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The Universal Future of the Risen Christ

A Study on the Development of Jürgen Moltmann's Eschatology

Den uppståndne Kristus universella framtid

En studie om utvecklingen av Jürgen Moltmanns eskatologi

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Abstract

This thesis is a study on the development of the German theologian Jürgen Moltmann's understanding of eschatology. Eschatology is often described as 'the doctrine of last things' but Moltmann considers this to be a mistaken point of view, rather he claims that eschatology is the 'doctrine of the Christian hope'. This hope is according to Moltmann based on the belief that Christ was raised from the dead and that his resurrection unveils the universal future of the whole cosmos. This is the foundation in Moltmann's chain of logic and throughout this thesis I will demonstrate how he develops this notion in relation to his belief in a God who suffers with the victims in this world.

Keywords: Jürgen Moltmann, religion, theology, eschatology, process, apocalyptic, relation, Jesus, crucifixion, critical theory, resurrection, hope, kingdom of God, body of Christ, communal identity, universalism, cosmological, historical, ecology.

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Introduction

Background

My interest in the theology of Jürgen Moltmann stems from my previous studies of his former student Miroslav Volf.¹ During the time I spent reading Volf's theology it became more and more obvious to me that much of what he expresses is worked out in relation to Moltmann's theological understanding. That is not to say that the two are in complete agreement with each other but Moltmann's influence on Volf's theology is indisputable. What further made my attention turn toward Moltmann's theology was the fact that he has written extensively on the subject of hope from a perspective that does not shy away from taking the crises of his own context into consideration, rather he attempts to interpret the Christian faith through the lens of the apparent Godforsakenness of the world. These factors combined appealed to me since I truly appreciated Volf's theology and because the horizon of world history appears rather dark if we contemplate what the future holds in light of our environmental issues, the constant threat of terror and war, financial crisis, economical injustices, and so on. These crises are real and undeniable and they pose the question to us whether there is hope for a better world, or in more radical terms, if there is hope for a future world at all. These questions led me to develop an interest for Moltmann's 'theology of hope' and thus his eschatological understanding which as we will see sets the framework for his reasoning.

Purpose

My purpose is to examine the development of Moltmann's understanding of eschatology by comparing his two books *Theology of Hope* (1964) and *The Coming of God – Christian Eschatology* (1995). My perspective will be that of a theologian and I will present a conclusion that highlights what the books have in common and what sets them apart from each other.

¹ Gustafsson, Josef, "Omfammandets Teologi – En studie av Miroslav Volfs teologiska politik", Göteborg, 2011.

Thus, the question I will set out to answer is this one: *What are the significant developments of Moltmann's eschatological understanding that can be deduced from a comparative reading of Theology of Hope and The Coming of God?*

Choice of Literature and Earlier Research

As already mentioned, the primary literature that I will use is Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* and *The Coming of God*. I will in addition to these books use other literature written by Moltmann and a number of other scholars with a specific interest for Moltmann's theology, among them Richard Bauckham, Miroslav Volf and my own professor Arne Rasmusson.

As I briefly mentioned above, I came to Moltmann's theology via Volf who is a former student of Moltmann. Much of what Volf has to say about Moltmann's thinking is affirmative but his work is not focused on explicitly discussing Moltmann's writings, rather Moltmann's theology functions as a theoretical framework for Volf's theological reasoning. However, there are some significant differences between Volf and Moltmann. In the book *God Will Be All in All* (edited by Bauckham) Volf directs a critique against Moltmann's millenarian understanding that, as we will see, proves to be important for this present thesis. I will discuss this in more detail further on but it is worth mentioning that I believe that Volf consciously attempts to write a theology that takes the weaknesses he sees in Moltmann's theology into consideration. Notably this can be seen in Volf's book *Exclusion and Embrace* in which he goes head to head with the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze in order to counter the claim that the Christian faith is oppressive in nature.² From my perspective this is important because it provides context to the critique Volf directs at Moltmann's theology.

Perhaps the most well known interpreter of Moltmann's theology is Bauckham and for that reason I have felt compelled to allow for him to be heard in this thesis. However, Bauckham is not particularly helpful when it comes to analyzing Moltmann's standpoints since he is more approving of Moltmann than most other scholars. The one who stands out as a critical voice is Rasmusson who in *The Church as Polis* articulates a

² Volf, Miroslav. *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*. Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1996, s. 286-305.

critique against some of Moltmann's most foundational assumptions. Hence the difference between Rasmusson on the one side, and Volf and Bauckham on the other, is that Rasmusson does not accept Moltmann's way of doing theology while Volf and Bauckham tends to critique Moltmann's thinking from within his own theological framework.

What Rasmusson reacts against in regards to Moltmann's theology is that it is spelled out for the purpose of mediating the relevancy of the Christian faith to the modern situation. For Moltmann this ultimately means that his mission as a theologian is to demonstrate to his contemporary society that Christian practice is relevant in the struggle for justice, peace and the integrity of the creation.³ This approach is worked out from the belief that politics is the only viable instrument by which we can control and change the future. Hence, according to Rasmusson, the political horizon is for Moltmann the necessary frame for theology.⁴ He explains that this way of writing theology is a result of Moltmann's understanding that the society is a human and historical project that aims to realize 'the future kingdom of freedom' and he goes on by saying that Moltmann 'wants to write a contextualized and side taking theology'. According to Rasmusson this is deeply problematic for a number of reasons and I will throughout this thesis use his critique in order to analyze the development of Moltmann's eschatology. Particularly important for the purpose of this thesis is that Rasmusson perceives an inherent tension in Moltmann's thinking over time. This tension, he claims, becomes visible as Moltmann starts to consider the issue of ecology since he then also begins to questions the primacy of history, which he affirmed in his early theology. The tension Rasmusson points to come into sight since this shift does not seem to have any significant effect on Moltmann's political hermeneutics.⁵ It should be mentioned that Moltmann addressed the ecological crisis as early as 1985 in the book *God in Creation (The Gifford Lectures, 1984-1985)*⁶, however ecology is one of the main topics in *The Coming of God* and also in his latest book *Ethics of Hope* and I will therefore look to these

³ Rasmusson, Arne. *The Church as Polis – From political Theology to Theological Politics as Exemplified by Jürgen Moltmann and Stanley Hauerwas*. Lund University Press, Lund, 1994, s. 43.

⁴ Ibid., s. 44.

⁵ Ibid., s. 45-46, 49.

⁶ Moltmann, Jürgen, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*. SCM Press, London, 1985.

books rather than *God in Creation* when addressing this issue.

God in Creation was the second book in Moltmann's later theological project that he labelled as his 'contribution to theology'. This project marks a shift in his approach to theology and in it he makes the claim that the concept of truth is, in Rasmusson's terms, poetic, holistic and participatory. Rasmusson claims that this shift generated further tension to Moltmann's theology since, as already noted, his political hermeneutics presupposes that theology is about mediating the relevancy of the Christian faith to the modern situation.⁷ This can be exemplified by what Moltmann writes in his book *History and the Triune God: Contributions to Trinitarian Theology* (1991) in which he declares that his concern is not primarily to be right but to be contextually relevant.⁸ He thus re-affirms his political hermeneutics as the proper way of doing theology while he at the same time subscribes to a concept of truth as poetic, holistic and participatory. Moltmann believes that these conceptions complement each other but Rasmusson argues that he does not say too much about *how* they complement each other.⁹

Theoretical and Methodological Reflections

Throughout my study of Moltmann's theology I will theoretically assume a hermeneutical approach that acknowledges the apparent difficulties that the interpretation of texts implies. I do not spell this out for the purpose of excusing my own interpretation but in order to disclose an awareness of my own limitations and how this will effect the interpretations and thus the conclusions that I will present. My initial claim is that every interpreter approaches a text from his or her particular perspective and that our various perspectives unavoidably will effect our interpretations since the sense of a text, at least in part, is produced as we read it.¹⁰ Hence our previous knowledge and our prejudices will effect how we perceive the sense of a text. From this follows the recognition that I cannot assume coherence between various interpretations of Moltmann's theology since every reader approaches his texts from their particular

⁷ Rasmusson, Arne. 1994, s. 57.

⁸ Moltmann, Jürgen, *History and the Triune God: Contributions to Trinitarian Theology*. SCM Press, London, 1991, s. 167.

⁹ Rasmusson, Arne. 1994, s. 57.

¹⁰ Jeanrond, Werner. *Theological Hermeneutics – Development and Significance*. Macmillan Press Ltd, London, 1991, s. 1.

perspectives and with their unique prejudices. Further it must be mentioned that we cannot read a text with the presupposition that our interpretation will reflect the intentions of the author. That is not to say that the author's intentions is not important for a text's sense but that it is impossible for any interpreter to reach into the authors mind through the text in order to detect the intentions behind the words. Rather I claim that the author's intentions must be considered as they become visible within the text (or texts) that one reads. For this very reason I have chosen to include Moltmann's autobiography *A Broad Place* for the purpose of making my interpretation of the theology he intended to communicate more informed. Still, this text needs to be interpreted as well, which leads me to the conclusion that my interpretation has certain limitations and that a more extensive study of Moltmann's life and writings *might* result in a different interpretation. To be clear, my theoretical approach does not make the claim that all interpretations of Moltmann's theology therefore are of equal validity, rather that the quality of our interpretations must by determined by how informed they are and not by how they correspond to some objective interpretation since no one has access to an objective perspective. To bring these brief reflections to a conclusion I would like to make the claim that an informed interpretation must take into consideration the unavoidable difficulties mentioned above and also that it should be passed on to others in the form of articulate thought. In light of this I believe that it is correct to say that no interpretation is final and that we therefore are wise not to treat them as such.

By using this approach as my initial point of departure I will set out to study Moltmann's theology descriptively, analytically and comparatively. I will first turn to *Theology of Hope* since it was published before *The Coming of God*. I am looking to follow a chronological line to articulate not simply my interpretation of the texts but also important developments in Moltmann's thinking between the two publications with the aim of clarifying not only how Moltmann has developed his eschatological thinking but also why. The parts where I intend to put forth the content of the main books will be primarily descriptive but I will end each part with an analytic discussion in which I will involve critical opinions by the scholars listed in the previous section. Each part will end with concluding remarks to set the scene for my final chapter that will contain a final conclusion of the thesis as a whole.

The Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann

Introducing Moltmann: 1926-1964

Moltmann was born 8 April 1926 and he grew up together with his parents and three siblings in the village Volksdorf outside of Hamburg. His upbringing was not particularly religious and his family only attended one church service every year, at Christmas Eve.¹¹ In February 1943, Moltmann was conscripted into the German army and he was stationed together with the rest of the boys from his school with the Alster anti-aircraft battery in Schwanenwieck. He writes about this experience in his autobiography *A Broad Place* and how he was placed together with his friend Gerhard Schopper on the firing platform. 24 July 1943 the English instigated what they called 'Operation Gomorrah' which was to become the first destruction of a major German city. Moltmann describes how the attack lasted for nine days and how it ended with his friend Schopper being torn to pieces when a bomb hit the platform on which they were both standing. Moltmann received a few splinter wounds but did not suffer any severe physical injuries from the explosion. Psychologically though, it effected him greatly and he writes how he later that night cried out to God for the first time. He explains how he did not ask 'why does God allow for this to happen?', rather he echoed Jesus' cry from the cross; 'my God, where are you?'.¹²

Moltmann's experience of the war was intensified in July 1944 when he was called up to fight for the German army at the front. However, his time as a soldier did not last for very long as he gave himself up to the English in February 1945 and subsequently became a prisoner of war incarcerated in Belgium.¹³

When the war ended 8 May 1945, Moltmann was moved from Belgium to Scotland and this is where his religious journey truly began. An army chaplain handed him a Bible and soon after he read the words uttered by Jesus on the cross: 'My God my God why

¹¹ Kennedy, Philip. *Twentieth Century Theologians – New Introduction to Modern Christian Thought*. L.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2010, London, s. 193-194.

