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The Problem with Moltmann

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- **The Problem with Moltmann**
- *Le problème posé par la pensée de Moltmann*
- *Anmerkungen zu Moltmanns Konzept der Hoffnung*

Stephen N. Williams, Belfast

RÉSUMÉ

La théologie de Moltmann continue à attirer beaucoup d'attention. Mais l'un des ses thèmes principaux, la notion d'espérance pour ce monde, pose problème. On ne voit pas bien ce qu'il entend lorsqu'il dit que Dieu a fait des promesses pour ce monde-ci, alors que ce monde pourrait être ravagé par une catastrophe nucléaire ou écologique. On ne voit pas non plus clairement ce qu'il veut dire lorsqu'il parle d'espérance pour la création entière.

La présente étude suggère que nous

faisons une distinction entre l'amour et l'espérance comme motifs d'action sociale, car l'amour peut déterminer notre action de façon concrète, ce qui n'est pas le cas de l'espérance. Cela nous permettra de souligner l'importance de l'action sociale en évitant les difficultés que comporte le concept d'espérance chez Moltmann. Bien que cet article soit très critique à l'égard de la pensée de Moltmann, il lui sait gré d'avoir donné à l'amour de Dieu en Christ l'importance qui lui est due, en particulier dans l'ouvrage Le Dieu crucifié.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Moltmanns Theologie ruft nach wie vor große Aufmerksamkeit hervor. Doch einer ihrer zentralen Aspekte—das Konzept der diesseitigen Hoffnung—ist problematisch. So ist nicht klar, was mit der Aussage, daß Gott Verheißungen für diese Welt gegeben hat, gemeint ist angesichts dessen, daß diese Welt durch eine nukleare oder ökologische Katastrophe vernichtet werden könnte. Zudem ist unklar, was Moltmann meint, wenn er von einer Hoffnung für die gesamte Schöpfung spricht.

Das Anliegen dieses Artikels ist es,

zwischen Liebe und Hoffnung als Gründen für soziales Engagement zu unterscheiden, da Liebe auf den Einzelfall ausgerichtet ist, was auf Hoffnung nicht zutrifft. Dies versetzt uns in die Lage, die Bedeutung von sozialem Engagement hervorzuheben und gleichzeitig die Probleme von Moltmanns Konzept der Hoffnung zu vermeiden. Obwohl der vorliegende Artikel eine kritische Position zu Moltmann einnimmt, ist doch anzuerkennen, daß Moltmann (vor allem in Der gekreuzigte Gott) der Liebe Gottes in Christus eine angemessene Bedeutung beimißt.

Moltmann's work continues to attract a lot of attention. Last year, Richard Bauckham published a second volume on Moltmann's theology.¹ In the previous year, Arne Rasmussen produced the first major study of Stanley Hauerwas' work, in a lengthy comparison of Moltmann and Hauerwas.² This year, Moltmann celebrates his seventieth birthday. This is one reason why the title of this article smacks of the ungenerously churlish. A second is that it is easy to detect problems, compounding the ungenerously churlish with the unduly negative. So, a little compensation is in order on both scores. Firstly, after critical discussion, I shall turn to a constructive proposal. Secondly, and very briefly, I shall try at the end of this piece to locate any elements for such a construction that can be discovered in Moltmann's own work.

What is the Problem?

The problem in mind goes a long way back, to the *Theology of Hope* itself. Of course, criticisms of this work also go a long way back and Moltmann's thought has gone some way forward in the thirty odd years since it was published. However, the line of criticism I want to pursue here has not been marked out clearly enough, I believe, even in cognate lines of criticism. And although there has been development in Moltmann's theology, there are also constants. Writing, at the beginning of this decade, of his theological career, Moltmann summarized his effort as a reflection on a theology which has: '—a biblical foundation,—an eschatological orientation,—a political responsibility'.³ Since then, Moltmann has produced one more volume in a systematic series which began with *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, namely *The Spirit of Life*.⁴ While he implies that the connections he now makes between pneumatology, christology and eschatology, constitute an advance on *Theology of Hope*, we are not long into the book before realizing that eschatological hope is still to the fore.⁵ Pneumatology is trea-

ted eschatologically.

