

# Limping but Blessed

*Jürgen Moltmann's Search  
for a Liberating Anthropology*

Ton van Prooijen



# Limping but Blessed

# CURRENTS OF ENCOUNTER

STUDIES ON THE CONTACT BETWEEN  
CHRISTIANITY AND OTHER RELIGIONS,  
BELIEFS, AND CULTURES

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We read: ‘So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak’ (Gen. 32: 24). Do you know of any more salient description of the lot of human beings? Of their lot in its full extent? Not only in life but also in death? Whenever people ask about the meaning of life, human life, then the answer must be that it exists in the search for *a blessing*. (O. Noordmans, *Gestalte en Geest*, Amsterdam: Holland Uitgeversmaatschappij, 1955, 14f.).

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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .....	xi
Abbreviations of Works Cited .....	xiii
1. Introduction .....	1
2. Towards the Homeland of True Humanity: Exercises in Imaginative Anthropology .....	9
2.1. One of the Many Who Come Home— and Do not Come Home .....	9
2.2. Limping but Blessed: <i>Wurzelerfahrungen</i> .....	16
2.2.1. Two Iron Rings .....	17
2.2.2. Wrestling with God .....	19
2.2.3. Hope Against Hope .....	22
2.3. Centre and Horizon: Theologizing in <i>Wirtschaftswunderland</i> .....	24
2.3.1. <i>Trümmertheologie</i> and Beyond .....	24
2.3.2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Way to True Worldliness .....	31
2.3.3. The Perseverance of the Saints or the Re-historicization of Theology .....	38
2.3.4. In the Horizon of Christ's Reign: A Midterm Review .....	55
2.4. The Revelation of the Hidden God and Hidden Human Beings .....	63
2.4.1. The Problem of Transcendence .....	64
2.4.2. <i>Spero Ut Intelligam</i> : Interweaving the Blochian Tapestry .....	78
2.5. Contemporaries of God: Evaluation and Preview .....	105
2.5.1. Fundamental Perspectives on Human Beings . . .	105
2.5.2. The Apocalypse of the Hidden Human Being? The Problem of Identity .....	108
2.5.3. <i>Missio</i> and <i>Pro-missio</i> : The Issue of Relevance .....	112
2.5.4. Anticipatory Questions .....	113
3. Singing the Lord's Song in a Foreign Land: Exercises in Critical Anthropology .....	119
3.1. The Transcendent Freedom of Two Quarrelling Aunts .....	119

3.2. True Humanity in the Messianic Intermezzo:	
A “Critical Theory of God”	127
3.2.1. Facing the Identity-Involvement Dilemma	128
3.2.2. Vicious Circles of Death	133
3.2.3. The Purposelessness of Life:	
On the Justification of Human Beings	136
3.2.4. Identity in Non-Identity	151
3.2.5. In the Counter-History of the Triune God	154
3.2.6. The Church as “Messianic Intermezzo”	161
3.3. A Christian Perspective on Human Rights?	
A Case Study	170
3.3.1. The Position Paper	171
3.3.2. The Concluding Paper	177
3.3.3. The Universal and the Particular	184
3.4. Long Marches into Freedom:	
On Universal and Particular Liberation	186
3.4.1. The Growing Conflict	190
3.4.2. The Open Letter	195
3.4.3. The Exodus of Oppressors?	
Looking into the Mirrors	202
3.5. Exercises in Critical Anthropology:	
Evaluation and Preview	212
4. In the Spacious Place of the Triune God:	
Exercises in Sabbatical Anthropology	213
4.1. The Point of No Return:	
Flowing Harmony and Faith in History	219
4.2. The End-Times of Modernity:	
Towards a Revaluation of Values?	228
4.2.1. The Crisis of Modern Messianism	230
4.2.2. Once Again:	
A Theological Rehabilitation of History	235
4.2.3. Once Again:	
A Theological Rehabilitation of the World	240
4.2.4. Exodus and Sabbath: A Preview	244
4.3. The Liberating Indwelling of the Triune God:	
A Divine Ecology	245
4.3.1. Trinitarian Hermeneutics:	
How One “Knows” God Once Again	245
4.3.2. Christology After Chernobyl:	
Cross and Resurrection Once Again	255
4.3.3. The Home of the Trinity:	
The Revelation of the Inhabitable God	260

4.3.4 <i>Gloria Dei</i> on Earth: Revealing True Humanity . . . . .	269
4.4. Towards a Habitable Existence: A Divine Therapy . . . . .	276
4.4.1. The Sabbath-Sunday as Paradigm of Christian Identity . . . . .	277
4.4.2. Priests and Priestesses in the Community of Creation . . . . .	286
4.4.3. Unity in Diversity and Diversity in Unity: Charismatic Fellowship . . . . .	293
4.5. In the Spacious Place of the Triune God: An Evaluation . . . . .	307
5. Re-embedding the Disembedded?	
Concluding Debate . . . . .	313
5.1. In Search for a Liberating Anthropology . . . . .	313
5.2. A Theological Anthropology in Eight Perspectives . . . . .	329
5.2.1. The Human Being and the <i>Deus Absconditus</i> . . . . .	331
5.2.2. The Human Being and the Revelation of the Wholly Other . . . . .	334
5.2.3. The Human Being in Christological Perspective . . . . .	335
5.2.4. The Human Being in Pneumatological Perspective . . . . .	337
5.2.5. The Human Being in Eschatological Perspective . . . . .	339
5.2.6. The Human Being in Ecological Perspective . . . . .	342
5.2.7. The Human Being in a Eucharistic Perspective . . . . .	344
5.2.8. The Human Being in the Perspective of the Apostolate . . . . .	349
5.3. Re-embedding the Disembedded? Concluding Remarks . . . . .	354
Bibliography . . . . .	359
Index . . . . .	371

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Ton van Prooijen  
Alkmaar, September 2004

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## Abbreviations of Works Cited

This study cites the English translations of Moltmann's books and articles where available. In other cases (predominantly in CHAPTER TWO) my own translations of the German texts will be given without further notice. The following abbreviations of works by Moltmann have been used:

- [**TH**] Moltmann, Jürgen. (1993). *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*. 1st ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. Translated by James W. Leitch from the German *Theologie der Hoffnung*. 5th ed. Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1965.
- [**CG**] (1993). *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*. 1st ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. Translated by R.A. Wilson and John Bowden from the German *Der gekreuzigte Gott*, 2nd ed. Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1973.
- [**CPS**] (1993). *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*. 1st ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. Translated by Margaret Kohl from the German *Kirche in der Kraft des Geistes*. Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1975.
- [**TK**] (1993). *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*. 1st ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. Translated by Margaret Kohl from the German *Trinität und Reich Gottes*. Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1980.
- [**GiC**] (1993). *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*. 1st ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. Translated by Margaret Kohl from the German *Gott in der Schöpfung*. (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1985).
- [**WJC**] (1993). *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions*. 1st ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.. Translated by Margaret Kohl from the German *Der Weg Jesu Christi*. Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1989.
- [**SL**] (1992). *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*. 1st ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. Translated by Margaret Kohl from the German *Der Geist des Lebens*. Munich: Chr. Kaiser. 1991.
- [**CoG**] (1996). *The Coming of God. Christian Eschatology*. 1st ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. Translated by Margaret Kohl from the German *Das Kommen Gottes*. Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1995.
- [**EiT**] (2000). *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*. London: SCM Press. Translated by Margaret Kohl from the German *Erfahrungen theologischen Denkens*.

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## Introduction

This study, which describes and analyzes the anthropology of the German theologian Jürgen Moltmann (1926), is the principal result of my participation in a research project on religious anthropology at the Free University of Amsterdam. The aim of this project, called “Why are Human Beings on Earth?” was to explain how present-day scholarly representatives of different religious and non-religious worldview traditions operate within the tension between life as it—in their conception—*actually is* and as it *should be*, seeking to provide a language in which people can encode their personal, social and political experiences. This project has resulted in five studies on Humanist, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu anthropology. The current book is the separate study on Christian anthropology. It focusses exclusively on Moltmann’s view on humankind, judging this view on its own merits. Any comparison between different religious anthropological insights or any philosophical or theological reflection upon the nature of such a dialogue thus lies beyond the scope this book. It is, however, written in the hope that it may contribute somehow to a further debate on the differences between religious traditions, which, as Keith Ward remarks, are “nowhere clearer than in their views of human nature” (Ward 1998: 324).

The major reason for consulting Moltmann concerns his way of doing theology. As all readers of his books, from his most enthusiastic supporters to his most sceptical opponents, will agree, he has a very good ear for the problems of his time as well as a passionate and compassionate way of confronting these problems with the fundamental insights he derives from Bible and tradition.<sup>1</sup> As he himself writes, his aim has been a “revision of theological issues in the light of their biblical origins, and their renewal or reworking in the challenge of the present” (*EiT*: xiv).<sup>2</sup> This way of doing theo-

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<sup>1</sup> As the editors of *Gottes Zukunft - Zukunft der Welt* (a *Festschrift* in honour of Moltmann’s 60th birthday) write in their foreword: “The biographically-rooted attentiveness to that which people suffer belongs to the characteristic features of his theology” (Deuser *et al.* 1986: v; my translation).

<sup>2</sup> With more irony than regret Moltmann acknowledges: “I have not written any theological textbooks. The articles I have contributed to various theological dictionaries and encyclopaedias have seldom been particularly successful. I was not concerned to collect up correct theological notions, because I was much too

logy carries a price. Moltmann's *oeuvre* is often characterized as rambling, as hopping from one topic to another. Over the years many commentators have pointed out inconsistencies in his thought, noted the lack of a consistently implemented method, accused him of a too associative use of the Bible and of too loose references to the ideas of his theological, philosophical and scientific partners in dialogue and became frustrated because of a lack of concreteness as far as the application of his theological elaborations is concerned.<sup>3</sup> The continuity of his theological enterprise, however, lies in the fact that it takes place consciously at the intersection of personal experiences, historical challenges, biblical testimonies and the fundamentals of the Christian tradition. Moreover, Moltmann has sought to "contribute" to the "shared theology of all believers" (*EiT*: 11f.), seeking a dialogue with other theologians and theologies (in the past and present, in Western Europe but also in Latin America, South Korea and the Eastern Orthodox world) as well as with, for instance, Marxists and Jewish thinkers. Therefore, the expectation is that an analysis of Moltmann's way of doing theology within the conflicts of his age will give an impression of the dilemmas, the frictions and the fault lines of Christian anthropology in the context of societal changes during the past five decades. Subsequently, it may offer some helpful leads for contemporary Christian anthropology.

For Moltmann, it has always been a matter of course that theological anthropology must be *liberating*. The leading question should be how dehumanized humans beings can find their "humanity;" or, as he writes with Luther, how "proud and unfortunate gods" can become "real men" (1974b: 20). How can theological anthropology interpret our current situation of ali-

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preoccupied with the perception of new perspectives and unfamiliar aspects" (*EiT*: xv).

<sup>3</sup> Obviously, this does not completely counteract the critique concerning the cohesion and coherence of Moltmann's thinking. His own argument here that, just like mediaeval cathedrals, every theology *must* remain fragmentary and unfinished, "because it is the thinking about God of men and women who are on the way and, being still travellers, have not yet arrived home" (*EiT*: xvi) may be valid in so far it concerns the mere rejection of a polished theological system in which ambiguities and tensions are (attempted to be) removed. It seems however, not self-evidently a sufficient justification of a theology like his own. On the contrary, the farewell to conceptual, hierarchical systems compels a theologian even more to reflect seriously on the question of what kind of coherence or wholeness characterizes his theological enterprise (cf. Jansen 1995: 223ff.).

enation, guilt and slackness and point a way beyond it? How can it place daily life within the perspective of God and his reign in such a way that it liberates people from unhealthy and superstitious fixations that frighten, disparage and suppress them, comforts and encourages them in situations of distress and urges them to take concrete responsibility for the world in which they live?

His search for such a liberating anthropology starts, apparently, from two premisses. The *only reason* why a theologian should risk writing a book on anthropology, he says the preface to his *Man*, is “because he sees in God the worth of the question-able being which we all are, and therefore sees theology as providing the theme for anthropology” (Moltmann 1974b: x). His thinking about humankind thus takes its departure from the traditional theological postulation that human knowledge about humans and human knowledge about God are closely connected. Theologically speaking, anthropology does not start by discussing the human being biologically, psychologically, sociologically, historically, economically, politically or philosophically (although this may all be of theological importance) but by looking at humankind from the perspective of God. Moltmann puts it this way:

The question of God and the converse question which is hidden in it, God’s question about what is human in man, makes much open to question which we regard as unquestionable and obvious, and much else again full of hope which we regard as hopeless (1974b: x).

Hence, a theological book about humankind “will inevitably slip into a book about God.”

The *only way* a theologian may write a book on anthropology, Moltmann states in the same preface, is “as a contemporary of the sufferings and of the hopes which today torment and move mankind, to portray what it is to be human, so far as this can be portrayed.” He rejects any theological anthropology that treats the problem of humankind in “the form of pure theology which speaks only of the eternal situation of man before God.” Theologians must resist the “overweening presumption” (*himmlische Vermessenheit*) to make “the foolish claim to portray the whole of man, or to intend to pass a final verdict.” As Moltmann asserts: “For if in man we have a case in open court between what is human and what is inhuman, it is more appropriate to practice theology in action, related to the experiences and life of man in contemporary industrial society, and to explore ways for this man to become man.”

Moltmann presupposes therefore that theological anthropology can be liberating only if it starts from the two presumptions just indicated. So,

firstly, a theological view of human life can be liberating only if it succeeds in having its own specific perspective formed by the reality of God's kingdom of which the Bible and the Christian tradition speak and not if it stretches and limits Christian beliefs until they fit the search profiles of today's society. And secondly, a theological view on human life can be liberating only if it manages to speak in a contextual way, i.e. if it registers the sufferings and hopes of its concrete historical context, and not if it claims its own perspective to be universal, time-tested dogmas, moral codes or rituals.

On the face of it, however, pursuing both imperatives into a supposedly liberating anthropology (and, accordingly, in a relevant "public theology"<sup>4</sup>) appeared to be quite problematic. What, after all, is "liberating" today? Who or what determines what is liberating and for whom? Is Christian anthropology liberating only *because* it says something from its own biblical perspective about and to our historical situation or only *in so far as* it responds to our historical situation? Or is this a false dilemma?

From the very beginning of his theological enterprise, Moltmann has been loyal to the Barthian methodological and epistemological theological starting point that the knowledge of God and, accordingly, of humankind cannot be derived from philosophical or anthropological reflection, but that, conversely, any human reflection should start with the fundamental question of how God reveals himself and what this says about humankind (§2.3). However, this transcendentalist (and personalistic) theology led him into difficulty as soon as he tried to give "positive theological answers" to the historical, socio-political challenges of his age (§2.3). The inner dynamic of Moltmann's theology is how to bring the world and human history into

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<sup>4</sup> In the course of this book I will be using this term, "public theology," regularly. Generally speaking, I mean by this a theology that indicates how one should operate within the "public domain" from a religious, confessional perspective (this "public domain" is, by the way, broader than just the political arena). Many questions could be asked with regard to a further specification of this broad definition (Koopman 2003 gives a brief but helpful overview of the debates). European theologians (Moltmann included) are not really accustomed to making a distinction between the role of the church in the public sphere and the role of confessional theology in the public debate (cf. De Kruijf 2003: 139). Unlike the Northern American context, European "public theology" does, therefore, not focus predominantly on the question of how individual theologians can make use of religious arguments in their contributions to public debates but on the social performance of the church and their particular congregations. Like Moltmann, I will use the term "public theology" in the latter way.

theology without going back before the Barthian critique of nineteenth-century syntheses of theology and culture. In his earliest writings he speaks of the tension between the “center” and the “horizon”. Barth’s rediscovery of the “center” of theology (God’s revelation in Christ) had apparently led to a loss of the “horizon” of theology (world and history). How does one relate the center and the horizon? He characterized the problem later as the dilemma between “identity” and “relevance.” In *The Crucified God* (1972) he wrote:

The more theology and the church attempt to become relevant to the problems of the present day, the more deeply they are drawn into the crisis of their own Christian identity. The more they attempt to assert their identity in traditional dogmas, rites, and moral notions, the more irrelevant and unbelievable they become. (CG: 7)

It continued to be a problem when in the 1980s and 1990s, among other things, the threatening nuclear Armageddon and environmental catastrophes forced him to rethink the relation between God and creation:

The *identity* of the Christian belief in creation has become questionable in today’s ecological crisis and must therefore be given a new definition in that context; while the *relevance* of belief in creation must prove itself in ideas about the present ecological crisis and in suggested ways of escape from that crisis. (GiC: 22)

Moltmann has continually tried to show that, theologically speaking, the dilemma between the “center” and the “horizon,” between “identity” and relevance” (often mistakenly presented as a stalemate between “conservatives” and “progressives”) is a false one. Of course, this fundamental theological problem goes far beyond the limits of theological anthropology. It does, however, directly touch the heart of theological thinking about humankind. Moltmann believes that only if we can make clear how the revelation of God is related to the lives of contemporary people in their concrete historical, social and political situation can the question of human beings and their “liberation towards true humanity” be dealt with theologically. But how can this be made clear? That is what this book is about.

In my attempt to examine Moltmann’s search for a liberating anthropology I will follow a more or less *chronological* approach. As already indicated, the continuing urge to respond to the problems of the day *theologically* is the artery of his theological project. Whoever cuts through this aorta will be left with a lifeless body. Theologians are not pathologists conducting autopsies. The most promising way to reconsider the value of Moltmann’s

theological reflection seems to follow him on his way through history, in conversation with the spirit of the age, recording the signs of the times, wandering, seeking and experimenting.

Accordingly, my method can be described as a *descriptive-analytical close reading* of Moltmann's texts. As indicated, I will try to place the development of his theology in its social-historical context. I will seek to characterize the spirit of the age by demonstrating how it influenced Moltmann's thinking and how he criticized it. Where it seems necessary to understand the course Moltmann's thinking follows, I will discuss contemporary theologians and philosophers. At times this follows logically from Moltmann's own dialogue with them; at other times I will introduce them myself in order to put Moltmann's thinking in relief.

To analyze the developments in Moltmann's thinking, I distinguish three major periods: 1943-1968 (to be discussed in CHAPTER TWO), 1968-1977 (CHAPTER THREE) and 1977-2003 (CHAPTER FOUR). Basically, this distinction follows the turning points in his life and thinking that Moltmann himself has indicated (1997a: 13ff.): the second world war, his discovery of Ernst Bloch's philosophy in 1960, socio-political developments in 1968 (e.g. the end of the Prague Spring and the death of Martin Luther King) and a conference of liberation theologians, black theologians and feminist theologians in Mexico City in October 1977 (for reasons to be explained in CHAPTER TWO I will not discuss his earliest writings and his "theology of hope" of the 1960s separately).

CHAPTER TWO analyzes how in the 1950s, Moltmann, stamped by the war and the Barthian "theology of crisis" that arose afterwards, tries to bring "the world" and "history" back into theology without once again falling into the trap of identifying a human ideology with God's history with human beings. How can we attain "certainty of life" without clinging to human securities? In the course of the 1960s he comes under the spell of Bloch's dialectical philosophy of hope and his maxim that the "home of identity" of humans lies in the future. The "humanizing" of humans, he discovers, takes place on the boundary between this transcendent future and immanent reality, the infinite and the finite. Bloch thus leads him to a "model of transcendence" in which central notions as promise, perseverance, anticipation, hope and solidarity can be integrated.

CHAPTER THREE points out how socio-political developments forced him to adjust this paradigm. How can one experience freedom under unfree conditions? In collaboration with Johann Baptist Metz (and under the influence of the "negative dialectics" of the Frankfurt School) he explores the possibilities of a political theology. Humans experience true identity in

“non-identity” with existing power structures. In the course of the 1970s he integrates this idea into a “sacramental theology” of “God’s trinitarian history with this world.” A brief case study will spotlight the problems Moltmann encountered in his attempt to pursue these insights concretely in his theology of human rights. An analysis of his growing conflict with Latin American theologians is designed to elaborate on these problems. The confrontation with “contextual theologies” puts the issue of universality and plurality on Moltmann’s theological agenda in a compelling way.

CHAPTER FOUR shows how ecological problems question the historical, prophetic paradigm of Moltmann’s theology. Besides the fundamental anthropological insight that the “home of identity” lies in the future, he now also has to come to terms, theologically speaking, with the insight that nature is the “home” (the *Heimat*, the *oikos*) of humans, a natural home from which they are largely alienated. Both insights lead to two different and even contrasting anthropological paradigms (a historical and an ecological) and, apparently, also to two different concepts of relevant public theology. This chapter explores Moltmann’s efforts to integrate them.

Finally, CHAPTER FIVE looks critically at the analysis in the previous chapters and asks what clues in the theological anthropology contained in Moltmann’s proposals could take us further in contemporary debates.

One final remark must be made. A recent Moltmann bibliography lists 1217 works by Moltmann himself and 1043 books and articles dealing with his theology (including 192 dissertations, Wakefield 2002). These are horrifying statistics for an aspiring scholar with the ambition of writing a study on Moltmann. Rigorous selection is inevitable. As far as secondary literature is concerned, I refer to discussions about the interpretation of Moltmann’s theology only when it seems necessary to shore up the walls of my own interpretation. Thus I have tried to avoid disturbing interruptions in the course of my arguments and rearguard actions in footnotes. As far as my own canon of Moltmann texts is concerned, I started with the volumes of his early trilogy and his later “messianic theology” and then, via references and bibliographies, selected other relevant booklets and articles.

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## Towards the Homeland of True Humanity

### Exercises in Imaginative Anthropology

#### 2.1. *One of the Many Who Come Home—and Do not Come Home*

The spring of 1960 turned out to be unforgettable. Jürgen Moltmann, who had been a lecturer at the *Kirchliche Hochschule* in Wuppertal for a year or two, took a few days off for a short holiday in the Swiss mountains with his wife Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel. He would often later remember this holiday as a turning point in his life and thinking. It was not the beauty of the mountains that overwhelmed him but the mysterious *magnum opus* of an atheist Jewish Marxist philosopher he had brought along as holiday reading (cf. Moltmann 1997a: 15). He immersed himself in this work and when he and his wife went for walks he would euphorically recite whole passages. Elisabeth has less pleasant memories:

From 1960 on, something else entered our life and permanently changed it. During a spring holiday in Ticino I got the oppressive feeling that my beloved no longer loved me but something else. However, the other was no female rival but a book and a man: *The Principle of Hope* and Ernst Bloch. (Moltmann-Wendel 1997: 40)

The conclusion that this first encounter with Ernst Bloch changed their lives forever is certainly no overstatement. “Why has Christian theology let go of its most distinctive theme, hope?” Moltmann asked himself after finishing the book (1997a: 15)? Back home, he began a “parallel action in Christianity on the basis of its own presuppositions” (Moltmann 1970: 288; 1997a: 15). The first major result was his book *Theology of Hope*, which was published in 1964. It became an event (the book underwent six printings within two and a half years, rather sensational for an academic theological study).<sup>5</sup> In the following years it was discussed not only in universities but also in local congregations in Europe as well as in Latin

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<sup>5</sup> For the impact of *Theology of Hope*: cf. e.g. Marsch 1967: 8ff.; Müller-Fahrenholz 2000: 57ff.

America and the United States. Moltmann was frequently asked as a speaker on all kinds of occasions. From one day to the next, the relatively unknown theology professor (who had moved in the meantime to Bonn) became a globetrotter with the pull of a movie star (cf. Volf 1986: 6).

“Hope was in the air.” Thus Moltmann himself later explained the success of his book (1970: 289, 1991a: 227). The awakening theology of hope was not merely the result of his book, he remarks, but of the mood of the times. Without trivializing the impact of *Theology of Hope*, it should be noted that it is, indeed, obvious, in retrospect, that the beginning of the 1960s heralded a period of thawing in the international situation and the awakening of a new spirit of hope. Nikita Khrushchev’s politics of de-Stalinization led to a thaw in the East-West relations, due to the *aggiornamento* of the Roman Catholic church new ecumenical opportunities germinated, the dream of the equality of all people blossomed in the rich soil of the Civil Rights movement in the U.S.A., and the decolonization of former colonies was seen as the budding of a new, just world and a harmoniously united humanity.

This awakening optimism of lasting peace and welfare entailed saying farewell to a chilling decade. The 1950s are often portrayed today as an oasis of rest, law and order and community, in which life was manageable and secure. This seems to be based more upon nostalgia than upon the feelings of the people those days. The 1950s were marked by fundamental tensions that continually undermined the certainty of life (*Lebensgewissheit*) or sense of security. In his earliest writings which preceded *Theology of Hope* and in many of his retrospectives, Moltmann touches upon these tensions. I distinguish three stages in development of his earliest theology, each characterized by its own tensions and, accordingly, its own theological dilemmas.

1. First, there was the war and its aftermath. The Germany to which Moltmann returned in 1948 is disparagingly portrayed in Wolfgang Borchert’s *The Man Outside* (1946). Beckmann, the main character of this play, is a soldier from the frontline (“one of them”) who returns home after the war. At least, that is what he thinks he is doing:

A man comes to Germany.

And there he sees a quite fantastic film. He had to pinch his arm several times during the performance, for he doesn’t know whether he’s waking or sleeping. But then he sees to right and left of him other people all having the same experience. So he thinks that it must indeed be true. And when in the end he is standing in the street again with empty stomach and cold feet, he realizes that it

was really a perfectly ordinary everyday film, a perfectly ordinary film. About a man who comes to Germany, one of the many. *One of the many who come home - and then don't come home, because there's no home there for them anymore.* And their home is outside the door. Their Germany is outside in the rain at night in the street.

That's their Germany.

(1952: 78, italics mine)

Borchert does not just bare the soul of post-war humanity but also that of post-war society. At the end of the 1940s this society was already beyond the worst desolation (and, as we will see, beyond the cathartic “zero hour” at which point society could have followed an entirely different path). People tried to heal their wounds by repressing the past, by hushing up the story of “them.” Note what the producer of the theatre remarks when Beckmann wants to read his poem about “nothing but the truth” on stage:

You'll only make yourself unpopular. Where would we all be, if everyone suddenly started telling the truth? Who wants to know anything about the truth nowadays? Eh? Who? Those are facts you must never forget. (1952: 105)

This repression of the past did not involve the embracing of new utopias. On the contrary, people had lived through enough abortive ventures and had had their share of messianic experiments. The first years after the war were dominated by the fear of a new dictatorship and a new war, fear of Communism and of an economic crisis.<sup>6</sup> What people wanted was rest, certainty, stability. Whereas the older generation attempted to dissociate itself from the recent past and its own part in it, the “twenty-somethings” (the so-called “sceptical generation”) wanted to make up for lost ground and focussed on their career and family (cf. Moltmann 1970: 288). This realism and sobriety was not only reflected in politics (the Christian Democrat Konrad Adenauer, who won the first elections in 1949, carried on a “No Experiments” politics) but also in the church. In spite of the questionable role they had played during the Nazi era, the state churches were rather easily able to return to their pre-war ways. The reason seems obvious: they offered what people were longing for, namely certainty, safety, and forgiveness wrapped in eternal and

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<sup>6</sup> I am basing my description on Schelsky 1963, Boterman 1996: 389-436, Von der Dunk 2000: 197-308, mainly 235ff.

universal Christian truths, norms and values which would safeguard them against chaos and apathy.

However, as sociologist Helmut Schelsky pointed out, not all members of the “sceptical generation” were anti-political (Schelsky 1963: 74ff.). A relatively small group, notably students, called for a new, more democratic and more humane, society. Moltmann was somewhat associated with this group. In §2.2 I will show how this was related to the fundamental experiences of faith he had had during his imprisonment. According to his own account, he had encountered a God who could not be pinned to time-tested securities. This God was not a safeguard against the dark sides of existence, but, on the contrary, his presence could be experienced only within the abysses of meaninglessness, suffering and guilt. Is it possible to speak about God amidst the dismantled ideals, utopias and certainties without either trivializing the suffering and guilt or tempering the great hope of a new and completely different world? Or, to put it differently, how can one—over against simply restoring the church—do justice to the suffering, the pain and the guilt of the recent past without falling into apathy and how can one—over against widespread resignation—speak of “the God of hope in hopelessness,” giving one certainty in the spiritual and moral disorientation of those years without fixing this certainty in time-tested values, rules, and morals?

2. Second, in the course of the 1950s the war faded into the background (until the 1970s when the time appeared ripe for new reflection). “Modern life” became an intrinsic part of daily life, with all the confusion, hopes and dilemmas it entailed. Due to spectacular economic progress (the German *Wirtschaftswunder*), “growth” became the main principle of life once again. Huge technological advances, moreover, caused revolutionary changes in ordinary life (new electric home appliances, television, increasing mobility), in medical science, in space technology (the launch of Sputnik in 1956, for instance), and also in atomic warfare. These developments caused a new technological chiliasm (the dawning of a glorious future of humanity) but also feelings of anxiety: Where will it all end? All of a sudden, for an increasing group of people the certainties proclaimed by the church no longer provided consolation. The old answers—based on a pre-modern, biblicistic cosmology, anthropology and theology—lost their credibility (how could modern people still believe in a heaven above or a hell below, let alone in a “Son of Man” who would descend from heaven on a cloud?<sup>7</sup>), but these

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<sup>7</sup> These examples are taken from Bultmann (1985: 15).

answers were also answers to questions that a good many people were no longer asking. Apparently, human anxiety no longer arose from the question of how one could attain eternal life or appease the wrath of God but from the experience of complete *emptiness* and *meaninglessness* (cf. Tillich 1952: 40-63). In other words, the existential question was no longer “How can I find a merciful God?” (Luther), but: *What is the point of everything?* We live on a small ball that moves through an infinite universe and for the first time in history humanity is able to extinguish all life on earth by its weapons of mass destruction.

Rudolph Bultmann acknowledged this existential feeling of “homelessness” caused by the impact of modern life. Already in his *New Testament and Mythology* (*Neues Testament und Mythologie*, 1941) he had written these impressive words: “We cannot use electric light and radio and in the event of illness avail ourselves of modern medical and clinical means and at the same time believe in the spirit and wonder world of the New Testament” (Bultmann 1985: 4). In addition, he accused those who insist on doing so of making Christian preaching impossible at the time. In the course of the 1950s, his alternative—existentialist—reading of the New Testament became popular. Like Heidegger, he portrayed human beings as thrown into existence and having to rise above themselves and grasp true humanity. Contrary to existentialist philosophers, however, he claimed that humans cannot do this by themselves. They need the helping hand of God. The real message of the New Testament, underneath the mythological surface, is that in Christ God has come near to us and that with Christ we can “crucify” our old life and rise up to a new existence. The “reign of God,” he believed, was not a Never-Never land far away in the future but existential freedom that can be grasped time and again in the moment of faith (we will say more about Bultmann in §2.4.2a). Thus Bultmann accepted the problems many people experienced with outdated biblicism and offered what people were longing for: certainty, a “home,” true humanity. He thus points to a way beyond the apparent apathy stemming from the confusion and anxiety caused by stunning scientific and technological developments and the biblicistic, anti-modern counterattack of churchly orthodoxy.

Moltmann did not agree with this existentialist position, for two main reasons. As will be pointed out in §2.3a, during the first years after the war Moltmann associated himself with Karl Barth (this would influence him for a lifetime). Gradually, however, he ran into problems with Barth’s transcendentalism when he wanted to give “positive theological answers” (Molt-

mann) to developments in society as well.<sup>8</sup> For him, Bultmannian existentialism led to similar problems. It was too much focussed on the individual and his decisive moment of faith to be theologically relevant for the world and human history.

The second reason was that Bultmann's existentialist, personalistic exegesis was at right angles with the messianic biblical theology of Gerhard von Rad—who, generally speaking, was constructing a “*history of salvation*” as a narrative structure in the entire Bible—and with Ernst Käsemann's futuristic interpretations of New Testament apocalypticism that Moltmann loved to read (cf. Moltmann 1970: 289). Did Bultmann not throw out the baby with the bathwater, that is to say, the apocalyptic expectation with the mythological image of reality? Is it possible to present the New Testament image of the kingdom of God when eschatology is reduced to an individual act in the moment of faith?

As I will demonstrate in §2.3, the central theme of Moltmann's theological enterprise in the course of the 1950s is “certainty of life” in the midst of the flux of modern life. However, how can one, theologically speaking, do justice to the world and human history as well as to the supposedly futuristic eschatological perspective on God, humanity and the world without once again falling into the trap of identifying God's kingdom with human kingdoms, utopias and ideals (such as technological chiliasm)?

3. Third, “[j]ust when it seemed that the Bultmannian existentialist translation of New Testament eschatology was to rule the day, a new movement towards the re-eschatologizing of theology was launched” (Braaten 1967: 211f.). Many explanations could be given for this decline of Bultmann's existentialist paradigm at the end of the 1950s. Moltmann gives at least two.

The first is related to the thawing process I indicated. The post-war restoration—for years a general aim in society—was finished. In addition, economic prosperity had never been as high. Moltmann observed how, in view of the changes in the world, many people had become tired of the “No Experiments” realism and had begun to hope for a new, different world (cf. 1970: 289f.). “Freedom” more and more became the key word. As many chroniclers have pointed out, Western society was standing on the threshold of a new age. Among many others, E.P. Meijering remarks how the meaning of theological language would change in the dawning decade: resurrection

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<sup>8</sup> For clarity's sake, it was not Barth's political choices with which Moltmann had difficulties but his theological method, which apparently prevented him from giving “positive *theological* answers” to political challenges.

would become “standing up against the status quo,” the kingdom of God the “ideal society of tomorrow,” incarnation “realizing God’s will in human acting,” and faith “working for peace and justice” (2002: 61). This indicates how world and history were coming into view. What was needed were theological clues to make the world and history a point of reference for theology. The personalistic paradigm of the theology of the 1950s fell manifestly short.

The second reason Moltmann gives is, in my opinion, somewhat underexposed in the later reflection upon his theology. It concerns the manifest *pluralization* of modern society. For the sake of clarity, this is not the radical pluralism of religions and worldviews we are currently facing but certainly a plurality of images and social roles that stemmed from the advancement of modern life which lifted people out of the traditional frames of reference. Moltmann observes how modern people fail to manage their unlimited freedom and to become the rational subject modernity envisaged and urged them to be. Overrun by images, norms, values, ideals, etc., they fall into apathy.

What is needed in Moltmann’s eyes is a transcendental frame of reference that goes beyond the mere individual. Evidently, Bultmannian existentialism was not able to offer this. Precisely at this point Bloch apparently points a way out. His peculiar messianic Marxism offers a new “model of transcendence” in which God, humanity and history are related in a way that nourishes hope for the future and encourages action for a better world (§2.4b). The popular perception of Moltmann’s *TH* is that it was a comet suddenly penetrating theological space and heralded a completely new and different way of doing theology. To a certain extent this is true, but such a view easily disregards the developments in Moltmann’s theology that preceded it. I have come to believe that Moltmann’s book only offered new theological ways in so far it was an answer to the dilemmas of the 1950s, which emanated mainly from the ambiguities of modern life in which people were suddenly catapulted.

This chapter will analyze Moltmann’s concept of humanity in his theology of hope (an “imaginative anthropology,” as we will see in §2.4). I will first survey how Moltmann tried to cope with the theological problems in the different stages just sketched (§2.2 and §2.3). In §2.5 I will evaluate the different perspectives on human life and give a preview of the next chapter.

## 2.2. *Limping but Blessed*: Wurzelerfahrungen

The story of Jürgen Moltmann is the story of a whole generation. At least, so he himself suggests. His individual biography, he writes, “was shaped, interrupted and radically changed, in a very painful way, by the collective biography of the German people in the last years of the Second World War and by the lengthy imprisonment after it” (1991: 166).

Seen from outside, whatever may seem to be my own particular individuality is from the start always related to collective experiences. Anyone who has had to cry out to God in the face of the mutilation and death of so many who were comrades, friends and relatives no longer has any withdrawn, individual approach in theology. (1991: 166)

It seems, indeed, no overestimation to conclude that an entire generation of German theologians was stamped by similar experiences: traumas resulting from the war and imprisonment, the crumbling of the meaning-giving frameworks in which they were raised (from the ideal of *Deutschland heiliges Vaterland* to messianic dreams of a new thousand-year empire), the feelings of shame and guilt. For them the elementary theological question—which has had a manifest impact on post-war German theology to this day—was whether God can be brought up in a credible way (not to mention that he must be praised and glorified) among the ruins of human utopias without ever falling again into the trap of identifying divine salvation with one’s own ideologies.

Of course, we should be careful not to trace every line of Moltmann’s theology back to our own psychological interpretation of his war experiences. Nevertheless, these years have undisputedly determined the course of his thinking. He speaks about “deeply rooted experiences” to which he continually appears to return, even after decades.<sup>9</sup> With regard to the theme of this book it is illuminating to examine the different autobiographical fragments Moltmann has written over the years to find out what these “root ex-

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<sup>9</sup> Moltmann (1980: 9): “Perhaps there are certain deeply rooted experiences in every life which mould existence and sustain it at the same time. We return to them again and again, recalling them and thinking them over. We continually give them a new interpretation. As we enter into them they become present, and the time that cuts us off from them ceases to exist. We experience ourselves as being still the same person, though new and different things have been added. We find our identity of being in all the changes life brings. That is the way I still experience today what I went through over thirty years ago.”

periences” are.<sup>10</sup> First, I will point out the existential experiences in which Moltmann’s first theological experiments are rooted (§2.2.1), then I will show how these experiences can be condensed to an elementary experience of God (§2.2.2), and finally I will consider how this determined the fundamental setup of Moltmann’s theological thinking (§2.2.3).

### 2.2.1. Two Iron Rings

July 1943: it was the height of summer, but the world was at war. A few hundred bombers of the British Royal Air Force left their bases for “Operation Gomorrah,” intended to bring the German war industry around Hamburg to a standstill. It would turn out to be the most destructive air bombing before Hiroshima.<sup>11</sup> In the streets of Hamburg all hell broke loose. Women, children and thousands of prisoners working in the factories tried desperately to escape the inferno. Seventeen-year old Jürgen Moltmann and his classmates—busy preparing themselves for their school exams—were brought in to crew the flak batteries. During one of the firestorms, his battery was wiped out by a bomb. He himself was unscathed, but the school-friend next to him was blown to pieces (Moltmann 1997a: 13). His hometown was in ashes and more than 40,000 people burned to death. That night, he later remembers, he cried out to God for the very first time in his life: “My God, where are you?” and “Why am I alive and not dead like the others?” (1997a: 13).

Moltmann came from a liberal, secular family of teachers, cultivating the enlightened *Bildungsideal* of self-development, discipline, and self-control (Moltmann 1989: 73). Great German thinkers and poets (Lessing, Goethe, Nietzsche) were cherished and highly preferred to anything religious.