¹² Moltmann, Jürgen, *A Broad Place: An Autobiography*. SCM Press, 2007, London, Kindle 380.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Kindle 538.

have you forsaken me'. These words resonated with him because he could see in Jesus someone who had experienced the same existential agony as him. Almost 60 years after this event took place he wrote

This early companionship with Jesus, the brother in suffering and the companion on the road to the land of freedom, has never left me since, and I became more and more assured of it. I have never decided for Christ once and for all, as is often demanded of us. I have decided again and again in specific terms for the discipleship of Christ when situations were serious and it was necessary. But right down to this day, after almost 60 years, I am certain that then in 1945, and there, in the Scottish prisoners of war camp, in the dark pit of my soul, Jesus sought me and found me'.¹⁴

Later Moltmann was transferred to England and the 'Norton Camp' where he was allowed to study theology. This was where he decided to become a theologian and after he was released from his imprisonment in 1948, he enrolled at the university in Göttingen where he stayed till 1953.¹⁵

The following years Moltmann worked as a reformed pastor but soon after completing his *habilitationsschrift* in 1957 he went on to begin teaching in the Kirchliche Hochschule in Wuppertal.¹⁶ Moltmann writes that the most significant event during his years in Wuppertal was his meeting with the Jewish Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch in 1960.¹⁷ One year before this event took place Moltmann had read Bloch's book *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* and it made a great impression on him. Later he has written that

Bloch is the only German philosopher for centuries who quotes the Bible extensively and knowledgeably, and in his own way proves himself to be a good theologian of what he calls 'the religion of the Exodus and the Kingdom'.¹⁸

Moltmann was inspired by Bloch's philosophy of hope but he claims that he never intended to follow Bloch, rather he set out to search for a 'theological parallel act to

¹⁴ Ibid., Kindle 30.

¹⁵ Moltmann, Jürgen. *A Broad Place*, refererad i Kennedy, Philip. *Twentieth Century Theologians – New Introduction to Modern Christian Thought*. L.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2010, London, s. 194-196.

¹⁶ <http://www.giffordlectures.org/Author.asp?AuthorID=217> (2012-09-09)

¹⁷ Moltmann, Jürgen. 2007, Kindle 1429.

¹⁸ Ibid., Kindle 1443.

[Bloch's] atheistic principle of hope on the basis of the promissory history of the old covenant and the resurrection history of the new'.¹⁹

Theology of Hope

Introduction

Moltmann stepped onto the theological scene in the 1960s as a result of the publication of *Theology of Hope*. This was a time in history that was characterized by its strong optimism regarding the possibilities of modernity; the rapid scientific and technological development was believed to lead humanity forward without any limitations, thus it was a time when utopian thinkers were considered as the prophets of the day.²⁰ The theology Moltmann presented was no different and it was an attempt to bridge Christianity with modernity. In *The Church as Polis* Rasmusson uses a quote by Moltmann that Rasmusson claims summarizes Moltmann's approach to theology:

Christian theology has the task of relating the Christian tradition and message critically and therapeutically to this modern situation, for only in that way can it communicate the tradition of Christian faith.²¹

Moltmann himself writes in the essay "Hope and Reality: Contradiction and Correspondence" that he had a revolutionary Christianity in mind when he wrote *Theology of Hope*; a Christianity that 'would turn the wretched condition of the world into what was good, just and living by virtue of its hope'. Hence, *Theology of Hope* was according to Moltmann an attempt to sustain this revolutionary Christianity with a political theology of resistance.²² Rasmusson explains that Moltmann was not simply trying to preserve the Christian message but he also attempted to make it present. This implies, he says, that the Christian message needs to be translated.²³

¹⁹ Ibid., Kindle 1440.

²⁰ Rasmusson, Arne. 1994, s. 11.

²¹ Ibid., s. 42-43.

²² Moltmann, Jürgen, "Hope and Reality: Contradiction and Correspondence" in Bauckham, Richard [ed]. *God will be all in all – The Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann*. First Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2001, s. 78

²³ Rasmusson, Arne. 1994, s. 43-44.

The strong belief in limitless possibilities for the future during the 1960s implies that nature no longer was considered as the horizon for what is possible. Instead the cultural trend was to perceive history as human made. Rasmusson writes that Moltmann therefore did not see any other option but to free the church from its strong ties to nature.²⁴ This is, as we will see, one of the more prominent themes in *Theology of Hope*. The 'open future' that Moltmann proposes is not understood as a result of history or present possibilities, rather he suggests that this future is promised and achieved by God's raising of Christ from the dead. Rasmusson writes that it is this 'history of promise' that Moltmann wanted to mediate to the modern experience of the world.

Theology of Hope was published in 1964 with the German title *Theologie der Hoffnung* and the first English edition became available for readers in 1967. Moltmann writes that his theology of hope grew out of a discussion between himself and the other editors of the periodical *Evangelische Theologie*. This discussion took place between 1958 and 1964 and its main concern was the way history should be understood: 'Is reality experienced as history in the context of God's promises, which awakens human hopes? Or is history based on the historical nature of personal human existence?' The goal of the editor's discussion was to move beyond the general existentialism of the time so to make available future perspectives in the quest for a world of peace.²⁵

Moltmann starts out in *Theology of Hope* by establishing his understanding that the actual meaning of eschatology is 'the doctrine of the Christian hope'. This hope, he says, is a result of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and this leads him to understand eschatology as the doctrine of Christ and his future. This is for Moltmann the foundation for theology as a whole and he explains that this hope is a forward looking and forward moving hope that should not be understood as one element of Christianity, but as the medium of the Christian faith as such. What this amounts to is a conclusion that contributes enormously to Moltmann's theological understanding, namely that eschatology should be considered as the beginning of theology, rather than its end. What this means is that the future of the crucified Christ is possible as a result of his resurrection and Moltmann's interpretation of this event is that all statements and judgments about Christ must entail something of the future that can be expected as a

²⁴ Ibid., s. 50.

²⁵ Moltmann, Jürgen. *Theology of Hope*. First Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1993, s. 8.

result of it. Hence he writes that Christian theology must be articulated as a hope for a hidden future, a new hope that has been made possible because of the resurrection of Christ.²⁶ There is a clear distinction in Moltmann's thought between this hope and any hope that might spring out of the experiences of the existing reality since the former cannot be conformed by a given existential situation. Rather it is brought into conflict with the existing reality and as a result it creates the conditions needed for the possibility of new experiences.²⁷ Hope is in this sense 'the expectation of those things which faith has believed to have been promised by God'. Hence the resurrection of Christ opened up new possibilities within the world, possibilities promised by God, and while faith believes them, hope expects them. The effect of this hope is, according to Moltmann, not simply 'consolation *in* suffering, but also the protest of the divine promise *against* suffering.'²⁸

In this way he explains how the hope made accessible through Christ's resurrection draws the believer into the life of love and effectively help reshape the believer's understanding of human nature, history and society. The Christian hope is therefore ultimately perceived as directed towards a *novum ultimum* – 'towards a new creation of all things by the God of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.' Hence we can see that Moltmann understands the resurrection of Christ to point ahead towards a new creation of all things and in this way he offers an eschatological perspective for our current existential situation that embraces all things. This perspective, he suggests, can direct our lives as we live in a world that contradicts the Christian hope.²⁹

Cracking Transcendental Eschatology Open

In Moltmann's account, Immanuel Kant is the one philosopher that is put forth as a representative for the classical form of transcendental philosophy. Kant's claim was that it is inconceivable that there could be any intellectual knowledge of the 'last things' since these 'objects [...] lie wholly beyond our field of vision'.³⁰ Kant argued therefore that any ideas of the 'last things' must be obtained by the use of practical reason and thus he

²⁶ Ibid., s. 16-17.

²⁷ Ibid., s. 18.

²⁸ Ibid., s. 20-21.

²⁹ Ibid., s. 33.

³⁰ Ibid., s. 46.

reduced 'eschatology' to 'morality'. Moltmann therefore writes that Kant's view excludes 'hope' as a valid category within the framework of eschatological reasoning.³¹

The revelation of God can neither be presented within the framework of the reflective philosophy of transcendental subjectivity, for which history is reduced to the 'mechanism' of a closed system of causes and effects, nor can it be presented in the anachronism of a theology of saving history [...] Rather, the essential thing will be to make these abstract products of the modern denial of history fluid once more, and to understand them as forms assumed in history by the spirit in the course of an eschatological process which is kept in hope and in motion by the promise grounded in the cross and the resurrection of Christ.³²

What Moltmann means by this is that 'time' as a category should be understood as history experienced from the eschatological future.

With the early dialectical theologians at the beginning of the 20th century came the transcendental eschatology of Kant to be fused with a dialectic understanding of time and eternity, which resulted in the understanding that the *eschaton* constitutes the boundary for this dialectical movement.³³ Karl Barth's theological interpretation of this dialectic meant that the revelation of God must be understood as an 'eternal presence of God in time, a present without any future'.³⁴ According to Moltmann, this view amounts to an eschatological understanding in complete deprivation of a *telos* within history. When considering the theology of Rudolf Bultmann, Moltmann writes that

Eschatology has wholly lost its sense as a goal of history, and is in fact understood as the goal of the individual human being. [Hence] the *logos* of the *eschaton* becomes the power of liberation from history...³⁵

Moltmann's point is that when Christian faith uses the Kantian concepts as its framework, then the message of hope is ultimately replaced by a Gnostic longing for redemption of the individual soul, which is understood to be imprisoned in the self-contained system of this world.³⁶

Moltmann's Christological approach leads him to recognize the resurrection of Jesus

³¹ Ibid., s. 47.

³² Ibid., s. 50.

³³ Ibid., s. 51.

³⁴ Ibid., s. 57.

³⁵ Ibid., s. 62.

³⁶ Ibid., s. 69.

