Introduction

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In publications spanning fifty years, Jürgen Moltmann has pursued what he calls an adventure in theological discovery. It all began in prisoner-of-war camps in the late 1940s. As a young German soldier faced with the newly revealed horrors of the Nazi regime, he found God in the gift of unexpected hope and in the companionship of the Christ who suffers with us. Over the years he has written frequently of this deep experiential root of his theology, but when, in the 1960s, his first major book, *Theology of Hope*, became a theological phenomenon (even on the front page of the *New York Times*), what drew so much attention was the way it seemed to chime with the mood of that remarkable decade. In western Europe and North America, it was a time when unlimited possibilities of radical change for the better seemed within reach. But Christian churches focused on individual salvation beyond this world lacked the theological resources for positive engagement with the secular hopes of the time. Moltmann's work sought to restore the full dimensions of Christian hope. Sweeping aside the aversion to future eschatology in the German theological tradition, Moltmann showed how the biblical history of promise projects a new future for this world and its history. Within the horizon of God's coming renewal of God's whole creation there was plenty of room for proximate hopes of social and political transformation, awakened and sustained by ultimate hope. This was a programmatic reorientation of theology that, in a single move, turned the church toward both the future and the world. Of course, it was far from the only way in which Christians worldwide were recovering an impetus to seek transformation in all dimensions of human life, but it would be hard to exaggerate its influence.

I first read *Theology of Hope* when it was still Moltmann's only major work. No doubt I was not immune to the optimistic mood of the time, but what impressed and excited me was that Moltmann was not giving theological support to some general notion of hope, still less to optimism. The center of his theology was (and has always remained) the biblical history of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. Against the background of the Old Testament history of God's promises, Moltmann read the history of Jesus as messianic history, full of promise for the all-embracing kingdom of God. Christian eschatology speaks

of Jesus Christ and his future, which is the world's future only because it is first of all the future of the world's Messiah. This not only inspires Christians to join with others in pursuing present possibilities of change that correspond to the coming kingdom. It also gives Christian hope a critical potential, especially when it is remembered that the resurrection gave new life to the *crucified* Christ, the one who in his abandoned death was identified with the most wretched and the most hopeless. Christian hope has nothing in common with the complacent optimism of the successful. Solidarity with the victims—including the victims of "progress"—alone gives it Christian authenticity. While those who saw in *Theology of Hope* little more than a theological gloss on the progressivist optimism of the modern age were surprised, even shocked, by the turn Moltmann's theology took in his next major book; those attuned to the christological heart of his early work were somewhat less taken off-guard. Whereas *Theology of Hope* found God-given hope in the resurrection of the crucified Christ, *The Crucified God* found the suffering love of God in the cross of the risen Christ. A dialectic of cross and resurrection was at work in both.

There is continuity and coherence between the two books, but not even Moltmann had anticipated where he would be led by his attempt to retrieve the "profane horror and godlessness" of the cross from interpretations that disguise its offensiveness. It required a "revolution" in the concept of God that then took a good part of several more books to be developed fully. In effect, Moltmann put Jesus' dying cry, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me," at the center of his understanding of God. Taking this cry seriously requires both that God must be understood to suffer, with consequences for the traditional understanding of divine impassibility, and also that the cross as an event of divine suffering be understood as anevent "between God and God," a trinitarian event. At the cross, Jesus, the divine Son incarnate, identified with the world in all its godlessness and godforsakenness so as to take it within the love between the Son and the Father. In their love for the world, the Father abandoned his Son to death, suffering his loss, and the Son voluntarily suffered abandonment by his Father. Their mutual love, the Holy Spirit, united them at this point of agonizing separation, such that the whole of the world's pain was taken up into a trinitarian history in hope of the overcoming of all evil. This was "revolutionary" because it made the cross an event internal to God's own trinitarian relationships and an event that affects not only the world, but also God. From this beginning, Moltmann was to develop a trinitarian understanding of the world in God and God in the world.