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<sup>10</sup> For clarity’s sake: I have limited myself to Moltmann’s own testimonies. These are unavoidably coloured by his later theological reflection. The first truly personal reflection on the war was written in 1970 (at the request of the editors of *The Christian Century*; this was later published in German in his book *Umkehr zur Zukunft*, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus Gerd Mohn, 1977). It was the time when, generally speaking, more and more (theological) reflections on the war were published. The fact that in the course of the 1970s he begins to unveil things about his own personal experiences may also be prescribed to the influence of liberation theology, which emphasized the socio-political context of theology, and, moreover, of feminist theology, which taught him to say ‘I’ in theology (cf. *EiT*: 270).

<sup>11</sup> For the information on the bombing of Hamburg bombing I am dependent on Hillgruber 1966: 92f.

The Moltmann family had, at any rate, been quite indifferent towards Christianity and church since Moltmann's grandfather happened to visit the free-masons's lodge (*EiT*: xiv). Moltmann's occasional (and often ironic) remarks about his childhood suggest that somehow he did not really fit into this environment with its "iron rationality" (1979a: 270). He portrays himself as a dreamy boy who could often be caught staring out of the window to the far horizon of the flat northern German countryside (here he finds a connection with his later concentration on eschatological horizons, 1974a: x). His father, for whom health and well-being were a matter of "will power," had a hard time teaching his "weakly son" to "conquer himself" (Moltmann 1989: 73).

It was the great heroes of this enlightened education that accompanied him to the front, about a year after the bombing of Hamburg. In his satchel he carried the *Taschenfaust für Soldaten*<sup>12</sup> (a present from his sister) and his Nietzsche in *Feldausgabe* (Moltmann 1997b: 3). The division to which he was attached took part in the fierce battle for the bridge of Arnhem (September 1944). Moltmann survived the massacre and was captured a few months later, somewhere in Belgium. In the prisoner-of-war camp near Oostende, "hope ran itself raw on the barbed wire" (1974a: x). Being detained without any prospect of returning home soon and at the mercy of tormenting memories,<sup>13</sup> his dreams turned to ashes (such as becoming a great scientist like Planck or Einstein, *EiT*: 4). After all, "what was the point of it all?" (1997b: 3). Around him, fellow prisoners even died of hopelessness. But, as he remembers it, the "worst of all" happened after being transported to a camp in Scotland. There he was confronted with pictures of Bergen-Belsen and Auschwitz hanging on the wall in one of the huts (1997b: 3f.). The truth gradually trickled into his consciousness: "Was this what we had fought for?" "Had my generation, as the last, been driven to our deaths so that the concentration camp murderers could go on killing, and Hitler could live a few months longer?" More than physical suffering,<sup>14</sup> he was tor

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<sup>12</sup> Goethe's *Dr Faustus* in pocket edition for the armed forces.

<sup>13</sup> Moltmann (1997b: 3): "And then those sleepless nights, when I was overwhelmed by the tormenting memories of the tanks that overran us on the fringes of the battle of Arnhem, and woke up soaked with sweat; when the faces of the dead appeared and looked at me with quenched and sightless eyes. It was five years at least before I found some degree of healing for these memories."

<sup>14</sup> Moltmann (1974a: x): "To be sure, this prisoner was not in a morgue, as was Dostoevski in Siberia. Externally, at any rate, the internment camp was

mented by the hopelessness of his situation and the loss of any “certainty in life” (*Lebensgewissheit*) as well as the “sombre burden of a guilt which could never be paid off ... an inconsolable grief” (1980: 6).

The break-up of the German front, the collapse of law and humanity, the self-destruction of German civilization and culture, and finally the appalling end on 9 May 1945—all this was followed by the revelation of the crimes which had been committed in Germany’s name—Buchenwald, Auschwitz, Maidanek, Bergen-Belsen and the rest. And with that came the necessity of standing up to it all inwardly, shut up in camps as we were. I think my own little world fell to pieces then too. (1980: 7)

Moltmann describes the meaninglessness (“Why am I not dead like the others?”) and guilt (“How can I live with this?”) as being like two “iron rings” choking him (Moltmann 1997b: 4).<sup>15</sup> Goethe’s poems no longer offered any relief. They did not give him the “knowledge that can sustain existence” (*Existenztragendes Wissen*) or “what the Heidelberg Catechism calls “comfort in life and death”” (*EiT*: 4). The existential questions haunting him apparently went deeper than the surface of the “naive idealism of my Hamburg family” (1991: 167).

### 2.2.2. Wrestling with God

Moltmann’s theology arose out of these “abysses of meaninglessness and guilt,” among the ruins of his Enlightened education and the ideology of *Deutschland heiliges Vaterland* (Moltmann 1997b: 1, 4). Reading his own testimonies, I receive the same impression as Christopher Morse: “There followed no dramatic conversion to faith ... but out of the darkness of those years the reality of a God in the midst of suffering impressed itself upon him increasingly” (quoted in Burnham 1991: ix). Moltmann himself writes:

What I felt all at once was the death of all the mainstays that had sustained my life up to then. It was only slowly that something different began to build up in their stead. At home, Christianity was only a matter of form. One came across it once a year at Christmas time, as something rather remote. In the prison camps where I was I only met it in very human—all too human—form.

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bearable.”

<sup>15</sup> The English translation reads “strangleholds;” the German original *eiserne Ringe* (Moltmann, *Die Quelle des Lebens* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser 1997, p. 13).

It was nothing very overwhelming. And yet the experience of misery and forsakenness and daily humiliation gradually built up into an experience of God. (1980: 7)

Moltmann believes it was *God himself* who was “drawing him” (1997b: 6; 1980: 8f.). Half a century later, he compared his earliest experiences of God with Jacob’s wrestling with God by the Jabbok river (Gen. 32:22ff). He writes that in this story he found his “own little human history” (1997b: 1f.) again. During the lonely nights he fought with powers that were dark and dangerous (cf. 1980: x). Little by little he began to interpret these powers as the God of Jacob, the God of Israel (“he who struggles with God”). “We wrestled with God in order to survive in the abysses of senselessness and guilt.” His first “experience in theology” thus arose from a “personal struggle with the dark sides of ‘the hidden face of God’” (*EiT*: 3). This certainly left a permanent stamp on his theological thinking. God is not a triumphant ruler or the poor old bourgeois God of culture-Protestantism, the “fairytale God” which Wolfgang Borchert would so mercilessly polish off.<sup>16</sup> God was encountered in the experiences of death, in the feelings of guilt, in the inner perils of utter resignation. Moltmann writes: “... these were the places where my theology was born. They were my first *locus theologicus*, and at the deepest depths of my soul they have remained so” (*EiT*: 4).

But what makes a twenty-year old man, raised in a more or less secular milieu, think that it must be “God” drawing him? Was it, after all, not merely Moltmann’s later interpretation? The least we can say is that two things were apparently decisive for this steadily growing awareness. In the first place, there was that Bible offered by a Scottish army chaplain (Moltmann writes: “I thought it was out of place. I would rather have had something to eat” (1980: 8)). Moltmann started to read it and became deeply affected by the psalms of lamentation. Unexpectedly these provided him the language to give expression to the suffering he was experiencing:

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<sup>16</sup> Borchert in *The Man Outside* (1952: 115): “Oh, you are old, God, you’re old-fashioned, you can’t cope with the long lists of our dead and our agonies. We no longer really know you, you’re a fairytale God. Today we need a new one. Oh, we’ve searched for you, God, in every ruin, in every shellhole, in every night. We’ve called for you, God! We’ve roared for you, wept for you, cursed for you! Where were you then, dear God? Where are you tonight? Have you turned away from us? Have you completely walled yourself in in your fine old churches? Can’t you hear our cries through the shattered windows, God? Where are you?”

“I was dumb with silence, I held my peace and my sorrow was stirred” (but Luther’s German is much stronger—“I have to eat up my suffering within myself”) ... my lifetime is as nothing in thy sight ... Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry; hold not thou thy peace at my tears, for I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were ....” (Psalm 39, quoted in Moltmann 1997b: 4f.)

God was pictured as a dark and mysterious power but at the same time as a God living among those “that are of a broken heart” (Moltmann 1980: 8). The appeal of this God grew stronger when he read the gospel of Mark. As he writes: “Then I came to the story of the passion, and when I read Jesus’s death cry, ‘My God, why have you forsaken me?’, I knew with certainty: ‘this is someone who understands you’” (1997b: 5). In the God-forsaken Jesus, he recognized his “divine *brother in distress*, the one who takes the prisoners with him on his way to *resurrection*” (italics mine).

I began to summon up the courage to live again, seized by a great hope. I was even calm when other men were “repatriated” and I was not. This early fellowship with Jesus, the brother in suffering and the redeemer from guilt, has never left me since. I never “decided for Christ” as is often demanded of us, but I am sure that then and there, in the dark pit of my soul, he found me. Christ’s God-forsakenness showed me *where* God is, *where* he had been with me in my life, and where he would be in the future.

Thus the God he had experienced received a sharper focus in Jesus, the “divine brother in suffering,” who showed “where God is,” namely among the suffering and the God-forsaken. Moreover, he became convinced that real liberation lies in fellowship with the suffering but resurrected Christ. The new hope emerging from this insight was totally different from the hope that had disturbed him so far: the hope of going home soon, which had made him moody, impatient and cynical (Moltmann 1974a: xi). The new hope, he said later, made him free to accept. It was “not that painful, disturbing hope, but rather a deeper, liberating hope which works through love.” This sounds like an euphemism for resignation and acquiescence. However, it goes beyond both accepting one’s lot and the hope of returning to one’s old “home.” Moltmann remarks: “Perhaps, behind the barbed wire, we had discovered the power of a hope which sought *something new*, not merely a return to the old conditions” (Moltmann 1970: 288, italics mine). Thus the paradoxical knowledge that the God he had experienced in the midst of his suffering is at the same time the God of this “hope against hope” gave him

the support for which he was searching and helped him to break the iron ring of meaninglessness.

In the second place, it was, according to his own account, his encounters with Christian people. In Scotland, villagers invited Moltmann and other prisoners into their homes without reproaching them (“We were accepted as people, even though we were just numbers and wore our prisoners’ patches on our back”). In Norton Camp, the English prisoner-of-war camp he ended up in July 1946 (Moltmann 1997b: 5f.), they were looked after by members of the YMCA. These had put together a library of theological works and printed books that introduced Moltmann to a world that had been forbidden to him under the Third Reich (such as Bonhoeffer’s *The Cost of Discipleship*), offered theological courses (Moltmann studied Hebrew and New Testament and attended classes given by Anders Nygren and other scholars), and arranged meetings with, for instance, Dutch students who told their stories of Gestapo terror and the loss of their Jewish friends but also told him about Christ as “the bridge on which they could cross” to each other (Moltmann: ‘For me that was an hour of liberation. I was able to breathe again, felt like a human being once more, and returned cheerfully to the camp behind the barbed wire’). It was encounters such as these in which they were *accepted* that broke the iron ring of guilt. Strikingly, it was not a trivialization of their share in recent history (such as blaming the circumstances) that was liberating in the end. Moltmann writes: “We were given what we did not deserve, and received of the fulness of Christ ‘grace upon grace’.”

### 2.2.3. Hope Against Hope

“The experiences of the life of a prisoner,” writes Moltmann, “have left a lasting mark on me: the suffering and the hope which reinforce each other” (1997a: 13). These “root experiences” led to fundamental theological decisions (we should keep in mind that the interpretations of Moltmann’s early experiences of God are coloured by the theological climate as shaped by the YMCA in Norton Camp, i.e. Christocentric and ecumenical). In view of Moltmann’s entire theology it seems no overestimation to state, as Richard Bauckham suggests, that suffering and hope reinforcing each other form the two complementary sides of Moltmann’s theological thinking (Bauckham 1995: 1). From the very beginning, Moltmann’s theology was first characterized by a paradoxical (or, as he would later say, a *dialectical*) experience of God. “God in the dark night of the soul—God as the power of hope and pain: this was the experience which moulded me in what are a person’s most receptive years, between 18 and 21” (1980: 9). The God who promises a new life, a new kingdom, is at the same time the God who

identifies himself with the suffering and lives among them. He is not a God high on his throne but a God who “is there even in hell,” as expressed in the psalms (1979a: 270). Secondly (and accordingly) it has a clear-cut *Christocentric* outlook. Through Christ and *only* through Christ, forgiveness and reconciliation were possible. Through Christ and *only* through Christ, Moltmann found a way to live with the history of his nation, to live “in the shadow of Auschwitz.” It was the focus on Jesus Christ as *brother in suffering* and *Redeemer from guilt* that offered a way to bring together two realities that seemed divided forever: daily reality, meaninglessness, and the reality of God. The syntheses of these realities proclaimed by pre-war “culture-Protestantism”<sup>17</sup> lost their credibility definitively. Nor was Moltmann helped by any worldview that remained stuck in resignation, neglecting the “hope against hope,” or, perhaps even worse, any theology that talked about God, promise and hope while trivializing his suffering. In the crucified but risen Christ, both realities coincided in a paradoxical, dialectical way. The promises of this God, encountered in the God-forsaken but resurrected Jesus, are trustworthy because the one who promises is the one who knows what it is to be forsaken.

As stated above, Moltmann compared himself with Jacob. Not that he saw God “face to face”—that, he believes, “is reserved for only a few ‘friends of God’” (1997b: 8). Nonetheless he pictures himself analogously as a man who fought with God, who “experienced with pain his hiddenness and remoteness,” and who unexpectedly sensed how God “looked upon [him] with ‘the shining eyes’ of his eternal joy.” Just like Jacob he went on, “limping but blessed.” Obviously, this has affected his personality ever since. Almost fifty years later, standing among his former fellow prisoners during a Norton Camp memorial service, he said: “The pains and the blessings are still in us, for they go with us wherever we turn” (1997b: 2). It has had theological consequences as well. After his Jabbok experience, speaking about God, about faith, about hope was never easy but always a hard-won possibility, a narrow escape. It conquered meaninglessness, hopelessness and apathy. Moreover, speaking about God was only possible when the hidden God revealed himself—for Moltmann most visibly in Jesus Christ, the “brother in suffering and redeemer from guilt.”

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<sup>17</sup> Among others, Barth and Bonhoeffer used this term to label the identification of Christ and culture in German liberal theology at the turn of the twentieth century (cf. H. Richard Niebuhr’s characterization in his classic study *Christ and Culture*, 1956: 91ff.).

### 2.3. *Centre and Horizon: Theologizing in Wirtschaftswunderland*

This section focusses on the period from Moltmann's repatriation in 1948 until the late 1950s. This period was characterized by the shadow of the war—especially the first years—and, as pointed out in §2.1, the spectacular revival of modern life that was now also experienced in the life of ordinary people. It is evident that in the course of the 1950s Moltmann wanted to view these developments theologically. But how could he do this? In this section I will try to explain why Karl Barth's theology appeared to be the only credible and promising way of doing theology and why Moltmann nevertheless became blocked by the walls of the Barthian fortress (§2.3.1), how Bonhoeffer showed him a way of bringing "the world" into theology (§2.3.2), how early Calvinist theology lead him to a rehabilitation of history (§2.3.3), and how these lines converge in a draft for an imaginative "bold theology" (§2.3.4).

#### 2.3.1. *Trümmertheologie* and Beyond

Moltmann's hope surmounted his apathy. In his experience, "when one grasps the courage to hope, the chains begins to hurt, but the pain is better than the resignation in which everything is a matter of indifference" (1997a: 13). Therefore, he did not fully recognize himself in the label given to his generation, namely the "sceptical generation" (so Schelsky 1963: 74ff.) He remembers: "... basically we were neither sceptical nor resigned" (1970: 288). Of course, his retrospectives (and his earliest publications as we will see) confirm what Schelsky thought to be typical for this generation: the existential search for *certainty in life* and the aversion to utopian interpretations of reality.<sup>18</sup> However, behind the barbed wire of Norton Camp, Moltmann had discovered "the power of a hope which sought something new, not merely a return to the old conditions." This hope gave him ground on which to stand, even confronting the tormenting memories and feelings of guilt and shame. In addition, in spite of the disillusionments of the past years, Moltmann entertained the expectation that this hope could be implemented in a new, completely different society. Was it not "zero hour," the time of new opportunities? Out of the ashes of the old phoenix, so it was believed, a new one would arise. Moltmann writes: "... we returned to Germany de-

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<sup>18</sup> After analyzing post-war German literature, Wolfgang Binder came to the same conclusion: post-war people shut their eyes to ideological interpretations of life (he called it a "daseinsblindes Positivismus") and find themselves in what is "at hand" (in their *Vorfindlichkeit*) and no longer against the horizon of something absolute (Binder 1969: 24ff.).

terminated that now and forever after things should be different, more humane and democratic" (1970: 288). The wide-spreading apathy and scepticism, however, were a thick blanket that threatened to suffocate the newborn phoenix. The question, therefore, seemed to be one of how to keep the "hope against hope" alive in conditions that, indeed, easily hammer one into resignation? And how could this hope, now at the *kairotic* moment of "zero hour," be the basis for a humane and democratic society?

It is no exaggeration, I think, to conclude that for Moltmann it was of vital importance to continue his theological studies. He moved to Göttingen to "understand that power of hope to which I owed my life" (Moltmann 1991: 166), or, in other words, "the certainty that enables a person to confront nothingness" (Moltmann in Volf 1986: 5). I will first sketch the theological climate that would permanently stamp Moltmann's theology (a). Secondly, I will define Moltmann's problem as one of attempting to be loyal to these theological fundamentals while at the same time trying to say something theologically about world and history as the "centre-horizon dilemma" (b). Thirdly, I will design a map for surveying Moltmann's exploration of the "horizon" of the Christian faith (c).

#### a) Theology of Catharsis

Was there any theology that could relate the hope he discovered with his own concrete situation without neglecting the suffering and the homelessness of post-war people? Or, better perhaps, was there any theology that could take him any further along the theological road taken in Norton Camp? There was young Martin Luther's theology of the cross. Moltmann tells how students were running through the streets of Göttingen early in the morning to find seats in the lecture halls where Hans-Joachim Iwand showed them the relevance of this radical Christomonistic theology (by candlelight because of the power cuts). Iwand took up the Lutheran credo of the "justification of the sinner" and told his students that sinners are not loved because they are beautiful but that they are beautiful because they are loved (*EiT*: 87).<sup>19</sup> The impact of such phrases on the post-war generation can hardly be overestimated. Moltmann-Wendel, for her part, remembers: "Beautiful'—was that a category of Christian anthropology at all? 'Beautiful'—what kind of a sensuous idea was that in our bare, hungry, post-war world?" (Moltmann-Wendel 1997: 24)

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<sup>19</sup> Luther: "Ideo peccatores sunt pulchri quia diliguntur, non ideo diliguntur quia sunt pulchri" (in: Luther 1933: 388, 392).

Furthermore, the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard's existentialist "theology of the leap of faith" mesmerized quite a number of students, Moltmann included (cf. *EiT*: 269, Moltmann-Wendel 1997: 33). And Dietrich Bonhoeffer's call for "radical discipleship" was an apparent successor to the ecumenical activism of Norton Camp (more on him later).

But most of all, there was Karl Barth. His theology was the high-pressure area that determined the theological climate in Göttingen. He had great moral authority, like many of the teachers in Göttingen, because he had been on the "right" side during the Nazi era. But, in addition, his theology appeared to be the way to relate the reality of God with the concrete situation of post-war Germany. Over the years this theology has been characterized as a "theology of crisis" or a "theology of the catastrophe." Such labels may not measure up for sounding the depths and surveying the breadth of Barth's theology, but they are a precise expression of why it was so attractive for many post-war students—at least if "crisis" is understood as *catharsis*, as a moment of blissful purification. Barth's theology matched the "zero hour" spirit among the Göttingen students: there is a new beginning *but only when all human utopias have hit rock bottom*.<sup>20</sup> Moltmann puts it this way:

At that time we were very Barthian and wanted to get away from the misalliances of "throne and altar," "faith and the bourgeoisie," "religion and capitalism," characteristic of culture Protestantism and move in the direction of Christ alone and radical discipleship in the service of peace. (1997a: 14)

Why was the dialectical and Christocentric setup of Barth's theology attractive? It does not seem too difficult to hazard a guess. Barth started from the very same *aporia* as these students encountered in themselves. This was more or less the following: within the negativity and contradictions of our contemporary historical existence we *can no longer* speak about God, but in view of the hope we have discovered we *have to* speak about God. Moltmann writes:

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<sup>20</sup> Shortly after the war Barth delivered a "message to the German people" in which he had called them to be "down-to-earth" (*nüchtern*). He meant that they were not to play the role of victim, complaining of how they had been framed but to confess frankly the errors that had been made; not to long for the restoration of the situation before 1933 (after all, were the seeds of the later insanity not already present then?) and never to entrust themselves to any Führer and his utopias: "No more dreams yet" (Barth 1961b: 92ff.).

This sense of no longer being able to talk of God and yet of having to talk to God [*Nicht-Mehr-von-Gott-reden-Können und Doch-von-Gott-reden-Müssen*] in the face of the specific experiences of an oppressive burden of guilt and cruel meaninglessness in my generation is presumably the root of my theological concerns, for reflection about God constantly brings me back to that aporia. (1991: 166)

The formulation as such already echoes his master's voice (cf. Barth 1924: 158). The *impossible possibility* of theology—that was the issue. As is commonly known, for Barth the one and only reason why theology can say something is because *God himself* speaks, i.e. when he meets human beings in his “Word”—(in his later theology) his self-revelation in Christ.<sup>21</sup> The presupposed infinite and qualitative distance between God and humans is bridged only by God's reconciling act in Christ. Thus the only point of contact between God and humans is Christ—not human history or nature or some religious consciousness. Every individual is called to accept in faith the freedom offered to him in Christ. This, Moltmann states, “gave us ground to stand on” (1974a: xi). “We were “in despair and yet consoled”” (1970: 288). But, in addition, it “gave us a critical consciousness over against religious illusions that merely bore the name of Christian” (1974a: xi). Thus Barth's theology was not only believed to be the foundation of a new theology but also of a new church—in the Barmen tradition: critical and challenging—and even of a new, humane society.

#### b) The Centre-Horizon Dilemma

In the course of the 1950s, the latter, however, proved to be highly problematic. In retrospect, Moltmann later realized, the opportunity of “zero hour” had already been over when he returned to Germany in 1948. A process of rebuilding had already begun in the economy, in politics, in culture and also in the churches—a rebuilding that in many cases turned out to be a restoration. Moltmann states: “The old names showed up again, and many of the old conditions. Everywhere in the country rubblefields were put again ‘in order’” (1970: 288). Moltmann was astonished to find that without any self-criticism the Protestant state churches—which had kept silent or rejoiced in the Hitler era—rebuilt themselves in their pre-war fashion. But

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<sup>21</sup>As commonly acknowledged, after his commentaries on *Romans* Barth's theology moved away from an actualistic “Word-of-God theology” to a more Christocentric interpretation of the Word of God. I have tried to be aware of this change whenever I discuss Barth, but I will not continually make it explicit.

he was probably even more bewildered about the fact that leading figures of the “Confessing Church” also supported such re-churchification and re-institutionalization of the church. Later, in 1970, he wrote:

But then, beginning in 1948, a new order was instituted in the Protestant church in Germany. The new beginnings launched by the “Confessing Church” were not as successful as its theologians had anticipated. I exaggerate somewhat when I say that out of the experience of God “in the abyss of the world” there now developed an exaltation of God as “Lord of the church”. What had been experienced in the days when the church was under attack, as inner certainty, open witness and community of the faithful, was now transferred into an institutional and slightly clerical entity which was all too consciously claimed as a possession. The churches found a place for themselves in a “Christian society,” and won more influence on schools, press and politics than was good for them, since on their part they were more influenced by the society’s powers and interests than they realized. (1970: 288f.)

At the Göttingen theological faculty (“the Mecca of a theology which is critical of politics and the church,” Moltmann 1997a: 122), these developments were followed suspiciously. Moltmann remembers that “wave after wave of protest broke out in the Protestant student communities” (his own part in these movements must not be overestimated, by the way; according to what he writes, (1970: 289) he actually preferred to read the new books by Von Rad and Käsemann instead of taking to the streets). These protests did not, as yet, meet with much approval. The traditional churches exerted a great attraction, for they offered precisely what people wanted: a move away from grand utopias and ideologies to time-tested values and beliefs that guaranteed certainty and stability in one’s personal life. Even more problematic was that in any attempt to break through this new realism with protest and ideas about a different society their own theological starting points were turning against them. Their own weapons were, so to say, used against them: anti-utopianism and Christocentric concentration. Moltmann describes this embarrassment as follows:

The “loss of the centre” seemed to be a precise description of the situation of Christianity, which had lost its bearings. So we sought “the centre of scripture” and became exclusively christocentric, *solus Christus*. However, we got into difficulties with this narrow understanding of Barth and this “Barmen orthodoxy” when we

wanted to give positive answers to the political possibilities and cultural challenges of the post-war period. (1997a: 14)

To leave no doubt, it was not Barth's own attitude that undermined the credibility of his theology (from Basel he continued to criticize the church and to publish his views about societal issues such as nuclear warfare). It was the radicality of his "first commandment" theology that turned out to be a problem.

Moltmann explores the metaphor of the "centre" and the "surrounding area" (or "horizon") to explain it (so 1959a: 8, 1959b: 28, 1960b: 42). As he states, Barth's dialectical theology could be described as a protest against the "loss of the centre" (*Verlust der Mitte*) in the syntheses of nineteenth-century culture Protestantism. Over against such a "Christianity without Christ," he proclaimed Christ as the *centre* of church, preaching and theology. Among the ruins of the Third Reich and the Christian institutes that collaborated with it, Barth's focus on Christ as the centre of theology had been liberating and purifying for post-war students. But a critical theology stressing the universal *centre* of theology was no longer sufficient since restoration theologies appeared to be doing exactly the same. The "loss of the centre" was not the sole concern; a new danger had appeared: the "loss of the horizon" (Moltmann 1959a: 9). In other words, the danger was no longer merely the vanishing of Christ behind a Christian culture but also "Christ" and the "Word of God" becoming a universal principle to found and defend conservative politics over against "new experiments" and churchly reconstruction over against initiatives for new modes of being church. In order to be relevant (i.e. translating Christian obedience to society, culture and politics), *positive* theological answers to the immediate context were needed—but how is this to be accomplished if any positive human fixation of God's revelation in human history is undermined by a Barthian-like reference to the first commandment?

This indicates the dilemma that determined Moltmann's theology from the early 1950s on: the *centre-horizon dilemma* (essentially it is the same dilemma as the one that would turn up in his later theology as the "identity-involvement dilemma;" cf. §3.2.1). Focussing on the centre seems to involve a loss of the horizon and vice versa. Can one start with the *a priori* that Christ is the only "point of contact" between God and human beings without ending up in a transcendentalist, personalistic theology in which, theologically speaking, the world is no longer in view? Conversely, can one bring "the world" into theology without once again confusing one's own ideals and utopias with the Word of God? Barthian theology seemed to lead to an inescapable impasse.

It goes without saying that this was a touchy subject in post-war German theology. For many, to go further than Barth's fortuitous rediscovery of the "centre" was impossible. With the unavoidable and self-evident initiation in Barth's Christocentric dialectic, Moltmann's own theological thinking underwent a decisive mutation already in embryo (the beginning of this lies actually in Norton Camp, as shown above). This has to do with not the edifice of Barth's systematics as such but its foundation, i.e. the methodological, epistemological decision that the knowledge of God that gives one "ground to stand on" cannot be derived or extrapolated from any philosophical, anthropological, psychological or whatever reflection but that theology should stem from the (rationally) completely unfounded truth claim that every reflection on God, human beings and the world begins with God's self-revelation in Christ: *Credo ut intelligam*. Although some commentators—analyzing Moltmann's later political or ecological theology—have claimed the opposite, I believe that during his entire theological career he never abandoned and never intended to abandon this acknowledgement of the "centre" of Christian theology (see §2.4.2a). Apparently, this fundamental decision is so crucial that he confronts the tensions it involves rather than giving it up. Abandoning it was simply no option. But was there a way *beyond* Barth?

### c) Exploring the Horizon of the Christian Faith

For years Moltmann had been convinced that after Barth's "monumental *Dogmatics*" there could be no more systematic theology ("because he had said it all and said it so well," 1997a: 15). As he often reminded himself, it was after he became acquainted with Arnold van Ruler in 1957 that he was "cured ... of this misapprehension." "Through him," writes Moltmann, "I became acquainted with eschatology (a field then lying fallow), with the missionary initiative of Christianity and, not least, with the joys of theological imagination" (Moltmann 1970: 289). In his book on the "origins of the theology of hope" Douglas Meeks casts some doubts on this statement (1974: 24). He shows in his book how his Göttingen teachers had presented Moltmann with the eschatological and missionary perspective of theology prior to this (Ernst Wolf's introduction to Bonhoeffer and Otto Weber's discussion of Reformed theology are important here, as we will see). At any rate, the encounter with Van Ruler apparently fired him with enthusiasm for the exploration of the horizon of theology and the way he describes it here is significant. Apparently, it has to do with:

1. The "*apostolate*," i.e. the universal mission of the church (which does not involve a churchification of the world, but the opening of the church to the world—"the church inward out-

ward,” as Van Ruler’s kindred soul Hans Hoekendijk—another representative of imaginative theology—put it (Hoekendijk 1967).

2. The *eschatological perspective* of the “reign of God.”
3. The joys of theological *imagination*.

These proposed theological moves beyond Barth found their expression in Moltmann’s earliest publications: the *first*, I would say, primarily in two studies on Bonhoeffer’s social ethics and the *second* predominantly in different contributions on late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed theology (among these his dissertation and habilitation). Discussing the issue of Christian presence in a secular society, the first points to a way of bringing “the world” into theology. Focussing on the Reformed perspective on eschatology, the second points to a way of bringing in human history. Both lines converge in what could be seen as the first fruits of Moltmann’s “joy of theological imagination,” namely his essay *Die Gemeinde* (1959a). In the following I will analyze these writings. From the perspective of the theme of this study, my concern is the problem of “certainty,” or the “home” in the “homelessness of this age” (cf. 1961a: 6f.). Can Christian faith offer certainty in spite of—or perhaps due to—the exploration of its horizon? This is not a minor concern in Moltmann’s theology. On the contrary, it is no exaggeration to say that it will prove to be the central issue in his theological enterprise.

### 2.3.2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Way to True Worldliness

“Open your eyes to the *apostolate* of the church,” said Van Ruler. By this he meant that one should explore the breadth of Christ’s reign in this world. Moltmann listened. However, he did not concentrate on Dutch apostolate theology (at least he did not publish on it) but wrote two solidly constructed essays on the socio-ethical theology of Bonhoeffer. The conclusion is similar to Van Ruler’s ideas: exploring the horizon of the Christian faith is not done at the cost of its centre, but, on the contrary, both presuppose each other (cf. e.g. Van Ruler 1948: 9). As such, the articles on Bonhoeffer are too small a basis to draw conclusions about his own theology, but a quick glance through his *Die Gemeinde* will suffice to see how much he was influenced by Bonhoeffer’s vocabulary and ideas. Apparently, Bonhoeffer pointed to a way beyond Barth. How precisely did he do this? That is what we will explore first (a). Then we will focus on Moltmann’s own attention to Bonhoeffer’s variation on the dialectical Word of God theology (b) and see how this is worked out in two major themes of Bonhoeffer’s theology that are clearly echoed in Moltmann’s thinking, namely the concept of vicarious suffering and the theology of the mandates (c).

## a) Who is Christ for us Today?

“Every ‘centre’ has a surrounding area, otherwise it is not a centre” (Moltmann 1997a: 15). But how does one rehabilitate this “surrounding area” without losing the “centre” once again? Or, in other words, how does one open oneself to the world without undermining the “certainty of faith” anchored in Christ as the centre of faith? Or, yet again, how does one bring human and divine reality together in such a way that they are not amalgamated in a nineteenth-century-like synthesis but nevertheless allow us to give positive answers to questions that arise out of our current socio-political context? This question, which had puzzled Moltmann as a student, turned out to be all the more problematic when he became the pastor of a Reformed congregation in Bremen-Wasserhorst, “a little country congregation of about 400 people, 50 farms, and 2,000 to 3,000 cows” (*EiT*: 5). According to his later remarks, his own personal theology started to develop here. His academic thinking was confronted with the faith of the village people. The result was, as he puts it in the language of his later Latin American dialogue partners, a “community theology,” a “theology of the people.” Through his pastoral work, he realized that the Christocentric theology of Barth, which at first seemed to offer what he was looking for, namely certainty, was inadequate as soon as one asked with Bonhoeffer: “Who is Christ for us today?” (1959a: 7). My assessment is that Bonhoeffer’s theology appealed to Moltmann because it compelled theological attention for the world *starting from the premisses of dialectical theology*. This theological space for the world was not created by thinking less Christocentrically but by thinking *even more* Christocentrically. In his *Die Gemeinde* Moltmann quotes Bonhoeffer: “The more exclusively we acknowledge and confess Christ as Lord, the more freely the wide range of his domination will be disclosed to us” (1959a: 9, Bonhoeffer 1955: 181). This paradox seems to me the key to understanding Moltmann’s interpretation of Bonhoeffer. The crux, in my view, is the epistemological question of how humans can “know” God—or perhaps more precisely, how they can speak of God and base their “certainty of life” on his Word. Moltmann does not elaborate on Bonhoeffer’s critique of Barth at this point nor does he make explicit why he needs Bonhoeffer to move beyond Barth himself. However, Bonhoeffer’s main concern is distinctly expressed in Moltmann’s writings, namely the consequences of Barth’s epistemology for social ethics. Therefore, it may be illuminating to locate the point of friction between Barth and Bonhoeffer in Bonhoeffer’s theology itself (I will focus on his habilitation *Act and Being* (*Akt und Sein*, (1931), 1996: 123ff.).

As stated above, for Barth knowledge of God is never linked to natural knowledge or religious or moral consciousness. Knowledge of God is only possible because and when the free and sovereign God himself speaks. In no way can his Word be secured, fixed or possessed by human beings. Bonhoeffer remarks that for Barth this non-objectiveness (*Nichtgegenständlichkeit*) of God's revelation implies that humans have to take into account that whatever they think they know about God can be overruled by God himself. In other words, our "judgement of knowing" always includes a "judgement of not-knowing." This *a priori*, meant to guarantee the freedom of God, was grounded epistemologically in Barth's dialectical method. In Bonhoeffer's view there is a high price to be paid for this methodological safeguarding of the freedom of God. God "is" only in the act of faith (*Glaubensakt*) realized by God alone and not in any human reflection upon that act. Thus God's act of salvation of which the Bible speaks is transformed into a formalized principle. We are saved by God, but we cannot appeal to that too explicitly since God's freedom should be left open dialectically. The biblical image of God as "Creator" and "Lord" is changed for God as "Subject of faith," or "Subject of my new existence." Such an epistemological starting point, Bonhoeffer argued, leads inevitably to individualistic and actualistic tendencies. "Certainty of faith" can only be gained in the individual "act of faith." We run into serious trouble as soon as we try to draw theological conclusions for Christian ethics from this. After all, what does such a personalistic, actualistic theology have to say to the world?

For Barth God is the one who *loves in freedom*. Bonhoeffer agrees, but he doubts whether this freedom should be so explicitly linked to God's sovereignty. He for his part states that God's commitment to humans does not restrict his freedom but is rather an expression of it: "God is not free from human beings, but for them" (Bonhoeffer 1996: 91). Epistemologically speaking, this gives him at least the possibility of underscoring the biblical promise that we can "know" God, that "we can know what is given to us" (as 1 Cor. 2:12 reads). Moreover, he can presume that human knowledge of revelation must be grounded in the *community of faith* in which the believer stands. Only then can it serve as theological basis for social ethics. However, this does not yet affect Barth's core problem: how, then, can we "know" God and speak of his revelation without locking him up in our ideals and utopias?

### b) The Word Writing History

At this point Moltmann's articles on Bonhoeffer are clarifying (1960b and 1967b<sup>22</sup>). The central question is how God makes himself known, how we can be "certain" of this revelation, and how can we base our "certainty of life" on it. With Bonhoeffer, Moltmann can presume that it is a theological misunderstanding that openness to the world means a loss of the centre of faith. He concludes that the Christocentric concentration in Bonhoeffer's work (mainly his earlier works) and the breadth of his social ethics (particularly his later writings) belong together "like center and circumference, proximity and horizon, concentration and expanse" (1967b: 56). But how is this so? We will explore Moltmann's analysis in order to highlight two consequences that are of vital importance for Moltmann's own theology.

For Bonhoeffer, Moltmann explains, Christ and only Christ is the "Word of God"—not a word once and for all, an eternal truth to be accepted in an act of faith but a Word that *writes history* itself. What does he mean? To clarify this, he differentiates between word as "claim" (*Anrede*) and as "idea" (i.e. a timeless truth) and stated that the Word of God is not a timeless truth but a word that claims people. It is spoken in a particular context and requires an answer in a particular context, a context that changes from time to time and from place to place. Such an "actualization," Moltmann understands, is not an adaptation of the Word to human contexts. The Word (still *extra nos!*) writes history by laying claims on people: it has a performative power and is a creative, history-making Word. To explain this, Bonhoeffer referred to the Hebrew word *dabar*, which points to a unity of act and word. In the beginning, God's Word created the world and, as Moltmann's analysis of Bonhoeffer shows, this original Word of God had a *performative* power. This supposes a continuity between God's Word and our reality. If I understand this correctly, we could say that "in the beginning" there was no discrepancy between God's reality expressed in his creative Word and human reality. The breaking of this original unity, as Moltmann reads Bonhoeffer, can be described as *sin*. Since the distortion of the "first language," humans live in a dumb, silent world. They can only hear themselves and no longer hear God in the things around them. However, Bonhoeffer held that *Christ* is the new Word of God that speaks to us in a silent world. This new Word also creates a history by laying claims on people. The new Word originates, so to say, a history within and at the same time over against our human history. The only point of contact between God

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<sup>22</sup> The latter was published originally in 1959.

and the world is Christ, the new Word of God. But this Word is not just experienced in “moments of faith,” like being struck by lightning. It writes history today in our world.