So, what is the problem? Moltmann launched his theological campaign in *Theology of Hope* with the claim that Christianity is eschatology. Christology, far from identifying something thematically distinctive in Christianity, gives particular form to its essential messianism, a messianism which makes it comparable in its intellectual structure to Marxism and to National Socialism.⁶ Ideologies that are messianically structured, such as these, owe their existence as this-worldly messianisms to a mistake in the history of Christian thought. What happened was that Christianity lost its true eschatological orientation. It maintained a prominent eschatology, but it was an other-worldly one. So hope for this world emigrated from the church and the church, rather than recapturing its own true eschatological nature, allied its mistaken other-worldliness to a defensive, socially conservative, anti-revolutionary ideology. From *Theology of Hope* onwards, Moltmann has aspired to restore to Christianity its proper dimension of this-worldly hope. This-worldly hope stimulates, drives and gives direction to mission, a mission understood holistically, but distinctively charged by Moltmann with social action on behalf of the poor and the oppressed. Whatever his tergiversations or expansions, there has been no let-up over the course of his authorship in Moltmann's emphases on these points.

So, we repeat, what is the problem? The problem is that the concept of this-worldly hope is troublesome. And the attempts to create an 'ethical field-theory for hope', as Douglas Meeks once put it, consequently run into trouble as well.⁷ As we examine this concept, we do well to invite our theological consciences to heed words written by Hugo Assmann many years ago. '... Theology is intended as an expression of the hope of liberation, not as a theoretical debate to define hope'.⁸ Whether or not this is well said, I shall pick up this point in the course of the discussion.

This-worldly hope

Why is 'this-worldly hope' troublesome? Because its meaning is unclear. In terms of his overall conceptual scheme, Moltmann has always intended to distinguish between ultimate, eschatological hope and proximate hopes. The former produces the latter. The former is grounded in divine *promise*. '... The biblical testimonies which it [Christian faith] handed on are yet full to the brim with future hope of a messianic kind for the world ...', declares the opening page of *Theology of Hope*, in which Moltmann begins to unfold the logic of promise.⁹ The latter, proximate hopes, are indirectly but not directly grounded in promise. That is, we do not have a promise that proximate realities will turn out well, but we are promised *possibilities* and, therefore, there is no excuse for despair and every cause for mission. What is possible is derived from what is promised, but is obviously not identical with it. Those who peruse the vocabulary of hope from Moltmann's earliest works will find that it frequently slides without regulation from the one to the other meaning, from a confident, certain hope, correlated to promise, to a hope in the ordinary-language sense, where it is contrasted with justifiable certainty. Yet, there is a clear schematic intention to distinguish.

In principle, the distinction between this-worldly and other-worldly hope may be important enough. But there is some question about the way it functions in Moltmann's writing. Moltmann's literature generally exhibits rhetorical indifference to the distinction between 'not x' and 'not only x', but the explicit force of his contention that Christianity has been guilty of an other-worldly instead of a this-worldly hope is obviously lost if the distinction is not in principle clearly maintained. *Prima facie*, the distinction is not a difficult one, and, apparently, only those cursed with the idle theological habit of kicking up dust and complaining that they cannot see, will wonder about it. Yet, the distinction in Moltmann's work is not at all clear, even when we attend to its

broad schematic features, instead of focussing on every word, and even when we allow for any positive sense he may ascribe to 'other-worldly' hope.¹⁰ We discover this when we recall a theme which cropped up in his earlier theology and in much theology of that earlier period: the prospect of nuclear disaster. Moltmann's literature has exhibited the wider social shift from nuclear to ecological worry, but the point at issue applies in both cases.

In his work over the years, Moltmann has taken seriously both the extreme nuclear and bleak ecological prospects, which comprehend the devastation of this planet as we know it. He took his time to address these in very specific relation to the theology of hope.¹¹ But the principle of the problem was taken up in his 'ecological doctrine of creation', *God in Creation*.¹² Here, he rejected the apocalyptic expectation of *annihilatio mundi*, represented in traditional Lutheran dogmatics by Johann Gerhard. He did not deny that the *mundus* could be annihilated. Divine promise is no guarantee against that. To think otherwise would be to refuse to take the nuclear threat seriously. But its apocalyptic *expectation* is a breach of faith in God as Creator. Faith in God as Creator reinforces what Moltmann had long maintained on the basis of divine eschatological promise: whatever befalls, God is committed to the *nova creatio*, the new heaven and the new earth. What Moltmann does not offer is a dogmatic denial of an eschatological *annihilatio mundi* in the name of an alternative *transformatio mundi* as in traditional Reformed dogmatics, as critics from a more conservative wing of the Reformed tradition have pointed out.¹³

