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Editorial Foreword

How Can Faith Discourse Intervene in the World? Jürgen Moltmann and the Significance of "Hope"

YANG Huilin
Translated by Chloë F. Starr

"Political Theology" emerged when faith values began to be involved in real world problems, but the question of how a Political Theology based on specific faith traditions can have an effect in a pluralistic world remains a critical issue of our time. Jürgen Moltmann connects the human world with the natural world, compares the political order with the ecological order and extends the "Just Peace" of "New Political Theology" to the "Just Environment" of "Natural Political Theology", arguing that the manipulation of the natural world is exactly the same as violence against others: both are rooted in a self-centered fantasy. Following this, Moltmann's Political Theology naturally targets human usurpation, and his criticisms are also turned towards his own faith tradition, including the "pattern of behavior in the catholic and protestant political traditions which apparently led to the failure of churches and Christians." [①] As far as the humanities are concerned, such self-criticism seems enlightened and admirable.

According to Moltmann, Political Theology embraces various theoretical forms. Whether in the historical power relations of "Anarchism versus Sovereignty" or the similar contemporary case of "Terrorism versus State-safety," certain Political Theologians (or Political Philosophers) have furnished a kind of "transcendental and absolute" legitimacy for the "state of exception" of "the ruler". Carl Schmitt's famous definition, "Sovereignty

[①] Jürgen Moltmann,"Political Theology and Modern China," lecture at Renmin University of China, October 15, 2014. See p. 31 of this issue.

is the one who decides on the state of exception,"[①] has been replaced by American politicians' "state of exception" and applied in their actions against "terrorism from below" using "terrorism from above". Moltmann traces the roots of such a mind-set to the "Just War" theory which originally targetted "unjust" violence. In his opinion, there should no longer be any valid theological doctrine of "just war", but a new doctrine of "just peace", because the prime purpose of "just war" is to overcome and control war, while faith should be "independent of the political interests of the powerful." [②]

If we take this a step further and ask, when "the state of exception" is under question, should what we ultimately do to maintain peace in society be to rely on the "social justice" of a certain group of people, or rather on the "social justice" of different collective groups or communities (which themselves may prove the existence of social justice)? This may relate to the particular logic of Moltmann's "Hope" and why it is effective, and to why Moltmann repeatedly emphasizes the need to "overcome the terrorism in people's mind and head", and why "if we treated ourselves as the enemies of our enemies, we might have ended up with eliminating as many enemies as possible, but the friend-enemy relation would remain." [③] Moltmann's Political Theology thus transforms "peace on earth" to "living harmoniously with the earth,"[④] and his reflection upon the "state of exception" is very clear.

In 1999 Moltmann published "The Destruction and Liberation of the Earth: Ecological Theology", later entitled "The Destruction and Healing of the Earth: Ecology and the Theology" and included in American theologian Max Stackhouse's series "God and Globalization".[⑤] It is worth noting that

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[①] Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty,* trans. by G. Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005 [1922]), 5.

[②] Jürgen Moltmann, "Political Theology and Modern China," lecture at Renmin University of China, October 15, 2014. See p. 31, 47 of this issue.

[③] Ibid., p. 48,46 of this issue.

[④] Ibid., p. 33 of this issue.

[⑤] Jürgen Moltmann,"The Destruction and Healing of the Earth: Ecology and Theology," in *God and Globalization, volume 2: The Spirit and the Modern Authorities,* eds. Max L. Stackhouse, Peter J. Paris & Don S. Browning (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2001), 166-190.

Moltmann's theological reflection on ecology not only addresses Western society and political systems but also the Christian tradition per se.

As Moltmann notes,

> This ecological crisis is in the first place a crisis brought about by Western scientific and technological civilization. … The Western standard of living cannot be universalized. It can only be sustained at the expense of others: at the expense of people in the 'Third World,' at the expense of coming generations, and at the expense of the earth. … In addition, the global market is compelling poor countries to give up their subsistence economy, to plant monocultures for the world market, to cut down the rain forests, and to overgraze the pastureland. … The Western world destroys nature in the Third World and forces Third World countries to destroy their own natural environment. Conversely, the destruction of nature in the Third World – the cutting down of rain forests and the pollution of the seas – strikes back at the First World by way of climatic changes. ①

Moreover, the destruction and violence human beings have exerted upon the earth replicates the violence and injustice in human society: "Violence against weaker people justifies violence against weaker creatures. Social lawlessness reproduces itself in lawless dealing with nature…. Without social justice between the First and the Third Worlds, there will be no peace; and without peace in the world of human beings, there will be only the destruction of nature."② In as much as scientific discoveries and technological inventions still "serve the political will to acquire, secure, and extend power," and growth and progress "are still gauged by the relative increase of economic, financial, and military power," ③ the crisis we are now experiencing is not purely an ecological crisis, and cannot be solved merely by technology.

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① Jürgen Moltmann, "Destruction and Healing of the Earth," 168-169.

② Ibid., 169.

③ Ibid., 171.