Christ as the new Word of God lays a claim on us today. But how? Moltmann discovered that for Bonhoeffer—as for Barth—this was not a matter of translating the gospel of Christ in such a way that it fits into modern frames of reference. However, it was also not a matter of defining the “act of faith” in which the salvific act of Christ—once and for all at a certain point in history—could be accepted (or not). The question led Bonhoeffer to a rethinking of the Christian doctrine of *incarnation* and its supposed *social intentions*. He emphasized the *universal* and *ontological* consequences of the belief that the Word of God *became flesh* in Christ. Referring to Colossians 1, Ephesians 1 and the “Christ hymn” in Philippians 2, he argued that the doctrine of the incarnation was a matter of God’s reality penetrating the world’s reality in Jesus Christ (so Moltmann’s analysis in 1967: 58ff.). This has ontological consequences. The very being of our universe, the ontological structure of reality is transformed by the incarnation of God in Christ and, following that, the reconciliation of the world with himself. If that is the *a priori* of Christian theological reflection on our world, we can then say that all interpretations of reality that neglect this penetration are merely abstractions. They limit reality to one certain part of it. In other words, no one can speak correctly about God *or the world* without referring to Christ. In Jesus Christ God adopted the world and reconciled the world’s reality with his reality—thus only through Christ can we see the world as it really is, *a posteriori* as God’s creation and in line with prophecy and promise as God’s reign (Moltmann 1967: 57). For Bonhoeffer, this implies that since Christ one can no longer think dualistically about God and the world, worldliness and faith, the church and the world. As Moltmann concludes, for Bonhoeffer “... the incarnation has restored the whole of reality under one Head” (1967: 61). He therefore protested against any theology that takes the eternal conflict between God and the world as the ethical starting point and for his part started with the one *synthesis* of God and world in the reconciliation in Christ. After the coming of Christ it is impossible to conceive of God without the world or the world without God. Moreover, whoever belongs to Christ is no longer divided in worldliness and faith but is himself a “whole” (*ein Ganzes*). In other words, a liberating view of human life can be derived only from the *ontological* statement that the gap between God and the world has been bridged in Jesus Christ and that, consequently, in Christ we talk about the world when we talk about God and *vice versa*. The bridge between this reconciling act of God and our human

situation is not the act of God as the “Subject of my new existence” but the rule of Christ the *Lord* in whom God and world are reconciled. Christ is the *pantocrator*; the whole world is already completely under his claim to dominion (*Herrschaftsanspruch*).

This has radical consequences for the way Christians should look at the world. It means a “yes” to the world as the horizon of Christ’s rule, to a “*secularization*” of faith. It involves a protest against any division between God’s presence and the world in order to ensure a flow from the claims of the world into the sacramental spaces of the church. For the sake of clarity, such a flow was not what Barth intended. But, as we saw, it was actually how the church happened to present itself and Barth’s dialectical theology offered no clue for preventing this “loss of the horizon.” The core message of Bonhoeffer’s interpretation of God’s reconciling act in Christ was that we should unconditionally accept the world in its worldliness because and only because it is accepted by God. The reality in which humans find themselves is always the reality that has been accepted by God in Christ (the world, as Moltmann learned from Van Ruler (1967: 61), has a “messianic character”). For Bonhoeffer, being a Christian thus implies being faithful to the world. This enabled Moltmann to acknowledge Barth’s critique of the “loss of the centre” while at the same time exploring the world as horizon of theology.

### c) The True Worldliness of Faith

At least two important implications of this central claim become manifest in Moltmann’s own theology: the concept of “vicarious suffering” and the doctrine of the “mandates.” Bonhoeffer’s “real worldliness of faith” goes beyond syntheses and diastases of God and the world. In his theology, Moltmann observes, the all-embracing Christocracy is neither mirrored in the sacramental imperator, as in Byzantinian theocracy, nor expressed in some kind of principal unity as in the idealistic systems of the nineteenth century but it is the rule of God in the person of the *Crucified*. “Only the suffering God can help,” is a frequently quoted line of Bonhoeffer in Moltmann’s work (*TH*: 171, *CG*: 47, cf. Bonhoeffer 1971: 360f.). “Christ helps us by his weakness” (1967b: 64). In other words, the revelation of God’s omnipotence lies in the vicarious suffering of Christ. Divine vicarious action in Christ is as a “once-and-for all” act that is the foundation of life. Accordingly, Moltmann reads in Bonhoeffer that vicarious suffering as fellow human beings is the “ground pattern of sociality” expressed in all spheres of life. God’s “self-emptying” (*Selbstentäusserung*) in the Crucified unmasks all ambition for power (it is “a christocentric liberation from heteronomy and autonomy”) and liberates human beings to “real humanity.” This real humanity is practised in imitation (in *Nachfolge*) of Christ in vicarious

suffering, in solidarity with fellow human beings. We will see how this idea would return in Moltmann's theology of the 1970s (with all that that entails).

The idea of the universal rule of the crucified Christ thus has ethical implications (Moltmann does not make explicit what such "imitation" concretely involves). For Moltmann, such a view contrasted sharply with the activity and policy of the mainstream churches—as islands of safety in society, focussing on the individual soul or the community of the like-minded and leaving the world to its fate. But how should the church open itself to the world? In his own theology (*Die Gemeinde* is the first clear-cut example) Moltmann does not plead for a "christianization," let alone a "churchification" of the world as an alternative to the churchification of the church. He clearly follows Bonhoeffer. An important starting point for his own view is another train of thought in Bonhoeffer's thinking, namely his doctrine of the *mandates*. In Christ, we saw, the whole of reality is embraced. God is in the midst of our life and not only at the limits of our possibilities (1960b: 51). Consequently, the specifically "Christian" can be found nowhere else than in true worldliness, the supernatural nowhere else than in the natural, the holy nowhere else than in the profane (1960b: 47). For Bonhoeffer, this necessitates obedience to the historical lordship of Christ *in all dimensions of life*. Proclaiming the peace of the universal rule of Christ (and the comprehensive salvation of the whole of life in the coming Kingdom of God) requires acceptance of the idea that Christ's victory on the cross and resurrection liberates the world for its own essential possibilities (intended by God). Each sphere of society—state, church, labour, marriage—has its own mandate. For Bonhoeffer these mandates are ontologically founded—that is to say in his own ontology of the rule of Christ. For secular institutions, the rule of Christ does not involve a servitude under the moral authority of the church or the frozen and universal "natural rights" of natural law philosophy. Christ's rule liberates the world for "real worldliness," the state for real "stateness," the family for earthly holiness. Whatever this may involve concretely remains unnoted. It is clear, however, that under the rule of Christ world, state, church, family, etc. can become what they essentially are. For Bonhoeffer this is not what they have always been but what they are *within the horizon of the new humanity in God's coming kingdom* (for Moltmann this provides an important argument for democratic and participatory values over against conservative thinking in terms of natural law, see §3.3). For the church it involves a certain relativization of its own position. It is one of the mandates among many others—nothing more but also nothing less. Taking people seriously in their so-

cial relations and responsibilities—which are not secondary to one’s relationship to God—the church should function as the herald of the new humanity to which all mandates are directed (Moltmann 1960b: 67). The church does not stand above secular arrangements but in the midst of them in *partnership, prophetically* and *vicariously*.

I will sum up. The epistemological starting point that knowing God is only possible in “not knowing” leads to a travesty of the God of the Bible, namely God as “Subject of my own existence.” This makes it impossible to draw any theological consequences for ethics. What we know is that God in Christ has reconciled himself with the world. This divine “yes” to the world has ontological consequences: from now on the world is under the universal rule of Christ, has a messianic character, so to say. This relativizes any distance between the sacred and the profane. Whoever speaks about Christ speaks about the world and *vice versa*. Protecting Christian “identity” over against the world outside becomes grotesque and even idolatrous. Such an isolation strategy makes one blind to the certainty that—as Abraham Kuyper formulates it<sup>23</sup>—there is no square centimeter that Christ does not claim as his. Moltmann seems to have found a way to bring the world into theology again.

2.3.3. The Perseverance of the Saints or the Re-historicization of Theology  
In the course of the 1950s Moltmann discovered the eschatological perspective of Christian faith. Van Ruler challenged him, the biblical theologies of Von Rad and Käsemann inspired him and the dogmatics of early Calvinist theologians finally pointed him to a way. He trained himself as a church historian in those years. His *Doktorvater*, Otto Weber, guided him through the almost impenetrable forest of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed theology, along woodland giants like Calvin and Cocceius and smaller trees like Moyses Amyraut, Christoph Pezel, Theodorus Undereyk and Johannes Brocardus. At first glance, this did not seem to be a very exciting journey for someone who had started his theological studies “to understand the hope that saved his life.” But appearances are deceptive. Why did Moltmann apply himself so diligently to the Reformed fathers? There is, first of all, a romantic explanation. Moltmann: “I came to [Weber] out of love for my future wife Elisabeth [who was writing her dissertation under Weber’s guidance], and he gave me the subject for a thesis: ‘Moyse Amyraut and the theological

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<sup>23</sup> In *Gemeinde* lies the obvious link between Bonhoeffer’s mandates and Kuyper’s concept of sphere sovereignty, which was based on a similar belief in the universality of the rule of Christ (1959a: 27).

school of Saumur', of which I had never heard" (*EiT*: 89). That, however, only partly explains the passion he developed for this subject. Very quickly he received the impression that he had "struck gold," and he "became increasingly interested in that unknown period between the late Reformation and the early Enlightenment." What was the gold he dug up? In short, it was the Calvinist perspective on eschatology based on the notion of history as emerging from Calvin's view on the so-called *perseverantia sanctorum*, the perseverance of the saints. This is most distinctly expressed in his contribution to the *Calvin-Studien 1959* (1960a) and his habilitation *Prädestination und Perseveranz* (1961b). The doctrine of *perseverance*—what does it involve and, more importantly, why did it appear to be a key for opening theological reflection to the historical horizon of faith? I will first make some general remarks to place the subject in a broader theological context. For this I will turn to H. Berkhof and to G.C. Berkouwer, whose book *Faith and Perseverance* (1958)<sup>24</sup> was—with Moltmann's *Prädestination und Perseveranz*—one of the few systematic theological studies on perseverance written in those years (a). On the basis of this I will examine Moltmann's interpretation of Calvin's ideas on certainty and the continuity of faith (b) and his critical assessment of Calvinist orthodoxy on this point (c).

#### a) The Continuity of Faith

The doctrine of perseverance is part of Christian theological thought on the "renewal of man." In fact, it is a vital part of the process of "sanctification" that follows the "justification" of the sinner. As is generally known, in Reformed theology reflection on this renewal starts with this concept of *justification*. Briefly defined, it is the forensic, gracious act of God in which the sinner is acquitted of guilt and punishment and given the right to eternal life. The question that arises is: What happens after this declaration, when life goes on and faith has to be practised in daily life? Berkhof writes:

The more the believer, prompted by his security in God, ventures the life of new obedience, the more he needs, as he struggles along, the certainty that God's faithfulness and Christ's substitution will carry him through. Justification tells us that we stand on an unshakable foundation on which we can always fall back. But who guarantees that we, as we struggle and stumble along, and even suffer defeats, will not slide off this foundation? ... Then the question concerning certainty and security arises anew; this time

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<sup>24</sup> The Dutch original (*Geloof en Volharding*) was published in 1949.

not as a question regarding the *foundation* but one that concerns the *horizon*. The question is not: am I really a sinner received in grace? but: will this adoption be permanent and show its effects in my life? Who can guarantee that? The question is also: who, without such a certainty, can avoid succumbing to despair and keep up the courage to continue to fight? (Berkhof 1979: 476, italics mine)

Certainty of faith in the struggle of daily life—that is manifestly the issue. It concerns, moreover, not just the centre but particularly the *horizon* of faith. Berkhof refers to Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, in his view “entirely devoted to the renewal of man.” Paul starts with the justification of human beings (chapters 1-5), then speaks about struggle and progress (6-8), and finally concludes this train of thought “by affirming his conviction that believers will persevere and overcome” (8:28-39). The last verse is significant: “For I am sure that nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” According to Berkhof, it expresses that “our wavering faithfulness is upheld on all sides by God’s unwavering faithfulness.” There is a continuity of faith and that is not entirely dependent on us. “The believer may and dares to believe that he will persevere in that faith and nothing will snatch him out of God’s hand.” Basically, that is what the doctrine of the perseverance concerns.<sup>25</sup>

However, it is definitely not as uncontroversial as it may seem. The problem lies in the word “continuity.” As is widely known, there has been quite a controversy between Lutherans and Calvinists about the relation between justification and sanctification. Both traditions presume that after being “justified” through God’s grace, the believer lives in two realities, two kingdoms. For Lutherans the believer remains both sinner and justified simultaneously, while Calvinists, generally speaking, entertain the possibility of a “growing in faith,” a *progressus gratiae* as well. Behind this is the Calvinist idea that the reconciliation of God with the world in the Christ event is not the final stage in God’s plan of salvation, but only the sharpening of the eschatological promise of the future kingdom. In Jesus Christ the kingdom of God has dawned *but has not yet been fulfilled*. Justification and final salvation do not coincide. The origin of the new order in the Christ event and the final glorification are respectively the beginning and fulfil-

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<sup>25</sup> Berkouwer writes: ‘The perseverance of the saints is unbreakably connected with the assurance of faith, in which the believer face the future with confidence’ (1958: 11).

ment of the process of sanctification. The believer is on his way from the one kingdom to the other. He lives between the “already” and the “not yet” of God’s future reign. Consequently, the doctrine of sanctification and particularly that of perseverance become much more important. Given the Calvinist view on the renewal of humans and the eschatological view of history in which it is embedded, *continuity of faith* is—as nearly every page of Berkouwer’s book on perseverance reveals—an existential problem (“we are made to think of the alpha and omega of our lives,” 1958: 9). It is a problem of *certainty of faith*. Is there a constancy, a continuity, a certainty in history “that transcends all the incidental and fragmentary aspects of our experience” (1958: 9)? Is the course of the believer through history towards its fulfilment—characterized by set-backs and temptations—completely dependent on the endurance of the believer himself or is there a continuity of faith that transcends his own capacities? Calvinist theology, Berkouwer holds, has always confirmed the latter. The Reformed *sola fide*, then, is not only related to the forensic act of justification but also to its transference into all facets of the believer’s daily life (1958: 78). Lutherans were suspicious of such certainty, not only because they believed that it trivialized *sin* (can God’s grace still be lost by notorious sinners?) but also because one could easily slip into an identification of God’s grace with human certainties, thus ending up in a “speculative doctrine of election” (1958: 56, 64). Is it, if we open ourselves to God’s call in the obedience of faith today, possible to talk about continuity? Does the human search for continuity not obstruct the actual relationship with God, to be experienced in the moment of faith? Berkouwer is evidently aware of these objections. He emphasized that Calvinist theologians have usually never tried to elaborate on the “mystery of perseverance” from an anthropological point of view because they sensed the danger in this continuity (1958: 73). He further accentuates that perseverance is not primarily a theoretical problem but a *confession of faith* in the fragility of human life (1958: 14, 78). Like Berkhof, he suggests that the problems arise only after perseverance is made into an issue for academic theological debate. Finally, throughout his book he stresses the *eschatological character* of the idea of perseverance and with this the fundamental provisional character of every certainty of faith. Nevertheless, it apparently remains a matter of steering a middle course. How can one speak of the “mysterious continuity of faith” without fixing this continuity in human ideals, human nature or something else that can be attributed to humans?

From this perspective, it is to be expected that one runs into trouble as soon as one tries to reflect on the Calvinist doctrine of perseverance from

a Barthian point of view. For the sake of clarity, Barth also argued for distinguishing properly between justification and sanctification (e.g. Barth 1958: 499ff.). The problem, however, is that within the frame of his doctrine of revelation he is hardly able to acknowledge a continuity of faith as presumed in the doctrine of perseverance. This, after all, presumes a kind of *Offenbarkeit*, a revelation factually present in history, to which believers can point and on which they can rely. It supposes a history of revelation, of salvific acts of God in the past, that encourage believers today and makes them open for the future. In Barthian dialectics, these certainties are seemingly washed away. To judge from appearances, again the final question is how God reveals himself to humans, how they can “know” this and base their certainty of life on that. From a Calvinist point of view, in Barth’s stress on the *a priori* of revelation the ontic prevails so much above the noetic that there is no other verification anymore than within the closed circle of the sovereign and free revelation of God self, the *deus dixit* (cf. Berkouwer 1974: 77).<sup>26</sup>

Continuity is the central problem of those problems which must engage us. It has again become prominent especially through the dialectical theology. This theology puts great emphasis on the activist character of faith. It claims that the Word of God is not transformed into a static *possession* of man but is supposed to be heard and accepted every moment anew in submissive faith as the message of justification and forgiveness. Especially in its early phase, this theology denied that there could be a continuity that was anchored in us. Strong emphasis was placed on the concrete act of believing. (1958: 13)

To leave no doubt, Berkouwer also rejects any continuity rooted in a human *habitus*. At the same time, he defends the Calvinist stress on perseverance of the saints over against attacks from dialectical theology that identify the Calvinist view of perseverance as one based on human *habitus*. Berkouwer argues that theology may not relativize the certainties of God’s acts in history by referring to the “triumph of God’s grace.” He also refers to Rom. 8: 35ff. and concludes:

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<sup>26</sup> For a survey of Dutch neo-Calvinistic critique of Barth’s doctrine of revelation and in particular Berkouwer’s, see Van Keulen 2003: 297ff. Van Keulen writes: “From this critique [of Barth’s concept of revelation] it is clear that for Berkouwer a ‘factual [revelation] ... present in history’ and a ‘given’ revelation is non-negotiable” (302).

What the doctrine ultimately has in view is not an experience of consolation that flickers and dies and flickers again in the shadows of life's uncertainties; it is not an experience of joyful communion with the Lord that perhaps tomorrow could be partially, and later even totally, threatened and destroyed: but it is a continuity amidst all the transitoriness of our lives, as we proceed by devious paths through numberless circumstances and dangers towards consummation, toward the day of Jesus Christ. (1958: 10)

Thus the two fronts of the debate are indicated: an actualistic denial of continuity and a habitualistic location of continuity in the human being and his history itself. Where Barth, given his dialectical doctrine of revelation, is on the verge of actualism, neo-Calvinist theologians such as Berkouwer must take care not to fall into habitualism.<sup>27</sup>

#### b) Predestination and Perseverance

It is exactly at this point that Moltmann intervenes in the discussion. Interestingly, he suggests a parallel between Calvin's situation and his own. He needs four steps to make this explicit. *First* he gives an indication of the general attitude towards life in the 1950s. He writes that it seems to be a continuing experience of his generation that all facets of life, values, virtues, duties, and hopes, in short *everything that may offer human beings certainty and stability*, has been abandoned to the course of history (1961a: 7). He is talking, I think, not merely of the war and its aftermath (although he speaks of the "many catastrophe that have determined the experience of the historicity of human existence," 1960a: 43) but of the dynamics of modern life in which all certainties are fluid (see §2.4). Humans have been surrendered to

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<sup>27</sup> To see how Dutch Reformed theology was concerned to find a way beyond both extremes it is illuminating to quote what H.M. Kuitert writes on the last page of his review of *Theology of Hope*: "In the meantime we should not forget that Moltmann has written other works, including historical analyses, of which I would mention above all the very clear book on the perseverance of the saints, which doctrine has played a role in Reformed orthodoxy. It is instructive, not only in understanding Dordrecht but also in understanding Bultmann. I could add: for understanding what correlation means in Berkouwer. We do not want to preserve the continuity of faith by means of the scholastic concept of *habitus* nor do we have in mind discontinuity in Bultmann's sense. But it concerns a continuity that exists only—and that quite literally—in faith and prayer. That is found word for word in this book by Moltmann" (Kuitert 1967: 188, my translation).

the “process of the metamorphosis of flowing time” which means that “they cannot be today what they were yesterday and cannot achieve tomorrow what is decided today” (1961b: 7). This “radical and complete historicity of human existence in time” is something so irreversible that neither philosophy nor Christian theology can ignore it. Moltmann holds that it affects especially the question of the certainty of faith: “How can faith maintain itself in a timeless monotony in a steady equilibrium, if personal faith and the faith of the church is now subject to the process of the change of history, body and spirit, the individual and communities.” Furthermore, “Can there be a perseverance of faith in view of the flux of history out of which faith comes and into which it goes?”

On the basis of this Moltmann *secondly* asks the question of whether one actually *should* strive for “continuity of faith in time.”

Does the human being dare just to commit himself in faith at all to a decision made in the past and thereby determine his future, take charge of his future, over which he has, however no control at bottom, if he wants to be open to the continually new, living address of his God? (1961b: 8)

Is it, given the radical historicity of one’s existence that one experiences, not better to associate oneself with the dominant “philosophies of life” (Moltmann refers to Nietzsche and Rilke) and seek in faith to live in the unconditional liveliness of the moment? It seems attractive:

Then the human being is entirely present in every moment when he demolishes the ruptures of the past from which he came, destroys the traumas of the future which blind him and gives himself entirely to the event that will never return and occurs only once. Faith must then indeed be a new, uncertain risk; it must be understood as pure actuality that *breaks down the housing of the relationships on this side of continuity again and again* .... He is then engaged in strife and daily penance. He is then moved only in the continually new act of becoming. (1961b: 8, italics mine)

Should we thus give up any certainty in the perseverance of faith because it could obstruct any new and unexpected encounters with God in the “act of faith?”

The New Testament, Moltmann claims *thirdly*, points to a completely different route. In the—relatively few—Bible texts he mentions, the prescribed attitude is, indeed, not merely a permanent willingness to repentance and renewal, but patience, perseverance, and holding on to hope.

There is little said here, namely in the letter to the Hebrews and in the Revelation of John, of the risk-character of faith and a continually new fundamental decision. There is also little said about the concerns of the loss of oneself in instability, but very pointedly there is a great deal said of certain hope, of “patience” and “remaining,” of “testing” and “preservation,” thus also of trust in the *perseverantia sanctorum*. It is not the arising of faith in the change from unfaith to faith but faithfulness in persevering to the end that is the decisive factor in the event of faith. (Moltmann 1961b: 9)

Thus Moltmann contrasts sharply the message of New Testament with the dominant philosophies of life and existentialist theologies. According to the New Testament, he claims, the life of the believer is not merely characterized by risk and a leap but by persecution, hope, and patience, by perseverance, providence and ordeal. There is a continuity of faith and it is based on the hope of the future (Rom. 5:5): “Faith is constantly certainty and its certainty is always bound up with the hope of the perseverance of being saved in the midst of temptation.” It is striking that Moltmann picks up the apocalyptic, eschatological skin that Bultmann—in his demythologizing programme—had just peeled from what he considered to be the genuine New Testament message (as stated above, the existential, unconditional decision for God in moments of faith, cf. §2.1).

This contrast between the prevailing attitudes to life and New Testament eschatology is the lens through which Moltmann, *fourthly*, photographs the theological landscape. Since the rise of dialectical theology, he observes, theological reflection on the question of the certainty of faith has wavered between two fronts: an *actualism* in which faith is presented as an ever new act and a *habitualism* in which faith is regarded as “a confessionally, traditionally or emotionally habitualised pattern of behaviour” (1961b: 10ff., 171ff.). He does not describe the latter (at the end of his book he only points to habitualistic trends in Reformed and Lutheran orthodoxy); he presumably takes his objections against habitualistic trends for granted and continues to articulate his problems with actualistic trends within his own theological world. In dialectical theology, he notes, the actuality of faith has become the central problem (parallel to philosophies of life and existentialist movements). Just as the Word of God cannot be transformed into something humans posit and have at their disposal, the faith it arouses cannot be preserved in conditions. Just as the Word of God “happens” only “in the moment of being addressed,” faith exists time and again only in the act. Moltmann refers to the dogmatics of the young Karl Barth, who— anxious

to safeguard the freedom of the sovereign God—could speak of continuity only as “the constancy of an act which not only goes on, but which in the fullest sense continually begins all over again at the beginning.”<sup>28</sup> Moltmann also refers to Bultmann’s “decisionism,” in which faith as a historical act is always the concrete decision in the moment. Faith arises in the concrete conquering of unfaith (cf. §2.4.1). Parallel to this, Moltmann observes an actualistic way of thinking among the theologians of the so-called “Luther renaissance” (he mentions K. Holl, R. Hermann, Iwand, W. Elert, and A. Köberle).

The theological positions are sketched now (I will come back to Barth and Bultmann in §2.4). For the sake of completeness, Moltmann remarks that being confronted with the results of these developments—“a structureless arbitrariness, a directionless situation ethics, and an confessional actualism that is hostile to tradition”—the fathers of dialectical theology themselves, Barth and Bultmann, carefully began to reconsider their choice for radical discontinuity (1960a: 12).<sup>29</sup>

In four steps, the problem has thus been made clear. In the fluidity of life, people seeking for certainty need a continuity of faith in history. Theology, therefore, needs to go beyond the starting points of (early) dialectical theology, while at the same time avoiding any continuity based on a *habitus*. The following quote seems to me the sharpest formulation of the problem:

How does the human being gain identity and continuity in the history of God, without seeking refuge in the illusion of an unchangeable, immortal and unconnected island in the soul or an institution from the fear to which time gives rise and having to deny the temporality and historicity of his existence? (1961b: 171)

In a few words Moltmann suggests a parallel between the situation just sketched and Calvin’s situation (1960a: 60f., 1961b: 173f.). At this point, he maintains, Calvin’s position is one between and beyond his teachers Luther and Martin Bucer. Generally speaking, Luther on the one hand rejected any certainty independent of the act of hearing God’s Word and receiving the sacraments (I will leave aside for the moment the necessary

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<sup>28</sup> Barth 1927: 295. Berkouwer quotes the same lines to clarify the position of early dialectical theology (1958: 13).

<sup>29</sup> Moltmann writes that in Barth’s doctrine of predestination (*Church Dogmatics* II.2; the German original was published in 1942), a new view of the “continuity of faith” becomes visible.

differentiations that Moltmann makes). He characterizes his position as “actualistic.” Bucer, on the other hand, declared that at birth the elected believers were implanted by a “seed of the Holy Spirit,” which manifests itself in a predisposition to faith and devoutness. Bucer spoke of a “spark of being the image of God (*Gottesebenbildlichkeit*),” which is revealed in exemplary humanity. Moltmann characterizes Bucer’s position as “habitualistic.” The continuity of faith is sought in a human *habitus*. I will not elaborate on these positions here. What has become clear is the perspective from which he analyzes Calvin’s works: how does he go beyond radical discontinuity and habitualistic continuity?

In Moltmann’s view, Calvin’s theology was stamped by the eschatological perspective of the New Testament just sketched (1960a: 45). He reminds us of the fact that it is not for nothing that Calvin has been called the “theologian of hope” among the Reformers. For Calvin faith was “*meditatio vitae futurae*,” i.e. a striving forward to the future life, a passionate expectation of God’s faithfulness which gives us the power to persist. Basically, this is all there is to it: the certainty of life “stems from the firm hope on the faithfulness with which God will fulfill the promise that awakens faith” (Moltmann 1960a: 45, transl. mine). A few differentiations have to be made with regard to the God-human relationship that has so far appeared to be crucial to the question of certainty of life.

The certainty of faith—basically a certainty of hope (*Hoffnungsgewissheit*)—does not only have a subjective foundation in the act of faith but also an objective one, even if it is not in some human *habitus*. For Calvin, Moltmann holds, the objective foundation of hope is the faithfulness of God who promised his kingdom. He explains that in Calvin’s theology the certainty of hope is based upon one of his most debated doctrines, that of *predestination*. Moltmann claims that the essence of this doctrine is rightly understood only if regarded from the eschatological perspective of God’s promise to be fulfilled. Then its pastoral concern comes into view (Heiko Oberman writes that nobody formulated the “consoling perspective” of this doctrine more clearly than Moltmann, 1988: 47). The doctrine of predestination namely reveals the *provisional* character of God’s promise. The fulfillment is yet to be expected, but this does not depend upon chance or human effort. Moltmann suggests that Calvin’s concern was not to found the idea of some *a priori* order of salvation (as frequently occurred in later Calvinist orthodoxy) but to make clear that in view of God’s faithfulness the message of the promised future life is stripped of all fortuity. On the one hand, Calvin founds the position of human beings and their calling in the temporariness of election and promise, but, on the other hand, this involves their being

oriented and open to the salvation, fulfilment and eternal glorification of humankind. Thus the doctrine of predestination not only takes away the contingency (*Zufälligkeit*) of faith but also its transitoriness (*Hinfälligkeit*). Predestination means, in short, not only the fulfilment of God's plan of election but also the promise and hope of eschatological fulfilment; it means not only the recollection of God's elective grace (*Gnadenwahl*) but also the expectation of his faithfulness. Moltmann writes: "The predestination includes the *adoptio* and the *haereditus vitae futurae*" (1961b: 34). In other words, certainty of life is grounded in the hope of the fulfilment of God's promise—predestination turns this hope into "certainty of hope."

Perseverance of faith, then, is the reverse side of predestination (Moltmann 1961b: 50). It is, Moltmann writes, a "historical-eschatological gift" that sustains the human will in such a way that in spite of all weakness it will not fall. Perseverance is thus not simply human endurance. It is a gift, an *extra nos*. But it is certainly a gift on which believers can rely. This can be rightly understood only from an eschatological perspective. For Calvin, perseverance is taken up in the hope in the faithful God, a hope that can be grasped only in his promise (1961b: 45). Thus it is at the same time something that transcends the limits of human possibilities and something objective on which humans can rely. For the sake of clarity, this is not an invitation to withdraw oneself from the earthly into the "spiritual." Perseverance of faith is perseverance within the ambiguities of life until the final salvation of this earth in the reign of God. Thus the eschatological perspective becomes a *universal* one. Moltmann suggests that in Calvin's theology perseverance of faith is faithfulness to the earth on which the cross of Christ stood.

So far Calvin. Moltmann similarly seeks a way between radical discontinuity and continuity in some kind of *habitus* by adopting the Siamese twins of predestination and perseverance. One question arises: Why was Barth's theology no longer adequate? Had Moltmann himself, after all, not noticed that Barth had left the track of radical discontinuity, notably in his doctrine of perseverance, and was his "cross-theological doctrine of perseverance" not—as Moltmann once let slip—the only thing that really "touched [his] heart" in Barth's dogmatics (1991: 126)<sup>30</sup>? Moltmann himself does not answer this question comprehensively, but an answer can be extrapolated from a few remarks in his appraisal of Calvin.

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<sup>30</sup> As Moltmann writes, the rest of the *Church Dogmatics* was "like a beautiful dream: too beautiful to be true on this earth, from the annihilation of which in the war we had just escaped."

Under the influence of dialectical theology, he argues, the “Calvin renaissance” of the past decades and especially the doctrine of predestination had been characterized by a Christocentric concentration (1961b: 31 ff.). This becomes clear in Barth’s elaboration. God entered into a covenant with people and promised them new life—but this promise of the covenant God has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Although we are sinners, we are *de jure* justified since in Christ God reconciled himself with this world. Accepting the covenant means basically accepting this fulfilled promise. Moltmann judges this to be a significant narrowing of Calvin’s view (1961b: 35). Calvin, he emphasizes in contrast, did not only speak of a theologically and Christologically founded *conservatio* of the believer (the “objective” side of perseverance) but also of “a pneumatologically founded subjective perseverance and continuity of faith;” not only of the possibility of salvation offered to human beings *once and for all* in Christ but also about the once and only, irrevocable outpouring of the Holy Spirit. For Calvin this presence of the Spirit can no longer be lost—not because of human steadfastness but because of God’s faithfulness. The indwelling of the Spirit is a *historical-eschatological* and not a historical-transitory gift. Moltmann thus concludes that for Calvin perseverance does not only include a “God-with-us” but also a “God-in-us.” That makes it possible to presume the possibility and necessity of growth in faith, of progress in the life of Christians.

Moltmann recognizes the objections to such a pneumatological foundation of perseverance from the perspective of the doctrine of justification (1961b: 53). How can one avoid a spiritual mixture of the divine and the human? Does the indwelling of the Spirit not become a *habitus* as well? Something in which one can take pride? For Calvin, the indwelling of the Spirit is a permanent witness for the believer. Moltmann admits that this borders on a *habitus fidei*. But—similar to Berkouwer—he counters that for Calvin the promise of the permanent indwelling is not an analytical claim about the situation of the believer but a “*kerygmatic promise* that raises hope in situation where there is nothing to hope” (1961b: 53, italics mine). He refers to Calvin’s commentary on Romans (Romans 8, 10; Calvin 1892: 145) when he—over against the supposed Lutheran overemphasis on justification—states that believers should not take their own weakness more seriously than that which God does for them, to them and in them. In other words, the “triumph of the Spirit” may not be trivialized by a scrupulous stress on justification alone. Instead, one should have the boldness to acknowledge the work of the Spirit in one’s own life and in history. Calvin’s rehabilitation of “sanctification” over against Luther’s one-sided stress on justification seems to open theology to history.

As stated above, Barth also pleaded for a proper distinction between both justification and sanctification. But he was apparently not able to draw the radical consequences Moltmann draws. Once again, the point seems to be the question of how the relation between God and humans is expressed in God's revelation, what human beings can "know" about that and how it gives them certainty. For Barth God's self-revelation in Christ means the fulfilment of the promise (the world has already been reconciled with God, we only have to acknowledge this). Revelation cannot be a given fact, an *Offenbarkeit*, and thus he cannot speak about a history of revelation, a continuity, a certainty based on what God has done for us so far. For Calvin, however, the fulfilment is yet to be expected; we live between the "already" and the "not yet." If history is thus put under strain, faith is not just a matter of accepting, of learning to see what has been done for us, but also of stumbling along, of entrusting oneself to a promise, of conquering set-backs and temptations in hope and prayer. This is the vocabulary of a pilgrim who longs to be assured that he is on the right way, who needs to look back at the footsteps behind him, who needs the indwelling of the Spirit as permanent guidance.<sup>31</sup>

At this point Moltmann abandons the edifice of Barthian theology. He adopts the two Calvinist themes of the God-human relationship: predestination expressing God's faithfulness to fulfill his promise of a new future and to preserve his people and perseverance expressing the believer's hopeful obedience on his way to the fulfilment of God's promise in the future. Experiencing the radical historicity of existence, this was apparently more appealing than Barth's actualism in which certainties in history were washed away.

### c) Salvation-historical Theology

For the sake of convenience, it is important to note that Moltmann dissociates himself from dominant trends in Calvinist orthodoxy. In his view, it became derailed on two points (1961b: 171ff.). First, the Reformed tradition often grounded the unshakable continuity of the elect in the supposedly

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<sup>31</sup> How much this notion of the "pilgrim" being guided by the promise of God and the power of the Spirit was characteristic of Calvinist anthropology is emphasized in C. van der Kooi's essay: "De spanning van het 'reeds' en 'nog niet' bij Calvin, Kuyper en Berkouwer [The tension of the 'already' and the 'not yet' in Calvin, Kuyper and Berkouwer]." If there is one word that suitably describes the life of the Christian on earth, that is the verb 'perigrinari'. The human being is a traveller and a pilgrim on the road to the promised land" (Van der Kooi 1992: 255, my translation).

steadfastness of God's plan and in the faithfulness of God which was thought to be identical with his eternal being. Biblical texts, however, as Moltmann learned from Weber, do not talk about God and his faithfulness in terms of an 'absoluteness as such'. They do not base the security of faith on the philosophical-theological axiom of the '*immutabilis Dei*' (as Moltmann would again later argue in *TH*, the latter emphasis is Greek), but on the permanence of his (freely chosen) relation with people. Moltmann holds that God's faithfulness does not mean a timeless and ahistorical absoluteness but the confirmation within history of the once-and-for-all given covenant and divine promise in the concrete, temporal, contingent events of history. Therefore, if perseverance is based on the faithfulness of God, then it must be clear that this faithfulness proves itself in the contingencies of a concrete history with an eschatological *telos*.

Secondly, the history of the Reformed tradition shows a move towards habitualism (towards Buceranism). Calvin's idea of the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit was transformed into an idealistic anthropology. The election related to the indwelling of the Spirit was understood as a particular human disposition (*inclinatio, habitus fidei, potentia*), a certain part of the very structure of the human being that was immune to the horrors of history. Again, Moltmann stresses that this is at right angles with the biblical message. Moltmann writes: "Not through the memory of his eternal, original, foreordained nature prior to all history but through the historical event of the covenant, the call, the justification and perseverance does the human being find himself." In other words, theological anthropology should not take its cue from a supranatural notion of the unchangeable essence of human beings but speak about human beings in a historical-eschatological way, i.e. about their historical encounter with God in Christ and about the historical promise that gives him the power to persevere.

Moltmann himself holds with one particular strand in Calvinist theology, namely the "salvation-historical theology" that extends "from the Reformed theologian Johannes Cocceius, by way of Pietism and the nineteenth-century Lutheran school at Erlangen, down to the present day" (*CPS*: 138, cf. *EiT*: 89). He does not elaborate on it in *Prädestination und Perseveranz*, but at the end of the 1950s he published several articles on themes related to this theology. As such, these are distant analyses that hardly reveal anything about his own sympathy for it. Throughout his entire work, however, he has referred to it as one of the testators of modern kingdom of God theology, his own included (*CPS*: 138, *CoG*: 7, *EiT*: 89). That, I believe, justifies the interpretation of these texts in this context and seeing how the

theology of salvation history goes beyond the two supposed misconceptions of Calvinist orthodoxy just pointed out.

As far as the first misconception is concerned, it should be stressed that the great theme of these salvation-history theologies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was the recognition of the different stages—the *series temporum*—of God’s redemptive plan, to be fulfilled successively in the different phases of salvation history (cf. *TH*: 60ff.). Moltmann calls these theologies “economic” and “prophetic.” Such theologizing is “economic” to the extent that “it brings to light the “economics,” or saving dispensations of God in the past and thus turns past history into comprehended history, while on the other hand it draws conclusions for God’s future action from his ways in the past.” And it is “prophetic” in that sense that “it seeks to take prophecies and events in the past which point beyond the present, and use them as a means of discovering and portraying the future.” For Moltmann its real appeal does not just lie in the idea of the divine saving plan of history, but “rather in taking the testimonies of scripture, which point historically towards each other and also beyond themselves, and using them to turn history into a ‘system of hope’” (J.A. Bengel). Here Moltmann found a starting point for a systematic translation of the messianic Biblical theology he discovered in the works of Von Rad and Käsemann. In contrast to orthodoxy’s supranaturalistic and doctrinaire view of revelation, the Bible was to be read as a “history book,” as “the divine commentary upon the divine acts in world history.” Moltmann considers this new historical understanding of revelation—which, he explains, had its ground in the rebirth of eschatological millenarianism in the post-Reformation age—as “the start of a new, eschatological way of thinking, which called to life the *feeling for history*” (*TH*: 70, italics mine). In the light of history, the revelation of God in Christ was not an “eternal moment,” but “a transitional stage in a more far-reaching ‘kingdom of God’ process,” the ultimate datum for the future that points beyond itself to the eschaton (not seen as a *futurum aeternum*). In other words:

... the revelation in Christ is then the last, decisive element in the history of a kingdom whose pre-history begins in the Fall and indeed already in the Creation—whether with the proto-gospel of Gen. 3.15 or with the promise of the divine image in Gen. 1.26—and whose final history extends historically and noetically beyond the revelation in Christ.

Thus, the revelation in Christ is viewed from the perspective of the history of revelation, in which progression is expressed in the idea of the development of salvation *stage by stage* according to a previously fixed plan of sal-

vation. This has anthropological consequences. Cocceius, for instance, subscribed to the *infralapsarian* view that the “image of God” (*Gottesebenbildlichkeit*) in human beings before the Fall is not a lost ideal situation but the starting point for a development towards the completed *imago dei*. From creation on (and not only after the Fall), humankind has a “comparative imperfection” In other words, “even the creation of human beings is open to greater perfection” (Moltmann 1959c: 347). God, Cocceius argued, could have made humans perfect immediately but it was his decision to do so gradually. Thus God’s “salvific decree” and its execution, salvation history, become the deepest foundation of creation. Christ did not become incarnate simply because to atone for human sin but also to complete the *imago dei* of human beings. Christ as the true *imago dei* is the realization of the ideal of human history. The doctrine of reconciliation itself may be based on Gen. 3, but the goal of reconciliation is found in Gen. 1:26.