Christ as the foundation for the Christian hope because he understands it to have revealed the future of the risen Christ and thus the hidden future of all things. His claim is therefore, as already mentioned, that the Christian hope is directed towards a new creation. The reason for this conclusion is that he understands the resurrection of Jesus as both a 'foretaste' and a 'promise' of his future, guaranteed by the faithfulness of God.³⁷

The God of Promise

Moltmann sets out to motivate his understanding by appealing to the Old Testament and its depiction of God as the 'God of promise'. He contrasts the God of promise with the Greek view of 'epiphany' by accentuate that Israel initially is portrayed as a nomadic people and that they later on keep their understanding of the God of the promise although they settle in Palestine after the time in the wilderness. What Moltmann finds so remarkable is that the tribes of Israel continued to view the present as 'unfulfilled' and themselves to be still moving towards 'new horizons' even when they were geographically at a stand still.³⁸ His claim is that the Old Testament reveals a people with a 'religion of expectation' for that which does not yet exist. Thus, he explains that the Israelites expectations for the divine promise did not depend on present possibilities, rather it was perceived as possible because the God of promise, who can create what is 'new' out of nothing, gave it to them.³⁹ Hence Moltmann points out that the Israelite's belief in the God of promise provided them with an understanding of reality as moving towards the promise:

It is not evolution, progress and advance that separate time into yesterday and tomorrow, but the word of promise cuts into events and divide reality into one reality which is passing ... and another which must be expected and sought.⁴⁰

Moltmann's claim is that this awareness led the people of Israel to experience reality as a tension between the uttering and the redeeming of the promise, and the result is that the Old Testament provides us with a view of reality as 'history'.⁴¹ Israel lived by the promise and thus experienced reality as history. Although their wandering in the

³⁷ Ibid., s. 85.

³⁸ Ibid., s. 97.

³⁹ Ibid., s. 102-103.

⁴⁰ Ibid., s. 103.

⁴¹ Ibid., s. 106.

wilderness had come to a stop as they settled in Palestine, they kept the understanding that they were still moving towards the horizon of history by experiencing history, remembering the promise and expecting its fulfilment.⁴² What must be said here is that Moltmann's view of the future fulfilment as the horizon of history should be understood as 'a thing towards which we are moving, and which moves along with us'.⁴³

Consequently, he sees the revelations of God as promises that create new, historic and eschatological possibilities, or to use Moltmann's own terminology, God's revelation reveals 'new horizons for the future'.⁴⁴

From the Particular to the Universal

The fact that Jesus Christ was a Jew discloses, according to Moltmann, that the God revealed in him is the God of the Old Testament – the God with future as his essential nature. As a consequence, he contrasts the God revealed in Christ from the Greek understanding of God as 'eternal present of Being', the 'highest Idea' and the 'Unmoved mover'. He also asserts that God's being is not declared by the world as a whole but by Israel's history of promise, thus he gives an account for why he sees God's revelation as moving from the particular towards the universal and not the other way around. What this means is that the particular and historic events of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ should be understood as universal, not because the universal became particular but because the particular revealed the universal since it anticipates the universal eschatological horizon.⁴⁵ As I have previously stated, Moltmann interprets the resurrection as a 'foretaste' and a 'promise' of this universal horizon and that is the foundation for this conclusion. From this follows also the belief that the Christ-event has unmasked for us what 'true humanity' really is and it therefore places all who receives the eschatological promise of God in conflict with the world.⁴⁶ However, Moltmann does not believe that this conflict should result in an abandonment of the world in any sense, rather he says that the believer should live as a messenger of the hope that has been revealed in Christ, and as such also function as a critique against that which contradicts

⁴² Ibid., s. 107-109.

⁴³ Ibid., s. 106.

⁴⁴ Ibid., s. 112.

⁴⁵ Ibid., s. 141-142.

⁴⁶ Ibid., s. 142-143.

this hope in the world. Hence, faith becomes a resource meant to benefit the world since the one who shares in the Christ-event becomes a part of the message of hope.⁴⁷

Moltmann also includes a distinction regarding the historicity of Christ's resurrection into his argument. Christ's resurrection, he says, is historic because it creates history, not because it occurred in history. In other words, the resurrection revealed the future of God for the world and in so doing the resurrection is an invitation directed towards all people to participate in the eschatological process. The step into communion with Christ is therefore, as I stated before, the way for humanity to become truly human. It opens us up to the future and the *eschaton* of all things.⁴⁸ Thus, Moltmann claims, the future of God's promise can be viewed in a dialectical relationship with the Christ-event that moves history forward.⁴⁹

The Kingdom of God

If Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead, then the Kingdom of God can be nothing less than a *nova creatio*. If the risen Lord is the crucified Christ, then the Kingdom is *tectum sub cruce*.

These words of Moltmann reveal his understanding that the Kingdom of God is a new creation that will transform its citizens to embody the risen Lord. He is the King but his crown was made of thorns, a fact that turn things upside down and proclaim that 'the coming Lordship of God takes shape here in the suffering of the Christians, who because of their hope cannot be conformed to the world...'⁵⁰

Moltmann understands the act of 'new creation' to reveal that God is both the Reconciler and the Creator, hence he believe that the Christian anticipation of final reconciliation must include all things.⁵¹ The implications for the people of God is that they must be considered to be called to a life in the world in which they embody the life of Christ, and in so doing, lead the world which is subject to death towards its new beginning – the new creation. The cross, Moltmann says, should shape this life of

⁴⁷ Ibid., s. 163.

⁴⁸ Ibid., s. 181, 194-196.

⁴⁹ Ibid., s. 201.

⁵⁰ Ibid., s. 222.

⁵¹ Ibid., s. 223.

discipleship and its foundation – that which gives hope – is the promise of the one God of the coming Kingdom in which ‘God will be all in all’.⁵²

Eschatology of History

Moltmann claims that the French Revolution marks a time in history that changed the way we view history since it has since then ‘been experienced as a permanent state of crisis’. This statement is meant to describe how the nature of politics changed so that it is now perceived as the means by which we try to master the constant crises we encounter. Also, from this time in history and onwards the historical sciences has gone through a similar change that has resulted in that they now serves the purpose of making history comprehensible with the aim of controlling the chaotic reality we find ourselves in. What Moltmann attempts to express is that our present circumstances demands from us to either ‘bring the new experiences into harmony with the traditions of the past or to rid ourselves of the burden of the past...’ The consequence of this analysis is the conclusion that history is perceived as moving forward towards the ‘new world’ and that we no longer look to the past in order to bring back the ‘golden age’. This development, Moltmann claims, led the philosophers of history to criticize the present age by the light the not yet existing future sheds on it.⁵³ However, this not yet existing future is always understood as a result of present possibilities, which leads Moltmann to dismiss the whole notion because of its inherently conservative character. What he finds particularly problematic is its implicit logocentrism and the fact that the ‘new’ is measured according to the standard of the old order of life. He therefore writes that

If, however, the new factor is perceived in the crisis, and history is not regarded as a crisis of the existing order but is expected in the category of the future, then the horizon of illumination and expectation will have to be totally different.⁵⁴

Moltmann therefore moves his focus away from the philosophy of history towards eschatology of history with the purpose of preserving history as history rather than annihilating it altogether. His claim is that this move creates a possibility to perceive history as open.

⁵² Ibid., s. 222-224.

⁵³ Ibid., s. 232-234.

⁵⁴ Ibid., s. 260.

In the argument Moltmann put forth he contrasts the Greek philosophical understanding of history with the Judeo-Christian understanding of eschatology of history and explain that the two were fused together and can be clearly identified if one studies the modern, 19th century understanding of history.⁵⁵ He critiques the modern notion of history by claiming that it is a 'philosophic, enlightened millenarianism', which in effect means that its *telos* is the 'ending of history in history'. History is then seen as a totality in itself and the possibility or need to know or direct history is eliminated. The result of this view is according to Moltmann that present decisions in times of crises renders meaningless. History, he says, should be understood as both coming history and past history linked together by the forward moving history of promise and mission that was achieved and made visible through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.⁵⁶ Reality is then perceived as history and the effect is that we can understand the present by both what has been and by what is to come. Through this eschatological lens the horizon is still open and the future is becoming. The mission of the church is therefore to bear the promise towards the eschatological hope. Hence, for Moltmann 'the missionary direction is the only constant in history [...] for in the front-line of present mission new possibilities for history are grasped and inadequate realities in history left behind'.⁵⁷

Creative Discipleship

In the final chapter of *Theology of Hope* Moltmann sets out to deal with the concrete form of the eschatological hope in the modern society. With the term 'modern society' he refers to 'the society that has established itself with the rise of the modern industrial system' and he explain how this society has removed history (religion, culture, morality, tradition, et cetera) from its central sphere. Since the future of this society is not understood to depend on its origin it is perceived as emancipated from history and in Moltmann's view this divide has led the modern world into a state where it is run by a totalitarian system. The reason for this analysis is that the individual who lives within the system by necessity is identified as a 'citizen' who is required to participate in it as a force of labour.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Ibid., s. 261.

⁵⁶ Ibid., s. 264-265, 284.

⁵⁷ Ibid., s. 284.

⁵⁸ Ibid., s. 304-308.

Moltmann says that in the modern society the Church has lost its place as *cultus publicus* to now being understood as a *cultus privatus*. The Church has been removed from the public life since what matters in it are solely the social relationships of the industrial system. The Church therefore only functions as one out of many spaces within the private sphere where individuals can inwardly search for a way to preserve their private humanity.⁵⁹ This development, Moltmann claims, was a result of the modern metaphysic of subjecthood that originated in early idealism and was developed by Immanuel Hermann von Fichte. Faith was thus seen as part of man's ethical framework but it was removed from the larger framework of 'social behaviour and the self-contained rational laws of the economic circumstances in which he lives'. Consequently religious faith became impotent to criticize the systems of oppression and was rendered socially irrelevant.⁶⁰ Moltmann concludes that the Church's self understanding of its mission therefore could not be understood as a calling within the world.⁶¹

Consequently Moltmann argues for the Church to break free from this bondage so he writes that it must venture an exodus in order to establish itself as a community of believers that lives with a purpose different than what the societal structure subscribes to it. The task for the Church is then to establish an agenda separated from the rational and financial goals of the world if it desires to function in unity with the promise of God that was achieved and established by the resurrection of Christ. In order to accomplish this exodus Moltmann says that the Church must 'resist the institutional stabilizing of things by society in order to live within the horizon of the expectation of the Kingdom of God'. By doing so the Church is free to articulate its hope and exist as the body of Christ in favour of the world. The Church, Moltmann explains, does not exist for its own sake; rather its sheer existence is predicated on being a community of believers that brings hope and service to others. Therefore the modern society cannot be allowed to dictate the role for the Church since that removes its possibility to actually exist at all.⁶² The Christian identity thus differs significantly from that of the romanticist since the constant factor in his life is the calling to mission and not himself. He is alive and receives his identity when he expands himself in non-identity as part of the Body in

⁵⁹ Ibid., s. 310.

⁶⁰ Ibid., s. 313, 316.

⁶¹ Ibid., s. 321.

⁶² Ibid., s. 325-327.

service of the other. Moltmann describes this life in the Body as a life of 'creative discipleship' and that it is a way of living in order to make present the justice of the coming Kingdom because the world is not yet finished.⁶³

Towards a New Approach to Theology

Moltmann published his second major work in 1972 with the title *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*. Rasmusson points out that Moltmann had shifted his focus in this book by replacing the Christian 'hope' with the 'cross'. Hence, instead of talking about 'the God of promise who opens up new possibilities' he chose to highlight his understanding that God is experienced in suffering.⁶⁴ Although Moltmann himself believes that the two books complement each other, Rasmusson claims that this shift was provoked by a cultural change rather than being part of some preformed theological program. What he means by this is that Moltmann had gone from using his theology as mediation between the Christian faith and the strong cultural belief in the openness of the future, to now using it as mediation between the Christian faith and critical theory. He therefore problematizes the approach Moltmann had to theology in his early work by emphasizing that a theology that is closely related to transitory movements are doomed to be ephemeral.⁶⁵ Rasmusson continues by saying that

[Moltmann] wants to write critical theology, but one might ask if it is critical enough [...] In his interest to be relevant and meaningful for 'progressive' people of the 1960s he failed to use the resources in Christian faith to criticize the understanding of history, nature, and human power that legitimate the misuse of nature.⁶⁶

Consequently Rasmusson claims that he failed to move beyond his own culturally shaped ideas and the result became a religiously legitimated version of the New Left of the 1960s. That is not to say that Moltmann was a Marxist. Rasmusson rightly points out that Moltmann did not accepted the Marxist understanding of history but he stresses that Moltmann 'reasoned inside the general climate that the New Left of the 1960s, so

⁶³ Ibid., s. 333-335.

