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Jürgen Moltmann—
Theologian of Hope, 1926–2024
尤爾根·莫特曼（1926–2024）
——盼望神學家

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Jürgen Moltmann made theological history with his major works *Theology of Hope* (1964) and *The Crucified God* (1972), which have appeared in many editions and translations. He became the most internationally influential German Protestant theologian of the second half of the 20th century.

Moltmann's theological passion grew out of deep personal experiences of helplessness and despair, especially those of the firestorm over Hamburg during the war and then as a prisoner of war. He shared with Johann Baptist Metz the experience of not only having to endure his own fears of death during the war, but also having to live with the agonizing question: Why did the friends at my side have to die? He also shared with many people of his generation the experience of losing their youth and the oppressive realization that he had not only been a politically and ideologically seduced person who had lost his youth, but also belonged to the people of the guilty warmongers and Nazi henchmen and was counted among them.

These experiences gave rise to his desire to pursue a “theology in critical contemporaneity”. Calls for “exodus”, “awakening”, “resistance”, “objection”, “criticism” and “contradiction” are characteristic of Moltmann's and Metz's theology. However, the special power of Jürgen Moltmann's theology lies in the fact that he, like Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, wants to ask to what extent God's revelation and God's work enable people to resist and set out. Not to develop political criticism, criticism of religion and moral criticism out of own power, but to trace

the criticism and the empowerment for new beginnings and new beginnings, which emanate from God's revelation, from the cross and resurrection, from creation and new creation, from the promise and fulfillment and of the gifts of the Spirit — that is the lifeblood of this theology. Jürgen Moltmann's work in general and his theology of hope in particular remain exemplary, particularly in the ever new invitation and challenge to pursue systematic and critical contemporary theology as a biblically and Christologically oriented theology of content.

Hope as the driving force and medium of theological thought and ethical life practice: almost all the important decisions for a new version of Christian eschatology are made in the very first pages of the Theology of hope. Moltmann criticizes the conventional "doctrine of the last things", i.e. of "final events" that break in from a beyond of history and end history on this earth. He criticizes the abstract talk of "Judgement Day". He expresses this criticism based on the biblical testimonies, which — as he puts it following Ernst Bloch's Werk *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* — are "brimming with messianic hope for the future of the earth".

The focus of theological eschatology lies in dynamic hope: "Christianity is entirely and not only in the appendix eschatology, is hope, prospect and orientation towards the future, and therefore also the departure and transformation of the present. The eschatological is not something about Christianity, but it is in fact the medium of Christian faith..." The eschatological as the medium of Christian faith—thus eschatology is transformed from a special content into a general form of theology. In fact, Moltmann propagates a new form of theology by declaring the eschatological

to be the “character of all Christian proclamation, of every Christian existence and of the whole church”.

However, Christian eschatology does not talk about the future as such. It starts from a certain historical reality and announces its future, its future possibility and future power. Christian eschatology speaks of Jesus Christ and his future. It recognizes the reality of Jesus’ resurrection and proclaims the future of the risen One. For this reason, the foundation of all statements about the future in the person and history of Jesus Christ is the touchstone of all eschatological and utopian ideas. The hope that is oriented towards Christ is consistently also the hope of resurrection. As a resurrection hope, it proves, as Moltmann puts it, “its truth in the contradiction of the future of justice against sin, of life against death, of glory against suffering, of peace against brokenness, which is promised and guaranteed therein”. Moltmann explicitly states: “In this contradiction hope proves its strength. That is why eschatology must not wander off into the distance, but must formulate its propositions of hope in contradiction to the experienced presence of suffering, evil and death.”

The focus on Christ and the resurrection is expressed according to Moltmann in suffering from the given reality and in contradicting it. He therefore states: “Those who hope in Christ can no longer resign themselves to the given reality, but begin to suffer from it, to contradict it. Peace with God means discord with the world, because the sting of the promised future is relentlessly digging into the flesh of every unfulfilled present.” On this basis, the theology of hope sparkles with the joy of discovery and the power of language, comparable to Karl Barth’s commentary on Romans.

However, the rousing rhetorical power should not allow the interdisciplinary discussion capacity of this book to be overlooked. The intensive dialog with Ernst Bloch, the debates with thoughts of Kant and Hegel, the discussions with Barth, Bultmann and Pannenberg and the inclusion of basic ideas and drafts from the philosophy of history lend this work further theological-academic substance. A petit printed text im §5 of the third chapter, “The ‘Death of God’ and the Resurrection of Christ”, already anticipates several of the most important ideas that Moltmann and Eberhard Jüngel would publish years later for the discussion on the theology of the cross. The theology of Hope is given particular weight by the discussion with theologians of the Old and New Testaments in chapters II and III.

Moltmann himself remarked in retrospect on Theology of Hope that he had originally wanted to use this book to take part in the discussion on “Promise and History” in the 1960s. This discussion took place for long stretches in the journal *Evangelische Theologie*, of which he became the main editor in 1971. Outstanding German representatives of a “theology of the Old Testament” took part in this discussion, especially Gerhard von Rad, Walther Zimmerli, Hans Walter Wolff and Hans-Joachim Kraus, as well as representatives of a “theology of the New Testament”, especially in the tense relationship between Rudolf Bultmann and Ernst Käsemann. It can be said that Moltmann, by participating in this discussion, also offered a contribution to an interdisciplinary “biblical theology”, which was reflected upon internationally in terms of method and developed in terms of content in the following decades.

These basic features of the theology of hope are supplemented by a social and political critique of religion in the final chapter. With this chapter, which in some respects is reminiscent of Barth's famous *Tambach lecture* and left-wing Hegelian critique of society and the times, Moltmann actualizes Barth's and Bonhoeffer's theological critique of religion in the 1960s. His efforts to develop a "political Theology" in the following years and his inspiring contributions to various forms of liberation theology are already foreseeable here.

The theology of hope became a model for many directions of emancipatory, church and socially critical theology and piety around the world, especially for feminist, political and post-colonial and not least ecologically oriented theologies. As chairman of the *Society for Protestant Theology* from 1979–1994, Moltmann endeavored to strengthen the connection between church and civil society commitments. He was also awarded many honorary doctorates and regularly gave lectures in many countries, particularly in the USA and South Korea.

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