The consequence is a new kind of *imago christology* that influenced pietism: besides *Christus pro nobis* there is also *Christus in nobis* (that is, the *new imago dei* in human beings). In this way, the *kenosis* of God in Christ is extended to the whole of history: it includes the entire salvation history. Or, in other words, salvation history proceeds from the “disempowerment of God” (*Machtenthaltung Gottes*). This extension of the *kenosis* of God in Christ to history becomes a central element of Moltmann’s own theology (he even extends it to the whole creation; see §4.3.3). From this perspective, as I understand it, *predestination* is not an eternal, deterministic decree of an immovable God but the theological expression of the faithfulness of the God who will fulfill the salvation history he initiated through his disempowerment. *Perseverance* is founded in the faithfulness of God, which is experienced in the eschatological progressiveness of history.

How this strand of theology goes beyond the manifest habitualism of Calvinist orthodoxy—the second issue at stake—becomes clear in Cocceius’ theology. In his article Moltmann describes the relation between Cocceius’ idea of salvation history and his pietistic image of humankind. I will summarize Moltmann’s extended and detailed analysis (1959c).

Cocceius assumed a continuity of faith in history, but he explicitly did not ground this in some human *habitus* but in the *covenant* of God with his people. The striking aspect of Cocceius’ covenant theology is that he presumes a created, natural human receptivity for this covenant, a desire (an *appetitus*). His view is rooted manifestly in Augustinian mysticism (“*Cor inquietum donec requiescat in te*.” “my heart is restless till it finds rest in Thee”). It went beyond the mere forensic aspect that was predominant in

mainstream Reformed theology; the covenant is not only an *analytical* judgement of God but also functions as the fulfilment of human *need* for salvation.<sup>32</sup> Thus it becomes clear that covenant is a relational category. Cocceius regarded the covenant as a treaty of peace and friendship, in which, on the one hand, God declares himself to be the *summum bonum* of human beings. Genuine humanity lies in friendship with God (*amicitia dei*), in the familiar intercourse (*commercium familiare*) with the Creator. In other words, the initiative is God's; he has destined humans for the covenant. On the other hand, it is presumed that by nature humans yearn to enjoy God (*fruitio dei*) and glorify God (*gloria dei*). The covenant—something *extra nos*—is the expression and fulfilment of this desire. “Where God finds his glory on earth, humans find the *summum bonum* that fulfills them and reversely” (transl. mine).

Moreover, Cocceius viewed the covenant in explicit historical categories. He presumed a development towards the eschatological fulfilment of God's reign. The eschaton is not the mere restoration of a paradise lost but the realization of something new. Plainly, this has crucial anthropological consequences. Being created in “the image of God” (Gen. 1) does not involve the “essence” of human beings, their “nature;” it concerns their *destination*. In their historical growth, God's covenant and his kingdom serve the full realization of this *Gottesebenbildlichkeit* and help humans reach a higher perfection. Humans are created *mutabilem*, so that a greater perfection is possible (they are “created for hope”). The goal of their creation is the *gloria dei*, its completion the *fruitio dei*. Believers move step by step towards this.

For Moltmann, the most important thing is that Cocceius interpreted the “piety of the heart” (*Herzensfrömmigkeit*) and the voluntaristic beliefs of his teacher Wilhelm Amesius (whom he criticized in *Prädestination und Perseveranz* among the examples of Calvinist habitualism) in a covenantal way. Amesius had transformed the notion of perseverance into “a supernatural natural walk [*supranaturalen Naturwandel*] for the elect and repentant” (1961b: 174). Cocceius rehabilitated the historical context of the notion of perseverance and predestination. The final goal of predestination, salvation and justification is the “destruction of the old and the resurrection of the new human being reformed into the image of God.” Therefore, Coc-

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<sup>32</sup> For the sake of clarity, I am not suggesting that the “affective” element is lacking in Calvin and others. As Van der Kooi explains in his book on Calvin and Barth, in Calvin's concept of God the affective moment is even of paramount importance (Van der Kooi 2002: 107).

ceus argued, human beings are offered the gift of *perseverantia*, which is the everlasting love of God in their heart and the increase of his *Gottes-ebenbildlichkeit*. Thus the two sides of the God-human relationship, predestination and perseverance, were interpreted as God's love and the enjoyment of God's love.

The Calvinist idea that the *telos* of humankind is *gloria dei* and the interpretation of this as "enjoying God," as *frutio Dei*, is rather clear in Moltmann's theology: in *Die Gemeinde* (here, as we will see, the influence of the confession of the Netherlands Reformed Church of 1949 also seems to play a part<sup>33</sup>), very clearly in *Theology of Play* (1972a, §3.2), but also, for instance, in *God in Creation* (*GiC*, §4.3.1.). Once again, I do not jump to conclusions about the influence of Cocceius and like-minded theologians on Moltmann's own theology. He has serious objections to these theologies, such as their outdated cosmology. Nevertheless, their central claims reecho in Moltmann's theology: a slightly pietistic view of the relation between God and human beings (love and joy are key words), embedded in the idea of an eschatological progression of history.

#### 2.3.4. In the Horizon of Christ's Reign: A Midterm Review

Where do we find "certainty of life" in an insecure world? How can we discover "support for our existence"? That was the anthropological, existential question. Seeking a way beyond resignation and apathy on the one hand and ecclesiastical restoration on the other, Moltmann was confronted with a double problem: a focus on the "centre" of Christian faith appears to lead to a loss of the horizon, while a focussing on the horizon seems to lose sight of the centre. To go beyond this dilemma, as I have demonstrated, he seeks the limits of the Barthian dialectical paradigm. With Barth he acknowledges the crisis of the nineteenth-century syntheses of culture and Christianity and he embraces his dialectical method. But he also sees the danger of an actualistic theology in which the biblical image of God is transformed into the "Subject of my own existence" and security of faith into relief in the moment of faith. We could perhaps conclude that by thinking *more Calvinistically* than the Calvinist Karl Barth—i.e. by adopting the Calvinist view of history and accordingly the view on the God-human relationship expressed in the notions of predestination, perseverance, hope and life "in

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<sup>33</sup> Weber had introduced them to the "Foundations and Perspectives of Confessing the Faith" issued by the Netherlands Reformed Church in 1949 (*Fundamenten en Perspectieven van Belijden*, Moltmann 1997a: 14ff, *EiT*: 87ff.).

the Spirit”—he can speak of a history of revelation, a salvation history in which believers participate.

Like Barth, his starting point is exclusively Christocentric. But he sees the danger of losing the “horizon” of faith (perhaps not primarily in Barth’s thinking but certainly in that of some of his followers). By thinking even *more Christocentrically* than Barth, Moltmann can claim that “centre” and “horizon” belong (that is, theologically or, better, christologically) essentially together. Christocentric preaching applicably displays Christ’s reign in its breadth in all the spheres of life in which people work and suffer.

Thus Moltmann seeks a way to relate God’s reality and our human, historical and worldly existence. “My whole theological work,” he would write in 1970, “is aimed at overcoming this false alternative between an unreal God and a godless reality” (1970: 290). Already in his earliest writings it becomes evident that he wants to point a way beyond “diastasis” and “synthesis:”

Today we see Christ and the world (the cosmos) in a corresponding, complementary relationship and no longer in diastasis or in syntheses. Just as centre and periphery, narrowness and breadth, prayer and openness to the world condition one another, so the church and the cosmos are related. (1959a: 35, transl. mine)

Accordingly, he insists that Christians should gain the freedom to become “more churchly than the church in general” and at the same time “more worldly than the world in general” and thus break through Christian mediocrity and illusionary or resigned this-worldliness. That is the only way to discern the “fulness of Christ’s reign” and hence true humanity and true freedom. Moreover, only by doing this can the church be “a *promise* for land and nation” (1959a: 35). That, however, demands a theology that is far more *imaginative* than prevailing theologies.

With this, we arrive at the third challenge to which Van Ruler had pointed: to discover the joy of theological imagination. Obviously, this was related to the two other challenges: rediscover the eschatological perspective of Christian faith and the apostolate as a function of the church in the world. Both perspectives—as indicated in Moltmann’s earliest theological work—come together in his book *Die Gemeinde im Horizont der Herrschaft Christi* (1959a). Retrospectively, Moltmann concludes that this essay—which was forgotten after the success of the best sellers that were about to follow—summarizes the different lines and themes of his theological thoughts of the 1950s and heralds all the themes of his later theology: the eschatological horizon of history in the kingdom of God, faithfulness to the earth, new partnerships for the church in the world, and “the narrow wideness of the

cross of Christ" (*EiT*: 91). Let us use this essay as a midterm review, to find out how the theological-anthropological clues indicated in previous sections are implemented in a first draft of a relevant Christian theology.

The most eye-catching word in this essay is "bold" (*kühn*). Imaginative theology is apparently bold theology. This touches the heart of Moltmann's critique of the way churches presented themselves. In the opening lines Moltmann—in the meantime a lecturer at the *Kirchliche Hochschule* in Wuppertal—expresses his main concern by quoting the Jewish theologian Ben-Chorim: "For the Jews the Messiah threatens to disappear behind the Kingdom of God. For the Christian Church the Kingdom of God threatens to disappear behind the form of the Messiah" (1959a: 7; transl. mine). In this way the problem—that of the "centre" and the "horizon" of Christian faith—is articulated. Moltmann suggests that whatever critique could be levelled at 19th-century reign-of-God theologies (e.g. father and son Blumhardt and Richard Rothe), they display a bold imagination that is lacking in the "helpless, subdued and really needy" Christocentric preaching of his day, which, as he puts it, becomes irrelevant as soon as we ask "but who is Christ is for us *today*." But how to proclaim the reign of God and thus be relevant for human society without losing once again the "centre" of Christian theology? Moltmann's answer in a nutshell lies in a quote from Bonhoeffer: "The more exclusively we acknowledge and confess Christ as Lord, the more freely the wide range of his domination will be disclosed to us" (1959a: 9; see §2.3.2a). But what does such a paradoxical phrasing mean concretely? Or, in Moltmann's own words: "How do we say and live that the Kingdom of God is the horizon, that the world of God is of an infinitely wide circumference which the centre of Jesus Christ annexes around itself" (1959a: 9). That, he declares, is "the theme that fascinates us today."

In *Die Gemeinde* he answers this question in four steps. The first thing he underscores is that the proclamation of Christ has a *universal foundation*. He postulates that God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ has made plain his "yes" to the world: God has accepted the world in Christ, however much it has fallen away from him. This is an ontological statement (here based not only on Bonhoeffer but also on Barth's later theology) that grounds the true worldliness of Christian faith. That is to say, it expresses ontologically the relation between God and all people as the liberating, worldwide rule of Christ. Since the reign of Christ is a "divine act and at the same time an active condition that bears the whole world," the proclamation of Christ is not "a value judgement of pious people or a significance that the believer bestows on Christ for himself" (here he seemingly alludes to churchly preaching) nor "only indeed in an act of a human delimitation of

the boundary at present that consists of a new understanding of one's personal existence" (this refers unmistakably to the existentialist theologies flourishing at that time)—it concerns the entire world saved in Christ. God's decision for the world in Christ stands *objectively* over against all human beings; all humans are Christ's own—whether they know it or not—and have been *de jure* addressed to him. Hence, Moltmann notices, the explicit exclusivity of the reign of Christ in the event of revelation has at the same time an inclusive, universal meaning. This is the universal dimension neglected by the church. At most, the church is concerned to churchify the world. "The preaching in our churches suffers from the fact that this presuppositionless breadth of the rule of Christ which comes first is not expressed with a quite different weight," he claims. And he continues: "The expectation with which we go to worship suffers from the limitation that *we do not dare to have higher hopes*" (italics mine).

With this we arrive, secondly, at the maxim that the church must "remain faithful to the earth" (in line with Bonhoeffer, he adopts Nietzsche's critique of Christianity as the motto for genuine kingdom-of-God theology).<sup>34</sup> Since God has revealed himself in Christ on this earth and in human history, this very earth and history constitute the horizon within which Christ comes to reign. Moltmann regards this as the ultimate task of Christian theology to weaken the widespread idea that Christians should turn their back on this sinful and unjust world and seek refuge in the intimate sphere of a privatized religion. He quotes Bonhoeffer once more:

"Thy kingdom come, on earth!" That is not the prayer of the fugitive, pious soul in his solitariness; neither is it the prayer of the utopian, the sentimentalist, the obstinate do-gooder! It can only be the prayer of the congregation of the children of the earth, who do not separate themselves, who have no miraculous plans for improving the world, who are themselves no better than the world, who stay with the world in its deepest experiences, in its daily tasks, totally involved. They alone can be true to their being and they can lift their eyes to that lonely place, where in this world, the world that had been cursed, the approval of God also broke through. The approval of God which they alone recognize in the

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<sup>34</sup> Moltmann is referring loosely to Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Nietzsche 1978: 3).

midst of this dying, torn and thirsty world is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (1959a: 19)<sup>35</sup>

In brief, we can and should accept the world because the cross of Christ stood on it; God's "yes" to the world in the Christ event should involve our "deep yes to this earth" (1959a: 15). This, he holds, is the real *boldness* of faith. For clarity's sake, "accepting the cross" does not involve a call for a pious internalization; it concerns our concrete social and political reality and it demands a breaking away from all kind of securities that are supposed to be constitutive for our "Christian identity." With Christoph Blumhardt, he regards this clinging to time-tested securities as a proof of unbelief in the real, effective reign of Christ in this world and, following Blumhardt, he urges Christians to "march into the world" and abandon themselves and all their beliefs to the service of Christ's reign in the world, trusting in the guiding "Spirit of perseverance" and in the *perseverantia sanctorum*. He also quotes the Confession of the Netherlands Reformed Church (article 18), which states that "if we look at the victory which has been won in Jesus Christ, we do not despair in this earth but remain faithful to it." The expectation of the redemptive rule of the crucified and exalted Christ (and only that!) gives us the power to take up the "cross of reality"—"without reservations, but also without illusions." If we believe that there is no worldly reality that is not "born, accepted and reconciled" by God's reality, then we can and should open ourselves to the misery and hunger in this world without being afraid of losing our Christian identity. Moltmann, therefore, encourages his readers to be bold enough to "accept the suffering," not in resignation but in hope and expectation and to *enjoy* earthly life. This may be the penultimate, a pilgrimage, a school, the anteroom, but it is not irrelevant or indifferent. Christian faith and hope thus leads humans into the "full, uncurtailed this-worldliness" of the *vita christiana*—not the "flat and banal this-worldliness of the enlightened, the hedonists or those who are resigned but ... the deep this-worldliness of the full centre and in which the recognition of death and resurrection is always present." We see how Bonhoefferian and early Reformed thinking are harmonized into a firm plea for an uncompromising faithfulness to the earth, i.e. for the courage to acknowledge and persevere in the suffering of this world in hope and joy.

Thirdly, this acceptance of reality on the basis of God's "yes" to the world in Christ involves a protest against any "christianization" or "church-

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<sup>35</sup> Moltmann refers to Bonhoeffer 1958. I found a translation in: Robertson 1977: 148.

ification” of the kingdom of God and the urge to search for “new partnerships” in the world. Moltmann writes: “We always encounter the human being in his social relationships and his social involvement, the human being in his responsibilities, the father, the mother, the child, the worker, the superior, the subordinate, etc.” Regarding these different spheres of life under the reign of Christ and the corresponding mandates, the church should not limit itself to human beings in relation to themselves and their private “intimate sphere” but call Christians to fulfill God’s commandments in all their social relationships. Moltmann holds that “the state, the economy, the family, the church and culture each have their special task in God’s history,” which must be carried out “reciprocally in reciprocal limitation and supplementation.” Here Bonhoeffer’s doctrine of the mandates—seen from the perspective of Dutch apostolate theology—is manifest. The church is “only” one of the institutions serving the rule of Christ, “an *arrabon* of the Kingdom,” “a sign and herald of the new humanity” (as the Confession of the Netherlands Reformed Church says). It is important to remark that Moltmann does not seize upon the doctrine of the mandates to defend natural law arguments (see §3.3.1), thinking in terms of rigid orders of creation (he distinguishes himself from both the Lutheran dualism of two kingdoms and theocratic tendencies in Dutch Reformed theology, the later Van Ruler included). His aim, rather, is to integrate Christian social life and action into the “living history of God,” thus sustaining its dynamic tension. On this basis he seeks to develop “new political virtues.” With Wolf he does not want to express Christian obedience in the traditional values of the virtue of obedience to “authorities” but in democratic and participatory values and patterns of behaviour. He acknowledges that the Gospel does not offer clear-cut, unequivocal political, economic and familial guidelines for today; what it guarantees is freedom from both the “curse of ideological self-justification” (Moltmann here undoubtedly implies churchly restoration) and the “curse of tired resignation.” Moltmann writes:

It provides the freedom to come to oneself—to the image of God, the freedom to seek the will of God only and his glory in all things. On the basis of this freedom that springs out of the proclaimed dominion of Christ there is a true being in partnership with one another and for one another and towards one another of the divine mandate in the world.

Thus the call to the kingdom must be proven in concrete participation in the various spheres of society (Moltmann thinks about working groups to take up social, charitable, cultural and political tasks). In other words, Christians must have the boldness to accept the presence of God in the polyphony of

society and to seek their *telos* in glorifying God in all the different spheres of life.

Fourthly, the three perspectives just mentioned—the universality of Christ’s rule, which enables us to accept the world without losing our Christian identity and to acknowledge the presence of God in all the different spheres of life—are brought together into a fourth dimension, namely “the courage for worldly preaching.” This demands a kind of “self-emptying” of faith instead of the usual spiritualization of the gospel or, with Bonhoeffer, a “new secularization of the gospel and faith,” i.e. a “prophetic presence” in all spheres of life. Moltmann thus advocates a contextualization of Christian preaching, or at least an “exegesis of the hearers.” He writes:

In addition to meditation and the concentration on the Bible, with which the sermon is concerned there must also be, with equal intensity, meditation on and exegesis of the audience—not “modern people as such” but those who are involved, who are called and who intend to be the image of God. The sermon brings not only God’s speech to the fore but also always the people, those crying out, those who have been silenced, the questioning, those who do not know themselves. The orthodox, biblically correct speech in the sermon is not only a lack of mercy but also an illusion concerning the “Word of God today.”

Hence, the church should have the courage to find contemporary answers to contemporary questions. Moltmann anticipates the critique that such actualization will lead to a moderation of the centre of Christian faith. The “absolute and unconditioned Word of God” is not “relative to the passing flow of history”—it is the Word itself that writes history and opens the present to the future. Moltmann clearly takes Bonhoeffer’s track once more. The question is how this Word addresses people in their particular situation today. It is clear that the courage for such a “secularization” of faith is only possible on the firm basis of the belief in the universal rule of Christ, the *pantocrator*, and the divine “yes” to this world.

Moltmann thus offers a view of Christian life that, in the context of the late 1950s, can certainly be labelled as bold and imaginative. It aims to break through resignation, slackness, halfheartedness, mediocrity and “narrowness of expectation.” Over against the “realism” that shunned utopias and far horizons, it sketches the “fulness of a life in peace under the reign of Christ” (1959a: 9). Remarkably, it did not meet with a wide response. Why not? Was it the sound of an army trumpeter who was far too ahead of the troops? Was it simply too bold and too provocative, as Müller-

Fahrenholz suggests (2000: 36ff.)? That is possibly the main explanation. However, only five years later Moltmann's *TH*—at least as provocative—was an enormous success (and not only in academic circles). Can that be ascribed merely to the simple fact that within a few years society had significantly changed (see §2.1)? Or are there also internal changes in Moltmann's thinking that may explain this sudden success?

The main theological question we have encountered in Moltmann's publications is how God's reality can be "known" in our immanent, historical reality. We have seen how he struggled with the theological aporia that we have to speak about God although, in reality, we cannot speak about God at all. This question of "knowledge of God" was directly related to the anthropological, existential question of "certainty of life." The *first* fundamental perspective on human life we can derive from Moltmann's theology is that human beings find "true humanity" at the "point of contact" between the immanent and the transcendent. Directly related to this is a *second* perspective: only in Christ does our immanent reality of suffering and death and the new reality of hope and resurrection come together. Pneumatological perspectives are, *thirdly*, also important, although Calvinist views on the indwelling of the Spirit, on perseverance and on sanctification are somewhat overshadowed by Bonhoefferian Christocentrism. Moving beyond the early *Trümmertheologie*, Moltmann comes to a *fourth* perspective: humans are historical beings who find "continuity" and "certainty of life" in the promise of the faithful God and in hope and anticipation. At the same time, he comes to a *fifth* perspective: humans become "truly human" if they "remain faithful to the earth" and acknowledge the universal rule of Christ in all different spheres of life. I will come back to these perspectives in §2.5.1.

The problem is that, starting from a dialectical paradigm, Moltmann wants to do justice to both history and world. Or better, he wants to hold together two basic anthropological insights: humans are historical and *homeless* beings "set in time" by a focus on the future reign of God and humans belong to this world and have to accept the universal rule of Christ in all facets of their truly worldly life. We should stress that Moltmann's view of history is not a *totalitarian*, universalistic view. He pictures a *particular* history, namely the *salvation history* of God's covenant. Humans are pilgrims through a *barren land*, holding on only to the promise of the faithful God. I can imagine that this was an anthropology that sustained the parishioners of Bremen-Wasserhorst. But how is this Calvinist anthropology related to the Bonhoefferian plea for faithfulness to the earth? For clarity's sake, the world is viewed also in (neo-)Calvinist theology as the "theatre" of God's glory and the rule of Christ is acknowledged in every sphere of

daily life. However, with Bonhoeffer Moltmann seems to go a step further in the “secularization” of faith. Anthropologically speaking, there seems to be a tension between his particularist view of history in which humans find certainty in a “counter-history” in a sinful world on the one hand and a universalistic view of the rule of Christ today in which humans are called to “open” themselves to the world on the other hand.

Although both motives play a role in *Die Gemeinde*, the latter plainly dominates. Could it be that Moltmann’s bold and imaginative view of being Christian today was too much tuned to the boldness and “openness” of Christians in and for the world that it drowned out the urgent quest for continuity and certainty? At any rate, the main question seems how to relate the two insights that humans find identity in hope and anticipation of the *future* reign of God and by full participation in the *here and now* in light of the universal rule of Christ. Moltmann tries to accentuate both the continuity of faith in history and the faithfulness to the world within the frame of Barthian dialectics. Could it not be that *Die Gemeinde* was still too much cast in the mould of Barthian dialectics to relate eschatological hope and history as well as the apostolate and the world in a credible way? Anticipating the next section, we can formulate this question also in this way: did the challenges Moltmann was facing not ask for a new *model of transcendence*?

#### 2.4. *The Revelation of the Hidden God and Hidden Human Beings*

The previous section described the problem of centre and horizon as it arose in Moltmann’s earliest theological reflections: how to implement the experienced “hope against hope,” regarded as the core of Christian identity, in such a way that it is not only consoling for the individual in moments of faith but also relevant for society and how to avoid mixing up this hope in the transcendent possibilities of God’s eschatological reign with hopes in human reigns? Or in a different theological formulation: how to go from the Christological centre of theology to the eschatological horizon of faithfulness to the world? With the dawn of the 1960s the move away from the mere concentration on “post-war man” and his search for security to the socio-political problems and challenges of humankind in the ambiguities of modern life became all the more manifest in Moltmann’s writings. The primary concern of his first major book, *Theology of Hope* (1964), was not merely the certainty of life of the post-war individual, but the “homelessness” (*Heimatlosigkeit*) of “modern man” in general. He refers to Heidegger and states that “no time has known so much and so many different things about human beings than the present—and no time has

known less what human beings are than ours” (1961a: 3, Heidegger 1929: 206). This paradox indicates the core problem of Moltmann’s anthropological reflection at that time. The titles of different publications—*Der verborgene Mensch* (1961), “Die ‘Weltoffenheit’ des Menschen” (1963)—reveal that in his anthropological analyses Moltmann followed up on current debates on anthropology as initiated and dominated by Plessner, Gehlen, and Scheler. Like other theologians, Moltmann availed himself of the vocabulary in use to describe the human situation. Humankind is not “finished” but *open to the world* and at the same time *hidden to himself* (he is a *homo absconditus*). As §2.4.1 will show, Moltmann holds the plurality and antagonism of images, roles, norms and values as the most manifest characteristic of the modern human being’s search for meaning; his metaphysical *homelessness* as its deepest root. §2.4.2 points out how, according to Moltmann, the revelation of God and the “apocalypse of man” are related.

#### 2.4.1. The Problem of Transcendence

Scientific and technological developments over the past centuries have fundamentally and irretrievably changed the human being’s perception of himself and the world in which he lives. So Moltmann’s writings assume (e.g. 1961a: 3ff., *TH*: 304ff., 1969: 200ff.). New technologies led to optimism and even a kind of technological chiasm hoping that technological progress would eventually lead to the perfect, completely transparent society in which human beings have everything under control. Humans have managed to transcend nature both outside and inside their bodily existence and to master the world. Moltmann, however, also observes how the quasi-nature of social institutions, political organisations, and industrial enterprises—the “new cosmos of his own objectifications”—is consistently more difficult to penetrate, let alone control. In the 1960s he wrote:

In this artificial cosmos of his scientific-technological civilization the old conditions, from which man freed himself, return in the form of the irrational coercion of his civilization: The opacity of destiny finds a new correspondence in the opacity of reticular bureaucratic manipulations; what once were natural catastrophes recur now in the guise of social and political catastrophes. The man who rules nature via society now becomes the slave of his own products. Man’s creations become autonomous, “program” themselves out of his control and gain the upper hand over him (1969: 183f.).

In later writings Moltmann would use the image of Goethe’s sorcerer’s apprentice to typify this situation (1974a: 26). The world is no longer a

“house of being” anymore, a “home in which he dwells,” but “the material which he investigates for conversion into his own use” (1969: 181). But in spite of increased scientific knowledge, humans no longer seem able to come to terms with the society they themselves made. Existence as such has become increasingly dependent on what humans have made and are making. They are surrounded by their own products as a new kind of “nature,” which they cannot predict and can no longer control. Ironically, the process of emancipation launched by modernity boomerangs on modern people today: the old fears and feelings of homesickness reappear. Moltmann suggests that there is no way back. As he would later express it with a Chinese proverb: “He who rides on the tiger can no longer get off it” (1974a: 22). In my view, this is the starting point of Moltmann’s anthropological reflection. This section is designed to outline Moltmann’s definition of the dilemma more sharply (a), his observations of the way people struggle to cope with that (b), his assessment of what he considers to be the heart of the problem (c), and his critique of the way Christianity accordingly presents itself in society (d).

#### a) Hidden Humanity

The human being is hidden from himself. It is not self-evident who, what, and why he actually is. He needs to acknowledge, to identify himself. As such, this, Moltmann claims, is the perennial problem of human existence (1961a: 6ff.). Contrary to other organisms, human beings are “not at home” in this world (Moltmann refers to Gehlen and Plessner). The particular thing about the human being is that his very being is a work-in-progress. The *Menschwerdung der Menschen*, is an open process.

However, in modern times—which have made humankind the pivot of the world—this question of humankind is posed with more passion and more doubt than ever before. At least so Moltmann presumes:

To the extent that “God is dead” and the human being has survived his “gods,” to the extent that the edifice of metaphysics has broken down and the feeling has collapsed through modern technology that human being is embedded in the cosmos and *at home* in it, the human being poses his question in the wilderness and can only direct it at himself (1961a: 6, italics mine)

In the *Heimatlosigkeit* of modern times (Heidegger), humans have not only lost their self-evident community with others but also their “substance.” The human being—which has no other point of reference than himself—is hidden from himself, a hiddenness that overwhelms him as a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, a terror from which he flees.

Why is the homelessness that characterizes modernity different from the homelessness that marks human existence in all times and places?<sup>36</sup> Moltmann attributes this to a fundamental ambiguity in the modern, emancipated society, namely the ambiguity between radical *objectification* and radical *subjectivity*. In *TH* he harks back to Hegel to explain this (*TH*: 307ff.). Modernity destroyed the forces of tradition and focussed on the liberation of the individual and the satisfaction of his needs. On the one hand, the modern era is characterized by an increasing pragmatization and *objectification* of human beings (in advertising, in political propaganda, etc.). The human being is basically viewed as a bearer of needs, a consumer. Only labour and consumption are socially important; everything else (culture, religion, morality) is relegated to the freedom of the individual consumer. For modern society, Hegel asserted, it does not matter whether one is Italian or English, old or young—a consumer can live everywhere. On the other hand, however, a new *subjectivity* offers the human being the opportunity for self-development. In modern society human beings count because they are human beings with talents and a wide range of possibilities and not primarily because one is Italian or English, old or young. In brief, the dilemma of the modern human being is how he “can endure, and even live in, the state of being torn between the rational objectification of his social life on the one hand and the free and infinitely variable subjectivity conferred on him on the other” (*TH*: 310).

My conclusion from Moltmann’s survey of Hegel is that he interprets the current situation as the outcome of this double process of radical objectification and subjectification. The process of modernity has lifted human beings out of age-old cosmological, social, and religious bonds and

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<sup>36</sup> Moltmann describes modern society as the society which “acquired its nature and its power precisely through its emancipation from [the] religious centre.” With Hegel he emphasizes the fact that after the destruction of all the forces of tradition society has become a “system of needs.” “It is the society which emancipates itself in principle from all presuppositions in regard to the orders of human life as laid down by historic tradition, and finds its content solely in the constant and consistent nature of man’s needs as an individual and their satisfaction by means of collective and divided labour. According to its own principles, it contains nothing but what is demanded by ‘the ascertaining of needs and the satisfying of the *individual* by means of his labour and by means of the labour and satisfaction of the needs of *all the rest*’.” Therefore, Moltmann concludes that this “society, in contradistinction to all previous societies, restricts itself to such social relationships as binds individuals together in the satisfying of their needs by means of their divided labour” (*TH*: 307f.).

transformed them into autonomous subjects transcending the objectified world. They no longer identify themselves through their daily work, their encounters with others, or their own ideas about themselves (the filtering through of young Marx's analysis is unmistakable here; I will come back to this). In his essay "Die 'Weltoffenheit' des Menschen" he remarks that the *Weltoffenheit* of humankind implies endless freedom and room for creativity. However, it also unmasks all possible answers to the open question of what the human is in himself as nothing but temporal and insufficient fixations (1963a: 115). The problem is how to find a balance between the fundamental self-questioning of the human being and the answers by means of which he intends to take control of himself (cf. 1974b: 3).

#### b) The Human Being as the Theatre of Conflicting Images

The problem, Moltmann writes, is not that our age has no images of humankind. On the contrary, the problem is that "our time has an unlimited fulness of images of humankind available, that are used alongside, through and over against one another and can no longer be self-evidently seen as compellingly *necessary, valid and community-friendly*" (1961a: 3, italics mine).<sup>37</sup> Moreover, the struggle over the image of humankind is not merely a struggle of human beings themselves to find some clarity in life but a struggle among these images for the chief role to guide them. Moltmann writes:

He is under pressure from the violence of powerful images. They tell him who the human being is and what he will be. They wish to determine him by means of instructions and patterns of the relations in his environment. They surround him and wish to determine him in his way of life. He thus becomes a theatre of their conflict. (1961a: 3f.)

Moreover, it is this multiplicity and contrariety of images and roles to which humans are abandoned that prevents them from finding or creating "a well-rounded image" in which they can find their "proper destiny and their true being." Moltmann concludes:

The nature of the human being thus portrays itself to the understanding, which would construct an image, not as a mystery that

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<sup>37</sup> Moltmann points at the following images: a bearer of needs in the consumer society, a *homo faber* at work, a psychological being on the psychiatrist's sofa and the image of God in church (1961a: 4).

shows the understanding its limits but presents itself to it as an ocean, as it were, in which the understanding and comprehension encounter no end and no solid ground and therefore threatens to become lost in the immense breadth and variety of human realities. (1961a: 5).

This “kaleidoscopic” look at himself and others leads the human being into a desperation from which there is no unequivocal way out. According to Moltmann, this sledgehammers people into passivity. Thus “the human being has become unrecognizable and vague in the *pluralism* and *antagonism* of the images of humankind in him and which manipulate him” (1961a: 5, italics mine).

According to Moltmann’s analysis, the consequence is that human individuals seek to escape from the ambiguity of modern society. In *Der verborgene Mensch* he distinguishes three forms: (1) resignation, (2) a utopian dream that sees one of the many answers as valid and views the human being by means of one portrait of the ideal and (3) a “direct action” in which the search for one’s true being is given up and in which one possibility is chosen which has to be pushed through with naked determination (1961a: 8f.). Moltmann traces the latter two escapes in what he later—in his book *Man*—would call different “secular experiments of the whole life,”<sup>38</sup> namely the rediscovery of young Marx’s utopia of the “total man,” the “ironic” attitude, and the *vivere resolutemente* (cf. *TH.*: 336). He discusses these “experiments” in detail (without, by the way, making clear where and how he spots them concretely). It is interesting to follow his analysis in order to highlight his own struggle with the dilemma and to profile his own position.

In the early 1960s Moltmann noted a growing interest in the young, “romantic” Marx (1961a:10ff., 1974a: 47ff.).<sup>39</sup> The Marxist concept of *alienation* (due to the modern division of labour, the production by humans—who should coincide with what and how they produce—was no

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<sup>38</sup> Moltmann 1974b: 28. The German original reads: “Sehnsucht nach dem heilen Leben” (*Mensch. Christliche Anthropologie in den Konflikten der Gegenwart*. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1983) p. 47)); the Dutch translation reads: “heimwee [homesickness] naar het goede leven” (*De mens. Christelijke antropologie in de conflicten van deze tijd* (Bilthoven: Ambo, 1972), p. 42).

<sup>39</sup> It is indeed evident that, for instance, most theologians—including Moltmann himself—acquainted themselves with this “humanistic” Marx (1842-1848) rather than with the Marx of *Das Kapital* (see Sperna-Weiland 1971: 90).

longer an expression of the “totality” of their being) as well as his alternative, the utopia of a realm of freedom and play in which humans can become who they essentially are by developing all their talents, aspirations, and ambitions (“man is not just a hunter, a fisherman, a shepherd, or a critic but someone who can hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, look after the cattle in the evening, and criticize after eating dinner”). Moltmann apparently sympathizes with this idea. He admits that this view of humankind “includes in itself a positive hope in a *home* which man must win back for himself in his lost state in order to become what he really is, man who is *identical* with himself” (italics mine). Nevertheless, he has serious doubts concerning the implementation of this *Harmonientraum* in 20th-century bureaucratic society, which is no longer based upon the straightforward capitalistic order of bosses and labourers Marx once analyzed but on “the domination of the anonymous connections and interweaving of interests.” Moltmann remarks: “Now the world of Franz Kafka has become the expression of our contemporary fate. This has changed the problem of humankind” (1961a: 16). As far as I understand Moltmann, he suspects that the “universal hobbyism of the all-round-person” does not solve modern humanity’s problem with the abundance of possibilities that are overwhelming him. On the contrary, “the utopia of the ‘total person’ leads to an infinity of possibilities and into a nothingness with respect to what is necessary.” A wide range of possibilities is not liberating as long as none of them is compelling in some way.

Moltmann has a similar objection with regard to a second experiment, that of *laid-back irony*, as illustrated in Robert Musil’s novel *The Man Without Qualities* (1961a: 17ff., 1974a: 86ff.). Moltmann acknowledges that ironical detachment can be liberating. As stated above, modern humanity is in danger of dissolving into “the multitude of views and interest, groups and associations ... competing with one another;” human beings experience themselves as “pluralistic being[s],” facing the inability of living at

the point of intersection of often very different claims, standards and expectations, which can no longer be brought under the common denominator of a single personality which is at peace with itself, and of a consistent picture of life.

The illusion that one eventually does not completely coincide with the multitude of social determinations and realities can be a relief. Musil’s novel shows a way of seeing our social life as playing with different roles and qualities. Life is a “laboratory, in which one can experiment with all human possibilities.” Moltmann summarizes: “The meaning of the ironic game is

thus found in extracting oneself from the world of determinations and definitions, from the bad reality, into one's own particular freedom, into ambiguity and unknown possibilities." What remains is a passive fantasy of "empty space" from which one can look objectively at oneself and somehow transcend oneself.

Moltmann's problem is that in this playing with social roles, human reality is a matter of "continuing to swim in the bottomless and limitless ocean of possibilities." In such experimental way of life, duty becomes loose engagement, one's profession simply a job, perseverance in loyalty a "useful chance." In Moltmann's view, the consequences of such a retreat into the "floating inwardness of a sensitive beautiful soul" entails the surrender of reality to the absurd. He refers to Hegel's critique of irony: "In order to preserve the purity of heart, it flees the disturbance of reality" (cf. Hegel 1986: 483f.). He concludes:

The figure of a man without qualities in a world of qualities without man is an aesthetically attractive, but ethically and politically disastrous Utopia of the negative. It is a dream of omnipotence in the area of the unreal possibilities, and it arises out of experiences of powerlessness in the area of social reality.<sup>40</sup>

We could conclude that there are apparently two possible ways to resolve the problem of alienation in modern society: a positive utopia and a utopia of the negative. According to Moltmann, Musil's "man without qualities," who ironically reflects upon himself in the negative multiplicity of his possibilities, is in a certain way evidently similar to young Marx's "very clever and profound people." Marx's idea of the *active* fantasy of blank humankind corresponds to the *passive* fantasy Musil describes. Utopia and irony, Marx's world of alienation and Musil's world of qualities without any relation to humans—both are searching for the access to the category of the unlimited possibilities of humankind living in a social reality which is experienced as insufficient, restricted and painful. This category of possibility, Moltmann explains, is the essence of Romantic thought. On the

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<sup>40</sup> One could ask whether Moltmann does not underestimate the power of irony. After all, it could be a weapon against the radicalness of every *vivere resolutemente*. I think Moltmann acknowledges the power of irony as a way to undermine fanatic idealism (certainly in *Theology of Play*, 1972a). In his view, however, in modern society, characterized by the tension between radical objectification and subjectification, irony is not at all liberating: it becomes an escape.

one hand, it opens up an endless horizon for a still unknown, unborn human being. But, on the other, it flows over onto every mainland of life. Moltmann concludes that both the “consumption of the beautiful soul” and the romantic-revolutionary dream of harmony of the perfect human being belong to the “sicknesses of an imperfect social reality in modern society.” Both are escapes from the tension that threatens humankind. It is exactly this escape, Moltmann states (thus revealing his own presuppositions), that deprives human beings of the power *to maintain their lives in tension and ambiguity*. It involves a negation of the real world, making every sort of cynicism possible within the reality that has been left behind.