⁶⁴ Rasmusson, Arne. 1994, s. 51.

⁶⁵ Ibid., s. 52-53.

⁶⁶ Ibid., s. 57.

strongly influenced by Marxism created'.⁶⁷

The fact that Moltmann's early theology was written within a Marxist meta-narrative creates yet another problem according to Rasmusson. As we have seen, Moltmann understands the resurrection of Jesus Christ as an event that both promises and achieves a radically new future that is not limited by nature. This claim implies that the Kingdom of God is part of what the resurrection creates and it is therefore part of the new creation. The consequence is that the citizens of God's Kingdom are called to embody the resurrected Christ but the issue that arises is that it is rather vague what this actually means. Moltmann talked in general terms about freedom and justice as part of the new creation and although this might resonate with some people, the result is that the vagueness of the message creates possibilities to grant essentially any social movement aimed at freedom and justice theological validity.⁶⁸ The obvious predicament that arises is that one person's freedom and justice potentially interferes with the freedom and justice of someone else. Within the framework set by the spirit of the 1960s the modern project was clearly seen as a project for freedom, but as Miroslav Volf points out, the inner dynamics of this project created new social and economic inequalities, as well as it resulted in the environmental crises we currently experience.⁶⁹ The conclusion we can deduce from these observations is that the theology presented in *Theology of Hope* carries with it an inherent contradiction. Moltmann set out to write a revolutionary theology of resistance in order to turn the wretched condition of the world into what was good, just and living by virtue of its hope, and he ended up with a theology that supported a movement that created just the opposite conditions for a large number of people in the world, primarily the poor and those who were yet to be born.

Richard Bauckham writes in the essay "Eschatology in the Kingdom of God" that Moltmann had come to understand modernity in a more negative way during the 1970s. He concurs with Rasmusson's view that the immediate context of *Theology of Hope* was the optimism of the 1960s and by doing so, he concludes that the catastrophes of the two world wars was not primarily what effected Moltmann in his writing. Nonetheless, Bauckham explains that he does not consider the book as simply a product of the

⁶⁷ Ibid., s. 59.

⁶⁸ Ibid., s. 65-66.

⁶⁹ Volf, Miroslav, "After Moltmann: Reflections on the Future of Eschatology" in Bauckham, Richard [ed], *God will be all in all – The Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 2001, s. 236.

context it was written in: 'Its basing of eschatological hope on the dialectical Christological basis of the cross and resurrection gave it a critical power in relation to facile optimism as an ideology masking oppression and misery'. He also affirms the long lasting value of *Theology of Hope* by highlighting the fact that it has proved itself to survive both the test of time and space by remaining relevant in contexts far different than the one Moltmann wrote it in. It should be mentioned that Rasmusson partially agrees with these statements although his opinion of Moltmann's early theology is far more critical than Bauckham's. The critique Moltmann directed towards modernity after *Theology of Hope* should not be mistaken as a total dismissal of all the advances that has been made, but he became highly critical towards the modern project as such. Bauckham explains that Moltmann began to see modernity as a project created by the powerful whose primary aim was to control the world and to create a bright future for themselves.⁷⁰

In *A Broad Place* Moltmann says that an essay he wrote in 1969 titled "The Theological Criticism of Political Religion" moved his focus towards a political theology of the cross.⁷¹ Further Moltmann says that *The Crucified God* should be understood as him wrestling with God on the issue of 'the Godlessness of the perpetrators and the Godforsakenness of the victims of injustice and violence in human history'.⁷² When writing about *The Crucified God* Moltmann appears to have an apologetic attitude towards his readers. He does not put into words that he desires to free himself from the indictment that his movement from the resurrection of Jesus Christ in *Theology of Hope* towards a theology of the cross was part of a broader cultural movement, but it is hard not to read this between the lines. That is not to say that *The Crucified God* simply was a result of a cultural movement but at least I get the impression that he wrote this passage with an implied critical reader in mind since he tenaciously argues that the thoughts spelled out in *The Crucified God* was present in his mind already before he wrote *Theology of Hope*.⁷³

⁷⁰ Bauckham, Richard, "Eschatology in The Coming of God" in Bauckham, Richard [ed], *God will be all in all – The Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 2001, s. 29-30.

⁷¹ Moltmann, Jürgen. 2007, Kindle 3004.

⁷² Ibid., Kindle 3547.

⁷³ Ibid., Kindle 3599.

Crucified in Weakness

The main theme in *The Crucified God* is that the crucified Christ reveals a God who is present in suffering and who is contrary to the god who makes his will known through the Law, the god of political religion and the god who reveal himself indirectly in history and in the creation. The reasons for these conclusions is (a) that Christ was crucified after being judged by the Law as a heretic, (b) because he died a political death as a rebel against the religious system and (c) since he experienced the abandonment by God while hanging on the cross. Christian theology is therefore, according to Moltmann, a critical theory of God that is 'free from the Law, free from desire to seek power and domination over others and free from the concern for self-deification.'⁷⁴ Further, it is important for Moltmann to accentuate that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ should be understood as a God-event: 'Here God has not just acted externally, in his unattainable glory and eternity. Here he has acted in himself and has gone on to suffer in himself.' Christ's death on the cross is therefore understood as an act of love and *kenosis*, which means that out of love God 'emptied' himself on the cross.⁷⁵ To be clear, the death of Christ should not be perceived as the death *of* God but as a death *in* God. This theme is important for Moltmann's thinking and it follows from his refusal of using a presupposed metaphysical idea about God. Rather than presupposing who God is Moltmann believes that we should look to the cross in order to retrospectively say that this event reveals who God is. This approach therefore leads him to perceive God as an event. He develops this idea in relation to the biblical notion that God is love (1 John 4.16) by writing that God is

an event in a loveless, legalistic world; the event of an unconditioned and boundless love which comes to meet man, which takes hold of those who are unloved and forsaken, unrighteous or outside the law, and gives them a new identity...⁷⁶

Hence we can see how Moltmann uses the same type of logic in *The Crucified God* as he did in *Theology of Hope* since he moves from the particular towards the universal. In the latter the particular event of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ is understood to have revealed God while in the former it revealed the universal

⁷⁴ Moltmann, Jürgen, *The Crucified God*. First Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1993. s. 68-69

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, s. 205.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, s. 247-248.

eschatological horizon.

As we have already seen, in *Theology of Hope* Moltmann was rather vague in his exposition on what it means to be shaped by the future of the resurrected Christ. In *The Crucified God* he therefore spelled out a much more distinct Christology with the purpose of fashion a theology that offer a more solid and structured foundation for Christian ethics.⁷⁷ In *The Christian Realism of Reinhold Niebuhr and the Political Theology of Jurgen Moltmann in Dialogue*, Robert Thomas Cornelison explicates how Moltmann's Trinitarian theology offers a critical response towards concentrated power:

Since the Trinitarian God consists of the unity and diversity of the Father, Son and Spirit, it is impossible to develop an idea of a universal, omnipotent monarch from such diversity. Divine power is shared power, not power isolated in one individual.⁷⁸

Moltmann's understanding does not only consist of the critique against autocratic leadership but it also implies that God should not simply be seen in the powerful but also in the weak and vulnerable. The justification for this claim comes from Moltmann's reading of Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus, he says, is the God who was crucified in weakness and abandonment, which in effect shows that God identify himself with the weak.⁷⁹ Hence, Moltmann's Trinitarian understanding becomes a critique against the project of modernity since it, at least according to him, was a project that benefited the powerful and neglected the weak.

Although Moltmann does not fully concur with Rasmusson's critique, the dilemmas mentioned above became somewhat apparent to him during the 1970s and he eventually started thinking of using another approach. However, the movement away from his early approach had also another explanation. Rasmusson writes that Moltmann struggled with the fact that he did not belong to the oppressed and he therefore felt somewhat impotent to speak on their behalf. Consequently, he shifted his theological approach and set out to accomplish what he describes as his 'contribution' to theology:⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Rasmusson, Arne. s. 69.

⁷⁸ Cornelison, Robert Thomas, *The Christian Realism of Reinhold Niebuhr and the Political Theology of Jürgen Moltmann in Dialogue: The Realism of Hope*, Mellen Research University Press, 1992. s. 20.

⁷⁹ Ibid., s. 21.

⁸⁰ Rasmusson, Arne, s. 52-53.

The expression 'contribution to theology' [...] is intended to avoid the seductions of the theological system and the coercion of the dogmatic thesis [...] By using the word 'contribution', the writer recognizes the conditions and limitations of his own position, and the relativity of his own particular environment. He makes no claim to say everything, or to cover the whole of theology. He rather understands his own "whole" as part of a "whole" that is much greater [...] Behind all this is the conviction that, humanly speaking, truth is to be found in unhindered dialogue.⁸¹

The effect of Moltmann's changed approach meant that he started to write theology in a more classic and systematic way. In Rasmusson's view, this change is significant but should not be overemphasized.⁸²

Concluding Remarks

In light of what has been said so far I believe it is fair to claim that *Theology of Hope* was written in the spirit of the progressive movement of the 1960s, or the New Left as Rasmusson refers to it. Within this system of thought Moltmann attempts to relate the Christian faith to the modern situation with the aim of presenting a critical, political and revolutionary theology of resistance. It is moreover clear that Moltmann aligned himself with the weak and the oppressed in order to struggle against the modern society to bring liberation, hope and peace to the world. In his mind this struggle is a vital part of the Church's mission but the Church has been pushed aside and no longer serves as a public influence but rather as a space for the individual to search for inward and personal meaning. *Theology of Hope* should therefore be understood as a radical critique against the modern society controlled by the industrial system and a call for the Church to break itself free from the bondage of the overarching and oppressive societal structure in order to struggle against it.

At the centre of Moltmann's eschatology in *Theology of Hope* stands the resurrected Christ and his Kingdom, which is a new creation that he believes will transform its citizens to embody the risen Lord. However, the apparent vagueness of what freedom and justice means in Moltmann's thinking opens up for the cultural ethos of his time to

⁸¹ Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Trinity and The Kingdom*. First Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1993. s. xii-xiii.

⁸² Rasmusson, Arne. 1994, s. 54.

determine that for him. Thus, his immediate cultural context seemingly controls his ethics and therefore at a more fundamental level, his understanding of who Christ is, what the Kingdom of God means, what the Church's mission is, and so on. One could for that reason say that Moltmann, at least in part, fails to spell out a theology that opens up for the Church to be shaped by the Kingdom of God as he understands it, and for that reason to truly exist as Church since he only moves its place from one structure to another.