Here, then, is our problem. How can we say both (a) that God has given *promises* for the eschatological future of *this* world and (b) that *this* world *may* be subject to nuclear or other devastation? Moltmann's epistemological moves, from the beginning of *Theology of Hope* onwards, still enable him to join the Christian tradition in placing confidence and having certainty in our hope that God has delivered promises. Hope is not directed to a precarious

eschatological possibility. But the prospects for this world are precarious. Moltmann never argued that catastrophic nuclear effects would be limited, in order to suit a theological conviction that this world cannot realize the darkest empirically foreseeable possibilities. Whatever 'this-worldly hope' means, in its ultimate, eschatological nature, it is compatible with nuclear (or other) devastation. Hence my questions. Why should our hope be called 'this-worldly' rather than indeterminate in relation to this world?

One possibility is that, via the notion of 'this-worldly hope', Moltmann is merely insisting on the corporeal and not incorporeal nature of that for which we hope. Corporeality, not continuity, is what matters about the future. This, however, is not a satisfactory response. On a literalistic reading of his work, he does, indeed, maintain the corporeal prospect. But 'this-worldly hope' can hardly mean no more than this. The point may be clearer if we substitute, as Moltmann sometimes does, the phrase 'hope for the historical future' for 'this-worldly hope'.¹⁴ The post-nuclear world is surely not the historical future, in the sense Moltmann means that. Of course, if we take Moltmann to be affirming the compatibility of the nuclear prospect with proximate this-worldly hope, there is no inconsistency. But then we are not talking of *ultimate eschatological* hope, *directly* grounded in promise.

The difficulties are compounded if we ask what prospects Moltmann has positively held out, over the years, for our historical future. The ultimate eschatological future does not impinge on the proximate historical future just by giving stimulus and direction to our efforts at social change. There are at least two other concepts Moltmann has used to make the connection between the ultimate eschatological and the proximate historical futures. The first, the most pervasive and enduring one in his literature, is the concept of 'anticipation'. In history, while we cannot expect progress until the consummation of the kingdom of God, at least things can happen which anticipate

the final outcome. This is a relatively non-technical notion that emerged not just in Moltmann's thought but on the ecumenical scene more generally, many years ago.¹⁵ The second is 'process'. This one is harder.

'With the resurrection of Christ from the dead and the annihilation of death which takes place through him, the eschatological process of the new creation of all transitory and mortal things begins'.¹⁶ What kind of 'process' is this? The question is the harder to answer because the vocabulary of 'process' was deployed in *Theology of Hope* when Ernst Bloch's conceptualities were particularly prominent. If we need to understand Bloch in order to understand Moltmann, many will conclude that we must penetrate the *obscurum per obscurius*. Without, however, dismissing this possibility, we can certainly note the negative: 'process', in Moltmann, is not 'progress'. The world can get worse, whatever 'tendencies' are set in motion by the resurrection.¹⁷ Moltmann believes this because he believes so strongly in human freedom understood, it would seem, in a libertarian sense. So the 'process' is neither one which definitely prevents the devastation of the earth nor one which prevents the degeneration of the human lot in history. What, then, is it? It is unclear.¹⁸

Two objections are possible to the foregoing declaration of difficulties with Moltmann. The first is that it evidences a profound failure of theological imagination, a captivity to a style of theological thought that fails to see the wood of eschatological vision for the trees of conceptual light and shade. In this connection, it may be argued that Scripture itself does not present the kind of description that is apparently demanded in the statement of difficulties with Moltmann. Let it be granted that perhaps a weak theological imagination is culpably contributing to the fact that one is missing what Moltmann is trying to say. Still, he is unclear! On the matter of biblical description, we must remember that nowhere does the Bible pose the 'this-worldly/' 'other-worldly' alternative in the concep-

tually conscious way that Moltmann does, nor speak of a historical 'process' set in motion by promise or resurrection. Those who would go in the name of biblical theology beyond biblical conceptuality, in order to explain its message, are theologically welcome to do so in principle, provided that they explain what they themselves are saying.

A second objection is that our whole dilemma as stated arises from a literalistic reading of Moltmann. It may be argued that Moltmann takes 'this-worldly hope' as a symbol regulating our attitudes towards the world in which we live and move and have our historical being. On this reading, Moltmann means, by his vocabulary, to secure our incorporation into the world of the biblical narrative by using well-grounded theological symbolism which is correlated to desirable types of action. What are we to make of this objection?

