and hope, but it is *faith and hope* that make experiences and bring the human spirit to an ever new and restless transcending of itself.⁵⁴

If this is true, then it follows that Moltmann would turn his attention to the material expression of this, namely the church—and in a broad ecumenical sense as we already see Moltmann’s resistance to the formalised institutions of church.

EXODUS CHURCH

In *Theology of Hope* all aspects of Christianity are filtered through his eschatological view and in the final chapter Moltmann’s critique of church and its place in society is relentless. Throughout the book he has demonstrated that the history and identity of the ‘people of God’ are tightly woven with the promises and revelations of God and this chapter pragmatically addresses all that he has explored. Focussing on “the reality of Christianity as that of the ‘pilgrim people of God’” he raises the question “What does it mean for the social shape of Christianity in ‘modern society and for the task it has there to fulfil in the field of social ethics?’”⁵⁵ In order to answer this question Moltmann reclaims a Reformation understanding of the location of church *also* being outside the limits of a congregational gathering and in the normal spaces⁵⁶ in which we inhabit, hence,

⁵² Ibid. 105.

⁵³ Ibid. 118.

⁵⁴ *Emphasis mine*. Ibid. 120.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 304.

⁵⁶ “We must follow the Reformation, and especially Luther, in speaking of ‘Christianity’ as represented in ‘church’ and ‘congregation’ and in Christians at their worldly callings.” Ibid. 304.

‘Everyone who believes and hopes is *vocatus* and has to offer his life in the service of God, in the work of his kingdom and the freedom of faith.’⁵⁷

Moltmann takes strong exception to what he perceived as the impotence of his contemporary western church. Throughout WWII, the Church in Germany had separated into two strands where the state church was amalgamated through the *Gleichschaltung* and the Confessing church rose in resistance to it. How could the prophetic engagement of the church with society have had such little impact on a nation that was rapidly becoming an oppressive regime? Where was its voice? Ought the church and a state which demanded distortions of Christian fundamentals coexist harmoniously?⁵⁸ He claims this is possible as a result of a privatisation of faith which is an inevitable product of modernisation where society banished faith into the private and individual spheres of life in order to emancipate itself from it. He observes that “this faith is in the literal sense socially irrelevant, because it stands in the social no-man’s-land of the unburdening of the individual—that is, in a realm which materialist society has already left free to human individuality in any case.”⁵⁹

Faith is rendered impotent because its voice lacks authority in the public arena. If there was once a time when religion had a voice, it was when religion was part of the social fabric. But now relegated to being about ‘the saving and preserving of personal, individual and private humanity’⁶⁰ its authority was subordinated to the authority of the *individual* giving voice—the strength of the prophetic is reduced to the perceived strength of the prophet.

We can sense the passion in Moltmann’s writing as he speaks prophetically to the ‘pilgrim people’, informing what he perceives to be the mandate of the church which is “not to serve mankind in order that this world may remain what it is . . . but in order that it may transform itself and become what it is promised to be.”⁶¹ Probably spurred on by the inaction of the church during the *Gleichschaltung* he says “ . . . no-one who was so ill treated as my generation was—shipped off to war for nothing but to die

⁵⁷ Ibid. 330.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 304.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 314.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 311.

⁶¹ Ibid. 327.

senselessly—can find peace in the ivory tower of an unpolitical scientific enterprise.”⁶² The church is to be an agitator in society to prevent it from stagnating:

The world is not yet finished, but is understood as engaged in a history. It is therefore the world of possibilities, the world in which we can serve the future, promised truth and righteousness and peace. This is an age of *diaspora*, of sowing in hope, of self-surrender and sacrifice, for it is an age which stands within the horizon of a new future. . . . The glory of self-realization and the misery of self-estrangement alike arise from hopelessness in a world of lost horizons. To disclose to it the horizon of the future of the crucified Christ is the task of the Church. . . . Hope alone keeps life—including public, social life—flowing and free.⁶³

At the same time as challenging the church at his time these words ring true for us today. Moltmann saw that the church was at odds with the privatisation imposed on religion by modernity and urged the church to resist this. He charges them with seeing themselves as an exodus people, seeking the promises of God to move us in the nature of Hebrews 13.13–14 : “Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.”⁶⁴ This wilderness we find ourselves in is not the time to give up hope and worship elsewhere, God is not dead, or removed, rather we are existing in the tension of his unfulfilled eschatological promise. We must move forward and agitate society to do the same.