The Coming of God

Introduction

Moltmann arrived from Bonn to the University of Tübingen in 1967 after being invited to hold the chair for systematic theology in the Protestant theological faculty of the Eberhard-Karls University.⁸³ He remained at the University of Tübingen for the rest of his academic career that ended in 1994 as he retired. In *A Broad Place* Moltmann writes that his theological writings during the last 15 years as a professor at Tübingen were aimed at trying to synthesize his theology of hope, his theology of the cross and his Trinitarian thinking.⁸⁴ Hence *The Coming of God* should be read as a part of the (already mentioned) systematic project that Moltmann describes as his 'contribution to theology', which also includes what he terms as an 'intensive conversation between theologians past and present'.⁸⁵ It would be too great a task within the space of this thesis to cover all of Moltmann's 'contribution(s) to theology' leading up to *The Coming of God* but before we move on to this book there are a few important themes of development that I would like to mention.

Matthew Bonzo writes in *Indwelling the Forsaken Other* that Moltmann was troubled by the fact that most Christian theologians throughout history have perceived God as incapable of suffering while at the same time maintaining that Christ suffered on the

⁸³ Moltmann, Jürgen. 2007, Kindle 2813.

⁸⁴ Ibid., Kindle 5470.

⁸⁵ Ibid., Kindle 5492.

cross.⁸⁶ Hence, Moltmann wrote in *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (1980) that ‘a God who cannot suffer cannot love either. A God who cannot love is a dead God’.⁸⁷ The reason for understanding God as incapable of suffering is found already within the pre-Socratic philosophical tradition, which teaches that change and plurality is unworthy of the divine. This belief regarding the divine found its way into Christian theology and it deeply influenced the Church’s Trinitarian understanding:

As a result, Christianity [was] forced to build its understanding of the god of Parmenides. In this tradition, there is great difficulty, even impossibility, in moving from God as one and actual to understanding the differentiation of divine being into Father, Son and Spirit.⁸⁸

Moltmann writes that Trinitarian thinking must presuppose that substances and relations are equally important and he thereby (yet again) denies the validity of the pre-Socratic notion of *ousia* that was underpinning ‘the conception of God rooted in an *analogia entis*’.⁸⁹ We have seen that Moltmann denied the validity of this understanding in *The Crucified God* in order to write a theology that acknowledges God as suffering. Eight years later in *The Trinity and the Kingdom* he continues to develop his Trinitarian understanding by emphasizing God as a *perichoresis* (interpenetration) of love.⁹⁰ Bonzo explains that ‘*perichoresis* refers to the eternal circulation between members of the Trinity that characterizes divine life’ and it is this mutual *perichoresis* between Father, Son and Spirit that creates a unity that makes it possible to speak of God as one. Moltmann’s claim is that this understanding of the inner divine life abolishes any notion of ‘personalism’ and ‘socialism’ as antithesis, rather he claims that they both becomes actual as a result of the mutual indwelling.⁹¹ Moltmann explains that the unity created by the *perichoresis* is not closed off but open, inviting and embracing for the Other.⁹² As we will see in *The Coming of God*, this understanding opens up for Moltmann to pursue an ecologically responsible eschatology. Hence the aim of writing a theology of hope that

⁸⁶ Bonzo, Matthew. *Indwelling the Forsaken Other – The Trinitarian Ethics of Jürgen Moltmann* (Distinguished Dissertations in Christian Theology 3). Pickwick Publications, 2009, s. 22.

⁸⁷ Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*. First Fortress Press, 1993, s. 38.

⁸⁸ Bonzo, Matthew, 2009, s. 25-27.

⁸⁹ Moltmann, Jürgen. 2007, Kindle 5224. Bonzo, Matthew, 2009, s. 24.

⁹⁰ Bonzo, Matthew, 2009, s. 31.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, s32.

⁹² Moltmann, Jürgen. 2007, Kindle 5534.

perceives the future as open and allows for God to suffer with the victims of the world turned out to also allow for a way of relating to (among other things) the environmental crisis, which was not apparent to Moltmann as he wrote his early theology.

In *The Way of Jesus Christ* (1990) Moltmann expanded his notion of the dialectics between the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In this book he echoes Paul's statement that 'if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain' (1 Cor 15.14) and explains that the resurrection marks a point where faith in God and the acknowledgement of Christ coincide. He emphasises the importance of perceiving the resurrection as an act of God and therefore distinguishes between the assertions 'Christ raised from the dead' and 'God raised Christ from the dead' and side with the latter of these two statements. From this follows that

Faith in the God 'who raised Christ from the dead' and the confession that 'Jesus Christ is the Lord' are mutually interpretive.⁹³

With this perspective in mind Moltmann then distinguishes between the crucifixion of Christ and his resurrection. The crucifixion, he claims, is a historical fact while the resurrection is an apocalyptic happening; the former event took place within our transient aeon of sin and death whereas the latter revealed the coming of the eternal new creation. The cross therefore represents the apocalyptic end of world history and the resurrection points ahead towards the raising of the dead at the beginning of the new creation. Moltmann thus re-affirms his understanding that history and eschatology should not be added together because 'either history is dissolved into eternity or eschatology is overtaken by history'.⁹⁴

With this understanding of the dialectics between the cross and the resurrection in mind Moltmann reflects on the experiences of the resurrected Christ in the biblical texts. Christ, he says, was experienced as Christophanies and in Paul's writings these encounters are referred to as apocalyptic events. What Moltmann wants to demonstrate is that Paul understood the resurrected Christ to unveil the still hidden new world.⁹⁵ In light of this Moltmann then explains how the interpretation of the Christophanies reveals three structural dimensions that he labels as prospective, retrospective and

⁹³ Moltmann, Jürgen, *The Way of Jesus Christ*. First Fortress Press, 1993, s. 213.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, s. 214.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, s. 219.

reflexive. His claim is that the witnesses experience of the risen Christ made known the coming glory of God while they at the same time were assured that the coming One is the crucified One since they could recognize him from the marks of the nails and the breaking of bread. From this followed an understanding of being called to an apostolic mission, which is explicitly spelled out in John 20.21 where Jesus explains that 'As the Father has sent me, even so I send you'.⁹⁶ Moltmann understands the apostolic call to proclaim the Christian faith as aligned towards Christ's *parousia*. In other words he says that the apostolic mission to proclaim the Christian gospel is part of the Christologically inaugurated eschatological process that was brought about by God's raising of Christ from the dead.⁹⁷ Further Moltmann makes the claim that since the gospel is a proclamation of the risen Christ it should reveal the same structure as his appearances:

1. The gospel is *retrospectively* 'the Word of the cross'. It makes the crucified Christ present.
2. The gospel is *prospectively* the anticipation in the Word of Christ's *parousia*, and therefore has itself a promissory character.
3. The gospel which proclaims the one crucified as the one to come, the one humiliated as the one who is exalted, and the one dead as the one who is alive in *the present call* into the liberty of faith.⁹⁸

The apostolic life is therefore a life with Christ that reveals the risen One, and thus the new creation, within this transient aeon of death.

In *The Way of Jesus Christ* Moltmann also attempts to articulate a cosmic Christology that, at least in part, is meant to critique the modern anthropocentrism in order to create a space for an ecologically responsible theology. This theme is, as we will see, one of the more prominent ones in Moltmann's later theology. In short, he argues that modern humans have attempted to isolate themselves from nature and that this endeavour has not only resulted in our present day environmental crisis but also in a loss of a proper self-understanding.⁹⁹ I will return to both these topics later on but it is worth mentioning that they were present in Moltmann's thinking before he wrote *The Coming of God*.

In *Theology of Hope*, Moltmann explained that eschatology is about hope for the 'new creation' and he starts out in *The Coming of God* by asserting that this is still, 30 years later, a major part of his thinking. Thus, he re-affirms that eschatology should not be

⁹⁶ Ibid., s. 220.

⁹⁷ Ibid., s. 226.

⁹⁸ Ibid., s. 227.

⁹⁹ Ibid., s. 270-271.

confused with the kind of apocalyptic final solutions that many have regarded it as, and that the message of the eschatological hope he put forth in *Theology of Hope* is still his own position. Hence, the reason for writing *The Coming of God* was not that he desired to re-shape his theology of hope; rather he explains that his concern is different from the one that led him to write *Theology of Hope*. To spell this out in more detail, Moltmann writes that *Theology of Hope* was a way of trying to find a new fundamental category for theology in general while *The Coming of God* is concerned with the 'horizons of expectation for personal life, for political and historical life, and for the life of the cosmos'.¹⁰⁰ One could therefore say that *The Coming of God* was an attempt to overcome the inherent weakness in *Theology of Hope*. Moltmann also elucidate that his aim in *The Coming of God* is to integrate the 'individual' and the 'universal' perspectives of eschatology, and the eschatology of 'history' and 'nature' too, something he claims have all to seldom been done by others within the modern Protestant tradition.¹⁰¹ Consequently *The Coming of God* was, at least in part, a continuation of Moltmann's ongoing critique against the modern Protestant movement's focus on the salvation of the individual. Moltmann explains this by writing that that 'the salvation of the individual was so much at the centre of things that the salvation of the body, human society and the cosmos were pushed out on to the sidelines'.¹⁰²

Personal Eschatology

In the modern society, death has often been portrayed as something personal and therefore ultimately as something which is not part of the human experience. Moltmann quotes Wittgenstein's famous statement that 'death is not an event in life [because] no one experience death' and he then sets out to argue against Wittgenstein. We do experience death, he claims, because we do not simply die our own deaths, we also die each other's.¹⁰³ Moltmann's premise is that death should not be reduced to simply biology for the reason that we live our lives together and in love of one another. To love and to be loved is that which grants us the experience of being alive. Hence, if we loose

¹⁰⁰ Moltmann, Jürgen, *The Coming of God – Christian Eschatology*. First Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2004, s. xii.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, s. xiv.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, s. xv.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, s. 49.

the people whom we love and the ones who love us, we lose part of our own life and thus we do experience death.¹⁰⁴ This experience should however be understood from a Christian perspective, according to Moltmann, which means that death in a sense is something we should accept and anticipate. This might seem like an odd statement but what Moltmann has in mind is that the Christian hope includes a belief that death is not the end; rather it is what must take place for there to be new beginnings.¹⁰⁵ These thoughts are obviously premised by the theology of hope that, as we have seen, tells us that the death and resurrection of Christ should be understood as a 'promise' of the universal future. The raising of Christ is here not looked upon as a historical event, rather Moltmann tells us that it is an eschatological 'happening' that took place once and for all. Further, Jesus' resurrection is therefore considered to be the launching of the eschatological 'process' that will, in the end, encompass all people and grant everyone eternal life.¹⁰⁶ For the same reason that Moltmann does not view death as something individual, he also argues that resurrection by necessity is inherently something social. What he means by this statement is that eternal life must be understood as a life together – a life in love – and this is closely linked to what he said in *Theology of Hope* regarding 'true humanity'.¹⁰⁷ God's raising of Christ from the dead is looked upon as a promise, which points towards everyone's resurrection and thus the receiving of our real lives.¹⁰⁸ This is why Moltmann claims that death, in a sense, is something that Christians should anticipate since death is necessary for there to be a future resurrection. This should not be misunderstood as if Moltmann celebrates death itself. The whole logic of his argument depends on the understanding that death is the enemy of life, but also that death itself has been defeated and will ultimately be 'swallowed up' all together.