We arrive here at what some may regard as *the* problem area in Moltmann's theology, the subject that really deserves to go under the heading: 'The Problem with Moltmann', namely, the problem of the status of his religious language. Perhaps we are not to anticipate clarification on this point until the production of the final volume in his projected systematics, the volume on theological method. The hermeneutical exercise involved in interpreting Moltmann's language as symbolic would take time and certainly entail a redescription of his claims as I have treated them. But suppose we grant that on the point of 'symbolic', as against 'literal', interpretation of Moltmann, the objection at least presents us with a possible reading. Nevertheless, to cut a long story short, if the symbolism of this-worldly hope is consistent both with the prospect of empirical holocaust and historical decline, it seems to dissociate our historical actions for the proximate future from any connection with what we might meaningfully call 'promise'. And this surely ruptures the fabric of Moltmann's thought.

I am far from claiming that there is no way round the difficulties. There may

even be a simple move available to solve our problem, forestalling the need for any conceptual ingenuity. All I claim is that the position is problematic as stated; or, more modestly, that I cannot follow Moltmann's meaning. The same applies if we turn to consider an important feature of this-worldly hope, namely its universalism. By this, I do not refer here to the question of individual human destiny. What is in view is Moltmann's oft-reiterated claim that all reality is destined for eschatological glory. It is spelled out in all its glaring obscurity in *The Way of Jesus Christ*, in the discussion of the 'Eschatological Resurrection of Christ', and especially the remarks on the connection between resurrection and nature.¹⁹ Even Richard Bauckham, a staunch, though not uncritical, advocate of Moltmann's theological enterprise, states that: 'The apparent implication of Moltmann's view that every individual creature that has ever lived—every marigold, every termite, every small-pox virus—will be resurrected in the new creation may seem bizarre . . .' and I do not understand how this problem is eased, as Bauckham says it is.²⁰ Bauckham's words may indeed confirm the suspicions of those who hold that my problems with Moltmann stem from a literal or literalistic reading. But then we are back with another set of difficulties in understanding quite what Moltmann is saying. With this, I rest the case for obscurity and submit my problem.

A possibility

The problem encountered in the theology of Jürgen Moltmann does, however, generate an interesting and, I think, fruitful theological possibility if we want to essay a constructive response. Suppose that we resist the claim that all individual creatures will be raised or any theological tendency that impels us in that direction. Does it reduce our incentive or imperil our grounds for commitment to the earth? Most of us will say: 'No'. Our hope for what we think of as the cosmic whole does

not entail hope for every cosmic particular. In that case, our concern for the particular is not governed by our hope for particulars. The theological basis for concern for the earth can and has been laid out in more or less sophisticated ways, but it is especially pertinent to alight here on the question of love. I may care for the earth out of love for God and for my dog. Love governs my relationship to particulars, where eschatological hope does not. Of course, one could elaborate. Eschatological hope may have a role to play in the formation of my love; eschatological hope for the cosmos may have some role to play in the formation of my love for the particular; the nature of love may need logical, phenomenological and theological elaboration to avoid our talk of love being mere truism. Having said all that, love governs particulars where hope does not.

Exactly the same obtains in the case of the eschatological destiny of human beings. Nonuniversalists will say that we may not hope for the salvation of all, in the sense of entertaining a certain, confident disposition generated by the promise of universal salvation. But they will not say that we can or should not love all. Here, again, love governs the particular where hope does not. (Naturally, we should modify this as we have just done in relation to the earth). Let me assume, at this point, the viability and validity of this position. The question then arises of whether we should deploy the distinction between hope and love in relation to social action, as well, which has always been at the heart of Moltmann's concerns. To put it sharply and at risk of courting an exaggerated response: can we not maintain that our social action is a work of love rather than of hope? If we do so, do we reduce the incentive and imperil the grounds for social action? Certainly, if we do not, the problems with Moltmann's eschatology logically expand into problems with his way of relating eschatology to social action. Let us try to explore the option we have tabled.

Love, Hope and Social Action

The *prima facie* difficulty with the proposed distinction between hope and love is easy to detect. Apparently, it dissociates loving action from any conviction about human destiny. So it looks as though it fails to regard human beings in an eschatological light. Since eschatological reality is the consummation of salvation and reconciliation, it ousts loving action from a soteriological context. And it is not hard to see where this leads. It creates a dualism: love, impelling social action, pertains to a soteriologically indifferent sphere while hope, which does not govern the particulars of social action, pertains to a soteriological realm, the ultimate-eschatological. Are we not headed for a Lutheran dualism of two kingdoms?