Theology of Hope and *The Crucified God* are undoubtedly classics of twentieth-century theology. One could approach them by locating them in the

history of German theology. Moltmann was one of several theologians who in the 1960s took up the theme of eschatological hope as a way of opening up theology to the world and the future. *The Crucified God* was one of the first books to take up the task of Christian theology "after Auschwitz"—that is, in the light of what the Holocaust has made theologically unthinkable. Moltmann's radical probing of the meaning of the cross for our understanding of God has much in common with the work of his Tübingen colleague Eberhard Jüngel, while the trinitarian theologies of both belong to a wider renaissance of trinitarian theology in the later part of the twentieth century. Yet classics are classics because they transcend their own time. If these two books seem less remarkable now than they did in their time, it is precisely because of the huge influence they have had. Yet such is the passion and the vigor of their argument, that new readers continue to find them profoundly inspiring in ways which are certainly not available through merely secondhand acquaintance.

Theology of Hope and *The Crucified God* were programmatic works or, one might say, "orienting" works, which serve to give to the whole of theology a particular kind of orientation. Eschatological hope has remained a decisive characteristic of all of Moltmann's theology and the cross has remained for him a decisive criterion of an adequately Christian theology. *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* completed this early trilogy, and performs a similar role, not so much through its understanding of the church as through its development of *The Crucified God*'s rather rudimentary account of the Spirit, making more fully viable the notion of a trinitarian history of God with the world. Then Moltmann's work took a new turn. He embarked on what became a series of seven planned volumes, five on classic Christian doctrines (Trinity, creation, Christology, pneumatology, eschatology), one on theological method (*Experiences in Theology*, not represented in this volume), and one on theological ethics. They have something like the traditional shape of a dogmatics or systematic theology, but he preferred to call them "contributions to theology," characteristically stressing their open and dialogical character as one theologian's contribution to the ongoing task. Early in his career, Moltmann had thought Karl Barth's achievement was something that left nothing more to be said, and he had not been able to write creative theology until he saw that Barth's treatment of future eschatology was seriously reductive. In his own work, he has no ambition to say the last word.

Moreover, while his early works created a fundamental structure of thought that has supported all his later work, Moltmann's thinking has proved constantly able to integrate new insights and to develop in fresh directions. Throughout his career, he has traveled frequently and extensively, and

wherever he goes he has attempted to engage with the churches, the theology, and the politics. As a result, it would be hard to think of a theologian whose work has benefited from such a wide and diverse range of ecumenical influences. In his trinitarian theology, he engaged with Orthodox theology, and in his pneumatology, with Pentecostalism. In his emphasis on the discipleship ethics of the Sermon on the Mount, he came close to the churches of the Radical Reformation. From feminist theology, especially through his wife Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, herself a leading feminist theologian, came an affirmation of bodily experience and, in some of his latest work, a turn from professorial objectivity to a more personal form of expression. A dialogue with Jewish theology has been important throughout his working life. At the same time, he has constantly returned to the theological tradition, retrieving its insights, learning from its mistakes, and continuing its debates.

This is not the place for a descriptive account or analysis of Moltmann's mature theology. Instead, by way of inviting readers into the rich experience of engaging with his work, I would like to highlight three key themes or characteristics:

1. *Passion.* This word, in its multiple meanings and dimensions, is a helpful clue to Moltmann's understanding of God. In his work, God's love is not the dispassionate benevolence of the God of traditional theism, who is impassible in the sense that he not only cannot suffer but cannot be affected by the world he loves, whether in suffering or in joy. Rather, for Moltmann, God's love is his passionate concern, his committed and costly involvement with the world. In the passion of Christ (in the traditional sense of his suffering), we find the com-passion of God, God's fellow suffering with all who suffer. The apathetic God (where "apathetic" is the Greek term for impassible, unmoved by anything outside himself) has his counterpart in apathetic humanity, people who hold back from life and love, commitment and involvement, for fear of suffering. The contemporary world respects competitiveness and success, not vulnerability. But in the company of the passionate and compassionate God, apathetic humans become open for love, suffering, and joy.