Historical Eschatology

Following the understanding that resurrection is inherently something social, Moltmann expands this logic to include the whole of creation. By stating this he places himself in a

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., s. 54-55.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., s. 65.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., s. 69.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., s.71.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., s.116-117.

polemical position vis-à-vis the reductionist opinion that simply equates 'the kingdom of God' with the notion of 'eternal life'. According to Moltmann, the 'kingdom of God' must be understood to encompass everything since without a cosmic eschatology there is no possibility for neither historical nor personal eschatology.¹⁰⁹

With an all-encompassing eschatological hope in mind, Moltmann sets out to discuss apocalypticism by stating that 'all eschatologies of world history has grown out of political experiences and intentions. What he means by this is that the ones in power have strived to keep the world as it is, while those who have been dominated have been afraid that nothing will change. Therefore Moltmann states that both the powerful and the oppressed have made their apocalyptic expectations to be in line with their own desires for the future.¹¹⁰ The most widespread understandings regarding the eschatological hope has been closely linked to what is commonly called 'millenarianism' which means that Christ and 'his people' will rule the world for thousand years before the end of history.¹¹¹ The reason for belief in such an empire comes from chapter 20 of the book of Revelation, a chapter in the Bible that has been subject for a wide range of various interpretations. Moltmann himself advocates that the millennium kingdom should be understood within the larger framework of eschatology; hence he is highly critical towards historical millenarianism regardless of what shape or form it takes. Historical millenarianism, he writes, has been used to legitimize political or ecclesiastical power, which is a fundamental misreading of Scripture that comes about because its proponents lack a proper understanding of the larger eschatological framework. Moltmann explains that the Christian hope does not derive from history but from God's promise that has been revealed in the raising of Christ from the dead. These thoughts are obviously closely linked to his critique of the transcendentalist theologians in *Theology of Hope* and his claim that the resurrection was eschatological rather than historical.¹¹² The understanding that God's raising of Christ was an act of new creation and thus a promise of a universal new beginning implies that this revelation also should be considered as a promise of 'the end of all things'. However,

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., s.131-132.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., s.133.

¹¹¹ Ibid., s.146.

¹¹² Ibid., s. 135-136.

For long stretches, the history of Christianity has been identical with the struggle for the Thousand Years' empire . . . In its purely religious form this expectation is cherished by the sects which separate themselves from this world as far as possible – the Adventists, for example, or the Mormons, or Jehovah's Witnesses. The idea has been implicit in the missionary consciousness of a church that sets out to convert the nations of the earth. It exists in the form of the Christian imperialism that subjugated peoples and sets out to rule the world. Finally, it can be found in the guise of Christian restorationism, which expects the Thousand Years' empire to take the form of a union between Christians and Jews on Zion.¹¹³

Moltmann writes that millenarianism that perceives the millennium as outside of eschatology will lead to, and has lead to, catastrophes in history. He continues by stating that eschatology without belief in a millennium is impotent to have any ethical consequences, and thus he concludes that millennial eschatology is the only proper viewpoint for Christian people to subscribe to.¹¹⁴

Moltmann dismisses the critique of his own opinion as being rooted in the critics' understanding of themselves as the fulfilment of Christ's rule on earth. These people, he claims, do not desire for the world to change because they are the ones in power and they do not want to loose it. The foundation for this argument is his Christocentric perspective, which lets Jesus' surrender to the death on the cross and the resurrection to provide the lens through which everything else is understood. What such a reading gives you, according to Moltmann, is the understanding that the end of this *aeon* of sin and death is foreseeable. Therefore, the empires of this world should be regarded as doomed rather than as fulfilments of Christ's rule on earth.¹¹⁵

To grasp where Moltmann's thought is heading, it is necessary to also understand his distinction between the messianic resurrection *from* the dead, and the universal and eschatological resurrection *of* the dead. If we fail to see this distinction, then his thoughts on the millennial reign of Christ and his people will not make sense. Christ will rule the world for a thousand years on this side of the raising *of* the dead and the final judgment. In other words, Moltmann expects the millennial rule of Christ to take place in history and for that reason, before the end of this world. Millennialism, he says, is

¹¹³ Ibid., s. 146-147.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., s.192.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., s.194.

therefore 'the special, this-worldly side of eschatology'.¹¹⁶ Consequently, the resurrection of Christ is looked upon as an invitation from God to participate in the eschatological process by presenting the world of sin and death to an alternative way of life. It represents, so to speak, a summoning by God to become 'truly human' and in Moltmann's view; it anticipates the millennial kingdom and ultimately the end of the world. In this whole process the millennium is understood as a period of transition between this world of sin and death, and the one to come.¹¹⁷ The Christological foundation that leads this chain of logic forward is that Christ resurrection presupposes that he was truly dead and thus Moltmann makes the argument that this world must die too for there to be a new creation. What is crucial to understand about this apocalyptic expectation of the end of the world is that it should be viewed as the Judgment of God rather than cosmic or historical catastrophes. Apocalypticism, Moltmann says, belongs to eschatology and it differs significantly from the modern, secularized interpretations in that it offers 'hope'.¹¹⁸ That is, apocalyptic eschatology does not depend on any optimism for historical development but on the 'promise' God made by raising Christ as the first fruit of all creation. This is something Moltmann believes that we can put our trust in even though we stand before the very real possibility that we might bring the earth to its end ourselves.¹¹⁹

Universal Salvation

During the first 300 years of Christianity, the belief in a Last Judgment was a 'hope' greatly cherished within the church. The final Judgment was understood as God's reckoning with the oppressors of world history for the benefit of the victims. However, after Constantine this changed and God's final Judgment was now seen as closely linked to the imperial judicial system of power. During the middle ages this understanding developed into a scare tactic to make people experience the need to seek salvation from within the church and when the Reformers came along in the 16th century, the Judgment was used as a mean to awaken a distress of conscience in order to stir up justifying faith through the Gospel. Moltmann is highly critical of this whole development and he

¹¹⁶ Ibid., s.197.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., s.201.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., s.226-227.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., s.229.

therefore sets out to retrieve what he understands to be the true Christian hope for the final Judgment.¹²⁰ He proposes that the Christian hope is that of universal salvation and thus he reject any notions regarding a physical location called 'hell'. He writes that the understanding of a 'double outcome' was popularized by St Augustine who advocated that only a select few would be granted the gift of eternal life while the rest are predestined for eternal damnation. Augustine's theology resonated with the people in power and thus it won the day. Consequently, Origen of Alexandria who proposed that all people and even the Devil would be redeemed was deemed a heretic and his universalism quickly went out of fashion. It took till the 17th and 18th century before the doctrine of universal salvation was considered anew and this theological u-turn was a result of the early pietistic movement and theologians like Albrecht Bengel (1687-1752).¹²¹

Moltmann writes that the Last Judgment is for the benefit of the world. He rejects any understanding that likens the Judgment with an imperial court system and put forth the view that this event should be longed for because it will be the universal revelation of Jesus Christ and thus constitute the universal new beginning of all things.¹²² However, his soteriological conviction should not be mistaken for a denial of neither damnation nor hell, because its foundation is the 'total hell of God forsakenness' that Christ experienced for the salvation of the world.

[I]t is Christ's descent into hell that is the ground for the confidence that nothing will be lost but that everything will be brought back again and gathered into the eternal kingdom of God.¹²³

What precedes this interpretation of the Christ-event is Moltmann's view that 'hell' is to be recognized as an existential 'experience' rather than a physical location. Hence, Christ experience at the cross – the experience of hell and damnation – allows for him to stand beside us in our sufferings. Hell is thus the existential experience of damnation that follows when people choose to reject God, but the Christian faith recognizes that Christ descended into this hell with the *telos* of taking hell and all those who are in it into his

¹²⁰ Ibid., s.235.

¹²¹ Ibid., s.237-245.

¹²² Ibid., s.250.

¹²³ Ibid., s.251.

Trinitarian fellowship with the Father.¹²⁴ In other words, Christ forsook heaven in order to step into the hell of godforsakenness to seek after the lost and become their companion in their suffering. Christ suffered the torments of hell in order to throw hell itself open and destroy it all together. Therefore, Moltmann says, 'there is no longer any such thing as being damned for all eternity'.¹²⁵ He concludes this passage by stating that this renders the Last Judgment to be a wonderful thing because it means that the perpetrators will not triumph over their victims anymore. In fact, he says, the Judgment will annihilate even the categories of 'perpetrators' and 'victims' because it is the Day when God will put 'everything' right. Hence, it is a day we should not fear but anticipate with joy in our hearts.¹²⁶

Cosmic Eschatology

Moltmann's eschatology is all-inclusive which means that he views the redemption of humanity, history and the whole cosmos to be highly integrated and interdependent. You cannot have the redemption of humanity without the redemption of everything else; therefore he writes that belief in salvation for humanity is predicated on the belief in a new heaven and a new earth.¹²⁷ His thoughts on these matters link *The Coming of God* with *Theology of Hope* because it all depends on the promise of God. This is, as we have seen, a reoccurring theme that runs through the whole of Moltmann's theology and in this case it make him understand the new creation as separate from the original creation.¹²⁸ However, he emphasizes that God's promise tell us that he will make 'all things new' which he takes to mean that nothing will be lost. 'Everything', he says, 'is brought back again in new form.'¹²⁹ This is ultimately a hope for the fullness of God's indwelling in the new heaven and new earth. As the Word became incarnate in the flesh of Jesus, so the eternal Word of God will indwell the whole of creation. This is, according to Moltmann, the fulfilment of time and the final *Shekinah* of God.¹³⁰

The notions of God's future indwelling of his creation has been severely effected by

¹²⁴ Ibid., s.250-253.

¹²⁵ Ibid., s.253.

¹²⁶ Ibid., s.254.

¹²⁷ Ibid., s.259-260.

¹²⁸ Ibid., s.263.

¹²⁹ Ibid., s.265.

¹³⁰ Ibid., s.266.

the myth of a circular course of time and it has led many to imagine that the end corresponds to the beginning, or to use other words, the new creation corresponds to the original creation. To illustrate this point, Moltmann quotes Aquinas saying

The end of things corresponds to the beginning. For God is the beginning and the end of things. Consequently the emergence of things from their beginning corresponds to the restoration of things at the end.¹³¹

However, if this notion of the circularity of time corresponds to reality, then the end can only be the restoration of that which once was. Hence, the Christian drama of redemption would need to be lived through over and over again throughout all of eternity. In Moltmann's view, this understanding is not compatible with the Biblical statement that Christ was unique and that his death and resurrection happened once and for all (Rom 6.10):

In *personal* eschatology the consummation of temporal creation is the transition from what is temporal into eternal life, in *historical* eschatology it is the transition from history into the eternal kingdom, and in *cosmic* eschatology it is the transition from temporal creation to the new creation of an eternal 'deified' world. It is for this fulfilment that all things have been created.¹³²

Again, Moltmann is invoking his understanding of the 'newness' that results from God's raising of Jesus Christ. Thus, the *telos* of creation is not to return to the beginning but to fulfil it in the receiving of God's *Shekinah*. This is not to say that the old creation will be destroyed, rather that the new creation will take it into itself.¹³³ In history, Moltmann writes, this presence of God in creation has only been actual among God's own people, in the temple, in Christ and in the Holy Spirit. His view of the consummation of creation tells us that God's new presence will render his glory unmediated and direct, and this is what makes all things new. Moltmann final remark on the subject refers to the last two chapters of the book of Revelation in which we can read that heaven descends to earth and that the earth becomes the city that holds paradise within itself. In this city – the

¹³¹ Ibid., s.263.