Moltmann has written an interesting essay on Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms, interesting because he is quite generous in his appraisal, though he is critical. According to Moltmann, because of the brand of apocalyptic dualism which characterizes his theology of history, Luther sees the worldly orders within which one exercises love as orders of preservation, at best, 'but not the anticipatory realization of the kingdom of God on earth'.²¹ In this connection: '... The two kingdoms doctrine gives no criteria for a specific Christian ethics ... It is a theology of history but not a foundation for Christian ethics ... It brings into Christian ethics a realism which reckons with the given facts. But it does not motivate world-transforming hope. That is its weakness'²². So an important criterion for Christian ethics is whether it motivates world-transforming hope. Moltmann believes that if eschatological hope is a transforming power in history, we have a basis for Christian ethics. (The concepts of ethics and of mission are interwoven in Moltmann's theology, and are inter-related and correlated on a common eschatological basis).

Now Moltmann does not go into the kinds of distinctions between motives and grounds, for example, which would go into a moral-philosophical look at Christian

ethics and I shall not seize on the language of 'motive' that he deploys here. But supposing we dwell on Lutheran love. Luther himself has a powerful statement of it in his short Reformation classic, *The Freedom of the Christian*. In it, Luther first expounds justification by faith as a power that transforms the self. But, justified by faith, the Christian is bound to love: indeed, as the believer dwells in Christ by faith, so the believer indwells the neighbour by love. It looks as though, if one took this seriously, one would go a long way in the direction of world-transformation. For if the neighbour labours under oppression of any description, for instance, of a political kind, and if the structure creates the oppression, one is bound to work for its removal. What apparently prevents one from going as far in Lutheran as one can in Reformed theology at this point, is the differing conceptions of government and right of resistance. Just how settled these differences really are, we shall leave open here. But if Lutheran world-transforming action is comparatively limited, its limits do not arise from the logic of love. On the contrary, the love established by Luther as the heart of Christian life, a life justified by faith, seems to strike out in a powerful and positive description towards maximal social transformation.

Still, quite apart from the limits set by a peculiarly Lutheran view of government, is the social dimension of its love so detached from the soteriological issue of history that it reduces motivation to change the world? Emil Brunner remarked aptly on a cognate point forty years ago, though his statements are very succinct. In his discussion of hope, Brunner focussed on Christ as its sole object. Nothing which lacks this object deserves to be called *Christian* hope. He emphasized that '... Christian hope is only that hope for which we have certainty in Jesus Christ himself'. Other hopes, such as the hope of increased justice, are legitimate, even mandatory, but their fruition is not guaranteed. We cannot say of what may happen in history: 'They *will* occur [my emphasis] because Christ has come'.²³

Brunner was not arguing that the coming of Christ has no impact on what happens in history. He was refusing to place the object of any *particular* hope under the constraint of a necessity arising from his coming.

Writing against the background of discussion of belief in progress, Brunner then proceeded to say that one of the fairytales of his age was 'that men need the idea of progress to make them active'. He responded as follows: 'What we really need to make us active is love, and if we have love we need no other stimulus'. We are 'called by Christ to become co-workers with him for the Kingdom of God—and this call is sufficient to activate man's total effort'.²⁴ Brunner gave an eschatological dimension to these remarks in two ways. First, he thought that the hope of eternal life is based on love. *Contra* Marxism, it follows that it cannot be an opiate, because, based on love, hope of eternal life 'cannot but create love'. Secondly, the hope of eternal life is not just a hope for my destiny. It is a hope for the perfection of the whole of creation, for 'world redemption' and 'world salvation'.

I do not wish to be bound by all the main elements of Brunner's theology at this point, more than by those of Luther. But his stark asseverations throw down a gauntlet. It is hard to add to the motivation of love. How can one limit what it wants to accomplish in this world? It is not dissociated from faith and hope, but it does not need the sphere of its interest to be coterminous with the sphere of hope before it expresses that interest. Indeed, properly speaking, hope applies to the eschatological sphere alone. Now we know that Moltmann admits a distinction of hopes, albeit one that he consistently blurs. But he refuses to distinguish soteriologically and to ascribe salvation to what is ultimate and eschatological, but not to that which is proximate and temporal. Here, he makes a significant criticism of the Reformers. 'The Reformation relativized the political orders, making them necessary orders in this world which can serve the welfare of all, and ought to do so, but do not minister to salvation'. The

Reformers made a 'critical distinction between salvation and welfare'²⁶. The way Moltmann ran this argument, found in *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, is worth looking at more closely.