Perhaps he was riding the optimism of the revolutions in the 60’s believing that there was at least some sense where his hope may come true, but as he says himself: the decade began with Vatican II; the civil rights movement in the USA was at ‘its zenith’; socialism with a human face rising in Czechoslovakia; and the ecumenical movement was making progress—it seemed like there was a trajectory toward something better : “Much became possible in that decade that had previously been thought impossible. By 1968, we were bitterly disappointed in many of these hopes.”⁶⁵

⁶² Conyers, *God, Hope, and History : Jürgen Moltmann and the Christian Concept of History*. 204.

⁶³ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*. 338.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 304.

⁶⁵ Conyers, *God, Hope, and History : Jürgen Moltmann and the Christian Concept of History*. 208.

As a result this disappointment but in the spirit of hope, he collaborated with Johann Baptist Metz and worked on the idea of a *Political Theology*, with a view, not to politicise the church, but rather to “Christianise church politics and the politics of Christians”.⁶⁶ This movement later became the foundation of Liberation theology when it was embraced by Latin America. And it was during the beginnings of this movement, that he wrote *The Crucified God*.

Conclusion

With *Theology of Hope* . . . I tried to present the Christian hope no longer as such an “opium of the beyond” but rather as the divine power that makes us alive in this world.⁶⁷

As well as injecting the 20th century theological landscape with this fresh eschatological perspective *Theology of Hope* has endured both the rigours of time and vigorous debate to remain one of the more significant theological books of its era. A new view on eschatology was needed and this provided the framework for this to happen with the resulting impact being seen in the development of Black theology, Latin American liberation theology, Feminist theology and Minjung theology (to identify but a few) simply because, through eschatology, the church reclaims it’s position as a socially responsible political agent. For he dreams that the church would ‘bear the cross of the present in our discipleship and seek therein the liberation of humankind, which is the goal of God.’⁶⁸

But his contribution is not limited to eschatology and politics, but also provides a new paradigm within which to do theology i.e. using one theme to interrogate the rest of theology. And though he sees that there are weaknesses in this approach he persevered to great effect in *The Crucified God* and to lesser effect in *The Trinity and the Kingdom*.⁶⁹ He acknowledges that his method means “that

⁶⁶ Ibid. 217

⁶⁷ Jürgen Moltmann et al., *Love : The Foundation of Hope : The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann and Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988). 4.

⁶⁸ Williams, *Jürgen Moltmann : A Critical Introduction*. 2.

⁶⁹ By his own admission in Conyers. Conyers, *God, Hope, and History : Jürgen Moltmann and the Christian Concept of History*. 212.

one must accept overemphases, but it also means that new light falls on the other elements of theology.”⁷⁰

I have laboured on Moltmann’s biography for the single reason that this is his self-confessed primary theological context, his academic endeavours are born out of an intellectual analysis of his grief and hope. It is for this reason that I see *Theology of Hope* as an exodus not only from the theological establishments and what he sees as impotent ecclesiological bodies but also from the despairing memories of the war—in a sense this book is his response to these things. Through his own dark journey and observation of the very real impact hope can have on a person he has forced theology back to the ground level where it needs to be accessed the most. His theology, though not explicit until the final chapter of *Theology of Hope*, becomes a theology for the people with urging the church to a fuller engagement with a society that cries out for hope but merely settles for distractions.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 212.

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