2. Mutuality and *Perichoresis.* For Moltmann, God is love because the three persons who are God constitute their unity in an intimate reciprocity of loving relationships. In the terminology of the Greek Fathers, *perichoresis* means that the three persons are "in" one another. Moltmann abandons the traditional idea of a fixed "order" of the persons in favor of a dynamic of changing relationships, in which the divine persons engage with each other in the course of engaging with the world. For the Trinity is not a closed circle of love, but an open and inviting unity. In God's history with the world, the world is

drawn into the loving relationships of the Trinity. Moltmann here extends the application of *perichoresis*, using it to describe the relationship between God and the world. God is in the world and the world is in God. As in the Trinity, this mutual indwelling does not obliterate difference, but constitutes relationship-in-difference or difference-in-relationship. The parallel is not complete, however, because in the Trinity God is in unity with God, like with like, whereas in God's relationship with the world God is united with what is not God, God's other. God's creation participates in the divine life, but does not become God.

In discarding the traditional idea of an "order" within the Trinity, in which the Father has a certain sort of priority, Moltmann grounds in God his rejection of hierarchical relationships in favor of relationships of mutuality. While hierarchy expresses dominance and suppresses freedom, relationships of loving mutuality are liberating. In the "kingdom" of God, the lordship of God is a provisional image and friendship with God the more adequate one. In Moltmann's political thought, the nondominating relationships within the Trinity ground democratic freedoms in society, while in his ecclesiology, hierarchy gives way to the reciprocity of different gifts exercised by equal participants. Moltmann's preferred model of the church is the image of open friendship, which does not form a closed circle of familiarity among those who are like each other, but is open in love for the outsider and the unlike.

The notion of mutuality, opposed to hierarchy and domination, also comes into its own in Moltmann's ecological understanding of the world. He sees the creation, humans included, as a community of God's creatures who share the earth in mutual interdependence. Creation itself is a perichoretic community constituted by relationships of mutuality. In the face of ecological catastrophe, humans need to move away from the exploitative domination that is destroying the natural world on which they are inescapably dependent. They also need to modify the purely objectifying form of knowledge that has accompanied domination of nature, a form of knowledge in which the knowing subject masters its object by isolating and analyzing it. An ecological theology requires instead a participatory form of knowledge, in which things are perceived in the totality of their relationships and the human subject perceives itself as a participant in the interdependence of all things.

3. *Life.* Moltmann's book on the Spirit, not initially part of his plan for the series, testifies to the growing importance of life as a unifying or embracing term in his theology. It is entitled *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation.* He understands the Spirit as "the divine wellspring of life"—source of all life, continually renewing all life, as well as ultimately source of eternal life for all

creation. This makes it possible for the whole of life to be experience of God and for God to be experienced in all things. The Spirit of life is God experienced in the profundity and vitality of life lived in God. In an important move to overcome the persistent duality of the "spiritual" and the "material," Moltmann insists that, as the Spirit of *life*, the Spirit of God is not related to the "spiritual" as opposed to the "material," nor to the human as opposed to the rest of creation. Life in the Spirit is not a life of withdrawal from the bodily, social, and natural world, but is characterized by a love of life and an affirmation of all life. This is a fresh form of Moltmann's characteristic concern for a theology of positive involvement in God's world. In the face of accumulating threats to life in our time, Moltmann gives an "ethics of life" an important place in his final work, *Ethics of Hope.*

Of course, the title of this concluding study of theological ethics reaffirms Moltmann's starting point. It is an *Ethics of Hope* that finally fulfills the ethical promise of his *Theology of Hope*. Moltmann's fifty years of theological exploration have taken him through times in which it has become much harder to hope than it seemed in the 1960s. He has come to see the contemporary world as an increasingly perilous experiment. So it has become even more important that Christian hope means resisting and anticipating—resisting the normative force of what dominates the present and anticipating the new and liberating future that comes from God.