The Church in the Power of the Spirit

In this volume, oriented to the oppressed, Moltmann aimed 'to point away from the pastoral church, that looks after the people, to the people's own communal church among the people'²⁶. As the *corpus christianum* decays, the congregation is to press on to 'total testimony of salvation which leaves no sphere of life without hope, from faith to politics, and from politics to economics.' (p. 10). This testimony is grounded in the church's comprehension of its commission in world history, 'in the context of God's history' (p. 2), which is more than church history. The testimony is integrated by the conviction that, although liberation takes different forms, 'the freedom that is sought can only be a single and a common freedom. It is the freedom for fellowship with God, man and nature.' (p. 17) So: 'Mission embraces all activities that serve to liberate man from his slavery in the presence of the coming God, slavery which extends from economic necessity and Godforsakenness . . .' (p. 10). Again: mission is 'infecting people, whatever their religion, with the spirit of hope, love and responsibility for the world' (p. 152). Although Moltmann might have in principle, and may have in fact, derived this conviction about the unity of freedom from more sources than one, the stated ground of his belief is eschatology. Eschatology is about a single, undivided freedom and our quest for it must be one, its elements (fellowship with God, man and nature) equally weighted. Moltmann has characteristically interpreted the messianic mission of Jesus in eschatological light, a mission which is comprehensive and indivisible. The poor and the captives may be spiritually, physically, socially or politically bound or deprived, but differences of conditions do

not allow some kind of hierarchy of liberations. So it is that a true orientation to faith and hope entails rejection of the Reformers' 'critical distinction between salvation and welfare.' (p. 178).

Two criticisms of this are in order.

First, the equal soteriological weight attached to diverse forms of liberation cannot be derived from its eschatologically holistic form or nature. The eschatological kingdom may, indeed, be one of personal reconciliation, social freedom and environmental health. It does not follow that there are no pertinent distinctions that apply in the proximate sphere. If the environmental situation deteriorates, we may believe that God will restore it eschatologically; social achievements can be largely undone in time, but we may believe that God will eschatologically establish *shalom* in its perfection. But what if one's personal relationship to God is marked by increasing indifference, contempt for his law and, bitterness. Is all this eschatologically reversible, no more imperilling our eschatological destiny than environmental disaster imperils the eschatological destiny of the earth? The cases are not the same. That is, the fluctuating conditions of the environment or socio-political order do not affect one's entitlement to eschatological hope for 'environment' or 'social order'; but the nature of our personal relationship to God *does* affect our entitlement to hope for its positive eschatological consummation.

Secondly, let us tritely consider the following. One person is materially poor, educationally disadvantaged, politically deprived—but lives trustingly in God. Another is materially comfortable, free for intellectual self-development, participant in a relatively democratic process, but heedless of God. In biblical perspective, which is nearer to the kingdom of God? To ask the question is to answer it. And to answer it is to distinguish the relationship of different forms of freedom to their eschatological consummation in a way that forces us to differentiate soteriologically between different freedoms. If the New Testament is not telling us that, there is no telling what it is saying.

Of course, no sooner does one say this than the cry of 'dualism' rings through the theological air and all its associated evils crowd to mind. But 'dualism' is not a felicitous word to use for the position being adopted here, particularly if it is a pejorative term. The proper commitment and holistic passion of love in diverse situations is neither compromised nor enervated by the perceived soteriological distinctions. True, soteriological perception will shape one's actions. The relative importance accorded to political liberation and personal reconciliation respectively will doubtless be affected by theological soteriology. Forced, in a particular situation, to choose between time given and importance relatively attached to 'x' and to 'y', one may indeed, on my view, accord less weight to political liberation than to personal reconciliation.²⁷ But the charge of dualism is in vain here. For the soteriological conviction of those who adopt Moltmann's position must also affect existential priorities in particular cases. Those who, in the name of holism, insist that love of neighbour entails political action, may as easily be accused of existential neglect in the concern for personal reconciliation with God, as often as alleged dualists are accused of existential neglect in their concern for political liberation.

We have framed this discussion by the conviction that love does entail transforming action, and that the loss of Moltmannian hope causes no relinquishment of its proper vigour. I hope, however, that, whatever the truth contained in Hugo Assmann's warning about theoretical debates about hope, its potential practical importance is clear. To proceed further on the trail of praxis, we should need to put particular situations under the microscope—theorizing can appear extremely vacuous otherwise. The *meaning* of one's theological claims is grasped when one observes how one's language functions in a form of life. I beg the pardon of non-Wittgensteinian readers if this way of putting things complicates life!