How easily the ironic play with multiple roles can turn into its opposite is illustrated by the third experiment Moltmann highlights: a senseless *vivere resolutamente* (“to live resolutely”), i.e. direct action because of action itself (1961a: 22ff.; 1974a: 96ff.). The ironic human being distances himself from real engagement but, tired of playing with social roles, may suddenly become convinced that “making a decision” (for whatever) will liberate him from the insecurity he nonetheless keeps on experiencing. For Moltmann, the end of Musil’s novel is characteristic. It shows the attraction of war for many young intellectuals in 1914: “Life at last becomes real and positive; there is nothing lacking in it. It is taken seriously, life does not lead into emptiness; one has conviction, a faith.” The naked call for struggle meets the elementary human need for a solid orientation, for a clear state of affairs, for stable identity. In struggle the person exhausted by constant reflection on himself experiences “a mystical rolling together of his existence, which has been split up by civilization, into a single situation and a single decision.” For Moltmann it is modern fragmentized society, based upon endless deliberation and compromises, that provokes such a desire for plain language and action. In his discussion of this attitude in *Man*, he mockingly remarks: “The liberal bourgeoisie would have answered the question of ‘Christ or Barabbas?’ by the setting up of a Committee of Inquiry, and so postponed the decision that was demanded” (1974a: 101).

But this attitude of the “adventurous heart” is the other extreme. It creates the appearance of the integration and unity for which modern people are longing in life. Moltmann quotes Ernst Jünger:

We are too much split up into branches. The sap no longer rises into the tips. Only when an immediate impulse burns through us like lightning do we again become simple and fulfilled. This is true both for individuals and for their sum, the people. In the dance upon the slender sword-blade between being and not being the true man reveals himself. Then this splintered nature melts

together again upon a few basic drives of overwhelming force. *The multiplicity of forms is simplified into one idea*, that of battle (1961a: 22, 1974a: 99, italics mine, Jünger 1922: 76).

The illusion of elementary life offers humans something to live and even to die for. Total surrender to some higher cause will liberate them from insecurity. Often, Moltmann wrote, great trust is put in a “strong man” who personifies the higher cause. This strong man is believed to be able to put an end to the chaos. Moltmann points out that history has shown the catastrophes to which such resolute engagement can lead, *just because of the engagement itself*.

In relation to the central theme of this book, my brief review of Moltmann’s analysis of these experiments yields important insights. Apart from mere resignation, Moltmann sees two possible escapes from the unbearable dilemma of modern life: on the one hand a withdrawal into either a positive *Harmonientraum* or into the negative utopia of ironic detachment and, on the other, a cutting of the Gordian knot by clinging to one of the many possibilities. He rejects both ways. On the one hand, the self-consciousness of the human being should not withdraw itself from the compromising, confusing, social reality (cf. *TH*: 336): “... one should prefer, with Nietzsche, to ‘remain true to the earth’” (1969: 185). On the other hand, the longing for clear, normative and binding decisions should not lead to a naked decision for an authority, a program, or anything whatsoever that would undermine the democratization and humanization of society (cf. 1974a: 102). He holds, instead, that “human life must be risked if it would be won. It must expend itself if it would gain firmness and future” (*TH*: 337). However, he continues,

if ... we are thus to risk expending ourselves, then we need a *horizon of expectation* which makes the expending meaningful—and moreover, a horizon of expectation which embraces the realms and areas in which and for which the work we do in our self-expending is to take place. (italics mine)

It is not surprising that, according to him,

the expectation of the promised future of the kingdom of God which is coming to man and the world to set them right and create life, makes us ready to expend ourselves unrestrainedly and unreservedly in love and in the work of the reconciliation of the world with God and his future.

But how can this be achieved?

### c) The Problem of Transcendence

As stated above, modernity emancipated humans from age-old social, religious, and cosmological contexts. Many have characterized this development as “the end of metaphysics” or the “death of God.” Moltmann obviously refers to Nietzsche who made clear that the problem of hidden humankind is the reverse side of another frightening and fascinating mystery: the hiddenness of God (Moltmann 1961a: 6f.). For Moltmann, Nietzsche’s famous declaration that “God is dead” expresses that all human words, thoughts, and images of God are not able to uncover the secret of his hiddenness. He states that it is definitely not a denial of the existence of God as such. Many have interpreted the end of metaphysics as the end of transcendence. Moltmann does not agree with this. In the course of the 1960s he wrote a series of articles dealing with the problem of transcendence (these articles sharpen the different lines in his *TH* to which I will return in §2.4.2). In an essay entitled “The Future as a New Paradigm of Existence” he claims that people still keep searching for “transcendence.” He understands forms of modern romantic religiosity as discussed above as “epiphenomena of modern existential transcendence,” for they “actually owe their existence to the fact that the soul has been *unburdened* by a stabilized immanence” (1969: 185, italics mine). Immanence, Moltmann claims, is no longer understood as the immanence of a transcendence, i.e. “as characterized, actuated, and transformed by that which surpasses it” but has been detached from transcendence. Immanence has thus become an enclosed reality and transcendence a vague or abstract reality into which one can flee.

The old relationship of immanence and transcendence is reversed. The immanence of man’s own world, which makes itself independent and confirms its own autonomy while structuring an increasingly more stringent entanglement around man, releases a free-floating transcendence of the soul which has become *homeless* in its own world. (italics mine)

Moltmann observes how vulnerable the impotent modern subject is to what he calls “the escapist form of romantic subjectivity” (1969a: 184). He quotes Carl Schmitt: “At the core of this fantastic superiority of the subject (i.e., over the world) is hidden the renunciation of every active alteration of the real world” (Schmitt 1925: 227). Moltmann comments:

The feeling of alienation through social thingification and the political impotence of the individual is growing, and out of these sufferings of man within his own world which enslaves its creator

arise new ecstatic forms of seeking and experiencing transcendence.

In Moltmann's opinion, people are still seeking transcendence, but the character that is ascribed to immanence and transcendence has changed (1969: 185, *TH*, 167ff.). What people are looking for is the "freedom which lies beyond the domain of necessity and need." This, however, is no longer a liberation from galling bonds but a liberation from the "*unburdening*" of *existence* (he borrows this term from Gehlen). In sum, Moltmann suggests that different forms of escapism today prove that people still seek transcendence. The question is: how do we find an *access point* for a *liberating* experiencing of transcendence within the immanent reality of our modern world?

To do so, Moltmann explores Tillich's concept of "boundary" (1969: 177). The understanding of transcendence, he argues, is always dependent upon the experience of a reality as immanence, while conversely, there is no concept of immanence which does not imply an understanding of transcendence. Between immanence and transcendence, he continues, there is no dichotomy, but "only distinction and relationship as we experience 'the boundary'." He turns immediately to Karl Barth, who would have protested strongly at such a definition of transcendence being applied to the God of biblical history. After all, whoever thinks of "God" only as transcendence for a definite immanence has thought of "God" as predicate and not yet as subject. That is to say, he has thought of God for the sake of something else, not for the sake of God himself. Moltmann agrees, but nonetheless he thinks it appropriate to use this concept of "transcendence" for the relationship of God to the world and to history—not to express *who* God is but *how* God is related to the world and to human beings in their experience of the boundary. He thus presumes that the experience of God is not the same for all times and places. "Transcendence" and "immanence" are involved, like the experience of the boundary, in a history of their changing relationship to each other. Every context has its own "boundary experience." For convenience's sake, Moltmann stresses the Christological limitations of his use of Tillich's boundary concept. Christian faith owes its existence to the Word of Christ and *only from this perspective* inquires about that boundary at which it must be present today if it wants to do justice to the transcendence of God's presence.

What are the different types of experience of the boundary in history to which Moltmann points? The first is the cosmic, metaphysical type, which interprets the whole of reality that can be experienced from the perspective of the one origin or the one all-embracing perspective. Moltmann asserts that the history of Western thinking is largely based on Greek

metaphysics, whose breeding ground was—as he generally labels it—ancient “Greek cosmic religion” (1969: 180ff.; *TH*: 77f.). From the symmetry and harmony of the enclosed cosmos it arrives at the one divine *arche*. The world, in its order of eternal recapitulation, is thus the place of divine theophany. Moltmann argues that Christian theology has identified the biblical God with this “Lord of the cosmos.” Here the cosmos is the hermeneutical place of theology. The boundary between transcendence and immanence runs between finitude and eternity. Everything that exists is threatened by its finitude. This threat of non-being, of chaos, is the ultimate experience of the boundary. At this boundary “immanence” is everything finite and transcendence, correspondingly, is seen as infinitude and immutability, of order and oneness.

Moltmann points out that this (Aristotelian) metaphysical notion of transcendence is valid in as far as the “physics” (i.e. the “understanding of reality”) that corresponds to it matches the understanding of the world. A change in “physics” he presumes leads to a change in “metaphysics.” That is, he thinks, what has happened in modern times. Human beings have objectified the reality outside themselves and freed themselves from prefixed cosmic frameworks. Consequently, they no longer find transcendence outside themselves but *inside themselves*. This is the second type. Transcendence is experienced in the inner dimension of human existence, in the *transcendental subjectivity* of human beings. God is no longer seen in his correlation to the world—this was no longer possible after the Kantian critique of the traditional proofs for the existence of God—but is transformed into the transcendental condition for self-experience (cf. *TH*: 45ff.). “The ‘boundary’ between immanence and transcendence runs through himself.” In their very existence people experience finitude and infinity simultaneously. In place of the old correlation of “physics and metaphysics” the correlation of “existence and transcendence” comes to the fore.

This does not, however, sufficiently explain the situation. In the “post-industrial society,” he holds, this typically modern correlation of “existence and transcendence” is losing its power as well (1969:189). Today the dilemma of modern life evokes a new type of “experience of the boundary:” “it is no longer the experience of [one’s] inner subjectivity transcending the objective world, but the experience of his own impotence in a straitjacket of autonomous objectification and in a ‘closed society’” (1969: 184). This is the third type. Neither in the objectification of humankind nor in the new *subjectivity* is there an opening for a new experience of transcendence. The inability of the transcendent subject to dominate the world and the increasing closeness of the immanence of its own world evoke

the quest for a new experience of transcendence. In other words, the changed “physics” demand a new “metaphysics.” With Roger Garaudy, Moltmann formulates it so: “Where is there to be found a transcendence which does not alienate but, rather, liberates us from alienation?” (See §3.1).

#### d) The Babylonian Exile of the Christian Faith

If Moltmann is to be believed, there is not much to be expected from the mainstream churches on this question. He continues to be critical about the role the church is assigning itself within the ambiguities of modern society. We noted how theologians filled the new vacuum after the breakdown of pre-war institutions by laying all stress on the doctrine of justification. In many cases this led to a theology that looked at the human being of the human community in their existence before God but left the whole field of public life out of view (Moltmann 1963a: 116). Theologians developed “existentialist” theologies (*TH*: 312). Such theologies localized faith in that ethical reality that is determined by human decisions and encounters, not by the patterns of social behaviour or the self-contained rational laws of economic circumstances. As constant reflection and decision, Christian faith was regarded as something transcendent to social relations. God is not God of the world, history, and society but the unconditioned in the conditioned (*das Unbedingte im Bedingten*), the beyond of the things of this world, the transcendent in the present (*TH*: 313f.). Accordingly, Christian ethics was reduced to “ethical demand,” spontaneous solidarity, I-thou relationships. During the late 1950s and the early 1960s the limitations of those forms off Christianity became all the more evident to Moltmann. He observed three new roles of Christianity in the post-war, modern society (Moltmann 1969: 110ff.; cf. *TH*:304f.). I will first briefly examine these, after which I will indicate Moltmann’s fundamental objection.

The processes of technocratization, pluralization, and secularization heralded the definitive end of the *corpus christianum*. The church thus lost the character of *cultus publicus* to which it had been accustomed for more than a millennium. It became something it never was and, according to Moltmann’s interpretation of the New Testament, never should be: a *cultus privatus*. “The cult of the Absolute is no longer necessary for the integration of this society. The Absolute is now sought and experienced only in our liberated, socially disburdened subjectivity” (*TH*: 310). The fact that the church was banished from social necessity does not mean that society does not assign it other roles in which it is expected to be effective. Moltmann maps out *three* new social roles of the church he spots around him: in the sphere of a released private personality (“religion as the cult of the new subjectivity”), in the sphere of subliminal community building (“religion as the

cult of co-humanity”), and in the sphere of non-obligatory affection towards one’s milieu (“religion as the cult of the institution”).

The *first* new role was established where society gave free reign to individuality. The modern slogan “religion is a private matter” meant not only the emancipation of society from any confessional standpoint but also the starting point of a new form of Christianity, namely, the *cultus* of a new subjectivity, a *cultus privatus*, a religion of personality. Modern human beings, Moltmann observes, expect faith to offer them salvation, maintenance, care, and the edification of personal humanity; it has to look after their lonely souls and their doubtful inner existence; its domain is the suffering, happiness and meaning of private life. God is not the origin and aim of the world, but the transcendent ground of existence and personal ability to act. Religion should “guard” the non-objectifiability of the “invaluable person.” But, Moltmann asks, can faith offer internal assurance as a substitute for what is externally lacking, namely security, *Heimat*, transcendence?

The *second* role reserved for Christian faith in modern society is that of “enclave of industrial society.” The attitude of a “real community” or “*Volksgemeinschaft*” over against industrial society is one that churches eagerly assume. Moltmann admits that it could offer people a spontaneous, purposeless solidarity. Such small groups alleviate the isolation and individualization that is encountered in public life. But it does not change the harsh reality of society outside these communities. In fact, they only form a counterbalance, “so that the human being can endure in the change-over from work and leisure, business and family, society and community, from public life to the private sphere in masterly schizophrenia.”

The *third* role modern society awards to Christian faith is that of a religious institution that forms, as it were, the cement of society. To Moltmann’s astonishment, this role was also assumed. It succeeds the renewed call for established institutions that we already noted. Apparently, in a dynamic and progressive society people want things to be fixed, to be a matter of course. “Through the institutionalization of his relationships the human being seeks to give his transient, demanding and changeable life some permanence.” The modern human being, therefore, easily delegates his decisions of faith to the institution which offers him eternal truths and values. Such neo-dogmatism, Moltmann warns, creates a religious practice of institutionalized non-commitment. Christianity becomes something socially self-evident, along the same lines as other institutions that are seen as socially self-evident. One no longer has to understand it. “It goes without saying” and acts upon people “in a roundabout way via the influence of the environment.” An anonymous Christianity this develops, a Christianity

*incognito*. The Christian essence does not lie in the heart of the individual nor in the community of some people, but in the milieu of all. But it is established and can hardly be moved. In such a situation, the question of meaning is removed entirely: “A charitable lack of asking questions” (*Wohltätige Fraglosigkeit*) (Gehlen) is preferred.

The crux of Moltmann’s critique lies in his observation that these roles did not develop out of a certain theological principle—they just naturally correspond to society’s needs. In other words, the theological obviousness of the Christian faith is in line with its social obviousness. It is precisely against this natural correspondence that Moltmann protest. If the Christian story is of any relevance to modern society, it should not be devaluated to personal opinion, to group therapies of isolate communities or to the cement of society. This may all be sociologically justifiable but, Moltmann firmly holds, *theologically it is not* (TH: 305). He refers implicitly to Luther’s *Freedom of a Christian* when he speaks about a “new Babylonian exile” of the Christian faith. Christianity took over the function of defending modern society, thus adapting to modern society. Of course, Moltmann cannot deny that churches are relevant this way, even socio-politically. His problem is that Christianity has no other message for the world than the one the world wants to hear (Moltmann 1969: 117). The next section will point out that the suggestion behind this critique is that this cannot be changed as long as one regards God, human beings and the world within metaphysical or existentialist “models of transcendence.” In other words, it is the wrong “model of transcendence” that fundamentally causes this supposedly distorted presence of Christian faith in modern society. What is the alternative?

#### 2.4.2 *Spero Ut Intelligam*: Interweaving the Blochian Tapestry

I will summarize the discussion so far. More than ever before, humans are driven by an open question, a question they do not merely ask but *are*. Modern humans are no longer at home (*beheimatet*) in the cosmos but seek their home in their own constructions. Apparently, this is increasingly impossible for many. In the multitude and antagonism of images, they are “hidden” to themselves. The basic anthropological question is, therefore, the quest for the disclosure of who humans really are—the *apocalypse of humankind*, as it were (Moltmann 1961a: 24). Moltmann notes three escapes from the condition of modern human beings: resignation, either a positive or a negative utopia, and “direct action.” All three escapes fail to offer a real way out of the dilemma between homogeneity and heterogeneity. Either the different options are reduced to one of the many or one simply surrenders oneself to the multiplicity, thus giving up the search for a “whole” life. Ac-

According to Moltmann, what we need is a “horizon of expectation.” We have seen how he translates this question into the problem of transcendence. Where can we find the “boundary” of transcendence today? In modern society the classic metaphysical, cosmological model no longer serves. But, in Moltmann’s view, neither does the existentialist alternative. We must find a new model of transcendence, not only so that contemporary humans can find a way to a “whole” life, but also to develop strategies for a liberating Christian presence in society (i.e. prophetically and vicariously and not only as have the function of defending society).

Having viewed the problem of humanity in this way, the step towards theology—i.e. the step from the philosophical concept of transcendence to “God”—seems easy to take. But appearances are deceiving. Moltmann—influenced as he is by Barth—needs to avoid even the semblance of identifying God with the human longing for transcendence (Christian soteriology cannot be simply another experiment among others; cf. Moltmann 1961a: 25). But that is not all. Much more problematic is that a theological paradigm shift is inevitably needed to reply to the new quest for transcendence as pointed out in the previous section. Was the theological world of the 1950s after all not too locked in the “existence-transcendence” paradigm to offer starting points for “bringing up” the transcendent God at the immanent “boundary” which people encountered at that time? Once again, the “boundary” of transcendence no longer lies only in the finitude of all things and beings and also no longer in human subjectivity which surpasses nature but in the torpid, “dead forms of [the human being’s] own objectifications and in the superiority of his own works over himself” (1969: 188). This subsection follows Moltmann in his attempts to come to terms with the problem of transcendence theologically. It analyzes how Moltmann runs up against the walls of Barthian and Bultmannian paradigms (a), how Bloch’s philosophy offers him a new “model of transcendence” (b), and the problems in Bloch’s approach and how he subsequently remodels Bloch’s dialectics of hope Christologically (c). The next section will deal with the question how this is supposed to lead to the “apocalypse of man,” and how he believes that this will result in a different Christian presence in society.

#### a) The Revelation of the Hidden God

The hiddenness of the modern human being is the reverse side of the hiddenness of God—thus Moltmann concluded with Nietzsche. The suggestion is that only if the hidden face of the *Deus absconditus* is revealed, can human beings come to know themselves. In other words, the questions of how humans can find their “substance,” their very being, how they can live lives of happiness and purpose and how they can take concrete

responsibility for the world in which they live should all be seen in reference to the fundamental question of God. With reference to Bloch, Moltmann states: “Only with respect to the *Deus absconditus* is the problem of what the *mysterium homo absconditus* is all about dealt with” (Moltmann 1961a: 25).

For clarity’s sake, it may be important to raise one—quintessentially *theological*—issue first. Without doubt, for Moltmann the described quest for transcendent meaning is the quest for *God*. From a Barthian, “dialectical” point of view such an angle is rather suspicious, since God thus may easily become a religious possibility of humankind. Some commentators have accused Moltmann of such an anthropological reduction.<sup>41</sup> This is unfair at least to the extent that Moltmann himself has always consciously rejected such a reduction of theology.<sup>42</sup> Rather, he takes his starting point in the (Calvinist and Barthian) theological *a priori* that the knowledge of God and the knowledge of human beings are two sides of the same coin. Moreover, God is put forward as the radical opposite (*das wesenhafte Gegenüber*), the *Deus absconditus*, who can only be known through his revelation. This stamps the character of his theological anthropology. Christian faith does not bring a new concept of humankind, nor does it fix humankind into an ideal portrait or present a clear-cut, ideal image of humankind with moral-missionary power; it simply “finds” humankind before that “final unavoidable reality” and discusses humankind with respect to this reality *only in so far as* this “reality” poses the question of humankind with respect to itself (Moltmann 1961a: 24ff.). “Chronologically speaking, theological anthropology may begin with a portrait of humankind

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<sup>41</sup> One example is the conclusion by Randall E. Otto (1991: 232): “Moltmann has accomplished in his theology a reversal of the Creator-creature relationship, making man the creator and ‘God’ his creation .... Having presumed the normalcy of autonomous reason and having dismissed the biblical portrayal of the world and its Maker on that basis, Moltmann has through his sinful reason and idolatrous imagination [*sic!*] formulated a theology that appeals to the rebellious desires of man to be as God, to create a world of his own, a world better than God himself did create.

<sup>42</sup> So Moltmann (1961a: 24f.): “If we speak of God at this place and of the expression and coming to himself of the human being ‘before God,’ then this is not intended to be one more possibility of a religious answer to the question of the being and goal of being human but the radical opposite of that which the human being together with his world and his environment finds placed in question.”

against the background of the spirit of the age but with regard to principle it starts from “the other side.” In *TH* he explains:

It will not be able, for example, to set out from the fact that man is the being which possesses reason and language, and then go on to verify this aspect of his being by means of the event of justification, but it will set out on the contrary from the event of justification and calling, and then go on in face of other assertions as to the nature of man to uphold this event which makes man, theologically speaking true man. (*TH*: 143)

As stated in §2.1, Moltmann’s theology begins from the Barthian fundamental position that the knowledge of God (and, accordingly, of humankind) cannot be derived from philosophical or anthropological reflection but that, conversely, any human reflection should start with the revelation of the *Deus absconditus* (and, accordingly, the apocalypse of the *homo absconditus*). In his own view, Moltmann, therefore, does not propose just another “experiment,” another play with ourselves and our world or another religious play with our possibilities. If questions about human identity, human destination, and revelatory change are interpreted as the “agonizing question of God,” then, theologically speaking, anthropology starts with the fundamental question of how God reveals himself and what this says about humankind. It does not start by discussing the human being biologically, psychologically, sociologically, historically, economically, politically or philosophically (although this may all be of theological importance) but by looking at humankind from the *perspective* of God and his reign. It points out who and what human beings are and how they can change before the face of God (*coram deo*, as Luther wrote).

Barth and Bultmann had something to say about this as well. Their ideas had stamped the theological climate of the 1950s. To gain a better view of Moltmann’s position, it may be clarifying to highlight the essence of their views. Barth admitted that to a certain extent the question of what is essentially human is an open question (he thus acknowledged the right of the sciences to examine the “phenomena” of human existence).<sup>43</sup> It is, however, no longer an open question as soon as “we set out from the fact that man is the being to whom God is gracious in Jesus Christ” (1961: 41). Theologically speaking, the crux of anthropology is that the true God re-

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<sup>43</sup>I will limit myself to CD III.2 (Barth 1960: 132ff., and CD III.4 (Barth 1961): 41ff.

vealed himself in the true human being Jesus Christ. “The ontological determination of humanity is grounded in the fact that one man among all others is the man Jesus” (1960: 132). That is basically what anthropology, theologically speaking, is about—and not primarily about human reason, responsibility, rights, or humanity as such.

When we see the glory of God residing in Jesus Christ, then, in and with the most high God Himself, we also see man: humbled, accused and judged as a guilty and lost creature, and only as such, only in the fire of judgement, upheld and saved; but also exalted and glorified as the creature elected and affirmed by God from all eternity. (1961: 42)

Being truly human thus involves the acknowledgment that in Jesus we find our fellow human through whose crucifixion our old life in crucified and in whose resurrection we ourselves are resurrected to new life.

For his part, Bultmann was influenced by Heidegger’s analysis of the human condition.<sup>44</sup> Following his hermeneutical method of demythologization (*Entmythologisierung*) he came to the conclusion that the New Testament distinguishes two forms of human existence: *outside* of faith and *in* faith (1985: 15ff.). The first is characterized by *Sorge* (i.e. care) and *Angst* (i.e. anxiety caused by the consciousness of finitude and death). Tragically, human beings try to find some security and to overcome their anxiety by cling to that which visible and at our disposal (the *Verfügbare*). Wrapped up in mythological images, the kerygma of the New Testament is that God graciously enters human life to create what Bultmann calls “eschatological existence.” This liberating act does not take place in nature or history but in the life of the individual before God. The “cross” is interpreted as saying farewell to the old life and the old world; the “resurrection” as rising towards a life in freedom, faith and love. The individual is called to answer the call of God. “In faith,” i.e. living before the face of the invisible and that which is not at our disposal (the *Unverfügbare*), he becomes “free from the world” (*entweltlicht*), free from the fatal circle of anxiety and fear.

There are, of course, significant differences between Barth’s transcendentalism and Bultmann’s *Existential interpretation*. What they share is, first, the presupposition that the knowledge of humankind and the knowledge of God are two sides of the same coin. The apocalypse of humankind is only possible through revelation from the other side. Divine

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<sup>44</sup>I will focus here on Bultmann 1985: 1-44, in which this is clearly expressed.

revelation and the human situation are dialectically opposed. Secondly, both interpret the transition from the old to the new life Christocentrically. As such, Moltmann does not disagree. In *TH*, however, he casts serious doubt on this (*TH*: 37-94). In Barth's concept of the "self-revelation of God" as well as in Bultmann's "disclosure of authentic selfhood" revelation and the eschaton coincide (*TH*: 46). "The wherefore and the whence are the same, the goal of revelation is identical with its origin.: God reveals nothing but "himself." Revelation does not open up a future in terms of promise, as in early Calvinist theology but is basically nothing but the coming, the *epiphany*, of the eternal God to human beings (Barth) or the coming of human beings to themselves (Bultmann). In other words, revelation is the apocalypse of the transcendent subjectivity of God or of humanity. In the light of the previous section, it is obvious why Moltmann protests. He also thinks dialectically and he also sees the transformation of human beings Christologically (although no longer exclusively—the Holy Spirit also plays a significant part, cf. §2.3.3). But Moltmann wants to relate this cross-resurrection dialectic to human history and the world. The "cross" has to do with the conflicts of our age, with the concrete suffering of people due to inhumane structures; the "resurrection" with hope for the world, with the transformation of unjust structures. If the eschatological event of revelation is exclusively located in a subjectivity that transcends time and space (the subjectivity of the sovereign God in Barth's case; our *Selbstverständnis* in Bultmann's), then it becomes accidental to the affairs of the world. In this way, Moltmann argues, theology is responsible for the self-surrender of Christianity to the non-critical roles modern society allows it to lay (cf. *TH*: 41).

#### b) Future as Transcendence

We have noted that in modern society the human being's subjectivity and the objectivity of his work and relations seem so far separated from each other that the products rule their producers and rationalized relationships throw an irrational force over human beings. This explains the decline of the attraction of the existence-transcendence model. Moltmann suggests that if we do not want to disconnect transcendence from immanent reality (as in all kinds of escapes—from LSD trips to utopian experiments), then we should broaden our scope and acknowledge the *historical dimension* of immanent reality. Or, more radically, we should even see immanence as *history*, i.e. "the experience of reality in conflicts," i.e. the experience of reality in the antagonisms of radical subjectivity and the objectification of our world (1969:195).

But if immanence is conceived of as history, how, then, must transcendence be characterized? As remarked above, transcendence can be

found neither on the subjective nor the objective side. How then? Moltmann writes:

If the “boundary” of the present immanence is experienced in such a way that man is alienated from his world and his world is alienated from man, then transcendence is experienced where critical perspectives on the divisions of the present are opened up, where new possibilities for a meaningful incarnation of man and new possibilities for a humanization of his alienated conditions are manifested, in brief: where a *future of reconciliation and transformation* attains the upper hand over this state of affairs. (1969: 189, italics mine)

In other words, transcendence is a qualitatively different, transforming and new *future* to be experience in the antagonisms of daily life. The problem is thus apparently intensified. After all, not only is the understanding of *transcendence* subjected to “the modern fissure within consciousness,” but also the understanding of “*future*.” Dealing with the problem of the understanding of “future,” Moltmann notices an ambiguity (which runs parallel to the subjectification-objectification paradox). On the one hand, industrial society identified the future as the progress and development of the present status quo. The future was *objectified* in the growth rate of social products and the acceleration of the objective human possibilities. In the current “post-industrial society,” Moltmann notes, this objective progress has lost its spell of transcendence. The modern planned society separates the transcendent future of independence from nature the fulfilment of human longing, the subduing of economic alienation, and the kingdom of political freedom. Moltmann writes: “A planned and programmed future has nothing more to do with transcendence: (1969: 189f., cf. 1971a). On the other hand, the “future” was *personalized*. In existentialism it merely became the inner extension of human existence in the openness of the heart and futurity of decision. According to Moltmann, both developments reinforce each other. The personalization of the future, which develops from being disburdened of responsibility for present history, owes its existence to the objectification of the future. Both the personalistic understanding of the future as the possibility of existence and the objectification of the future in the automatic progress of society are a product of the split in the modern spirit.

How can one go beyond this ambiguity? How can “future” become a new paradigm of transcendence? Only if this future is not the *quantitative extrapolation* of the present but the *prolepsis* of *something qualitatively new*. The thread running through the fabric of Moltmann’s theology of hope could be summarized in that way. In his reply to criticism of *TH* he makes

a distinction between *futurum* and *adventus*, both implied in the German word *Zukunft*. Moltmann writes: “The future is that which will be and that which will come” (1967a: 210). Both meanings point to different methods of *securing* the future (*Methode der Zukunftvergewisserung*). The future as *futurum* is *extrapolated* from processes of the past and the present; the future as *adventus* is *anticipated*. Such anticipation, Moltmann claims, is possible only if something completely different and *new* heralds its coming—in other words, if the promises of something qualitatively new stimulates the fundamental transformation of the present, antagonistic conditions of immanence. Then transcendence “becomes the embodiment of concrete, historical transcending of the concrete, historical boundary” (1969: 190). Future as transcendence can no longer be understood as the quantitative extension and development of the present but must signify qualitative transformation of the history which is experienced in conflicts. As Moltmann writes, hinting at Barth’s notion of transcendence, the “wholly other” (*Ganz-Andere*) of transcendence, then, is conceived as the “wholly transforming” (*Ganz-Andernde*). Therefore, the basic methodological question for theology is: “[D]oes the present determine the future through extrapolation or does the future determine the present through anticipation?” (Moltmann 1967a: 209).

As stated above, the memorable holiday in Switzerland in 1960 when he read Bloch’s *Principle of Hope* marks a turning point in Moltmann’s theological thinking. Apparently, the fiery messianism of this Jewish Marxist atheist was appealing in “a landscape of burned out craters and a petrified stratum of lava” (Moltmann 1976a: 13). For Moltmann—who admitted that his interpretation was possibly a little one-sided (Moltmann 1976a: 11)<sup>45</sup>—Bloch was the “red Bible detective” who made him aware of the “subversive Bible of the prophets and the poor” (Moltmann 1976a: 50). His messianic thinking, embedded in the Exodus (Moltmann 1976a: 16f.) as well as in, for instance, the Reformed chiliasm of Thomas Müntzer (Moltmann 1976a: 15, 66), on the one hand unmasked the hopes of technological society as “banal, automatic optimism in progress: and on the other protested against the attitude of resignation and apathy (*tristesse* as Bloch labeled it). But he also rejected the dominant, existentialist way of thinking that pretended to offer a way beyond apathy and technological chiliasm. He

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<sup>45</sup>Moltmann (in Volf 1986: 10) once stated that the common ground between his own work and Bloch’s *The Principle of Hope* existed wherever Bloch thinks in terms of Jewish or *messianic* thinking.

characterized it as the “bourgeois realism of the Philistine focussed on what is available” (*Vorhandenheitsphilisters*) (Moltmann 1976a: 18) and as a “narrow, reactionary, pro-fascist nihilism, focussing only on phenomena of anxiety, fear and naked determination.” He thus cuts off three ways: both technological chiasm and apathetic resignation stemming from modern developments and the existentialist way beyond them.

In view of Moltmann’s theology it seems important to highlight Bloch’s objection to the latter. Moltmann maintained that existentialist thinking takes, in a contemplative way, reality as it *is*, whereas for Bloch himself, in contrast, the key to understanding human existence is the orientation to the future, the “utopian principle,” the “drive to reach home again” (1986: 7f.). This impulse towards the future home (*Heimat*), (i.e. “a world which is more adequate for us, without degrading suffering, anxiety, self-alienation, nothingness” (1986: 18), this *desideratum* for the not-yet home, was in Bloch’s view the “only honest attribute of all men: (1986: 5) and, moreover, “the meaning of all men and the horizon of all being” (1986: 6). It is the germ of all freedom movements throughout history, the Exodus and New Testament messianism (the resurrection of the crucified Christ into the coming kingdom of God) included.<sup>46</sup> However,

... despite all these Enlightened patrols and even expeditions into terram utopicam, there is something broken off about them all, broken off by contemplation .... What Has Been [*das Gewesene*] overwhelms what is approaching. (Bloch 1986: 8).<sup>47</sup>

The utopian principle was not able to force a breakthrough, neither in the archaic mythical world (despite the Exodus) nor in the urban rationalistic world (with regard to the existentialist view we are thus supposed to conclude that there is nothing new under the sun). Bloch put it down to the fact that the dominant way of thinking has always been *contemplatively idealistic*. The world is considered to be a closed world that has already become everything it can be (a “gewordene” world), including a “projected over-world: in which the “What Has Become” (the *Gewordenes*) is reflected. Over against this “world of repetition” (*Kreislauftheorie*), this “great Time-and-Again” (*großen Immer-Wieder*, 1986: 6), Bloch presents his

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<sup>46</sup>Bloch also encountered this idea in the great philosophies of modernity (Leibnitz’s notion of *tendency*, for instance, or the notion of hope in the Kantian postulates of moral consciousness or Hegel’s dialectical system).

<sup>47</sup>In line with Marx, Bloch pleads for “knowledge as conscious theory-practice” (1986: 8, cf. § 3.1).

philosophy as a “conscience of tomorrow, commitment to the future, knowledge of hope” (1986: 7). Philosophy should not be restricted to the fetishism of facts; it should focus on the future and offer ways for the concrete transformation of society in orientation on this future.

Moltmann found in Bloch a philosophical companion on the way “out of apathy” (Moltmann 1970: 289). “Why has Christian theology let go of its most distinctive theme, hope?” he asked himself after reading Bloch’s book (1997a: 15). Was “hope” not already a central category of his theology? Had he not read and discussed Bonhoeffer’s works and Calvinist theologies of hope? Had Van Ruler not insisted on exploring the eschatological horizon of Christian faith? What could a Marxist atheist philosopher add (be it “a Marxist with a Bible in his hand” (Moltmann 1969: 15))? What he apparently meant was: Why has Christian theology (Barth, Bultmann, and Pannenberg,<sup>48</sup> as well as the theological inspirations of the 1950s) has always been based on the misapprehension that reality is static, a *Gewordenheit*, a world of eternal repetition and recapitulation? He came to the conclusion that *The Principle of Hope* could encourage Christian theology to try a new interpretation of the original Christian hope. Why? Because it offered a different view of reality, a view that not only fits the modern experience of life but also the biblical messianic perspective of freedom.

Bloch’s thinking thus provided a conceptual framework in which he could dialectically relate the transcendent future as *adventus* and the present immanence of history: in other words, a *new model of transcendence*. Bloch discussed transcendence in terms of the pressure exerted by the future on the present. The future, he argued, has logical priority over the present, the

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<sup>48</sup>Moltmann’s theology differs fundamentally from Pannenberg’s cosmological theology, which, as is well-known, is based on the idea of the indirect self-revelation of God in his historical action (*TH*: 76ff.). History as a whole is the revelation of God—only at the end of history is full knowledge possible. The end is anticipated in the “fate” of Jesus. Moltmann’s objection is the fundamental biblical confession that history is the event between promise and fulfilment is relinquished and replaced by a universal-historical eschatology based on a Greek cosmos theology (although Pannenberg claims that he has overcome this kind of theology). In Pannenberg’s theology of history, he asserts that “God” is what comes forward when one asks about the unity and *Ganzheit* of reality. For him, this kind of theology is nothing more than a necessary completion of Bultmann’s existential theology which sought the self-understanding of “God’s declarations about human existence.” Moltmann’s own alternative is not a theophany in history instead of in nature but a fundamentally different way of understanding reality as history, namely as *promise*.

possible over the *Gewordene*. The “home of identity” (*Heimat der Identität*), he claimed, does not lie in the present but in the future. What encourages people in the present is the power that emanates from the hope for this transcendental “homeland” in which they will find their “true identity.” This future, however, is in no way an extension or perfection of the present: it is rather something qualitatively new, a *novum*. This *novum* is dialectically opposed to present suffering. In other words, it is something transcendent over against the immanent reality of conflict.

The urgent question is of course: If the eschaton is not an extrapolation of our reality here and now but a transcendent *novum*, how, then, can we grasp it? The expected *novum*, Bloch writes, goes on in advance of human beings in dreams. His *Principle of Hope* starts with the observation that humans daydream about a homeland beyond the horizon (Bloch 1986: 3ff.). Utopia causes human beings to boil; his being is *open* and fermenting (1986: 196). For Bloch these dreams are not just a flight from harsh reality (nor the storing up of the *Urvergangenheit* in the cellar of human consciousness, as Freud or that “fascist babbling psychoanalyst” Jung believed (Bloch in Moltmann 1976a: 20) but the expression of “the new that is dawning,” of a future *Heimat* that lies ahead. Human dreams of hope burst open the present state and push human beings forward to the horizon of a not-yet realized future. Thus Bloch’s thinking contrasts sharply with the dominant schools of philosophical anthropology of that time. He shares the conviction that the human being is “open to the world” (*Weltoffen*) and he also labels the insecurity this evokes as “homesickness.” He further agrees that every temporary fulfilment of human dreams sooner or later ends up in disappointment and dissatisfaction (he calls it the “melancholy of fulfilment”). But Bloch does not dismiss the dreams. For him these dreams radiate from the *novum* in human consciousness (Bloch speaks of “advent consciousness,” 1986: 200). But, in addition, he asserts that these dreams have a correlate in the process of the world in becoming itself. “Expectation, hope, intention towards possibility that has still not become: that is not only a basic feature of human consciousness, but concretely corrected and grasped, a basic determination within objective reality as a whole.” In other words, “*docta spes*, comprehended hope, thus illuminates the concept of a principle in the world” (1986: 7). Reality is an unfinished *process*, namely the mediation between the present, the unresolved past and the possible future. According to Bloch, “mobile, changing, changeable Being, presenting itself as dialectical-material, has this unclosed capability of becoming, this Not-Yet-Closedness both in its ground and in its horizon” (1986: 196). Thus reality itself is open to the future. The *novum* bubbling up in human dreams is the *latent possibility* of reality itself and corresponds to

*tendencies* within reality. The longing for this *novum ultimum* is the basic direction of reality, its driving principle, its *primum movens*. Everything exists in advance of the new creation of this world as a just one. So in Bloch's all-embracing "*ontology of not-yet*," the *Weltoffenheit* of humankind is not understood as a human deficit but as the openness of human beings for the concrete tendencies in reality towards their future home.