Furthering this line of thinking, Moltmann argues that "the ecological crisis of the earth is a crisis of modern scientific and technological civilization. … It is not only a 'moral crisis' either, as Pope John Paul II maintained; it is a more profound crisis – a religious crisis involving that in which people in the Western world put their trust."[①] This crisis in Christianity itself is essentially due to human beings' modelling themselves on the controlling power of an "omniscient and omnipotent" being:

> Ever since the Renaissance, the understanding of God in Western Europe has been increasingly one-sided: God is the "Almighty."… God is the absolute determining subject, and the world is the passive object of Gods' sovereignty. In the Western tradition, God moved more into the transcendent sphere, while the world was understood in a purely immanent and this-worldly sense. God was thought of without a world, so the world could be understood without a God…. The strict monotheism of modern Western Christianity is an essential reason for the secularization of the world and nature, … as God's image on earth, human beings were bound to see themselves,… as rulers – that is, as the determining subjects of knowledge and will, standing over against this world.…It was in this sense that, at the beginning of modern times, Francis Bacon lauded the sciences of his time: "Knowledge is power"; it was through their power over nature that human beings were to be restored in their character as the image of God. [②]

In short, "It was the theology of the modern world in the West which determined the human relationship to nature and the anthropolitical concept of the human lordship over nature." [③]

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① Jürgen Moltmann,"Destruction and Healing of the Earth," 170.

② Ibid., 172-173.

③ Jürgen Moltmann,"Political Theology and Modern China,"lecture at Renmin University of China, October 15, 2014. See p. 33 of this issue.

It is easy for us to conclude that the problem lies not with God but in erroneous human understandings of God. And yet in reality Moltmann the theologian has found within traditional Christian resources three perspectives concerning the "liberation of the earth", namely "Cosmic Spirituality"; "the New Earth Science of the 'Gaia hypothesis'"; and "Human Beings and Nature in Covenant with God".[①] Yet given that "the understanding of God in Western Europe" since the Renaissance has become part of wider Christian tradition, this is precisely the problem Moltmann is dealing with, and his words are not some self-justificatory plea.

Given this background, Moltmann had little time for a type of nostalgic ecology: "At the Global Forum Conference in Moscow in January 1990, … the North American Indians, … the Indian Ambassador, … the Mongolian high priest, the African rainmaker, and the California New Age adherent implored us to return to 'the womb' of the earth…. But can the religious symbols of pre-modern times … help the urbanized masses of the postmodern world solve the ecological problems of industrial society? … Can we give up the liberty we have acquired, now that it has become dangerous? … I do not believe it." [②]

The most important significance of Moltmann's "Ecological Theology" or "Theological Ecology" is not simply its "lamenting the state of heaven and pitying the fate of humanity" (as in the Chinese idiom "*Bei tian min ren*悲天憫人"), but the way in which it is interlinked with the basic quest of political theology. Moltmann's own explanation might prove most fit for purpose here: ecological theology in the public sphere is in fact also a "natural political theology"; justice in the human world should be restored to "environmental justice", and "environmental justice" will ultimately result in a more reasonable world order. What works here is the critique and rejection of any kind of "state of exception", and the vigilance and caution towards any "self-centeredness".

[①] Jürgen Moltmann, *God for the Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology (Fortress Press, 1966), 101-112. For a Chinese version see Jürgen Moltmann, Su shi zhong de Shangdi,* trans. Zeng Nianyue (Taipei: Song of Songs Press, 1999), 127-142.

[②] Jürgen Moltmann, "Destruction and Healing of the Earth," 174-175.

The problem area that Moltmann has touched upon is not solely a theological problem, but one which has attracted attention in various academic disciplines. "Being critical", on the other hand, does not necessarily result in being free from the logic inertia of "self-centeredness". And so elsewhere we find many condescending moral appeals or self-pitying "self righteous" speeches: the former do not disagree with any specific opinions but disagree with any "agreements", and the later habitually select some proofs from within their own traditions, and apply these as a healing antidote for any given cause. These two extremes of "criticism" and "approval" have no real significance.

What is more, much "criticism" of social ills or evils is merely cynicism or empty noise, jumping rapidly to a "defensive" value position. Whether one can genuinely and effectively intervene in real-world problems does not depend on such posturing, and here Moltmann is a good example. For him, being critical means a critical dissolution of naïve, self-centered thinking. As a European, he argues that "European theology no longer has to be Eurocentric." He is male, yet believes that "theology no longer has to be androcentric." He lives in the "First World", but the theology he has developed "does not have to reflect the ideas of the dominating nations." Instead, he claims that theology should try to help make "the voice of the oppressed heard." In sum, he believes that theologians should be aware of "the absolute nature" of their own standpoint in their own context and try to "abolish this tacit presupposition". [①] Such resonant, insightful tones echo throughout Moltmann's political theology and ecological theology, where their respective discussions on "Hope" bring us to the core of the problems that challenge us.

[①] Jürgen Moltmann, "Preface," in *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God* (Fortress Press, 1981), xii.

Regarding Moltmann's ever-extending theology, one of his favorite disciples, Professor LIN Hong-Hsin, has quipped: "In the end – the beginning."[①] The end of Schleiermacher opened the era for Karl Barth; and the end of Karl Barth was the beginning of Jürgen Moltmann. We have great hopes for the dialogue between Chinese scholars and Moltmann's ideas, and anticipate the beginning of a journey of "Hope" that may bring more harmonious interaction and cultural integration between China and the West.

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[①] See LIN Hong-Hsin, "In the End-the Beginning: An Introduction into the Theology of Jurgen Moltmann," p.3 of this issue.

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