More positively . . .

On the negative side, I have tried to do two things. First, I have quarrelled with the intelligibility of the concept of this-worldliness in Moltmann's theology. Secondly, I have quarrelled with the way he allows hope to govern the grounds for social action. Certainly, we must limit the area of quarrel. On the first point, the argument is not that the claim 'eschatological hope should be this-worldly and not other-worldly' is intrinsically unintelligible or unimportant. I am dealing specifically with the problem in Moltmann's theology. On the second, I am not saying that Christian love is uninformed by eschatological hope. Love and hope are not partitioned: they are distinguished *ad hoc*. The hopeful passion of love—hopeful, in the sense of uncertainty about a particular outcome—can still be fuelled by eschatological hope. Christian life and conviction are deeply disintegrated if there is a move to compartmentalize faith, hope and love.

Is there anything in Moltmann's thought that is consonant with the proposed emphasis on love? Eight years ago, the proceedings of a conference in the United States, held to celebrate the Moltmanns' sixtieth birthdays, were published under the title of *Love: the Foundation of Hope*.²⁸ The title refers primarily to divine love, although Douglas Meeks (one of the editors) possibly had human love in mind as well when he wrote that: 'No one in our time has more convincingly shown that love is the foundation, source and power of justice than Jürgen Moltmann.' (p. 42) He supports this judgement by reference to the essays collected together under the title *On Human Dignity*. The reference is surprising, not just because Meeks uses such strong language to describe Moltmann's achievement, but because *On Human Dignity* is characteristically dominated by the emphasis on hope, increasingly so as the volume progresses.²⁹ However, Moltmann does, in this volume, say the following, *inter alia*, about love. In the conclusion to his essay on 'Messianic Atheism', he refers to Dietrich Bonhoeffer

on the connection between love of the earth and the resurrection of the dead. Only after one loves may 'one believe in the resurrection of the dead and in a new world'. Moltmann comments:

There is then no transcending of hope without the paradoxical countermovement of the incarnation of love, no breaking out to new horizons without the sacrifice of life, no anticipating of the future without first investing in it.³⁰

This last phrase threatens to scupper a contrast Bonino offered in his contribution to the birthday conference. Here he claimed that while the hope of liberation theologians was awakened by the experience of love in community: 'On the other hand, in European theology, one usually starts with "the promise", a promise that draws "the project" to itself.' (p. 72)

At the least, Moltmann's words signal caution in any attempt to schematize his eschatological thinking in relation to life and mission without factoring love into it. I have written this article as though Moltmann were not the author of *The Crucified God*, a theology of love, as well as a theology of hope. It evidences some kinship with the work of Bonhoeffer, whose *Ethics*, to which Moltmann was alluding in the reference above, advances a very powerful christological ground for discipleship, eschatology being present but not dominant.³¹ *The Crucified God* was true to its predecessor, *Theology of Hope*, in grounding its christological-eschatological basis for action in crucifixion and not just resurrection.³² It seems impossible to challenge Moltmann's brand of eschatological theology without attacking the heart of his proposal. But we are talking here about the heart of a conceptual structure. Moltmann's vision of love, and of the way of Jesus Christ, may in some important respects survive criticism. And there, it may be, we shall find the heart of the theologian.

1 R. Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995). His previous work was *Moltmann: Messianic Theology in the Making* (Basing-

stoke: Marshall Pickering, 1987).