I will return to the question of where the "boundary" (or "front" as Bloch writes) between immanence and transcendence is to be found. The world is not a prefabricated house but an open process (cf. Moltmann 1969: 16). Humans do not yet have their true being in themselves; they do not yet know what they properly are (they live in "prehistory" (*Vorgeschichte*) now, Bloch 1986: 1375), but they seek in common *the homeland of true humanity*. The place where this future is decided is the present. This present—not something static but a process full of real possibilities (*Realmöglichkeiten*)—is the *front line* of the future. At this point the important role of the human being in Bloch's philosophy becomes clear. "The Where To of the Real only shows in the Novum its most basic Objective determinateness, and it appeals to man who is the arms of the Novum" (1986: 18). As a being that is conscious of the latencies and tendencies of the *novum* in reality, 'the human being who afire with the thought of utopia' is for Bloch the "Archimedean point of reality" (Moltmann 1976a: 24, cf. Bloch 1986: 282ff.). This is in glaring contrast to the existentialist concept of humankind: hope "will not tolerate a dog's life which feels itself only passively thrown into What Is, which is not seen through, even wretchedly recognized" (1986: 3; in the German text the Heideggerian phrase *das sich ins Seiende nur geworfen fühlt* can be recognized). The future is neither human fate, nor the extrapolation of human possibilities, nor a Never Never land beyond history but something to be grasped in *hope and anticipation* and to be worked at in *action*, which is the correlate of hope. In other words, humans must actually take up the possibilities of the *novum* which are the access points to a better world. When humans grasp themselves and overtake that which is merely given, so Bloch's book ends, something will develop "which shines into the childhood of all and in which no one has yet been: homeland" (1986: 1376). If humans transcend themselves in hope and action, he will find his identity in this *Heimat* whose reality is latent and to which history is moving and which, as indicated, can be described concretely as a world more adequate to humankind—a world without unnecessary and pointless pain, anxiety, self-alienation or nothingness. It is not surprising that for Bloch Prometheus, the Greek mythological figure who dared

to steal fire from the gods, is the prototype of true humanity.<sup>49</sup> The human being should be a Prometheus, a “creative man” (*schöpferische Mensch*), a *homo faber*, facing the future uprightly. Only he who has courage not just to be but to hope (which is “the work against anxiety about life [*Lebensangst*]” (Bloch: 1986: 3), who grasps himself without disappointment and alienation, is able to create, to change, to realize *Heimat*. *Becoming human in hope and action* demands the courage—or *hubris*—to surpass oneself, to be a hero.

Transcendence is thus the concrete historical transcending of the concrete historical “boundary” in hope and grasping the possibilities for revolutionary change within reality. This boundary is sought by Marxists (for whom the historical dialectic of hope and history, of transcendence and immanence, means a leap from the reign of necessity to the reign of freedom, from a repressive to a humane society). But, Moltmann insists, it is also sought by Christians, who interpret this dialectic as the qualitative difference between history and eschatology and who, in the conditions of the here and now, run ahead of the actual state of affairs in concrete hope and action (1969: 191, cf. *TH*: 18). Basically, Moltmann’s own *Theology of Hope* is a recapitulation of Christian eschatology. Eschatology is not the end, he states, but the beginning of theology (this refers to Bloch’s credo that “the true Genesis is not at the beginning but at the end,” Bloch 1986: 1375). In fact, theology has only one problem: the future. The new model of transcendence is the future—a future that is *dialectically opposed* to the history of the world, as something qualitatively new, a *novum*. The crucial question is how this *novum* is to be experienced in daily life. Bloch’s conception of reality in historical categories helps Moltmann bring “history” into theology without giving up the qualitative difference between human hopes and the “hope against hope” (cf. *TH*: 18). However, as we will see, he moves away from Bloch precisely on the question of where this new future is experienced now and how this can give us “certainty of life.”

Some critics objected that Moltmann too often falls from the heights of the Barthian Word-of-God theology into an anthropological, historical and phenomenological theology of hope (so *e.g.* Gerhard Sauter, Hans-Georg Seyer, and Barth himself, cf. Moltmann 1967a: 205). Others, on the contrary, held that he clings too much to the transcendent Word of God over against human worldly hopes (so *e.g.* Dorothee Sölle, Wolf-Dieter Marsch,

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<sup>49</sup> So it was for Karl Marx himself. In his Marx biography, Francis Wheen quotes Marx’s doctoral thesis: “Prometheus is the most eminent saint and martyr in the philosophical calendar” (Wheen 1999: 50; cf. Bloch 1986: 9).

and Pannenberg). I think, the contradiction between the Word of Promise and human hope is indeed obvious. In his book on revelation, Peter Eicher remarks that from the perspective of the modern conflict between “revelation” and “reason” Moltmann’s doctrine of revelation does not go beyond the aporias of modern supranaturalistic thinking. He only sharpens them. Just as the anti-Enlightenment theology of the eighteenth century used the notion of revelation over against natural theology and philosophies of religion, Moltmann poses the idea of promise as revelation over against the Marxist philosophy of hope. Against the background of dialectical theology, this word of promise is interpreted as a word of God without any analogies in the reality of human history (Eicher 1977: 478). For Moltmann it is clear that the word of promise does not stem from human experience. Nevertheless, he moves manifestly away from Barth. As in Barth’s system, the experiences of godforsakenness and “hope against hope” are dialectically related. However, the “yet” of Barth is replaced by the “not yet” of Bloch. The word of God is proclaimed, pronounces and sends (*TH*: 325), but it is directed towards that *which lies ahead of it*. In other words, “it is open for the ‘future’ which comes to pass *in it*, yet which in its *coming to pass* is recognized to be still *outstanding*.” The word is *pro-clamation* and *pro-nouncement*; it points beyond itself as the promise of an eschatological and universal future. The element of contradiction remains essential. Present and future, experience and hope stand in contradiction to each other. Human beings are not brought into harmony and consonance with the given situation but are drawn into the *conflict between hope and experience*, between the transcendent future and the immanent present of suffering (*TH*: 18). But compared to Barth’s “model of transcendence,” transcendence *topples forwards*, so to say (cf. Geertsema 1980: 44ff., 88ff.).

To mark the difference between Barthian or Bultmannian eschatology and his own theology of hope, Moltmann contrasts biblical messianism with Greek thinking, which is characterized by the ‘eternal now’ (*TH*: 28ff.). He argues that the “God of Parmenides” is the basis of an ontology of static being which makes a meaningful experience of history impossible. It undermines hope by submitting the future to the present. In Barth’s and Bultmann’s theologies, the Eternal makes its epiphany in the present, in the “moment.” Thus, Moltmann states, there is nothing left to hope for from a new future (*TH*: 45ff.). In Blochian thinking, however, “What Has Become,” which wants to reproduce or restore itself, is confronted with the powers of a fundamentally different opposite, (*Gegenüber*), to which, as Moltmann holds in line with Bloch, reality as such tends and which is latently present in concrete possibilities of change. The “Parmenidesians”

hold that God's essence is *numen presentiae*. Extension through time is not an option; God's truth is in the "now." In the eternal nearness and presentness of God, humans acknowledges their humanity, their being human. With Bloch, Moltmann states that the God of the Bible is a God with "future as his essential nature" (*TH*: 16; *Futurum als Seinsbeschaffenheit*). He follows Bloch in his *a priori* that only hope is "realistic," because it takes seriously the *possibilities* ontologically present in reality. Being realistic does not mean taking things as they *are*, but as they *move*, change in view of possibilities. Hopes and anticipations are a real observation of horizons of the "truly possible." What he thus claims is that basically it is not he who *believes* but he who *hopes* who understands reality. He thus paraphrases Anselm's *fides quaerens intellectum—credo, ut intelligam*: *spes quaerens intellectum—spero, ut intelligam* (*TH*: 33).<sup>50</sup>

Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* is thus not a definitive farewell to Barthian Word-of-God theology, but the dialectical set-up changes significantly. After his studies of Calvin he concluded that the Word of God is not an eternal word to be experienced in the moment of faith but the Word of *promise* that guides us in history towards future salvation. Faith was linked to hope in the fulfilment of this promise of the faithful God. With Bloch, however, Moltmann goes a significant step further. He now relates hope directly to the course of history itself: "it is not that time at a standstill is the category of history, but the history which is experienced from the eschatological future of the truth is the category of time" (*TH*: 50). Critics who object that Moltmann falls into an anthropological phenomenology of hope fail to acknowledge that for Moltmann there is no empirical verification of this hope (this "hope against hope" is an "eschatological gift," *TH*: 18, 326). Hope's statements of promise do not result from experiences but are, conversely, the condition for the possibility of new experiences (*TH*: 18). Hope presses towards things which cannot yet be seen. As Moltmann states with reference to Paul: "Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?" (Rom. 8:24). The question of those critics who wonder whether this transcendent hope could ever be related to our daily hopes (and hopelessness) is, however, not yet waved aside. It is evident that we cannot hope for things we already see, but *can we hope for things we do*

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<sup>50</sup> For a discussion of the relation between faith and hope, see *TH*: 19ff. "Faith binds man to Christ. Hope sets this faith open to the comprehensive future of Christ" (*TH*: 21). Moltmann appeals to Calvin: "Hope is nothing else than the expectation of those things which faith has believed to have been truly promised by God."

*not see at all?*<sup>51</sup> We need to elaborate a little further on the question of how humans can “grasp” the future. We will see how Moltmann follows Bloch but soon takes another turn.

### c) Rethinking the Christological Paradigm

Considering what has been said so far, one may tend to agree with Barth, who suggested that *Theology of Hope* was a “baptized version of Mr. Bloch’s book” (Barth 1975: 274ff.). Moltmann countered this critique by arguing that his intention was to take a “parallel action in Christianity on the basis of its own presuppositions” (1970: 289, 1997a: 15). To see how he did this, I will focus on two apparent differences that are important in view of the theme of this book. In the many discussions Bloch and Moltmann had over the years (published in one volume in Moltmann 1976a), these differences continually pop up as two pregnant questions:

(1) *Who makes the possible possible?*

(2) *What about the “not and no longer possible,” the suffering people of today and yesterday?*

These questions are the refrain of Moltmann’s theology of hope. The answers he gives mark the specifically Christian—or, better, Christological—character of his own proposal. He returns manifestly to the theological discoveries of the 1950s, which I analysed in §2.3. Moltmann once described the dialectical structure of Bloch’s philosophy as the “pattern” in which he could interweave the “loose threads” of his early theological thinking. Bloch’s dialectical thinking may indeed be the pattern, but these threads eventually determine the colour of the tapestry. The most eye-catching are the Calvinist theology of hope and *promise* and Bonhoeffer’s call for vicarious action. To understand how these are related, it is important to pay attention to a third thread of Moltmann’s early theology—postponed in §2.3—namely his left-wing interpretation of Hegel, as influenced by Iwand.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> One is reminded of Bernard Williams’s famous words in his “The Makropulos case.” “Whatever we say about a life after this life, the minimal condition is that ‘it should be who lives for ever, and that the eternal life should be in prospect of some interest’ (Williams 1973: 96).

<sup>52</sup> A detailed discussion of Moltmann’s interpretation of Hegel lies of course beyond the scope of this book. For a philosophical reflection on Moltmann’s use of Hegel see *e.g.* Geertsema 1980: 186ff.

To begin with the first question, if the possible has ontological priority over “What Has Become,” *who, then, makes the possible possible* (Moltmann 1976a: 68)? Bloch claims that the present is already pregnant with the future. But, as Moltmann asks, who says that the child Future is better than mother Present or grandmother Past? Moltmann thinks that the Marxist latency-tendency dialectic falls short: “If possibility is ontologically speaking higher than reality, then it must find its ground in something that transcends both possibility and reality” (1976a: 69, transl. mine). It was not for nothing that Bloch referred to biblical language when he talked about the *novum* of the “home of identity.” He “hoped for greater things socialism is able to fabricate” (Moltmann 1969: 15). But can one speak about Israel’s experience of history without Israel’s concept of God? For Moltmann this is evidently a rhetorical question. According to him, the main difference between *The Principle of Hope* and the *Theology of Hope* is that the first speaks of transcending but without a notion of transcendence, while the latter speaks of transcending *with* transcendence (Moltmann in Volf 1986: 10).

How is this difference expressed in *TH*? Sölle observed that after the introduction (“meditation on hope”) the word “hope” is increasingly pushed aside by the word “promise” (Moltmann 1967a: 206). This is indeed striking. However, whereas Sölle thinks that Christian theology thus gives up its solidarity with those who are marginalized by saving itself through the infallible *metaphysicum* called promise, Moltmann suggests that its solidarity is even stronger because through promise the hope becomes concrete and “secured.” With his understanding of promise—manifestly stamped by Calvinist theology—Moltmann defines his own position over against theologies based upon “Greek” thinking (Barth, Bultmann, Pannenberg) on the one hand and Blochian eschatology on the other. This becomes apparent in the concept of God and his revelation, in the understanding of reality as such and in Moltmann’s view of humankind.

First, Moltmann claims that God’s name is not a cypher for the “eternal now” but a name of promise (*TH*: 30). The revelation of God is thus not the epiphany of the eternally present God, but the promise of the faithful God who will be “eternally present” in the future (cf. *TH*: 143). This also goes beyond the description of God as a God “with future as mode of being.” Christian eschatology has its starting point in the promise of the faithful God, that is, in the Old Testament promises and in Jesus Christ in whom the promise of God’s future is sharpened (so Calvin, cf. §2.3.3). What Christian eschatology proclaims is not just the *novum*, a transcendent future, but *the future of the Resurrected*.

Secondly, reality is not a closed circle but is open to the future. However, not hope is the *primum movens* but the word of promise (which

is not merely an historical fact but a word that creates history, cf. Bonhoeffer, §2.3). To clarify this Moltmann shows how in Palestinian Israel, the “kinetic-vectoral” moments of the old nomad religion and the “static moments” of the Canaan peasant religion clashed (*TH*: 96ff.). Nomad religion was not based on the cycle of sowing and reaping and the change of seasons, he explains, but on the experience of migration. This leads not only to a fundamentally different concept of God, namely a transmigration God who journeys along with his people, but also to a different understanding of existence (*Daseinsverständnis*). Being is not regarded as mere recapitulation and confirmation of the present but as a history of promise (*Geschichte*) leading towards the future, which is the very aim of the journey.

Thirdly, the view of God and reality stamps the image of humankind. In line with Mircea Eliade, Moltmann makes a distinction between two types of religious anthropology (*TH*: 98). According to the first type, humans live “as close as possible to the gods” (in German: they are *Wohngenossen der Götter*). In this kind of religion, place is hallowed (*der Heiligung des Raumes zum Wohnen und Bauen*). The threat of human existence by the powers of chaos is overcome by the eternal presence. According to the second type, people are “contemporaries of God” (*Zeitgenossen der Götter*). Time is hallowed. People with a divine promise in their ears (Moltmann 1969: 119), because of their hope, *do not fit in* with the world and set out for the promised new future. However, their security in life is not only based on hope as such but on the promise of the faithful God. In the faith of promise, the human being also secures his existence by hoping for the future but also by *remembering* previous promises (*TH*: 102). One lives in a promissory history. The notion of the covenant is important (*TH*: 121ff.). In nomad religion, the promise founded in election and predestination was one side of the community between God and people. The other side was keeping the covenant, i.e. keeping the commandments in the power of hope and perseverance. In the Old Testament, Moltmann holds, the commandments of the covenant are regarded as the ethical reverse side of the promise itself. They have a futuristic tenor, being a preview of the future. “Their goal is the reality of that human dignity which is vouchsafed to men through fellowship with the God of promise” (*TH*: 122).

Thus for Moltmann, humankind does not find itself simply in hope but in the hope stemming from the promise of the faithful God. He needs Bloch to point out how this transcendent future is dialectically opposed to reality and how it keeps people in a continuous *inadequatio rei et intellectus* (*TH*: 102). But for Moltmann the fact that hope and promise have a surplus value with regard to reality can only be understood theologically, namely in

the infinity of the God of promise. Central categories of his earlier publications on Calvinist theology—*predestination, perseverance, faithfulness, covenant, promise*—appear to be indispensable.

We come to the second question: *what about the impossible and no longer possible?* In a meeting with Moltmann in 1966, Bloch—as a good Marxist—objected to the Christian notion of the “patience of the cross” by holding that it is a moralistic idea that suppresses people and calls for simply enduring suffering without any protest. For him, the New Testament theology of the cross—Paul’s in particular (as interpreted by Luther)—is a doctrine which “allows the slaves to keep going” (Bloch in Moltmann 1976a: 56). Moltmann agrees in so far as it concerns the critique of the moralistic, pietistic theology of the cross. However, he believes that in Marxist thinking a vital question remains unanswered that, paradoxically, can only be resolved by the Christian theology of the cross. In Bloch’s philosophy, eschatological hope for the new is related to the possibility of historical activity in the sphere of that-which-is-not-yet, to what humans can *do*. But what does this hope accomplish in the sphere of that-which-is-no-longer (1969: 17)? Must hope not also be connected with what people must suffer in sacrifice, in pain, and in dying? Do we not also need hope also for those who are gone, for the dead (or do these end up on the dunghill of history, as Marxists are forced to believe)? Here, Moltmann believes, the militant optimism of *The Principle of Hope* is silent (1969: 17). Bloch cannot but resign himself to the fact that there are hells on earth “in which there is no Easter,” that there is suffering and dying where the principle of hope can achieve nothing. Moltmann believes he goes a step beyond by asking where the *cross* is to be found in hope.

Moltmann asserts that in the Bible the *novum* does not appear in the not-yet but in *nothingness*, where everything has reached its end. Eschatology is *eschatologia crucis*. In the crucified Christ, Christian theology discerns the deepest abyss of godforsakenness and hopelessness on earth. But, he continues, it also believes in Easter, in the God of Easter who creates new life *out of nothingness*, who created the world out of chaos, darkness, and flood, who made his Messiah of the future out of the abandoned and crucified Jesus, who justifies the Godless. If, Moltmann holds, Christians hope for the future for the sake of this God, they hope for a *novum ex nihilo* (1969: 17). Christian hope is expectation of the new—not only of the possible but also of the impossible, namely life for the dead, justice for the wronged, a kingdom for the poor (Moltmann 1976a: 69). Moltmann states: “If God creates what is new out of nothing, then the poor,

the abandoned, and the dying are closer to him than are the efficient and militant heroes of revolution who help mankind" (1969: 18).

For Moltmann, this is a directive to "remain faithful to the earth." With Bloch, he holds that hope involves crossing the boundaries of suffering, guilt, and death, transcending them and staying in the Exodus (cf. Bloch 1986: 4). However, Moltmann means that humans can only cross these boundaries where they have been crossed already. In other words, humans are able to cross these boundaries in imitation of the suffering, death in godforsakenness and resurrection of Christ. So where the boundaries that break all human hope are broken, faith should grow towards hope. There hope becomes passion for the possible because it can be passion for what has been made possible (Moltmann 1976a: 56ff.). In the resurrection of Christ, faith does not acknowledge the eternity of heaven but the future of the earth on which Christ's cross stood. Therefore, *the cross is the hope of the earth*. The theology of the cross is thus not only consolation *in* suffering but also a protest *against* suffering. For Moltmann, the *frontline* of transcendence in the immanent present is found in those situations where the powers of nothingness are confronted by God's creation of the new. Christians must be present in this dialectic of cross and resurrection, this contradiction between what they see and what they hope, experience and acknowledge, in view on the final reconciliation in the eschaton.

How is the transcendent future related to our immanent reality? For Moltmann this relation apparently does not lie in the immanent possibilities of reality, as Bloch proclaimed, but in the transcendent *promise*. Christian hope is never hope as such but always hope related to the promise of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Faith starts *a priori* with the resurrection of Jesus. Moltmann writes: "A Christian faith that is not resurrection faith can therefore be called neither Christian nor faith" (*TH*: 166). But then, how is this transcendent promise related to our immanent reality? Or, in other words, how is this Easter *kerygma* related to our daily situation?

Moltmann emphasizes that there are many perspectives from which the question of the reality of the resurrection is raised today:

*Is he risen? In what modus of esse is the reality of the resurrection to be understood? Is he risen in the sense of a reality accessible to "historical science"? Is he risen in the sense of a reality belonging to the history of ideas and traditions? Is he risen in the sense of a reality that affects our own existence? Is he risen in the sense of a wishful reality of human longings and hopes?*

Moltmann does not associate himself with one of these perspectives. What he does instead is to take a “meta-position” by questioning not only the nature of the reality of the resurrection that is at issue but “also the reality on the basis of which the question of the reality of the resurrection is shaped, motivated and formulated” (*TH*: 167). He claims that his approach is not determined by any single question *within* the context of those that can be asked on the basis of reality today but that it “embraces the whole modern experience of the world, of the self and of the future—a question which we ourselves constitute with our whole reality.” I understand Moltmann to be saying that the reality of resurrection has been defined in many ways—in “historical” or “existentialist” or “utopian” terms—but that in none of these ways does the idea of God thrust itself upon us *as necessary*.

It has become partly superfluous, partly optional—at all events in its traditional theological and metaphysical form. Hence the proclamation of the raising of Jesus from the dead by God has also become partly superfluous, partly optional ....” (*TH*: 168)

The reason Moltmann gives for this is that all kind of modern thinking about God and Christ has a secular starting point; they “have their ground in the a-theistic form of the historian’s view of history, of man’s view of himself, and of his utopian view of the future” (*TH*: 167). The question Moltmann implies is: Can modern humans do it differently? Can they talk about the meaning of the resurrection of Christ other than in historical, existential, or utopian ways? Can they speak about God in a non-optional way?

Moltmann claims that there is one sentence today in which God is compellingly necessary: *God is dead*. This is not merely a statement of philosophical metaphysics or of theology but “one which also seems to lie at the foundations of modern experience of self and the world and to provide the ground for the atheism that characterizes the methods of science.” He has thus in mind here a rather peculiar kind of “negative theology” in which the “atheist” critique is not countered but “incorporated” (cf. §3.2.3.). Atheism becomes the partner of theology:

Only when along with the knowledge of the resurrection of Jesus the “God of the resurrection” can be shown to be ‘God’ in terms of the “death of God” that has become familiar to us from history, from the world and from our own existence—only then is the proclamation of the resurrection, and only then are faith and hope in the God of promise, something that is necessary, that is new, that is possible in an objectively real sense. (*TH*: 168)

In other words, God appears as the One who gives meaning among the ruins of all human attempts to know God (*ex nihilo*). To a great extent this is evidently the Barthian cathartic theology I examined in §2.3.1. To all appearances, the question is not just how to speak about God among the ruins of all human attempts to *know* God but also of all human attempts to *be* God. That, after all, lies behind the modern experience of the death of God: There is no transcendent frame in which our life acquires meaning; we have to furnish it ourselves (§3.2.3.). With this, Moltmann's question to Barth is radicalized. The question is not just how the revelation of God coming to us in the crisis of all human undertakings to know him can be related to the world and history but how the God coming to us after the "death of God" can be credibly related to the modern experience of world and history.

It is at this point that Moltmann has recourse to Hegel. In *Faith and Knowledge (Glauben und Wissen, 1802)* Hegel described the "death of God" as the basic feeling of the religion of modern times and saw in it a *new interpretation of Good Friday* (so *TH: 168f.*). Human emancipation from nature and history through science as well as its result, the loss of a meaning-giving whole, lead to the qualitatively new experience of the *absence* of God. Hegel saw modern atheism and nihilism, which spirited away all dogmatic philosophies and nature religions, as a universalizing of the historical Good Friday of the godforsakenness of Jesus—as a *speculative Good Friday* of the forsakenness of all that is. Moltmann follows him. He argues that only in the experience of complete godforsakenness, of transcendental silence, of the "death of God" can resurrection become a prospect *necessary to all that is*, i.e. as a resurrection of the totality of being *out of nothing*. Moltmann writes:

If the modern a-theistic world thus comes to stand in the shadow of Good Friday, and Good Friday is conceived by it as the abyss of nothingness that engulfs all being, then there arises on the other hand the possibility of conceiving this foundering world in theological terms as an element in the process of the now all-embracing and universal revelation of God in the cross and resurrection of reality.

If the meaning of Good Friday is expanded to the godforsakenness of the whole of reality, then, Moltmann continues,

the stringency of the world's godforsakenness is not in itself enough to ruin it, but its ruination comes only when it abstracts

the element of the expending and death of God from the dialectical process of God and fastens on that.

From a theological standpoint it becomes clear that the resurrection and the future of God must manifest themselves not only in the god-forsakenness of the crucified Jesus, but also in the godforsakenness of the world.

This raises many questions. Moltmann suggests that developments after Hegel have clouded the real meaning of his speculative Good Friday. To understand the supposed significance of his concept today, we need to go back before these developments, that is, behind the Kierkegaardian interpretation of the cross-resurrection dialectic and the Nietzschean understanding of the “death of God.” To grasp the radicalness of Hegel’s expanding of the cross-resurrection dialectic to all of history, it is, first of all, necessary to go back before Kierkegaard (and Barth’s Kierkegaardian interpretation) and thaw the “dialectics that has frozen into an eternal paradox” (so Moltmann on Kierkegaard in *TH*: 170).

As is well known, Kierkegaard’s answer to the problem of relating the miserable human condition (described as “sickness unto death”) to God was a “leap of faith.” Faith thus becomes an individual matter that can be characterized as a nonrational jump. For Kierkegaard, the dialectics of theoretical atheism and existential “inner life” was the paradoxical, irreconcilable contrariness of objective godforsakenness and subjective piety. Faith therefore does not have anything to do with this godforsaken world. In Moltmann’s view, Kierkegaard’s philosophy is contemptuous of the external world as absurd, senseless and godless. It fixes existence with transcendence in the immediate and unmediated inner life, thus fixing the world of objects in its rigid unchangeableness, sanctioning its inhuman and godless relations. The individual falls back upon pure immediacy.

Iwand (not really influenced by Kierkegaard himself (so Meeks 1974: 33)) showed his students traces in Hegel’s social philosophy that could help them to formulate positive theological answers to society and church without slipping back into a nineteenth century-like culture Protestantism or churchly absolutism. Parallelling Jesus’s god-forsakenness on the cross with the experience of meaninglessness in modern society, Good Friday was reproduced in reflection on modern life in the light of its meaninglessness and godforsakenness. This god-forsakenness and absurdity of the world—pointed at by atheism in opposition to the theistic concept of God—is not a negative urge to flee into pure inwardness. On the contrary, atheism makes one aware of the godforsakenness of this world and forces theology to take this forsakenness seriously (to “remain faithful to the earth”). In other words, theology should accept the “cross of the present” (Hegel). As stated

above, if atheism springs from the nihilistic observation of the death of God (interpreted as the speculative Good Friday), then theology can be fruitful and relevant only when it turns out to be a *theology of resurrection* over against this reality.<sup>53</sup> Atheism, then, stands in a dialectical relation with theism, not in a static dialectic but a *progressive* one. This split between theism and atheism split is overcome if the God of resurrection is regarded as the coming God of the new creation and freedom, whose transcendence is not linked to our immanence in inner immediacy but in the all-embracing resurrection of the godforsaken reality. Theism and atheism are two aspects of one dialectic *of the future* (so Moltmann 1967c: 468). In this way the God of resurrection is an “a-theistic God” (*TH*: 171; for more on Moltmann’s critique of “theism” see the following chapters).

But does the sentence “God is dead” truly embrace the whole modern experience of world, self, and future? Is it, after all, not the modern human being who killed God, as Nietzsche’s man with the lamp cried out? It is crucial to note that Moltmann takes another step—back before Nietzsche (and Ludwig Feuerbach) this time—to Hegel (cf. *TH*: 170ff.). Unlike Nietzsche later in that century, Hegel did not ascribe the death of God to human activity but to an act of God *himself*, an act of divine self-renunciation (*Selbstentäusserung*). In other words, the death of God is fundamentally not the result of man’s exaltation above himself but of God’s renunciation of his own self. In doing so, God created a “split” within himself. In the resurrection of the Crucified God, however, this split has been overcome. This event of reconciliation generated the Spirit of reconciliation which creates a dialectical *process* in which human history is taken up into God who reconciled himself with the negativity of history to which he renounced himself. In other words, the split God created within himself was large enough to take human history with all its negativity up into himself. In this way Christ’s death and resurrection have universal meaning, not because God and humankind are once and for all reconciled (so Barth) but because it generated a dialectical process of the self-development of God leading to universal reconciliation. Thus history is the realization of the universal Spirit of reconciliation that arose out of the Christ event. In §3.2.5 we will see how important this notion of divine self-renunciation, of divine *kenosis*, would become in Moltmann’s critical theology of the 1970s.

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<sup>53</sup> Consequently, theology should not merely interpret reality but transform it in expectation of the divine transformation (*TH*: 84).

Moltmann thus relies on Hegel to go beyond the Barthian dialectic and to rethink the Blochian dialectic of future transcendence in a Christological way. His conception of Hegel is, however, critical. Once again the importance of Bonhoeffer is apparent, who writes:

The God who is with us is the God who forsakes us .... God lets himself be pushed out of the world on to the cross. He is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us (*TH*: 171, cf. Bonhoeffer 1967: 196).

The God who reveals himself in the event of the cross and resurrection reveals himself in his own contradiction. Moltmann himself writes: "Out of the night of the "death of God" on the cross, out of the pain of the negation of himself, he is experienced in the resurrection of the crucified one, in the negation of the negation, as the God of promise, as the coming God."

Contrary to Hegel, however, Moltmann argues that the godforsakenness of the cross cannot be made into an element belonging to the divine process and thus immanent in God. He states that in his attempt to reconcile faith and knowledge, Hegel neutralized the *historicity* of the Resurrection event, seeing it as an eternal event. According to Moltmann, Hegel's theology of the dialectical self-movement of the absolute Spirit is eventually nothing more than a modification of the ancient metaphysical conception of the epiphany of the Eternal (universal history is regarded as the totality of reality). It is a kind of deism. Moltmann for his part claims that the historicity of the cross is not already neutralized in the logos of reflection and consciousness (as in the philosopher's mind) but only in a preliminary way in the *promise* and in the *hope* of a still future but real *eschaton*. "The cross is the mark of an eschatological openness which is not yet closed by the resurrection of Christ and the spirit of the Church, but remains open beyond both of these until the future of God and the annihilation of death." With Hegel he believes that the world will not eventually be engulfed in the abyss of nothingness, but not because its negative aspects are taken up into a universal process (Moltmann apparently wants to avoid the term "process") but into the "not yet" of hope. The world, he writes, is not stabilized in eternal being but "is 'held' in the 'not yet being' of a history open towards the future."

Crucial for Moltmann's historical approach are the Easter appearances of Jesus. All we know about the Christ event is what is transmitted by Jesus's disciples. Moltmann holds that their proclamation was not based upon special imagination or unique inspiration. They simply related *two totally different experiences of Christ* (*TH*: 197ff.): the experience of the

cross, the godforsakenness of the *Gottgesandten*, and the appearances of Jesus at Easter in which they were *called*. Precisely in this vocation, Moltmann maintains, Jesus's "self-identification" takes place. Because Jesus talks to them, there can be no misunderstanding: his appearances are not the "hierophany" of a heavenly being, but the appearance of the *risen crucified*. The fundamental Easter event is thus the revelation of the identity and continuity of Jesus in the total contradiction of cross and resurrection, godforsakenness and nearness of God. The Christ event means continuity in radical discontinuity and identity in complete contradiction. Both cross and resurrection can only be understood in their *dialectical identity*.

It is important to note that the point of identity does not lie in the person of Jesus himself but *extra se* in God, who creates life and new being (*novum*) *ex nihilo*. In the self-revelation of Jesus in his appearances it is not the special character of his own being that is revealed but the *faithfulness* of God. God reveals himself as God and his faithfulness in the Christ event. So this event, on the one hand, refers back to the *promise* of God and, on the other, foreshadows the eschaton of the final revelation of his goodness. The Christ event should, therefore, be regarded as the "eschatological history of faithfulness," namely as both the guarantee of God's promise and the dawning of its fulfilment.

Moltmann argues that understanding this promissory history is only possible if Christian theology moves from the *concretum* to the *concretum universale*. In the history of Christianity, Moltmann discerns two developments leading to the opposite. First, he sees a theology that starts with the universal, attempting (or not at all) to say something about the concrete (*TH*: 142). On the ground of Christian metaphysics, Jesus is transformed into the incarnation of the One, the Eternal, the Unchangeable, etc. The historical character of what happened with Jesus and the eschatological promise derived from this event can no longer be grasped. Secondly, in the modern period Jesus is viewed in the light of a universal understanding of humanity. In Jesus we discover a universal notion of humanity. Both approaches can be breached, Moltmann claims, only if we rediscover the importance of the Old Testament for the understanding of Jesus Christ. The God of Jesus is the Exodus God with "*futurum* as his mode of being." That means that in Jesus it is not a universal truth that became concrete but—as Moltmann puts it—a concrete, unique, historical event of cross and resurrection in Jesus through the God of promise who creates being *ex nihilo*, becomes universal in the eschatological horizon. Only in the historical Christ event is born what can be theologically determined as "human," as "true human being," as "humanity:" neither Jew, nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor

female (Gal. 3:28). “Only when the real, historic and religious differences between people, groups and classes are broken down in the Christ event in which the sinner is justified, does there come a prospect of what true humanity can be and will be” (*TH*: 142). Thus, Christian theology has to start with the historical event, moving towards the universal in an eschatological direction.

Thus, between the cross and the Easter appearances an eschatological event took place, which is applied (*angelegt*) to the future resurrection of *all human beings*. The Resurrected is not the heavenly glorified or immortalized. In his appearances he represents the coming, promised glory of God. Our promised future is the future of Christ, as it appears in his appearances. This future can be expressed only in terms of the promise already present in Old Testament prophecies and is sharpened in the Christ event (*TH*: 202f.). Focussing on this promise, we are forced into the tension between knowing and not knowing, necessity and possibility, already and not yet. Our future is hidden and uncertain, but at the same time, Moltmann claims, we know for certain that there is a future and what it will look like through God’s promise sharpened in the Christ event. The Easter appearances can therefore be seen as an impetus for hope and anticipation. In other words, the knowledge of God’s promise is knowledge of *hope*.

Thus the new model of transcendence, the future as transcendence, is Christologically recast. Allow me to recapitulate: Christian faith understands both history and the eschatological future to be related in Christ. In him the qualitatively new future, the *novum*, is present under the conditions of history. Therefore, on the one hand Christian theology speaks of the historical Christ eschatologically and on the other it finds the end of history historically in the midst of history. History, therefore, cannot be something that is of no concern to believers. Since the Christian can hope in the new future through faith in Christ, Moltmann puts, he begins to suffer in the unredeemed nature of the present and realizes solidarity with all who suffer consciously or unconsciously in this unredeemed state. Through hope in the future he can oppose the “scheme of this world” and the systems of the present and change them. For ages Christian faith employed a metaphysical exegesis of the transcendence in which it believed through Christ. Later, as was shown above, it was interpreted in an “existentialist” way. However, today the presence of Christ is recorded where the “boundary” of immanence is experienced in suffering and transcended in active hope. The more transcendence is interpreted eschatologically, the more the frontline of immanence will be understood historically and the more one will surrender oneself to the movement of transcending. That was the Blochian discovery. But Moltmann moves beyond Bloch:

The more faith interprets this eschatological transcendence in a Christian way, that is, in consideration of the crucified Jesus, the more it will become aware that the qualitatively new future of God has united itself with those who are dispossessed, denied, and oppressed in the present. (1969: 199)

Furthermore, Moltmann stresses, it will become more sensitive to the fact that this future begins not from above at the point of the progress of an advanced society but *from below* with those who have been sacrificed to this progress. In other words, the negative to which the *novum* is dialectically opposed is not to be overcome in hope and action but has to be incorporated into a Christian dialectic of the future that starts with the universal Good Friday, i.e. the extension of the godforsakenness on the cross to the meaninglessness and godforsakenness of reality as such. As Moltmann would describe it later: “Christian hope is no blind optimism; it is a discerning hope which sees suffering and yet believes in freedom” (1970: 291). This is not—in a Hegelian way—interpreted as a universal process immanent in God but as a history of promise experienced by Christians in the midst of history.

### 2.5. *Contemporaries of God: Evaluation and Preview*

How can modern “disembedded” human beings be re-embedded in a transcendental framework in which they find “true humanity?” How does the mediation between What We Have Become and the Christian narrative of God’s kingdom with which Christians want to identify themselves take shape? In this evaluative section I will briefly point out the different perspectives on human life in Moltmann’s theology so far (§2.5.1). I will then aim to sharpen once more the question of to which Christian view of human life and of Christian identity (i.e. Christian existence) this leads (§2.5.2.). On the basis of this I will briefly focus on the question of “relevance” for society (§2.5.3.) and make some anticipatory remarks with regard to the following chapter (§2.5.4.).

#### 2.5.1. Fundamental Perspectives on Human Beings

In the course of this chapter we have come across different fundamental perspectives on human life (cf. §2.3.4):

1. *The human being and the Deus absconditus.* The lethargy which Moltmann observes, the inability to cope with the plurality and antagonism of images, the modern human being’s “hiddenness” are all related to the “hiddenness” of God today. The “death of God” is the key to understanding

modern human beings. They are no longer embedded in the transcendent frame of their ancestors. The *homo absconditus* is the reflection of the *deus absconditus*. The apathy and hopelessness cannot therefore be reduced to sociological or psychological factors only. It is ultimately a matter of a terrifying godforsakenness.

2. *The human being and the revelation of the Wholly Other.* The second insight is directly related to this. Moltmann adheres to the idea that the knowledge of human beings and the knowledge of God are reciprocal and that this reciprocal relationship is the perspective from which we must interpret the human condition. Christian theology does not merely produce another concept of humanity and does not fix humankind into an ideal portrait but “locates” humankind before the final unavoidable reality of God. Humans discover who they are at the boundary of transcendence in their immanent historical reality, where the infinite touches the finite. Theologically speaking, the question of humankind is raised in confrontation with the hiddenness of God. The “apocalypse” of the “hidden” human being is intrinsically related to the revelation of the hidden God. This revelation could only be “expressed” in a dialectical way. Knowledge of God is not the result of the human’s search for God in his situation of hopelessness but, conversely, this situation comes sharply into view only when he grasps the God-given liberation.

3. *The human being in Christological perspective.* Moltmann’s dialectical theology has a Christological focus: the dialectic between transcendence and immanence is fundamentally the cross-resurrection dialectic. Christian anthropology is an anthropology of the crucified and risen Christ. In his book *Man*, in which he would pursue his central anthropological analyses and starting points of the 1960s he writes: “The fact that in between the mirrors and masks in which men encounter themselves, the hard reality of the crucified Lord is represented, is the specific element in the Christian doctrine of man” (1974b: 21).