¹³² Ibid., s.265.

¹³³ Ibid., s.266, 277.

New Jerusalem – God finds his resting place and it results in eternal life, perfect justice and righteousness for all.¹³⁴

The Last Age of Humanity

As previously mentioned, *Theology of Hope* was published in a time when there was a strong belief in progress and development. Moltmann has said that ‘the 60s were brimming over with movements of hope and experiences of rebirth and renewal’. At the same time, the 60s gave rise to a stronger belief in a man made apocalypse, much as a result of the Cuban missile crisis in 1962.¹³⁵ 6 August 1945 was the day in history when humanity first became truly aware of the real possibility of a man made apocalypse and it gave rise to the peace movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Although *Theology of Hope* was written after the bomb was dropped over Hiroshima, it is clear that Moltmann was more influenced by the spirit of the time that professed faith in a steady progress than the possibility of humankind bombing itself out of existence. But, as we have seen, this mindset changed over time and when Moltmann wrote *The Coming of God* he did so with the confession that there is no certainty that the earth will survive, hence he claimed that we must learn to hope in danger.¹³⁶ Gorringer explains that Biblical scholars have revived apocalyptic literature as literature of resistance during the time that spans between the publications of *Theology of Hope* and *The Coming of God* and he claims that Moltmann has been a part of this revival.

Moltmann writes in *The Coming of God* that ‘the bomb’ in an instant transformed the way humanity perceives the world and he goes on by stating that Christian theology unfortunately have not been alert to this new predicament we find ourselves in. He refers to the present time as ‘the last age of humanity’ with the motivation that we now know that we can end human existence in simply a few minutes.¹³⁷ We have always been aware that others and ourselves can and will die, but we have never before experienced the common understanding that we might all die, and thus humanity with us. This is a

¹³⁴ Ibid., s. 266, 317-319.

¹³⁵ Gorringer, Timothy, “Eschatology and Political Radicalism – The Example of Karl Barth and Jürgen Moltmann” in Bauckham, Richard [ed], *God will be all in all – The Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann*. First Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2001, s. 103, 105.

¹³⁶ Ibid., s. 109.

¹³⁷ Moltmann, Jürgen. 2004, s. 204.

problem of commons, it involves all of us, and accordingly Moltmann describes 'the last age of humanity' as 'a common age of humanity' in which we must act together:

The unity of humanity which will secure its existence in the age of nuclear threat means that the individual interests of the nations must be relativized, that ideologies with their potential for conflict must be democratized, that the different religions must acquire tolerance, and that everything must be subordinated to the common concern of life.¹³⁸

However, it will not be enough for us to simply find solutions for how to avoid nuclear catastrophes because the threat towards the existence of humanity comes at us from more than one direction. Moltmann raises the issue regarding the ecological crisis and points to the fact that we are already in it. It is not something that can be avoided; it is something that must be dealt with.¹³⁹ He connects the environmental crisis we are in with the socioeconomic differences between the Industrial world and the Third world. Many of the struggles that the Third world countries are forced to endure are results of oppression and exploitation and his claim is that we must strive for social justice between the Industrial world and the Third. It goes without saying that Moltmann does not believe the environmental issue to be the sole reason for why this is important, but he stresses that without peace and justice, there will be no liberation of nature.¹⁴⁰ This is obviously an issue that is closely linked to the economic system and its inherent tendency to create conflict, oppression, exploitation and so on. Moltmann likens our present global capitalism with the beast in Revelation 13 and accentuate that this threat against humanity is as real as any other.

He thus asks the question: 'Should the end-times of the modern world be interpreted apocalyptically, or do the apocalyptic hopes and visions resist the cynicism of the modern prophecies of the worlds end?'¹⁴¹ What modern men and women has come to perceive as apocalyptic is that the world will end as a result of a nuclear bomb or a collapsed ecosystem and, as the Jewish philosopher and journalist Günter Anders have pointed out; this is an apocalyptic prediction without a kingdom and '[i]n this respect it is really the precise reversal of the 19th century modern world's faith in progress, and its belief in a kingdom of God without an apocalypse', which very much influenced

¹³⁸ Ibid., s. 204-205.

¹³⁹ Ibid., s. 208.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., s. 211.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., s. 216.

Moltmann's early theology. As we saw earlier in this chapter, Moltmann perceives Jewish and Christian apocalyptic to deliver a message of endurance and resistance rather than a prophesy of the world's end. The fact that Moltmann perceives the apocalyptic message as all too often misunderstood leads him to conclude by saying that proponents of true apocalyptic eschatology should expose this misconception in order to restore hope and counter cynicism in this 'the last age of humanity'.¹⁴²

Miroslav Volf summarizes this development in Moltmann's thought by saying that his early theology definitely was millenarian but that he did not consider apocalyptic to carry any significant weight. This is why the death of Jesus is understood to speak of the negativities of history in *Theology of Hope*, while *The Coming of God* presents Jesus' death as a prediction of the end of history.¹⁴³ Volf points out that Moltmann's millennial understanding have been criticized by Bauckham for being superfluous since Bauckham do not see any reason for why the millennial rule of Jesus and his people will accomplish anything that the arrival of the new creation cannot do. Volf's own judgment of Moltmann's insistence on the necessity of the millennium is that it is not just excessive, but that it is actually harmful:

If 'eschatological millennium' is *the* goal of *the* history and *if* it lays moral claims on us in the form of a concrete social project, it will share the basic flaw of all historical millenium's because it will be inherently oppressive: the one future, declared as divine, will suppress many human histories whose utopian imaginations diverge from it.¹⁴⁴

Moltmann's view is indeed problematic because in the same way as he allowed for the progressive movement of the 1960s to define the 'freedom' and 'justice' of the New Creation in *Theology of Hope*, he now opens up for his political theology to be encapsulated within yet another structure that divides and creates conflict rather than strives for reconciliation. On a further note I claim that Moltmann's millennial view also poses a real threat to his understanding of history as 'open' since it represents a fixed utopian like kingdom within history. The alternative for Moltmann would be to perceive the millennial kingdom he propagates as 'open' but such an understanding would bring him back to the problem we found in *Theology of Hope*, namely that the nature of this

¹⁴² Ibid., s. 218.

¹⁴³ Volf, Miroslav, 2001, s. 240-241.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., s. 242-243.

kingdom and thus the social projects would be determined by transient cultural movements.

A Non-Anthropocentric Anthropology

In his most recent book, *Ethics of Hope* (2012), Moltmann continues to highlight the ecological crisis that we currently experience. He makes the claim that this crisis is a result of the 'modern culture of expansion' and consequently connects our environmental issues to the culture of Western Christianity and its interpretation of the biblical texts. The major problems that Moltmann identifies in the Western Christian tradition are its anthropocentrism and its epicurean understanding of God as distinct from the world. He asserts that the biblical notion to 'rule over the world' has been taken out of context and rather than being responsibly interpreted as man ruling in accordance with God's wisdom it has been interpreted as a mandate for man to relate to nature as simply a resource for his own disposal. Further he says that the deism of Western culture has robbed nature of its divine mysteries since God has been perceived as merely the transcendent Creator of the world. This, Moltmann asserts, was the first step toward the secularization and objectification of the world. Therefore he states that

On the way to an ecologically responsible theology, what will be put in the forefront are the cosmological aspects of the doctrine of God and of anthropology.¹⁴⁵

He therefore turns his attention to Alfred North Whitehead and his process philosophy in order to 'grasp the transcendent immanence of God in the interplay between God's primordial nature and his consequent nature'. By using process philosophy Moltmann stresses that we should perceive God as present in all things, which in effect means that our respect for nature must change. Rather than understanding nature as an object that we are free to ransack for our own short-term winning we should perceive all things as having a transcendent inner side. Hence our experiences of nature can according to Moltmann become experiences of God. Rather than approaching nature from an anthropocentric perspective we should therefore ask how God relates to nature with the aim of attaining the divine dignity of God's creation, which not simply contain what we would normally relate to as nature but also ourselves. Moltmann thus attempts to move

¹⁴⁵ Moltmann, Jürgen, *Ethics of Hope*. First Fortress Press, 2012, s. 135-136.

towards what he refers to as a non-anthropocentric anthropology.¹⁴⁶ As in *The Coming of God* he emphasizes his understanding of cosmic eschatology and his belief that faith in Christ should result in a hope for the whole cosmos to be reconciled and made new. Consequently he makes a direct call for humanity to be reconciled with nature in the present.¹⁴⁷

The theme of a more ecologically responsible theology is brought up also in Moltmann's essay "Progress and Abyss: Remembrance of the Future of the Modern World". In this essay he draws together a number of ideas present in his earlier work and states that the present day ecological crisis to a large extent is a result of the lack of meaning in the ideas, visions and utopias of the 20th century. He initially clarifies that the destruction of nature has occurred because of the unbalanced connection between humanity and nature:

It is impossible to make oneself 'the master and possessor of nature' if one is still part of nature and depend on it.¹⁴⁸

Modern men and women has attempted to rule over nature as if we are not part of its dynamic interplay and this anthropocentric view is the fundamental reason for our ecologically irresponsible behaviour.¹⁴⁹

As we have seen, in *Theology of Hope* Moltmann critiqued 'transcendental eschatology' by saying that it reduces the Christian hope to a Gnostic longing for redemption of the individual soul. Christian identity, he proposed, is received in expanding oneself into non-identity as part of the Body of Christ in service of others. This communal identity is what he describes as 'true humanity' and rather than abandoning the world the Body of believers are called to embody the risen Lord, or to use Moltmann's terminology, to live lives of 'creative discipleship'. In *The Coming of God* Moltmann emphasized the relational dimension of life at a level that transcends the message in *Theology of Hope*. Fundamentally the idea is the same in both books – the

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., s. 137-138.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., s. 139.

¹⁴⁸ Moltmann, Jürgen, "Progress and Abyss: Remembrance of the Future of the Modern World" in Volf, Miroslav; Katerberg, William [ed]. *The Future of Hope – Christian Tradition amid Modernity and Postmodernity*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2004, s 13-14.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., s 15.

resurrection points towards the new creation of all things – but it is looked upon from a new perspective in *The Coming of God* as a result of Moltmann's evolving Trinitarian understanding, and his new understanding of progressive modernity and its negative consequences. The eschatology described in *The Coming of God* is all-inclusive; Christ descended into hell in order to bring 'everything' back into the Trinitarian fellowship with the Father. The whole cosmos and everything in it is therefore interdependent, hence the redemption of humanity cannot take place without the redemption of the cosmos.

Thus, when Moltmann writes that modern men and women has attempted to rule over nature as if we are not part of its dynamic interplay we can see that his call for a non-anthropocentric anthropology marks a shift in his own understanding of what it means to be a human being. Loving relationships is what makes us experience life; love for our fellow human beings but also love for the world *in* God that God is making new as He promised by raising Christ from the dead. Therefore, Moltmann's emphasis on living an ecologically responsible life in *The Coming of God* and *Ethics of Hope* reveals also a more distinct anthropology that puts humanity in a deeper relationship with nature and the whole cosmos than in his early theology.