- 2 A. Rasmusson, *The Church as Polis* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1994).
- 3 *History and the Triune God* (London: SCM, 1991), p. 182.
- 4 J. Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life* (London: SCM, 1992).
- 5 See, e.g., pp. 7, 69.
- 6 'Political Theology and Political Hermeneutic of the Gospel', p. 100ff, in *On Human Dignity* (London: SCM, 1984).
- 7 M. D. Meeks, *Origins of the Theology of Hope* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), see pp. 47ff and 129.
- 8 H. Assmann, *A Practical Theology of Liberation* (London: Search Press, 1975) p. 59ff.
- 9 *Theology of Hope* (London: SCM, 1967) p. 15.
- 10 Though the language is short of 'other-worldly hope', note J. M. Bonino's 'Professor Moltmann rightly rejects the dichotomy between a this-worldly (social) and an "other side" (personal) eschatology' ('Love and Social Transformation in Liberation Theology', p. 76. n. 20, in F. B. Burnham et al., *Love: the Foundation of Hope* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988) and the essay he has especially in mind, Moltmann's 'Love, Death, Eternal Life: the Theology of Hope—the Personal Side', published in the same volume, pp. 3–22).
- 11 Richard Bauckham pressed 'theology of hope' on this point in 'Theology after Hiroshima', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 38 (1985) pp. 583–601.
- 12 J. Moltmann, *God in Creation* (London: SCM, 1985). Cf. pp. 86–93 and p. 343, n.26ff.
- 13 B. J. Walsh, 'Theology of Hope and the Doctrine of Creation: An Appraisal of Jürgen Moltmann', *Evangelical Quarterly* 59 (1987) pp. 53–76; D. J. Schuurman, 'Creation, Eschaton and Ethics': an analysis of Theology and Ethics in Jürgen Moltmann', *Calvin Theological Journal* 22 (1987) pp. 42–67; *ibid.*, D. J. Schuurman, *Creation, Eschaton and Ethics: The Ethical Significance of the Creation-Eschaton Relation in the Thought of Emil Brunner and Jürgen Moltmann* (New York: 1991).
- 14 The phrase must be interpreted synecdochically; Moltmann's interest in history expanded to comprehend an interest in nature.
- 15 See *The Crucified God* (London: SCM, 1974) p. 287, n.125.
- 16 *History and the Triune God*, p. 78.

- 17 The language of 'tendency' is again technical, but more important in *Theology of Hope* (pp. 203ff) than subsequently.
- 18 According to Richard Bauckham: 'This process is the universal mission of the church', *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, p. 38. I am not sure that I grasp the meaning of 'is' here. But, as far as I can tell, this interpretation applies 'process' to church, rather than world, history.
- 19 J. Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ* (London: SCM, 1990). Moltmann succeeds in the space of this section in telling us that Christ's resurrection is bodily; that the symbol of the raising of the dead excludes ideas about life after death; that 'all life endures death with pain' (p. 253) and that resurrection has become the universal law for stones (p. 258).
- 20 *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, p. 210: '... This problem is alleviated by the novel concept of resurrection which Moltmann introduces in this book. It is that the whole of *history* (the history of nature and human beings) will be redeemed from evil and death and transformed in the eschatological eternity in which all its times will be simultaneous. So not simply creatures in what they have become in their temporal history, but all creatures as they are diachronically in the process of their history and in all their temporal relationships with other creatures, will be resurrected and transfigured in eternity.' I am unable to understand these sentences.
- 21 The essay is 'Luther's Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms and its Use Today' in *On Human Dignity*, though I have wandered into a subsequent essay in the same collection ('Political Theology and Political Hermeneutic of the Gospel', p. 108) to fetch these words.
- 22 Op. cit., p. 76.
- 23 For this discussion, see E. Brunner, *Faith, Hope and Love* (London: Lutterworth, 1957) pp. 48–58.
- 24 Op. cit., p. 57.
- 25 J. Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (London: SCM, 1977) p. 178.
- 26 Op. cit., p. xvi. Subsequent page references to this work are given in the text of the article.
- 27 This way of putting matters is shorthand, concessionary and presumes the good will of the reader. I do not assume that 'personal reconciliation' and 'political liberation' constitute some kind of alternative monolithic entities.
- 28 Op. cit. Page references to this work will now appear in the text of the article.
- 29 In this collection, Moltmann contrasts the primacy of love in medieval theology and the primacy of faith in Reformation theology with the primacy of hope, disclosed by modernity and laid upon the theological conscience. Of course, throughout his works, Moltmann gives considerable weight to the importance of love, as well as to hope, in relation to mission and social action.
- 30 Op. cit., p. 186.
- 31 If this seems to play down the perceived importance of eschatology in Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*, eschatology nevertheless does not assume the role it assumes in Moltmann's work. Here, Moltmann has been taken as constituting an advance on Bonhoeffer. (See G. C. Chapman, 'Hope and the ethics of formation: Moltmann as an interpreter of Bonhoeffer', *Studies in Religion* 12 (1983) pp. 449–60). Although I shall not argue the point here, I believe that whatever may be gained by strengthening the eschatological element in Bonhoeffer's theology, he grounds our social action more, and not less, effectively than does Moltmann.
- 32 'Christological-eschatological' in that christology is the substance of eschatology in *Theology of Hope*, just as Moltmann's subsequent work is trinitarian eschatology.