4. *The human being in pneumatological perspective.* Especially through Moltmann’s revisiting of Calvinist theology, the role of the Holy Spirit in the process of salvation is highlighted. We saw that “certainty of life” was the major issue in the 1950s. In his attempt to go beyond theological “actualism” he articulated the two Calvinist themes of the God-human relationship: predestination (expressing God’s faithfulness in fulfilling his promise and preserving his people) and perseverance (expressing the believer’s “persistence” on his way to the fulfilment of God’s promise in the future). In line with Calvin Moltmann speaks of “a pneumatologically

founded subjective perseverance and continuity of faith.” There is not only the possibility of salvation offered to human beings once and for all in Christ but also the once-only and irrevocable outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Moltmann thus not only presumes a “God-with-us” but also a “God-in-us.” Hence he entertains the possibility of growth in faith. It must be emphasized that the indwelling of the Spirit is a *historical-eschatological* and not a historical-transitory gift. On his way towards the future, in the radical historicity of existence, the believer is sustained by the “indwelling” of the Spirit as a permanent guide.

5. *The human being in eschatological perspective.* Humans are historical beings who find their humanity in the salvation history through hope for and anticipation of the promised future of the faithful covenant God. The human being has no “nature” but a history. In other words, what makes him human is not something pre-given or some platonic ideal transcending his concrete historical situation but the promise of the future of the covenant God. This is worked out Christologically (Christ as the final focus of this future), but there are also pneumatological motives, derived from Calvinist theology (humans are filled with and guided by the Holy Spirit).

6. *The human being from the perspective of the apostolate.* Humans must remain faithful to the world. With Bonhoeffer, this has a Christocentric basis. The whole cosmos is under the messianic rule of the risen Christ (only later, in his theology of the 1980s and 1990s, would pneumatological motives enter his theology on this point). Christians do not lose their “identity” when they identify themselves with the world. On the contrary, since God’s unconditional “yes” to the world in Christ, the world is of great theological importance. Christians are not indifferent to the fate of the earth. They expect the kingdom of God *on earth as it is in heaven*.

These insights, still “loose threads” in Moltmann’s theological enterprise of the 1950s, receive further elaboration in his theology of hope. First, there are the developments in society at which I hinted in §2.1. There was a much broader social basis for a bold and imaginative theology of hope. “Hope was in the air.” At the same time, a further fragmentation of social life can be observed. In the plurality of modern society, more than ever before, humans experience that they are not identical with themselves. None of the many contradictory answers that overwhelm them prove to be compelling in any way. For Moltmann, this is the major challenge of liberating contemporary Christian anthropology. In *Man* he would, similarly, speak of a “hall of thousand mirrors and masks” in which humans have to find their way (1974b: 2).

Secondly, there was the discovery of Bloch and his “model of transcendence.” As Bauckham writes, this served as a *catalyst* that brought together the convergent influences of Moltmann’s early theology (Bauckham 1995: 2, cf. 1987: 3ff.). We could say that the idea of humans as pilgrims on their way to the future and the idea of humans remaining faithful to and taking responsibility in the here and now are related in a messianic view of reality, which is conceived as being open to the future *itself*, and in an interpretation of the universal meaning of the Christ event in which the whole of reality is included in the “death of God” on Good Friday, in the resurrection to eternal life on Easter and in the reconciling history of the Spirit moving towards the final dawn of God’s reign.

In the course of this study we will see how the six perspectives on human life just indicated return in Moltmann’s theology, how they change and how they are complemented by new perspectives.

### 2.5.2. The Apocalypse of the Hidden Human Being? The Problem of Identity

In Bloch’s philosophy, humanity is the Archimedean point of reality. Ontologically speaking, reality is open towards the future, but it requires that humans arise and actively grasp the transcendent future.<sup>54</sup> Humans find themselves, their identity, their being truly human in *hope* and *action*. Moltmann’s anthropology differs significantly. It is, similarly, a messianic, eschatological anthropology, but he remodels Bloch’s messianism in a Christological way. The question “who makes the possible possible?” leads to a stress on God’s promise, which was given a sharp delineation in the Christ event. Hope thus becomes *hope based upon a transcendental promise in the concrete history of Christ*. The question “what about the no longer possible?” leads to a focus on hope for the hopeless and thus on solidarity with the poor and the oppressed. Thus action becomes *solidarity with the suffering in self-emptying love*. In short, it is not Prometheus but Christ who is the prototype of true humanity.

We have seen how Moltmann presents a theology that is fundamentally dialectical. Humans find themselves at the “boundary” of transcendence and immanence, in the tension between giving up immanent securities and identifications on the one hand and identifying with the dawning transcendent future on the other. Moltmann’s Christological focus,

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<sup>54</sup> As Moltmann interprets: “The future can bring everything or nothing, heaven or hell, life or death. Thus the future is full of salvation but also full of danger” (1969: 16).

his cross-resurrection dialectic, constitutes his anthropology, which can be labelled as *messianic*. It does so in two ways:

1. In the first place, humans become human through hope—not merely hope as such but hope in the fulfilment of God’s *promise* focussed in the Christ event. The promissory event of resurrection identifies the human being (*TH*: 91). Only within the horizon of the resurrection of Christ does the question of being truly human emerge, the question of what makes a human being human (*TH*: 196). This question is answered by opening up a way, a promise, a future, in which “truth” comes to human beings.

Communion with Christ, the new being in Christ, proves to be the way for man to become man. In it true human nature emerges, and the still hidden and unfulfilled future of human nature can be sought in it. This is an openness of human existence towards the world and towards the future—an openness grounded, manifested and kept alive by that openness of the revelation of God which is announced in the event of the resurrection of Christ and in which this event points beyond itself to an *eschaton* of the fulness of all things (*TH*: 196).

This openness of Christian existence is not a special case of general human openness, Moltmann stresses. It is not a special form of the “*cor inquietum*, the restless heart that is part of man’s created make-up” but “the historic and history-making *cor inquietum* of man [that] arises from the *promissio inquieta*.”<sup>55</sup> In fact, the resurrection of Christ goes on being such a *promissio inquieta* “until it finds rest in the resurrection of the dead and a totality of new being.” True humanity is thus found where human beings participate in the Resurrection of Christ by hoping for the future reign of God.

Biblically speaking, Moltmann claims (thus going beyond Barth and Bultmann), this finding peace in God must be understood *historically*. Only in the future will humans find rest in God. He writes that whenever humans are addressed in the Bible, it is not a view of the *essence* of humanity that is given but a certain history is introduced, in which human beings are

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<sup>55</sup> Moltmann refers obviously to Augustine: the “restlessness of one’s heart” continues till one finds rest in God. Again, he defines Christian faith over against “Greek” thinking, this time by comparing Augustine and Aristotle. Whereas the latter speaks of the human soul, he lists the powers of the soul, Augustine asks the question “What am I before the face of God?” This question implies a restlessness; it goes beyond the focus on the powers of the soul in the human being’s fear of himself and his inscrutability” (1961a: 26).

involved through *call*, *election* and *promise* of God. “The human being discovers the true secret of being human in history, which opens up his future to him.” In other words, it is not his being tied to nature or his own self-affirmation that helps him to understand himself. He only understands himself in the light of that history in which his future is announced. Not what the human being *is* but the fact that *he will become something* has to be considered. Moltmann quotes a rabbinic commentary: “God created all things finished but he created humans for hope” (1961a: 27).

This notion of the not-yet-identified human being on his way to the “home of identity” involves a critical distance towards society. Human beings are the “pilgrim people of God.” As Hebrews 13:13f. states, they have no “continuing city” (*TH*: 304). Pilgrims cherish principally the unrest that keeps them on the move. Moltmann writes: “The unrest of his heart leads to a constant iconoclasm of hope against the concepts of humankind that are intended to establish and define what he is conclusively” (1961a: 27). He supports this by referring to the Old Testament prohibition against images, which he makes clear concerns not only God but people as well: “The keeping of the prohibition against images is the prerequisite for human beings to become human, for it keeps their still hidden but announced future open to them and brings them into the movement of becoming.” The iconoclasm of fixed images of humankind is the negative side of the affirmation of humankind in history through hope. The Old Testament patriarch Abraham is an archetypal example. He is not told who he is but who he will be at the end of the road that leads him from everything that constitutes his being (family, homeland, relationships). The person who is involved in God’s history finds his identity through the promise of his future. His being human becomes historical and his history becomes *messianic*, i.e. full of the promised future that announces itself. Every present becomes painfully insufficient, a “not yet” that points beyond itself, because the sting of the promised uncovering of humankind is disconcerting in the present. The hope for God’s future can thus only be experienced when all human hopes and securities are radically doubted. The human being finds life, but it is hidden in the promised, not as yet appeared future of Christ.

2. Such a critical “incongruence” does not mean leaving the world to its own fate. According to Moltmann’s messianic anthropology, the human finds himself, in the second place, in action, not in Promethean action but in “love as self-renouncing.” The central biblical text is Luke 17.33: (cf. 1961a: 29). Biblically speaking, the *Menschwerdung* of human beings takes its bearings from the *Menschwerdung* of God. The apocalypse of humankind depends on the apocalypse of God. However, where the apocalypse of God and human beings breaks in, it has “no form or beauty” but is seen in the form

of the *Crucified*. The *Menschwerdung* of human beings can only happen in following the *kenosis* of God, as described in the old Christ hymn in Philipians 2. Seen in this way, Christ is not an anthropological figure or an example but the way of *Menschwerdung*: one gains oneself by abandoning oneself, in self-emptying service to one's neighbour (1961a: 30, cf. *TH*: 92). Human beings do not thus achieve identify by disregarding the negativity of life but by opening themselves to pain, patience and the "dreadful power of the negative," as Hegel stated. Moltmann holds that taking the "pain of love and self-emptying" upon oneself is possible "in the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead." In sum, it is not in the *Harmonientraum* of the "complete man" that removes the painful reality nor in the ironical retreat from this painful reality but in the acceptance of this reality in *kenosis* and the passion of love one finds himself. Every self-affirmation without the acceptance of non-being in *kenosis* evaporates into formless mist.

This leads to a theological answer to the question of how modern human beings, within the multitude and antagonism of images and roles, can find "identity" (i.e. a liberating way of Christian existence). In Moltmann's own words:

The torment of the "hidden human being" in the antinomies of his reality but also the excuses of the person who hides behind the social roles and covers himself can be sublimated and overcome in becoming human [*Menschwerdung*] through hope in the eventual apocalypse of the person and in the becoming human through passionate and therefore self-renouncing love. (1961a: 31)

Finding "true humanity" thus takes place at the boundary of immanence and transcendence, in the dialectics of cross and resurrection. On the one hand, humans find themselves as historical beings, or more precisely, as beings participating in the promissory history of the faithful God. On the other hand, humans become human when they remain faithful to the earth, in self-emptying love. Both the urge to be "on the way" and to remain faithful to the earth are related in a new model of transcendence in which the cross-resurrection dialectic embraces the whole of reality and in which the whole of reality is open towards the future of final peace and reconciliation.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Once more, let me stress that Moltmann does not want to offer a totalitarian view of history. Although it is a universal view about a final whole, it is not aimed at applying a concept of totality to history. Moltmann describes a salvation history that starts with the *concrete* history of Jesus Christ which opens the world to the universal perspective of God's future reign.

### 2.5.3. *Missio* and *Pro-missio*: The Issue of Relevance

The lines of Moltmann's messianic anthropology are continued in his theology of missionary presence in modern society. The different elaborations on this—the final chapter of *Theology of Hope* (*TH*: 304ff.), 1969: 108–28—confirm what I have indicated in my discussion of his anthropology: Moltmann addresses the problem of the contemporary period from a *theological* perspective. The position of the Christian believer, the church, and Christian institutions is evaluated not primarily on the basis of sociological analyses (what could be their *function* today) but on the basis of a theological analysis of their essence, i.e. their mission, their *call*. In other words, he does not ask what society can expect from the church today (I will limit myself to the church here) but why the church exists at all and what its very nature is.

Theologically speaking, the church is the body of Christ. Its identity is therefore messianic. But, as Moltmann stresses, it has its nature as the body of the crucified and risen Christ only “where in specific acts of service it is obedient to its mission to the world” (*TH*: 327). In addition, “its existence is completely bound to the fulfilling of its service.” Although Moltmann does not explicitly mention Van Ruler at this point, the influence of the latter's apostolate theology is undeniable. The church is “nothing in itself;” it exists solely “for the world” (Bonhoeffer can also be heard in the background, of course). “Church for the world”—what does that mean? With the help of the Reformed concept of church Moltmann states that “church” is not identical with “the organized institution with all its public functions” or the “congregation” of believers around word and sacrament. Christianity is “represented in ‘church’ and ‘congregation’ and in Christians at their worldly callings” (*TH*: 304). We can recognize Bonhoeffer's mandates. At this point, Moltmann maintains,

the decision falls as to whether Christians can become an accommodating group, or whether their existence within the horizon of eschatological hope makes them resist accommodation and their presence has something peculiar to say to the world. (*TH*: 305)

We can also put it this way: at this point it must become clear as to whether Moltmann's theology of hope can offer a credible alternative to the three roles of Christianity described in 2.4.1d.

One could defend the view that, by adjusting itself to these three roles, the church is in some way “church for the world.” Functioning to give relief, the church is thus “church for others” as well. Moltmann would reject such a suggestion. Apodictically he states that being church for the world means “service of the world and work in the world as and where God wishes

it and expects it" (*TH*: 327). God's will, he continues, is articulated in the mission of Christ and the apostolate. Engagement with and hope for the world are not based on humanistic ideals of a new humanity but on the promise and service of Christ. The *missio* of the church is embedded in the *pro-missio* of God's future. In Moltmann's thinking this has a critical function. The mission of the church does not lie within the "horizon of expectation provided by the social roles which society concedes to the Church," but within "its own peculiar horizon of the eschatological expectation of the coming kingdom of God, of the coming righteousness and the coming peace, of the coming freedom and dignity of man" (*TH*: 327). In other words, "the Christian Church has not to serve mankind in order that this world may remain what it is, or may be preserved in the state in which it is, but in order that it may transform itself and become what it is promised to be." Christian hope attacks the unjust structures of this world and embraces the world *in its own horizon of justice*.

Thus Moltmann not only claims that "church for the world" is nothing else but "Church for the kingdom of God," but he also presumes that in its mission the church lays claim to the whole of humanity. Moltmann writes:

... Christianity takes up mankind—or to put it concretely, the Church takes up the society with which it lives—into its own horizon of expectation of the eschatological fulfillment of justice, life, humanity, and sociability ...." (*TH*: 328).

Just as in *Die Gemeinde*, Moltmann does not plea for a Christianization or churchification of the world but for a "secularization" of Christianity. The old mission ideal of reaching every corner of the earth no longer involves the extension of the church's sovereignty but the "invitation" of people into the horizon of promise. The church thus starts from its own perspective on reality, its own "truth." Its engagement with the world is not based upon general ideals of humanity as such but upon the service of the Crucified—its message, or more broadly, its frame of reference, its horizon, is the universal kingdom of God stemming from the promise of the Resurrected. In view of the theme of this study, it is important to keep this universal basis and scope ("centre and horizon") of Moltmann's "transcendental framework" in mind

#### 2.5.4. Anticipatory Questions

Moltmann's theology of hope raises many critical theological questions (*e.g.* concerning the relation between Christology and eschatology). Two points of critique seem very important with regard to my focus on Moltmann's anthropology. He was accused, first, of a futurism that was too abstract (*e.g.*

Berkhof 1967: 183) and, second, of being “too Spartan” (so Harvey Cox, cited in Migliore 1968: 388f.). I will now phrase these points of critique in my own way, thus trying to point out the anthropological difficulties Moltmann would have to face in the further course of his theology.

1. As far as the first point is concerned, I do not merely have in mind the manifest lack of concrete practical strategies (Moltmann acknowledged the “one-sidedness” of *TH*; he countered that it was a programmatic work, a trigger for further debate; 1967a: 205). I am more concerned with the more fundamental question of whether Moltmann’s new model of transcendence truly places the human being in a broader frame of reference in such a way that he can manage to cope with the plurality and antagonism of the many images overwhelming him (that was, as indicated, Moltmann’s own diagnosis). It is striking that Moltmann eventually does not regard *Weltoffenheit* as such as the major problem but only the fact that this openness, this not being identified, is not embedded in a broader horizon of expectation of the future home of identity. Within this horizon *Weltoffenheit* is even something genuinely Christian. But can it be said that among the flux of antagonistic possibilities and images, the hope based upon the promise of a transcendent future is a compellingly necessary frame of reference and solidarity in self-emptying love a compellingly necessary attitude of life?

The answer must be sought in Moltmann’s critical use of Hegel’s assessment of modernity and his speculative Good Friday. The hope that places people in an all-embracing framework is not a hope within the immanent possibilities of modern life but a hope that transcends and embraces life as such because it starts with the “death of God” (it is, therefore, regarded as “hope against hope” and hope for a new creation *ex nihilo*). Anthropologically speaking, this finds its expression in a distinction Moltmann makes at the end of *TH*. We have seen that he considers the calling of the disciples as the “point of identification” of the Resurrected and the Crucified. Accordingly, the promise of the *universal* future of resurrection is implied in this *concrete* historical calling. He now takes up this notion of calling once again and makes a distinction between *call* and *calling*. What he emphasizes is that one should not “dissolve the call in the calling” (*TH*: 333). The call is “once for all, irrevocable and immutable and has its eschatological goal in the hope to which God calls us,”<sup>57</sup> whereas our callings are “historic, changing, changeable, temporally limited, and ... therefore to be shaped in the process of being accepted in terms of call, of hope and of

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<sup>57</sup> Moltmann points to a variety of Bible texts to ground this: Rom. 8:29; 11:29; 1 Cor. 1:9, 26; Phil. 3:14; Eph. 4:11f.; Heb. 6:4ff.

love.” The call always appears only in the singular, whereas “the callings, roles, functions and relationships which make a social claim on man, always appear in an open multiplicity.” Moltmann acknowledges that the modern human being stands in a multilayered network of social dependencies, claims and demands (“our modern society is conspicuously no longer a society of stations, but is rather to be described as a society of mobile jobs”), but this multitude of opportunities and demands does not touch the substance of one’s faith, one’s identity as a Christian, in concrete: the call.

Amid this fulness and wealth of conditions and possibilities, the decisive question for Christian existence is not whether and how man in the fluctuating variety of his social commitments, or at the point of intersection of all these roles in which he is always only partially involved, can be “himself” and can maintain his own identity and continuity with himself. The point of reference of his expressions and renunciations, his activities and sufferings, is not a transcendental Ego upon which he could and must repeatedly reflect in the midst of all his distractions. But the point of reference is his call. It is to this, and not to himself, that he seeks to live. It is this that gives him *identity and continuity*—even, and indeed precisely, where he expends himself in non-identity (italics mine).

Thus Moltmann claims—over the prevailing humanist anthropology—that the human being does not require preserving “himself by himself,” in constant unity with himself. Instead, “in surrendering himself to the work of mission he is *preserved* by the hope inherent in that mission” (*TH*: 334, italics mine). The callings, roles, conditions and claims which society lays upon human beings, he continues,

are not to be examined in regard to whether and how they fully occupy his own self or estrange him from himself but in regard to whether and how far they afford possibilities for the incarnation of faith, for the concretion of hope, and for earthly, historic correspondence with the hoped for and promised kingdom of God and of freedom.

In other words, the criterion for the choice of a concrete “calling” is constituted solely by the one call of Christian hope, based upon the universal “Christ event” of cross and resurrection.

This means that humans first have to identify themselves with this transcendental future and then begin to see how it constitutes a form of Christian existence, of “identity,” in which the multiplicity of modern life

could be faced. *Spero ut intelligam*. Does Moltmann—as Sölle argued—entrench himself too much in the transcendental Word of promise here to link the hope for God’s kingdom to human hopes in concrete situations of hopelessness? True identity, he points out, lies in the future and humans can identify themselves with that future in hope and solidarity. With Bloch, he postulates that both human beings and their world are open to this future. Here lies the problem, which, among others, is highlighted by Rubem Alves (Alves 1969: 55-68, cf. §3.4). Perhaps our world is not as open to the future as Moltmann presumes but closed by all kinds of negative (socio-political) factors. Apparently, he presupposes too easily that humans can break away completely from present identifications and identify themselves with the future reign of God. But as long as he does not make clear how this identification with What We Will Be takes place *within* the tragic situation of What We Have Become (often due to circumstances beyond our control), his anthropology of hope and self-emptying love at least creates the impression that it hovers above the hustle and bustle of daily life. In the next chapter I will show how this would become a major anthropological issue from the late 1960s on.

2. The second question is in line with the first. Does Moltmann’s anthropology not ask too much of people, of their drive, their persistence, their strength, their straightforwardness, their dauntlessness, their responsibility? In Moltmann’s view, the patron saint of modern human being was Sisyphus (*TH*: 24). As Hoekendijk wrote, Sisyphus “mockingly plods along, although he knows that the whole business does not contain a single promise” (Hoekendijk 1967: 47). He tries to unlearn hope. Bloch preferred Prometheus instead, the fearless revolutionary who dreamed of a new future for humanity and stands up to realize this future. Although Moltmann readjusted the concept of humanity that follows from this, one could ask whether his *imago Christi* anthropology is still not too Promethean. Does it not too easily presume that humans *can* stand up to a new future, that they *can* make unequivocal decisions and stick to these, that, moreover, the situations in which they find themselves allow unequivocal decisions? Does Moltmann’s theology of hope not overlook the tragic, the fact that ambiguities are sometimes unsolvable ambiguities, that pluralism of values is sometimes unbridgeable and irreversible, that humans happen to fail in what they resolve to do? Admittedly, the *cross* has a central place in his theology of hope. According to Moltmann, human beings are embedded in the promissory history of the faithful God, in which there is hope for the hopeless because it is an *eschatologia crucis*. But to take part in this history they have to fight on the barricades of transcendence. What do people experience of God, of his history of reconciliation, when all attempts at active tran-

scending collapse? What if one can no longer summon the courage to “empty oneself?” As stated above, Cox remarked that Moltmann’s theology of hope is too Spartan. Too little attention, he claims, is given to celebration, play, and humour as the necessary companions of the struggle for a new world. Notions such as *fruitio dei* and *gloria dei*, discussed in e.g. his article on Cocceius, do not receive much elaboration. Not yet. On this point Moltmann’s writings of the 1970s will display a significant broadening of his anthropology.

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## Singing the Lord's Song in a Foreign Land

### Exercises in Critical Anthropology

#### 3.1. *The Transcendent Freedom of Two Quarrelling Aunts*

It was a remarkable group of Marxists and Christians that gathered in Marienbad, Czechoslovakia, in 1967, a year before the Russian intervention put an end to the Prague spring and, consequently, to so-called “Marxism with a human face.” The third Christian-Marxist dialogue organized by the so-called *Paulus-Gesellschaft* drew the attention of nearly two hundred philosophers, theologians, scientists and about sixty journalists (Nenning 1967: 455ff.). Among the eighty-five members of the German delegation were Jürgen Moltmann and his Roman Catholic colleague Johann Baptist Metz, whom he had first met two years before at Bloch's eightieth birthday party. In the report of this conference (entitled “God is not completely dead”<sup>58</sup>), today's post-Cold War reader can sample something of the atmosphere of fraternization between Christians and Marxists at that time. The Czech theologian Jan Milic Lochman came to the conclusion already on the first day that “Christians and Marxists here join into a *cantus firmus* in which all notes of discord are endurable and even fruitful.”

The speakers in Marienbad represented the progressive wings of both Christianity and Marxism. In contrast to mainstream church theology, the Christians present were concerned with the revolutionary political implications of the Gospel and in contrast to the closed systems of Leninism and Stalinism, the Marxists for their part were open to religion and transcendence. As Moltmann writes, it was to be expected that the theologians would provide the notion of transcendence and the Marxists responsibility for the development of this world. “However, paradoxically enough, we found it to be exactly the reverse” (1969a: 64). It was the Marxists who

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<sup>58</sup> “Gott ist nicht ganz tot” (Nenning 1967). This title refers to a book by Vitezslav Gardavsky, *Gott ist nicht ganz tot* (Gardavsky 1968) which was translated into German with a foreword by Moltmann.

wanted to talk about “the courage for transcendence.”<sup>59</sup> What these Christians and Marxists shared was their passion for *freedom*. More precisely, both proclaimed that the meaning and goal of human life is determined by freedom as a *transcendent*, future reality, an “alternative future” (Garaudy 1974). In his contribution Moltmann stated firmly that genuine Christian theology proclaims the universal, new, and totally different freedom, initiated by the “coming God,” that will ultimately free the whole creation from its present misery. Such theology understands faith as the beginning and anticipation of this freedom in a world of bondage and slavery. Faith, in other words, means participation in the creative freedom of God under unfree conditions (1967c: 465ff.). Important for both Christians and Marxists was the dialectical relation between the “already” and the “not yet” of this freedom. Precisely this dialectical tension was considered to be the motor for human engagement in the realization of this freedom in our world. It evokes a critical, radical, and radically *eschatological* attitude. Therefore, their common view on freedom was opposed not only to any *institutional fixing* of freedom neutralizing these dialectics (mainstream churches, Stalinism) but also to political *liberalism* that did the same by claiming neutrality and renouncing any ideological interpretation of “freedom.” In fact, as Moltmann put it, such belief in neutrality only safeguards the privileges of those in power.

Christians are, therefore, not, privately, longing for the freedoms of liberalism and pluralistic society in which everyone could be blessed in his own way as long as he does not disturb others, because freedom is no private matter.

In Marienbad progressive Christianity and Marxism thus shared a passion for a freedom that is a *novum*, a completely different reality that stimulates humans to hope and to act correspondingly in daily life. The impact of this meeting on the world outside should not be overestimated (according to some high Prague official, the Czech authorities regarded the Marienbad

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<sup>59</sup> It was a kind of warm strain of Marxism (Bloch, 1986: 205ff.), based on the ideas of the young, humanist Marx, that was presented here. This humanist strand of Marxism could grow and blossom in the climate of “de-Stalinization” fostered by the Russian president Khrushchev (and did so mainly in the so-called satellite states such as Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia and in the Western world). Among the Marxists participating in the Marienbad conversations were the Prague professor Milan Machovec and the prominent French Communist Roger Garaudy, both of whom provided strong impetus to the Christian-Marxist dialogue in several publications.

conference “from the perspective of tourist traffic” (Nenning 1967: 455). Most of those in Marienbad were, apparently, themselves aware of that. Not only they did realize that they represented relatively marginal streams within Christianity and Marxism, but there was apparently also an ominous premonition that they were slowly being overtaken by the spirit of the age. After one of the discussions Metz doubted whether their dialogue could be typical somehow for “tomorrow’s world,” in which, he feared, people do not only no longer have answers to religious and philosophical questions, but also in which they have simply stopped asking questions.<sup>60</sup> Moltmann underscored his suspicions in the following ironic way: “Maybe the world says: what do I have to do with these two old aunts quarrelling here?”

Retrospectively, it is indeed apparent that the Marienbad conference took place at the fault line of two eras: on the one hand the 1960s, characterized by a hope that challenged the world with peaceful “happenings” and by a defrosting of political and religious institutions, and on the other hand the 1970s, marked by much more grim protests against the religious and political establishment, against the increasing technocracy and bureaucracy, against the exploitation of the “Third World,” and against the war in Vietnam. It would soon be clear that (Blochian) philosophies and theologies of hope needed revision in order to be relevant in this changing situation. The message of a transcendent freedom to be grasped in hope and anticipation seemed insufficient. After all, how could one “grasp the possibilities of the world open to the future” in a world that was not at all open to the future but enclosed by dehumanizing structures, patterns, and habits? On the face of it, Christians and Marxists therefore not only shared the same passion for a transcendent freedom but also the very same problem: How can this freedom be grasped in enslaving, oppressive, alienating structures? Or: *How can freedom be realized under the conditions of unfreedom* (cf. Moltmann 1967c: 467)?

Moltmann himself regards the year 1968 as the third “turning point” in his thinking (cf. *CG*: 2, 1997a: 17, *EiT*: 189ff., Moltmann-Wendel 1997: 42). As he writes, the hope he had cherished was frustrated by the end of the Prague Spring, which meant the collapse of the political dream of a united Social Democratic Europe, by the papal encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, which put an end to the openness of the Roman Catholic Church, by the assassination of Martin Luther King (Moltmann happened to be a guest lecturer in the USA at the time and he was deeply moved by the tremendous impact this had on both blacks and whites) and by the assault on the student leader Rudi

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<sup>60</sup> The discussion is printed in: *Neues Forum* 14 (1967): 469ff.

Dutschke. The apparent change of tune in his theology was, by the way, not provoked only by these events but also by the various critiques and misunderstandings of his *Theology of Hope* (in the USA, for instance, Moltmann met people who saw his book as a theological legitimation of the American dream; cf. Volf 1986: 6). Moreover, the early 1970s saw a thorough reflection on the Second World War and the Holocaust in particular. In theology this led to a renewed interest in *theodicy*: Where was God in Auschwitz? Taken together, these circumstances forced Moltmann to break off his work on an “Ethics of Hope” (the planned sequel of *TH*). Instead, he began to develop a theology that was centred around another focus: the *cross* (1997a: 17).

From now on, Christian theology thus “stands and falls with the knowledge of the crucified Christ” (*CG*: 65). It would be a misrepresentation to suggest that in Moltmann’s theology “the cross” (and “cross experiences” of suffering people today) had been thus far overshadowed by a militant theology of hope. We have noted the cross-resurrection dialectic inherent in his earlier theology of hope. As Moltmann himself claims, his “theology of the cross” is fundamentally a logical consequence of the dialectical structure of *Theology of Hope* (1974c: 14,<sup>61</sup> cf. Bauckham 1995: 100). We could perhaps describe the shift in emphasis as a transition from Christological eschatology to eschatological Christology. This expresses both the continuity and the shift in emphasis. On the one hand, the core of *Theology of Hope* was still present, namely the theological idea that in the identification of the Resurrected (representing the *novum* of God’s liberating future) and the Crucified (representing the suffering world) our liberation from unfree situations is implied. On the other hand, Moltmann acknowledges that his former stress on hope, anticipation and promise overlooked the plain fact that supposedly open history is blocked by structures that obstruct humans in standing up and grasping the possibilities of this future (he speaks of “vicious circles” of economic, political, cultural, environmental and even theological alienation, cf. §3.2.2).

Moltmann, therefore, wanted to develop a form of public theology that was intended to do justice to the concrete forms of oppression and alienation in this world. He did so in imitation of and, very soon, in colla-

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<sup>61</sup> Moltmann: “... to emphasize the theology of the cross in this way shows it to be an inevitable consequence flowing from the theory and practice of the theology of hope” (1974c: 14).

boration with Metz (1970: 290).<sup>62</sup> They labelled their new approach “political theology,”<sup>63</sup> which was obviously a highly suspicious term in post-war Germany (cf. Moltmann 1974c: 14). There are significant differences between both theologians, but for now I limit myself to the most obvious fundamental ideas they have in common. What Metz and Moltmann definitely not intended was a theological legitimation for any existing political party, interest or whatsoever. In fact, their approach could basically be described as a form of fundamental theology that was intended as a re-thinking of the relation between the transcendent reality of God’s future and the immanent, godless reality of oppression, suffering and alienation.

The motivation for their political theology was basically twofold: a protest against the individualistic trends in theology (notably Bultmann’s existentialism<sup>64</sup>) which tended to confirm the “status quo” instead of grasping the possibilities of God’s kingdom and an understanding of the gospel under the conditions of the present and, furthermore, a *transformation* of these conditions.<sup>65</sup> Manifestly, the philosophical ally of theology was no

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<sup>62</sup> Moltmann took up the “direction indicator” of Metz’s theology “by applying my ‘theology of hope’—with a theological principle of antithesis—to the whole area of political life. The theology of the cross is the principle of antithesis that makes this step possible” (1974c: 14).

<sup>63</sup> Metz was the first to use this label in 1966. My references to Metz’s ideas are based upon his book *Theology of the World* (Metz 1969), and upon Johns 1976 (mainly 87-156) and Peters 1998 (mainly 29-82).

<sup>64</sup> As noted in §2.4.1, Bultmann’s existentialist hermeneutic appeared to be a rather popular way of coming to terms with the hermeneutical problems of modern times (cf. Moltmann 1968a: 132ff.). As 1968a and 1970b show, the political theology of Metz and Moltmann emerged from the very same questions of modern hermeneutical philosophy. The necessary translation of the Gospel in view of the diachronic difference between the worldview and ethics of the apostles and contemporary Christians is, however, not sought in “saying the same thing in a different way” but in reflection on the present-day consequences of the ethics of the Gospel (for a discussion of this hermeneutical approach, with special reference to Moltmann, see Vroom 1978: 157ff., in particular 161ff.).

<sup>65</sup> This double motive is expressed clearly in the following quote from Metz’s *Theology of the World*: “I understand political theology, first of all, to be a critical correction of present-day theology inasmuch as this theology shows an extreme privatising tendency .... At the same time, I understand this political theology to be a positive attempt to formulate the eschatological message under the conditions of our present society” (Metz 1969: 107). Moltmann describes the

longer predominantly Bloch, with his optimistic, “positive” dialectic of hope. In the social philosophy of the Frankfurt School they discovered a “negative” dialectic that corresponded to their quest for freedom in unfree conditions (cf. Moltmann 1968a: 11ff., 1970b: 135ff.). The important point was, I think, the difference in *anthropology*. Whereas Bloch put his trust in the Promethean human being, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer as well as the popular Herbert Marcuse and Jürgen Habermas—also focussing on the philosophical anthropology of young Marx—emphasized and analysed the dehumanization and alienation of the “one-dimensional man” in capitalist society. There are at least three important characteristics of the way Metz and Moltmann tried to implement a “negative dialectic” in their theology.

First, Metz and Moltmann followed basically Adorno and Horkheimer in their assessment of modernity. Contrary to both apocalyptic, “anti-revolutionary” and messianic, chiliastic interpretations, they saw the Enlightenment as a *dialectical process*. On the one hand they stressed the liberating, emancipating power of the Enlightenment. With Kant, they held that the Enlightenment freed people from their self-incurred immaturity (Metz considered the Enlightenment to be the major secular history of liberation and noticed a striking parallel with the way early Christianity liberated human beings from the classic ancient worldview: just as the latter “de-divinized” the world and saw it as the unfinished, historical process of human self-fulfilment before God, the first freed humans from their cosmological bondage and gave their existence a historical horizon). On the other hand, they resisted any uncritical appraisal of modernity that neglected the reverse side (not only colonialism, imperialism, national socialism, etc. but also, and more profoundly, the alienation of Western human beings in a technocratic and bureaucratic society). The freedom of the subject to make public use of his reason and to shape the world according to his own ideas (Metz called this “hominization”) does not guarantee a *humanization*. On the contrary, the actual forms of the Enlightenment freedom created structures that enslave people and deprive them of their creativity.

Secondly, the urgent question, accordingly, became: How does one express human freedom within this antagonistic situation? Metz and Moltmann concurred with the so-called “*critical theory* of society” of the Frankfurt School, which basically boiled down to the idea of the “negation

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aim of political theology as such: “... to represent Christian freedom in the realm of political reason and in the public conflicts of our society” (1970a: 290).

of the negative.” In order to grasp true freedom, one should not start with analogies in contemporary society but with *contradiction*.

The future of freedom and its new possibilities are opened up in the *negation* of negative, enslaving structures and institutions. In fact, the critical element of this social theory is thus not outlining what genuine freedom is but what it manifestly is not. Metz and Moltmann followed this starting point in what was labelled a “*critical theory* of God” (CG: 69). As stated above, this was not a concrete plan for social action as such but a theology that examined the fundamental question of how the transcendent God reveals himself and his kingdom in our immanent reality and how we can know it. It was argued that true freedom as revealed by God cannot be known through the Aristotelian epistemological principle of analogy (“like seeks like”) but only in its opposite (CG: 25ff.). This principle of alienation was believed to be expressed in the gospel which portrayed Jesus as a *servant* and as the *crucified*. Moltmann writes:

In a culture that glorifies success and happiness and is blind to the suffering of others, remembering that at the center of the Christian faith there stands an unsuccessful, suffering and shamefully dying Christ can open man's eyes to the truth, can shatter the tyranny of pride and awaken solidarity with those who are hurt and humiliated by our culture. Remembering that God raised up a crucified one and made him the hope of the world can help the churches to break off their alliances with the powerful and enter into the brotherhood of the lowly. (Moltmann 1970: 291)

Hence, the “synthesis” of transcendence and immanence in critical political theology lies in the acceptance of Jesus in the form of the crucified servant. In Jesus as a servant, the distance between God and world is more apparent than ever and yet God accepts him as the Christ. God and world are thus not related in the powerful institutions of this world that claim divinity but in the crucified Christ. Remembering Jesus as servant and as the one who was crucified as a rebel and a blasphemer undermines every political and religious abuse of power in his name and places the world under the eschatological proviso (Metz spoke of the *dangerous memory* of Christianity).

Third, Metz and Moltmann emphasized that this critical theory is liberating only if it goes beyond mere “pure theory” (e.g. CG: 65ff.). Their main hermeneutical concern was not how the gospel's eschatological message of freedom could be translated into the modern thinking of individuals and groups but what “imitation of the crucified” means for the social and economic problems of today. They followed the so-called “theory-practice” of the Frankfurt School, based on young Marx, notably on his

eleventh and last thesis on Feuerbach: “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point is to *change* it” (Marx 1975: 423). Similarly Metz and Moltmann rejected the distinction between theology as “pure theory” and its practical application. Moltmann states: “What God has joined together in Christ let no man put asunder in metaphysics” (1974c: 21). In other words, the imitation of Christ is not the mere application of one’s faith but the essence of it (in the early 1970s Moltmann was even tempted to call the practice of the faith the *criterion* of the theory).<sup>66</sup>

We will not proceed any further with this examination of Moltmann’s political theology as such (the association with Metz, the influence of the Frankfurt School, etc.). We will focus instead on the anthropological question of how transcendent freedom can transform the lives of people living in unfree conditions. *How can they be “re-embedded” in the promise of and anticipation of the future in a world in which existing structures keep them closed to this future?* We could say that Moltmann’s eschatology is “grounded” in his new theology of the cross. The “mediation” between earthly and divine reality moves from the transcendent future to the cross in the midst of historical reality. In other words, the God of liberation is not only “knowable” in hope and promise but is visible in the face of the Crucified. In this chapter I will show how this insight led in the late 1960s and the 1970s to a significant modification and radicalization of his model of transcendence that was examined in the previous chapter. In §3.2 I will provide a general outline of Moltmann’s anthropological perspective on Christian “identity” today, which constitutes the basis for a liberating Christian presence in this world. I will try to show that his theology of the cross is a deepening of the idea that the human being “finds himself” at the boundary of the transcendent future of God’s kingdom within his immanent reality. On the one hand, Moltmann emphasizes much more strongly the fundamental *homelessness* of Christians in this world, suggesting that the future is grasped in the negation of the oppressive power structures of this world. On the other hand, he offers the contours of a *trinitarian* theology, viewing the Trinity as the “history of God” which contains within itself “the whole abyss of godforsakenness, absolute death and non-God” and into

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<sup>66</sup> H.M. Vroom has shown the problematic character of the idea of practice as verification of the theory (he discusses Moltmann’s proposals). Which practice is the right one? One plainly needs the theory in order to judge the practice (Vroom 1978: 168ff.). It should be mentioned that in Moltmann’s thinking, the question of theory-practice was a minor issue. He criticized this axiom himself (Moltmann 1988b: 92ff.).

which all human history is “taken up” (CG: 246). Humans can come “home” here and now in this *counter-history* of the triune God. This chapter is also designed to point out fundamental problems of this paradigm which came to light. With good reason it has been argued that the awareness of ecological problems in the early 1980s forced Moltmann to readjust his historical, prophetic kingdom-of-God theology (I will come back to this in CHAPTER FOUR). However, the limits of his theological paradigm become visible already in his debate with Latin American liberation theologians. In §3.3 I will present a brief case study focussing on Moltmann’s human rights theology, which anticipates the problems on which I will elaborate in §3.4 by spotlighting his conflict with the Latin Americans.