Concluding Remarks

While *Theology of Hope* was the result of a discussion between Moltmann and the other editors of the periodical *Evangelische Theologie* about the nature of history, *The Coming of God* was written with an altogether different question in mind. Rather than attempting to find a new fundamental category for theology in general Moltmann's objective in *The Coming of God* was to examine the horizons of expectation in light of the promise achieved and made known by God's raising of Christ from the dead. At a fundamental level he still confess to his 'theology of hope' but his willingness to explore the horizons of expectation point towards awareness of the weaknesses present in his early theology. Hence I believe it is accurate to say that *The Coming of God* was, at least in part, an attempt to provide his theology with the precision that was lacking in *Theology of Hope*. This is not surprising since Moltmann 30 years past the publication of *Theology of Hope* could look back on the not too pleasing effects of the progressive cultural movement of the 1960s, which he back then endorsed with his theology. His attempt to provide more precision to his theology is therefore also an attempt to

critically attack modernity and its progressive ethos by using his more recent perspective of social Trinitarianism supported by his Christological foundation which he began to develop already as 1972 as he wrote *The Crucified God*.

In *The Way of Jesus Christ* Moltmann affirmed his prior belief that the resurrection represents a promise of a new world but he did also move toward a more articulated apocalyptic interpretation of Jesus' death, which he described as a representation of the 'apocalyptic end of world history'. In *The Coming of God* Moltmann subsequently included a discussion in which he accentuated that a Christian perspective should embrace an anticipation of death since it is what must happen in order for a new beginning to take place. While Christ's historical death revealed the end of history his resurrection is interpreted by Moltmann as a promise for a new creation and an invitation to actively participate in the eschatological process. The significant difference between *Theology of Hope* and *The Coming of God* in regards of the death of Jesus is that while the latter book interprets it as a prediction of the apocalyptic final judgment and destruction of this transient aeon of sin and death, the former simply perceived it to speak of the negativities within history. There is also a much clearer emphasis on the millennial rule of Christ in *The Coming of God* than in *Theology of Hope*. Moltmann's belief that Christ's death should be viewed as apocalyptically revealing the end of world history leads him to see a need for a time of transformation that takes place within history before this end can occur. Why he comes to this conclusion is not particularly obvious which Bauckham makes clear by asking what the millennial rule of Jesus and his people will accomplish that the arrival of the new creation cannot do? Further, as Volf points out, Moltmann's millennial understanding creates the possibility for oppression of the Other since he believes that this static millennial kingdom lays moral claims on the Church in terms of a concrete social project. The alternative, as I have already mentioned, seems to be a less utopian-like kingdom but then one must ask how such a kingdom could be instructive in the present? The two alternatives Moltmann's millennial understanding leaves us with appears therefore to be either repeating the mistakes of earlier historical millenarianisms, or to repeat Moltmann's own oversight in *Theology of Hope* of letting ephemeral cultural movements define the goal of the Church's social involvement.

In *Theology of Hope* Moltmann articulated his understanding that God's being is not revealed by the world as a whole but by Israel's history of promise. His thus rejected the

Greek notion of *analogia entis* in favour of the opinion that revelation of God moves from the particular towards the universal. Consequently he interpreted the particular event of Christ's resurrection to unveil the universal future of the world. In *The Crucified God* he developed his understanding of the Christ-event and adamantly argued that this event reveals God as present in suffering. The Christ-event, he said, should be perceived as a God-event in which God has acted and suffered in himself. The death of God at the cross is for that reason interpreted as a death in God's self. By looking at the cross from this angle Moltmann claimed that God should therefore be understood as an event of kenotic love that takes hold of those who are unloved and forsaken and offer them a new and truly human identity. In *The Trinity and the Kingdom* this interpretation is expanded into a more distinctly articulated understanding of the Trinity. Trinitarian thinking, Moltmann said, should not value substance more than relations. He then argued that the divine life is characterized by a mutual *perichoresis* between Father, Son and Spirit and that it is this mutual indwelling that opens up for the possibility to speak of God's oneness. When Moltmann then writes *The Coming of God* he does so by weaving these different notions together into a cosmic eschatology that addresses both the individual and the universal. He claims that it is paramount to see the Kingdom of God as encompassing everything since the redemption of individuals, societies, history, nature and the cosmos are highly integrated and interdependent. Hence this eschatological horizon is what God's raising of Christ both makes possible and promises. It is further an invitation to participate in the eschatological process that points to the Day when the old aeon of sin and death are redeemed, made new and taken in by the new heaven and the new earth, which is indwelled by God's unmediated glory and thus participating in the divine *perichoresis*. Finally, Moltmann's cosmological eschatology provides him with a lens by which he can look at the major crises of today and spell out an ethics that takes them seriously while at the same time infuses hope into our seemingly Godforsaken world.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to study the progress of Jürgen Moltmann's eschatology in order to provide an answer to the question: *What are the significant developments of Moltmann's eschatological understanding that can be deduced from a comparative reading of Theology of Hope and The Coming of God?* I claim that the study I have presented shows that Moltmann's most significant developments in regards to his eschatology are his *apocalyptic eschatology* and his *cosmological eschatology*. The development of his apocalyptic eschatology is fundamentally seen in his interpretation of Jesus' crucifixion that is simply understood to speak of the negativities of history in *Theology of Hope* while it in *The Coming of God* represents the apocalyptic final judgment and destruction of this transient aeon of sin and death. The development of Moltmann's cosmological eschatology is deeply connected and depends on the evolution of his Trinitarian understanding. Throughout this thesis I have highlighted the evolving themes of *kenotic love* and *mutual perichoresis* as part of God's internal life and external actions. I have also shown that Moltmann incorporated these themes into his eschatological vision of a new heaven and a new earth, which he spoke of already in *Theology of Hope*. The result is a cosmological eschatology that emphasizes the relational and interdependent dimension of the redemption of the individual, nature and the whole cosmos.

Throughout his academic career Moltmann has desired to critically and therapeutically mediate the Christian faith to his contemporary society. His concern has not primarily been to write correct theology but rather to be contextually relevant. I believe that we are wise not to interpret this as if Moltmann does not care about truth and that his sole purpose is to be relevant in the eyes of the world. Rather his emphasis on being relevant is a result of his belief that the Church exists for the world and that the only way to change the course of history is by political means. Politics is thus the necessary framework for theology according to Moltmann, but one might ask if this is actually true, or at least whether his reasoning is coherent, since his understanding of the Church and its mission, in part, seems to precede this conviction.

The Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch's 'philosophy of hope' inspired Moltmann's 'theology of hope' and this can partly be seen in Moltmann's call for the Church to

venture an Exodus from the position in the 'private sphere' that the modern society has subscribed to it. Moltmann therefore said that he had a revolutionary Christianity in mind as he formulated his early theology since he believed that the Church's existence is predicated on its possibility to freely articulate the hope that the resurrection of Jesus Christ has made available. This hope is then what the Church is called by God to mediate to the contemporary society. Imbedded in this mission is also the struggle for *freedom* and *justice* but this is, as we have seen, a problematic point of view for a number of different reasons, primarily since the struggle for freedom tends to create new divisions and new oppressions. What creates a tension in Moltmann's early theology is at a fundamental level his political hermeneutics since it leads him to grant validity to ephemeral political movements that strive for freedom and justice. The consequence of Moltmann's hermeneutics is therefore that these political movements will be allowed to define the Church and its mission rather than receive the hope made available by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. One could agree with Moltmann that the Church should not accept the role as *cultus privatus* and that it should resist the modern metaphysics of subjecthood. One could also agree with the notion that the Church should not be socially irrelevant and that it should have a different purpose than the world. But as long as the Church's theology is spelled out within the framework of politics I believe that the Exodus Moltmann is advocating will prove to be impotent since it will only lead the Church from one structure of exclusion to another.¹⁵⁰ The unfortunate consequence of Moltmann's political hermeneutics is thus that it prevents his understanding of the Church to be realized since it does not allow for the Church to 'freely' articulate the hope that the resurrection of Jesus Christ has made available.

In his later theology Moltmann attempts, at least in part, to overcome these difficulties but he still allows for his political hermeneutics to control his reasoning, which creates new but similar problems. Since Moltmann believes that politics is the sole means by which we can control society he understands the millennial kingdom – the special, this-worldly side of eschatology – to define the Church's social projects. However, as Volf points out, this creates a new situation where the Church assumes a

¹⁵⁰ This is to some extent the problem in Moltmann's theology I believe that Miroslav Volf attempts to solve in his book *Exclusion and Embrace* by stressing the importance of making reconciliation the aim of politics since he believes that the struggle for freedom will always create new divisions.

place of power over the 'other' in order to rule the world as if it is the embodiment of God's 'fulfilled' promises. The fact that Moltmann still holds to his political hermeneutics in his later theology therefore leaves him with little room to avoid repeating the mistakes he himself criticises the proponents of historical millenarianism of committing.

In closing, I would like to say that although I find Moltmann's political hermeneutics severely problematic I have been intrigued by his reasoning all the way from *Theology of Hope* to his most recent writings. I began to read his books with a somewhat uninformed appreciation for his theology and I can only say that my appreciation has gradually grown as my understanding of his theological reasoning has increased.

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Summary

Moltmann's eschatology is at its core a vision for the universal future of the risen Christ. This is the theme that runs through his whole eschatology and it is therefore fundamentally what binds *Theology of Hope* and *The Coming of God* together. Implied in this statement is the fact that Moltmann perceives the God revealed in Christ as the Old Testament God of promise. He consequently understands God's raising of Christ as a promise by God to make all things new. In *Theology of Hope* Moltmann therefore made the claim that the resurrection of Christ creates a new horizon for human hope and further that this new horizon are to shape the missional life of the Church. The foundation for this interpretation is that the revelation of God moves from the particular towards the universal, hence the particular event of the resurrection of Christ unveils the universal future of the world. In *Theology of Hope* he further made the claim that Christ's resurrection demonstrate that the Kingdom of God is a new creation that will transform its citizens to embody the risen Lord. In *The Crucified God* Moltmann attempted to demonstrate that the crucified Christ revealed a God who is present in suffering. This book is according to Moltmann 'the other side' of *Theology of Hope*. While the latter described Christ's resurrection as a promise of a universal resurrection *The Crucified God* explained that God identifies himself with the weak and it thus provided a foundation for the claim that theology should be understood a critical theory of God in a loveless and legalistic world. The dialectic between the cross and the resurrection that Moltmann developed in his early theology is what drives his thinking forward and it moves him towards a more apocalyptic and cosmological eschatology during the years between the publications of *Theology of Hope* and *The Coming of God*. Hence when he writes his contribution to theology in regards of eschatology in *The Coming of God* he initially states that *Theology of Hope* is still a major part of his thinking. His aim was therefore not to re-shape his theology of hope but to concern himself with the eschatological 'horizons' of expectation for personal life, for political and historical life and for the life of the cosmos. The theology he presents is accordingly all-inclusive and describes that the redemption of humanity, history and the cosmos is integrated and interdependent. His claim is that everything will be brought back in new form and the final hope is that the fullness of God will indwell the new heaven and the new earth.