### 3.2. *True Humanity in the Messianic Intermezzo: A “Critical Theory of God”*

“How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?” This quote from Psalm 137 (in Moltmann 1972: 2) grasps the quintessence of Moltmann’s anthropology in the late 1960s and 1970s (including different articles on “political theology,” his *Theology of Play*, his anthropology *Man*, his theology of the cross in *The Crucified God*, and his ecclesiology *Church in the Power of the Spirit*). It expresses at least three major assumptions which were typical of Moltmann’s theology at the time.

First, the *telos* of human life is *gloria dei*. Referring to Calvin’s Geneva Catechism and the Westminster Catechism of 1647, Moltmann can state explicitly that “joy is the meaning of human life, joy in thanksgiving and thanksgiving in joy” (1972: 19). The meaning of life does not lie in that it has a demonstrable purpose but in the acceptance of life in joy (we will see how Moltmann, anthropologically speaking, plays with both Luther’s *justification* theology and Calvinist ideas about *sanctification*).

Second, humans experience “true humanity” in *freedom*, which for Moltmann is a “jubilant, liberating laughter.” However, we live in a “foreign land,” in exile so to say, in an “alienated and alienating society” (1972: 2). Our freedom is so obscured by human sinfulness and hostile behaviour towards one another that the realization of freedom is not possible. Everywhere, in many spheres of life, human beings suffer from political oppression, economic exploitation, cultural alienation, and the emptiness of a life in a bureaucratic society.

Third, true liberation is only possible in so far as both humans and the world are liberated from these alienating structures. That, however, sounds like utopia. Is a life of *gloria Dei* possible and, moreover, do we have the *right* to “sing” in face of the world’s suffering? As Moltmann asks, “[H]ow

can we laugh and enjoy ourselves when innocent people are being killed in Vietnam? How can we play when children are starving in India? How can we dance when human beings are being tortured in Brazil” (1972: 2)? He refers to the famous play *The Fiddler on the Roof* he once saw at that time. It struck him that in spite of oppression, poverty, and pogroms the Jewish community of Anatevka kept on singing “the Lord’s song in an foreign land.” He wonders whether they did this to suppress the consciousness of their problems or whether there is “really such a thing as freedom in the midst of slavery, joy in the midst of suffering, and praising God in the groaning of his creatures” (1972: 3). This, I think, is the core question of Moltmann’s anthropology. For clarity’s sake, it is not the question of those “who are incapable of feeling, of mourning and suffering with others because they are deceiving themselves with their shallow, self-satisfied optimism,” but of

those who are mourning and suffering with others, who are protesting and feeling oppressed by the excess of evil in their society, who are weighed down by their own impotence so that they are either ready to despair or seek to forget. (1972: 2)

In this section I will analyze Moltmann’s ideas about a relevant theology from the perspective of theological anthropology. I will do so in six steps. First, I will look at Moltmann’s assessment of the “identity-involvement dilemma” which churches are apparently facing (§3.2.1). Second, I will follow Moltmann in baring the anthropological roots of this crisis (§3.2.2). Third, I will explore his *theological* diagnosis as well as his theological “cure,” a social doctrine of justification (§3.2.3). Fourth, I will show how this is supposed to match a critical attitude of “non-identity” (§3.2.4). Fifth, I will indicate how he integrates this “critical theory of God” into a sacramental doctrine of God’s presence (§3.2.5). Finally, I will evaluate the different steps taken so far and, anticipating the following sections, I will ask how this could lead to a relevant presence of Christian faith today (§3.2.6).

### 3.2.1. Facing the Identity-Involvement Dilemma

Moltmann points out how churches are struggling to pass on the Christian faith today. In *CG* he points out that in its present form and ideology, the church is rapidly losing contact with “the scientific, social and political reality of the world around it.” He notes anxiously that many people who are

engaged in “social action”<sup>67</sup> are leaving the church (*CG*: 8ff.). He does not really blame the lapsed churchgoers but almost exclusively attributes the situation to the church’s “lack of contact and blindness to reality.” For him,

[the] exodus from a blinded society, which has psychologically and socially repressed its pain at the suffering in die world, and pushes people who suffer to the fringes of society, in order to withdraw undisturbed into its own small groups, consequently led to an exodus from a church which did not dissociate itself with sufficient determination from these inner and outward defence-mechanisms of its social environment, but enjoyed the religious tolerance of a frigid society, and which, in order to maintain itself in being, has made a dishonourable peace with society and become sterile. (*CG*: 9)

This critique of the church is possibly even sharper than in *TH* (cf. §2.4.1). The church fails to offer what people, in spite of (post-) Stalinist distortions, do find in Marxism: a powerful critique of society and a mobilizing “dream of the future.” It is such groups that display the vital messianic lifestyle of “inner homelessness,” reformation and hope that the church is actually supposed to foster. The church, however, has become settled in our unjust society. In the current moment of crisis (and of *kairos*, of unexpected possibilities<sup>68</sup>), it clings to old securities, to time-tested beliefs, norms and values, to religious stability (cf. *CPS*: xvii). Moltmann’s conception of church theology and practice is clear: fundamentalism fossilizes the Bible by regarding it as an infallible authority; dogmatism freezes the living Christian tradition; conservatism makes liturgy immovable; Christian moralism leads to deathly legalism. He concludes: “Only old, tired and resigned people who no longer understand the world find in such a church a repository of unchanging ideas, the affectionately remembered past and religious folklore.”

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<sup>67</sup> The way Moltmann uses the term “social action” trivializes the manifest social relevance of the mainstream churches. These certainly *were* taking part in social action (diaconal and charitable projects, pastoral care, education, etc.), although not in the socio-*political* way Moltmann had in view. He has in mind student protests for more democratic structures, protests against nuclear warfare, the sit-ins against racial segregation in which he joined in the USA, etc.

<sup>68</sup> Moltmann writes that in the moment of crisis there is a unique opportunity for “supplying a new, personal answer which will stand up to life—an answer man can live and die with” (*CPS*: xvii).

In his critique of the church (and his attempt to explain the “exodus” from the church), Moltmann starts from (at least) two major, interdependent presumptions. In the first place, the church underestimates the seriousness of the problems of human beings in a pragmatic and dehumanized society. Church proclamation is based on anthropological premisses that have become outdated in the current age of crisis (cf. *CPS*: xvii). It still regards the social and political circumstances as nothing but the “mere stage on which the practical, moral and religious drama of man has been played out.” Today, however, it is precisely these conditions—largely created by human beings themselves—that have become the problem. “The question is raised of how far this man-made world has a human form” (Moltmann 1974b: 24). In *Man* Moltmann writes:

The growing discontent of man in affluent societies, his passivity, his boredom, and his outbreaks of absurdities and obscenities, his anxieties and his feeling of guilt in the face of starving societies show that it is in fact *humanity itself that is in danger*. (1974b: 27; italics mine)

Theological reflection on the modern world today must, therefore, “take up the problem in which man is placed through the fact that he is radically altered, if not crushed, by the overwhelming power of his own works” (1974b: 26). In other words, the urgent anthropological question is not how to save the individual soul but *how to humanize a pragmatic, technological society*.

In the second place, the church has, in Moltmann’s opinion, a distorted image of its mission in the world. The way it tries to be present in society is still based on the aims of christianization and churchification. Instead, it must show that it does not exist for its own sake but for the “humanity of man” (*CG*: 12). That this is a problematic notion will become clear in the course of this chapter. The emphasis here is that hence the “relevance” of the church is not only expressed at the spiritual or individual level but also (and apparently almost exclusively) at the socio-political level. Or, better: the spiritual and individual are integrated into the broader socio-political framework (Moltmann, by the way, dissociates himself from any fanatic left-wing moralism in which this may result, especially in *Theology of Play*). The task of the church is to offer assistance “in the socializing of the individual, the task of giving meaning to his life and the humanization of society” (*CG*: 13).

In the light of this diagnosis, Moltmann discerns a dilemma which is most sharply defined in *CG*. “The Christian life of theologians, churches and

human beings," he writes, "is faced more than ever today with a double crisis: the *crisis of relevance* and the *crisis of identity*:"

The more theology and the church seek to become relevant to the problems of the present, the deeper they become involved in a crisis of their own Christian identity. The more they seek to maintain their own identity in traditional dogmas, rites, and moral views, the more irrelevant and incredible they become. (CG: 7)

He calls this double crisis the *identity-involvement dilemma*<sup>69</sup> for obvious reasons: "Where identity is found, relevance is called into question. Where relevance is achieved, identity is called into question" (CG: 25). Apparently, the relation of involvement and identity in contemporary Christianity is "inversely proportional" (cf. Míguez Bonino 1975: 145). In spite of their attempts to preserve both identity and relevance for society, inevitably theology and church seem either to lose the first in stressing the second or the second in stressing the first. How can this dilemma be tackled? Is there a way of doing theology in which relevance is rooted in identity and in which, conversely, identity automatically leads to relevance?

To all appearances, the dilemma displays a contradiction between conservatives and progressives, between the "vertical" and the "horizontal" dimension of faith, between evangelization and humanization. In *The Crucified God* Moltmann emphasizes that the problem is much more complicated. In his view both "conservatives" and "progressives" suffer from the *double* crisis of relevance and identity. As far as the *identity crisis* is concerned, Moltmann seems to follow two definitions of identity (which makes his analysis a little confusing). The one is identity as a fixed set of beliefs and practices. In Moltmann's eyes this definition is implied by conservatives advocating the protection of true Christian identity. The other sees identity as a form of Christian existence which, paradoxically, consists of a permanent critique of present identifications (religious ones included). In other words, it seeks a life in "non-identity" (cf. §3.2.4). Moltmann regards this as the genuine definition of (Christian) identity. He draws not only on Jesus's eschatological saying in Mt. 16:25 ("for whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life [for my sake<sup>70</sup>] will find it") but also on modern anthropology, which, he argues, has made this "the basic principle by which man becomes human" (Arnold Gehlen, for

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<sup>69</sup> The fact that in the original German text Moltmann uses the English phrase may indicate that it was a rather common expression.

<sup>70</sup> Moltmann omits this part of the text.

instance, spoke about “the birth of freedom out of alienation”). In the perspective of this latter definition it is clear why for Moltmann those conserving traditional and established forms of being church are losing their identity. For Moltmann, their desperate protection of traditional beliefs is not an act of faith, but a sign of little faith and superstition: “they regard their own obstinate lack of courage [*die eigene starre Mutlosigkeit*] as bearing the cross” (CG: 20). That does not detract from the fact that “progressives” associating themselves with critical groups and movements are also in danger of losing Christian identity (which is more than just being critical and a sense of solidarity with others). However, the question as to whether one abandons Christianity through solidarity with others in a particular political situation may not be raised by the modern “Pharisees” who “stand on what they suppose is the firm ground of the Bible, tradition and the church, and bewail the abandonment by revolutionary youth of everything that is sacred to themselves” (GC: 15). These people do not only underestimate how painful and difficult it is to break away from an “identity” fixed in tradition, habits, etc., but they also refuse to acknowledge that only through such a “self-emptying” will one find a new self or, rather, “true human identity.”

As far as the *crisis of relevance* is concerned, one is, obviously, in danger of losing relevance (i.e. socio-political relevance) if one aims for security and guarantees, builds a defensive wall round one’s own little group and sees oneself as “little flock” or “faithful remnant” in a doomed world. However, “progressives” who are involved in “liberation struggles” also risk a loss of relevance for society. Moltmann speaks of a “decay through uncritical assimilation” (CG: 21). When the Christian message is only a duplicate of what progressive movements regard as “true humanity,” it has become completely superfluous.

We can conclude that, according to Moltmann’s analysis in *The Crucified God*, the identity-involvement dilemma is a multilayered and complicated problem that cannot be reduced to the “false contradiction” between conservatives and progressives. As stated above, Moltmann presumes that humanity itself is at stake and that the church, whose concern is not its own existence but the “humanity of man,” must ask itself: *what is humane* (CG: 14)? For Moltmann, it is obvious that the Christian notion of humanity cannot be fixed in doctrines and morals, thus setting one’s face against society but has to demonstrate its relevance within concrete situations of inhumanity today. On the other hand, the relevance of Christian faith for humanity today does not coincide with social criticism as such (“others practise it”), with commitment to the poor and the wretched (“others fortunately are” committed), or with rebellion against injustice (“others rebel,

often with more determination," *CG*: 13). It must somehow be rooted in Christian identity. An important question urges itself forward. Must the church offer a Christian perspective on what is generally considered to be humane or does it have to pursue its own view of true humanity in the public debate about a humane society? Moltmann takes it for granted that the church must enter the public arena with its own presuppositions, its own "truth." At the same time, he seems to assume commonly shared ideas about what is humane. I will come back on this problem in some more detail in later sections. For now it has become clear that Moltmann pushes the anthropological question "what is humane?" right into the centre of his theological reflection on the crisis of identity and relevance.

### 3.2.2. Vicious Circles of Death

Moltmann intends to proclaim the Christian concept of true humanity not merely to the converted, but to the whole world. However, he refuses to take on the colours of his environment, thus becoming a "chameleon" (*CG*: 11). As a theologian, he sits down at the table to discuss what is "reasonable and humane" and what is actually frustrating the establishment of a "humane society." As stated above, anthropological questions have come to the foreground of Moltmann's reflections. Precisely in his anthropology he contrasts sharply, for instance, Marxist and liberal views. Already in the 1960s he had voiced his doubts with concern to Blochian optimism about the possibilities of humanity (cf. §2.4.2), but the view of human life he now submits is even more critical about optimistic Marxism and, in fact, of the do-it-yourself anthropology of modernity as such. It stresses the mere tragic element of the human situation. The comings and goings of human beings are interwoven in a web they cannot completely survey, let alone weave all by themselves. Liberation from this web is certainly not simply a matter of resistance, education or emancipation.

In *CG* Moltmann points out that this unfree human condition has concrete economic, political, cultural, ecological and religious dimensions. Within these dimensions he further locates so-called "vicious circles of death" (*Teufelskreise des Todes*) that do not allow humans to be human (*CG*: 329ff.). In the *economic* dimension, he distinguishes the vicious circle of poverty and exploitation; in the *political* dimension that of violence and oppression; in the *cultural* dimension underlying the previous dimensions that of racial and cultural alienation; in the *environmental* dimension in which the three dimensions mentioned so far are related to that of the industrial distortion of nature; and finally, in the *theological* dimension enclosing all other dimensions that of meaninglessness and godforsakenness. Moltmann declares that the liberation of humanity takes place in these *con-*

crete vicious circles (hence, academic debates about general views on the bondage of humans or ideological discussions focussing on abstract political and economic structures only are in his eyes far from helpful).

To understand what Moltmann means by his notion of vicious circles it may be illuminating to extrapolate his remarks in *CG* to a concrete form of human alienation he analyzes in other writings: *racial alienation*. We will look at this issue for two reasons. First, it is a problem Moltmann has analyzed thoroughly (his experiences in the USA in 1968 were probably a major impetus for this) and, second, it touches explicitly on the problem of identity.<sup>71</sup> The basic definition of racism Moltmann uses was formulated by UNESCO and adopted by the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Uppsala in 1968:

By racism we mean ethnocentric *pride* in one's own racial group and preference for the distinctive characteristics of that group; belief that these characteristics are fundamentally biological in nature and are thus transmitted to succeeding generations; strong negative feelings towards other groups who do not share these characteristics coupled with the thrust to discriminate against and exclude the outgroup from full participation in the life of the community. (1971c: 253, *CPS*: 183, *EiT*: 196)

In the racist mindset, the characteristics of one's own race are thus identified with the characteristics of humankind *per se*. In situations of white-black racism (on which Moltmann focusses exclusively), to be human means to be white; "non-whites" (*sic!*) are consequently nonpersons, *Untermenschen* or at least humans with less capacities.

In Moltmann's work he reflects on racism from the perspective of the *cultural* vicious circle. "Culture" is defined as "the sphere of the self-representation of persons, groups and peoples in relation to one another and as a whole before the ground of their existence" (*CPS*: 182). By focussing on the cultural aspect, Moltmann could be accused of neglecting the fact that racism is also inherent to political and economical structures. Therefore, it must be stressed that in Moltmann's thinking all dimensions are somehow inter-related (they are dimensions of the same unfree situation of humans). Liberation from the cultural vicious circle is not completely possible without

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<sup>71</sup> In my analysis of Moltmann's perception of racism I focus on Moltmann 1971c and *CPS*: 182ff. (for an insightful elaboration on the effect of the vicious circle of racism see also the section on black theology in his later book *EiT*, pp. 189-216).

liberation from, for instance, poverty. Moltmann does not suggest that a change of heart is sufficient to solve the problem of racism. Conversely, however, a redistribution of power will not be possible without the liberation of humans from a racist mentality (1971c: 253). Thus, although cultural self-representation is always bound up with production and consumption as well as political conflicts and associations, it is not totally absorbed by economic and political processes.

Having defended the view that culture is a relatively independent dimension of the human condition—a dimension to be taken into account in any analysis of socio-political problems—Moltmann goes on to spell out this process of human self-representation. As “questionable beings” that are not “fixed” (cf. §2.4.1), humans are continually trying to define their *personality*, their identity. As Moltmann explains, they want to *justify* their life, to legitimize the form it is taking. Basically, he holds, humans are seeking the *recognition* of others. The key to Moltmann’s view is that people do not acquire identity by realizing who they *are* but by desperately and aggressively holding fast to things they *have* (mostly things others do not have). He describes it in terms of a person’s *I-identity* and *ego-identity* (CPS: 186). Ego-identities are based on the idea of *having*, while the I-identity is based on the category of *being*. I will return to this in the next subsection. For now, I will conclude that the crux of cultural conflicts is the fundamental human quest for *identity*.

From this perspective Moltmann surveys the problem of racism. He holds that racist attitudes and ideologies arise because humans perceive those of other races as a threat to their own *identity*. In situations where people of different races have to live together, people’s inner *insecurity* can increase, because their previous identity, (unconsciously) legitimated in their own group and race, is called into question. Whites base their dignity on their white skin colour. However, racism goes beyond this emotional mechanism for self-justification. It is filtered down into *ideological mechanisms* for the subjection of others (CPS: 183).

Black theology has made Moltmann aware of how much the white world, after centuries of slavery and oppression, defines humanity in terms of whiteness and how this is expressed in all kinds of power structures, relationships and attitudes. Daily patterns of behaviour still confirm the inferiority complex of black people, who have learned to despise themselves in an inner attempt at self-destruction (in *EiT* Moltmann refers Malcolm X: “The worst crime the white man has committed has been to teach us to hate ourselves,” *EiT*: 202, quoted in Cone 1969: 19). Often unconsciously, these patterns also nourish the superiority complex of whites, which is basically an inhuman *fear* for what is different. Moltmann shows that “blackness” has

become a *psychopathological symbol*: it symbolizes wickedness, evil, and threat, as well as the irrational, the compulsive, the unclean, the lack of self-control, and the sensual. Moltmann thus argues that racist mechanisms have destroyed humanity *on both sides*.<sup>72</sup>

For the liberation of both black and white people from racism, political rights and economic justice may be of great importance but not sufficient. What is needed is a *new human identity*, based on self-esteem and self-confidence in accepting others and in community with others (CG: 333). This “human emancipation of men from self-alienation and alienating dealings with each other” would free humans from the compulsion to affirm themselves at the cost of others and enable them to recognize others as persons in their dignity and their rights. To arrive at such a liberated, non-aggressive identity “as humans,” humans should break through the vicious circle in which superiority and inferiority complexes confirm each other. As long as human identities are constituted by either racial superiority or inferiority, this circle will not be broken.

For Moltmann, a psychological phrasing of the problem (in terms of I-identity and ego-identity) is helpful only to a certain extent. It shows that, in order to develop their I-identity, humans should do away with their destructive ego-identity made up of all kinds of ideologies and idolatries. However, what is the content of this new identity “as humans” and what is the guarantee that humans can rely on it? For Moltmann, the deepest roots of racial alienation have not been laid bare so far. His claim is that in order to do so, one has to go beyond the diagnosis open to psychology. Racial conflicts—like all cultural conflicts—will not be entirely overcome if the *theological dimension* is not taken into account. Leaving the concrete case of racism, I will focus on this theological dimension of human alienation in modern society.

3.2.3. The Purposelessness of Life: On the Justification of Human Beings  
As stated above, beneath the “cultural circle” of alienation (as beneath the other circles) Moltmann distinguishes a *vicious circle of senselessness and godforsakenness*. Theologically speaking, he asserts, cultural alienation turns out to be the problem of the *godless person*’s compulsion “to justify himself and substantiate himself over against the ground of his existence, which he has abandoned” (CPS: 187). Humans separate themselves from

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<sup>72</sup> Emphasizing the (psychological) insight that racism destroys humanity on both sides, one may run the risk of trivializing the difference between white and black victims of racism, thus pushing questions of guilt and responsibility into the background.

God (their “ground of being,” as he puts it, with Tillich) and having no ground anymore, they desperately try to become “gods” themselves.

For Moltmann, this is not merely an old-time theological diagnosis about the human condition as such but is intrinsically related to his assessment of modernity and the alienation of modern humanity in particular. Basically, he is continuing his analysis of the early 1960s. In our bureaucratic and technological society, he writes, the future has become obscure. People have become “perplexed, disheartened, and many men lose all sense of purpose” (CG: 331). “Just as the rabbit is transfixed by the snake’s look, so today men are transfixed by future shock and become apathetic.” He observes how some “seek escape in enjoyment of the present,” while others “look for peace in dream-worlds” or “anticipate the decline by terrorism.” At any rate, this “general sense of disheartenment” makes people see the different areas of misery as *hopeless* vicious circles. The vicious circle of senselessness thus manifests itself in a widespread apathy (an “inner poisoning of life;” CG: 334).

Moltmann attributes this apathy of “post-industrial man” predominantly to the overstretched expectations of modern society, which is almost exclusively focussed on *achievement* and *labour*.<sup>73</sup> From childhood on, he writes, we have learned to build our self-esteem on demonstrable achievements (1972: 7ff.).<sup>74</sup> The accent lies on “doing,” not on “being.” Even with our leisure time we have to “do something.”<sup>75</sup> “There rarely oc-

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<sup>73</sup> Moltmann does so in his books *Man* and *Theology of Play* and in a few articles related to human rights issues. His caricatures of “post-industrial man” are debunking. See e.g. 1974b: 79 and 1972: 8f.

<sup>74</sup> How seriously this affects the life of people is shown in German schools, which, Moltmann holds, are characterized by a one-sided orientation to exams and results (1979b: 37-57). This cultivates and promotes a tough competitive struggle between pupils. “Instead of a classroom *community* the students experience very quickly a class competition.” The result of such an educational system—demanded by the great institutions of modern society in view of international competition—is fear, anxiety and psychological problems, not only among students but also among parents and teachers. They all suffer from the “terror of need.”

<sup>75</sup> Moltmann writes that “leisure time” serves work instead of the other way round: we get away a while for “vacation” to become better achievers—we do not work “to live our lives more freely.” He would emphasize this even more strongly in his theology of the sabbath which he developed in the 1980s (cf. §4.2.3).

curs in this context what Harvey Cox would like to see, namely a festive affirmation of living and an alternative to the daily routine of work, convention and mediocrity” (1972: 9). Of course, Moltmann does not want to underestimate the positive impact of work on one’s self-image and happiness (he acknowledges that work is a basic human right, *e.g.* 1984: 37ff.). His point is that a society that is exclusively founded upon the law of achievement-identity is an alienated society, because it marginalizes those who are not capable of achieving. He has in view here handicapped, sick and old people who lose their social identity (in fact, suffering, sorrow, guilt and death no longer have a place when everything that is not oriented to achievement does not count) but also, I would stress, the increasing number of people who, according to his observations, do not manage to cope with the demands of modern society and eventually find themselves staring lethargically at their televisions (1972: 8). As stated above, in Moltmann’s view their feeling of senselessness is a theological problem. The reverse could also be said: for Moltmann our theological problem today is their (our) feeling of senselessness and godforsakenness. People have lost touch with their “ground of being.” With the question of how they are to be liberated, *i.e.* how they can find their “ground of being,” we arrive again at the problem of immanence and transcendence spelled out in §2.4.

In §2.4.2c I noted that for Moltmann—just as for Hegel—the assertion “God is dead” embraces the whole modern experience of world, self, and future. In his *Man*, he accordingly states that Nietzsche’s aphorism “God is dead! And we have killed him!” disclosed the secret of theology as *anthropology* (1974b: 105). Human beings are not the image of God—the gods are the image of human beings. This is also the essence of Feuerbach’s well-known thesis that God is a projection of humanity’s wishes or, so to speak, the “better self” of humankind (which human beings contrast with themselves and then worship). At several places, Moltmann also refers to Marx’s critique of religion as an “opiate” (especially when he criticizes the church for being an element of bourgeois society instead of a critically corrective agent, *cf.* 1979c: 106). In Moltmann’s opinion, it is crystal-clear that we cannot go back before this critical unmasking of the religious images of humankind. He even considers the “protest atheism” of its twentieth-century heirs (notably Bloch, Adorno, and Horkheimer) as a “partner” of theology. His main interest is to place it in position against classical *theism* and its modern variants (by “theism” he means metaphysical theologies that make use of logical inference from empirical reality to the invisible properties of God, *i.e.* his absolute causality, power, wisdom, etc., *cf.* *CG*: 219). With these “protest atheists” he argues that our world is not at all “God-coloured” and thus it does not allow any conclusions with re-

spect to God's existence, righteousness, wisdom, and goodness. Moltmann writes:

... as the world has really been made, belief in the devil is much more plausible than belief in God. The hells of world wars, the hells of Auschwitz, Hiroshima and Vietnam, and also the everyday experiences which make one man say to another "You make my life hell" often suggest that the world as a whole should be thought of as the "house of the dead," a house of discipline, a madhouse or a *universe concentrationnaire*, and not the good earth under the gracious heaven of a righteous God. (CG: 220)

In other words, "in the broken mirror of an unjust and absurd world of triumphant evil and suffering" one cannot see "the countenance of a God, but only the grimace of absurdity and nothingness." Moltmann calls Dostoevski's novel *The Brothers Karamazov* the classical form of "protest atheism" (in particular the famous and much quoted lines about Ivan Karamazov rejecting the idea of a harmonious universe and returning his ticket to a heaven in which torturer and victim should be reconciled). For him it shows that "protest atheism" is not primarily concerned with the question of God's existence as such but with the question of God's righteousness in the world. Such atheism is only to be applauded. It makes theologians aware of the godforsakenness of this world and forces them to take it seriously.

Moltmann thus takes up the atheist critique on religion. However, for him it does not consequently lead to the acceptance of a Feuerbachian anthropological reduction of religion as such. He suggests that Feuerbach and his disciples factually operate within the same old theistic paradigm. They only exchanged subject and predicate and so reduced all predicates about God (*causa sui*, *omnipotent*, *omniscient*, etc.) to the human subject (1974b: 105). The heir to the Christian image of God has put himself in the place of God and has become a god himself. In Moltmann's words:

The wretchedness of a modern anthropology built on the basis of an inherited theology lies precisely in its theological and religious inheritances. As total man, as ideal man, as the man of possibilities or the man of decision, man must himself accomplish things which he cannot accomplish. The divinization of man makes him not more human, but rather more inhuman. (1974b: 106f.)

Today, Moltmann implies, such an "anthropology of the murder of God" has become at least as dehumanizing as former theism. Whereas humans were once deprived of their humanity by oppressive authorities, they are now dehumanized by the inhuman urge to form themselves. In Moltmann's eyes,

the manifest lethargy and loneliness of the individualized “post-industrial man” in his bureaucratic and technological society proves that the iconoclastic connotation of the word “man” in the modern age has now largely lost its power.

Therefore Moltmann states that if the secret of theology is anthropology, than the secret of an anthropology that transfers all the predicates of God to humankind is an *anthropotheism*, a divinization of humankind. He claims that the liberating iconoclasm of “protest atheism”

remains meaningful only so long as, conversely, the *real God* is an iconoclastic word against man: out of a knowledge of God an iconoclastic attack goes out against the images of man in which man reflects himself, justifies and divinizes himself. (1974b: 107, italics mine)

In other words, the “anthropological turn” is liberating only if it is a matter of *reverse iconoclasm*. Only in such an ‘iconoclasm of criticism’ (knowledge of God and human self-knowledge stand in a mutual relationship!) can “an understanding of *transcendence* which does not alienate, and does not deify, but humanizes, and an understanding of *immanence*, which does not allow resignation nor tyranny, but makes possible *final freedom*, ... arise” (italics mine). Therefore, anthropology should rather “give up its claims to anthropotheism, in order to speak again more humanly to man, and not to ask of him too much in absolute demands he can only disappoint.” For Moltmann, that is the only way to get beyond self-deification and idolatry.

One may suspect that Feuerbach would have denounced this “real God” of Moltmann’s double iconoclasm program as a projection of humankind as well, just as one could imagine that Ivan Karamazov would wonder whether Moltmann’s attack on the “theistic” image of God takes away his objections against a heaven in which a mother has to embrace the man who tortured her child. Apparently, Moltmann embraces “protest atheism” only as an instrument to purify the Christian tradition from all kinds of superstition and idolatry that have been stuck to it over the course of time. One could ask whether he does not too easily incorporate his atheist dialogue partners into his own theology. His Marxist dialogue partners at the Christian-Marxist conferences did not object. Neither did Bloch. He accepted Moltmann’s reversing of his famous saying that “only an atheist can be a good Christian” to “only a Christian can be a good atheist” (CG: 195).<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Moltmann: “[Bloch] meant that only an atheist who does not worship false religious and economic gods can be a good Christian. I meant that only a

Thus, Moltmann wants to accept the atheist critique but only when it is acknowledged that, conversely, "God is the criticism of man." He finds the theological basis for this double iconoclasm in *Luther's* theology. It is striking how much his theology of the early 1970s draws on young Luther's theology of the cross, to which he was introduced during Iwand's candle-light lectures (cf. §2.3.1). This *theologia crucis*, he claims, is not about "knowledge of God in itself" but about how knowledge of God transforms human beings. Thus, it marks "a transition from a pure theory to a critical theory" (CG: 208). The core of Moltmann's interpretation is the fundamental anthropological question: *what is humankind?* Or better, "How does man become human" (1972: 45, 1979b: 44)? On my reading of Moltmann, this is, theologically speaking, actually a twofold question: how can we know God, the "ground of our being," and how is this knowledge supposed to be liberating? The answer, for Moltmann, must lead us beyond *theistic* epistemology, based upon the principle of analogy, and beyond the *anthropotheistic* humanism of transcendental subjectivity.

As is generally known, Luther contrasted the medieval *theologia gloriae*, based upon the epistemological principle of analogy (God is known through his works in creation and history), with a *theologia crucis*, based upon the dialectical principle of knowledge which claims that God is known only in his opposite, ultimately in the cross of the outcast and forsaken Christ (I am following Moltmann's descriptions in CG: 25ff. and 200ff., cf. Moltmann 1990 and *EiT*: 169ff.). The first, Moltmann claims, is based on the (Platonic) principle that "like is known only by like," while the second is founded on the principle that "every being can be revealed only in its opposite." Protest atheism has undermined the analogical principle, as we saw. Moltmann agrees and adopts, in its stead, the principle of dialectical knowledge, which says that God is perceived as God only in what is essentially different or even in contradiction to him. For human creatures, God is the *Wholly Other* and his God-ness is perceived in their godlessness. In other words, humans perceive God only when they are wholly and entirely human beings who accept their limitations. As Luther stated, humans experience God when they give up their attempts of self-deification, i.e.

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Christian who believes in the crucified Jesus is free from the pressure to create gods and idols for himself. On this issue Bloch and I have come quite near to each other" (Valle 1983). Moltmann remembers that Bloch called himself an "atheist for God's sake" (*EiT*: 114). The reproach that Moltmann incorporated Marxist critique of religion in a "theologized" way came mainly from the GDR, where his books were banned by the censor.

when they cease to be “proud and unhappy gods,” let God be God and become true human beings themselves.

Luther knew that, humanly speaking, this is impossible. It happens only where God shows himself in his opposite, where he becomes human, and thus disperses human self-deification by giving back to them the humanity they have forsaken. For Luther, this place is the godforsaken misery of the cross. God’s self-revelation in his completely opposite, the cross, involves the unmasking of all kinds of self-deification and self-justification. Seeing God in the crucified Christ, condemned by the law, powerless and crucified, suffering, dying and godforsaken, the human being is set free from the legalistic concern to justify himself, from the desire to have power and domination over others, and from the concern for self-deification which guides him towards knowledge. The knowledge of the cross does not affirm the human being in what he is but actually *destroys* him. “It destroys the god, miserable in his pride, which we would like to be, and restores to us our abandoned and despised humanity.” Or, in other words, it destroys the destruction of the human being and alienates the alienated human being (it is a “negation of the negative,” cf. §3.1). The knowledge of the cross thus causes a “conflict between God who has become man and man who wishes to become God.” Only the godless person, i.e. the one who abandoned every deification of himself, can know God. In that way, the cross means the revelation of both God and ourselves.

For Moltmann, this dialectical principle is the basis of a *critical social theory*. Much more than Luther himself, Moltmann points to the socio-political implications of his theology of the cross.<sup>77</sup> “The theology of the cross had to be worked out not merely for the reform of the church but as social criticism, in association with practical actions to set free both the wretched and their rulers” (CG: 73). If only the “godless” person knows God, then, Moltmann concludes, God is to be found among those who actually *are* forsaken and abandoned in our world (CG: 27). The *locus theologicus* is among the poor and the oppressed. We may also put it differently, in a way that reminds one of Marx’s theory of *Verelendung*: It is those who have no interests and power in this world and who fall out of the web of dehumanizing structures who are able to know the truth and,

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<sup>77</sup> Moltmann’s critique is that “while as a reformer Luther formulated the *theologia crucis* in theoretical and practical terms against the medieval institutional church, he did not formulate it as a social criticism against feudal society in the Peasant Wars of 1524 and 1525” (CG: 72). In other words, it was a critique of the church and not a critique of society.

accordingly, can become the “subject of revolution.” In his elaborations Moltmann focusses mainly on the poor and oppressed in the Third World. But his view can also be applied to Western societies as such, which are, as stated above, tuned exclusively to achievement. The point of departure from the vicious circle of senselessness and godforsakenness is found in those who suffer from purposelessness of their lives and fail to construe a sense of *identity*.

The latter statement can be sharpened anthropologically by examining *Man* and *Theology of Play*. Moltmann delineates Luther's anthropology over against the Aristotelian doctrine of virtue (as Luther did himself, 1972: 45ff.). According to Aristotle, “man is what he makes of himself.” Or, in other words, his humanity or inhumanity is solely up to him. By acting repeatedly in a just way he becomes a just man; by practising injustice he becomes an unjust man. He can realize himself but also lose himself. At any rate, he remains the subject of his possibilities, even if in reality it often happens to be otherwise. But do humans not simply lose their ability to be human by the fact of their inhumanity? Do they not lose their freedom when they engage in unfreedom? If humans are what they make of themselves, Moltmann argues with Luther, then their very being human depends on what they *do*. However, what the human being does is subject to “law,” which, in turn, demands of him a justice he can no longer produce once he has become unjust.

Thus dehumanized man, who must exalt himself, because he cannot ensure himself as he is, in practise uses these religious insights only in the interest of his own self-deification. As a result, they do not help him to achieve humanity, but only give greater force to his inhumanity. (CG: 71ff.)

With Luther, Moltmann therefore asks: “How can an inhuman brute be transformed into a true human?” (1972: 48, CG: 231) or: How can “proud and unfortunate gods” become “real men?” (1974b: 20) or, in yet a third formulation: “How does the unfree will become free” (1979b: 45)?<sup>78</sup>

As is generally known, Luther rejected the “anthropology of the self-made man” and opposed it with the formula “man is justified by faith alone.” He contrasted the “justification” of humans through their works with

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<sup>78</sup> From the perspective of recent rehabilitations of Aristotle's virtue ethics—significantly in reaction to utilitarian and deontological approaches—Moltmann speaks too easily of “the naïve Aristotelian doctrine of virtue.” I will not deal with this criticism here. See e.g. Hurthouse 1999.

justification through grace. Because humans are *justified* by God's *grace* (*sola gratia*), they are liberated from self-justification through superstitious and idolatrous perversions of humanity. Similar to Tillich, Moltmann interprets this in psychological phrases. The fundamental primal fear of nothingness, which causes people to seek constantly new "possessions" to which they can cling, is replaced by a *primal trust* since one's I-identity is founded on the justification by God's grace. Theologically speaking, this trust is the "acceptance of being accepted by God," which liberates one to free self-acceptance and free acceptance of people who are different. Human life does not have value because of what one makes of it oneself, but because one is loved and accepted by God (cf. *CPS*: 186f.). In fact, it is not his deeds that can change him fundamentally but only the divine gift of grace. Thus, it becomes clear that no form of human action leads us from an inhuman to a human reality, *for there is no way from doing to being*. What man *is* fundamentally precedes what he *does*; it is that which becomes manifested in his actions. He has not have to make himself, but he demonstrates his new being from God in free works. Moltmann emphasizes that the justification of the godless person is the creative call of God to a *new mode of being*. Faith is, therefore, not a virtue which can be learned but more of a process of birth, of being born anew.

Theological language here abandons the realm of human productivity and draws its analogies from the *generative* sphere in order to distinguish doing from being (1972: 47). This becomes all the more clear when Luther's insights are applied to socio-political reality. Moltmann writes:

If we transfer this Reformational recognition [*Erkenntnis*] of the human being who is justified by faith and finds his I-identity in faith to the modern performance oriented society [*Leistungsgesellschaft*], then it means that the human being must not only be freed from heteronomy and exploitation but, still more deeply, from the obsession that he is what he produces. (1979b: 55; transl. mine)

In other words, economic, political or cultural (alone) liberation is not sufficient. What must be overcome is the very idea that true human identity is the sum of one's successes and failures. Moltmann's most striking implementation of Luther's doctrine of justification is, I think, to be found in *Theology of Play* (which he describes as a "critical theory of games," (1972: 6)). The basic anthropological insight defended in this book is the idea that humans cannot ground "true human identity" in what they have or do, in achievement or purpose, but in the "game of the totally-other." That is expressed in the following quote, which refers to Van Ruler:

If there is no firm ground for the world, within which all things are nailed down by grounds and purposes [*Gründen und Zwecken*], then the world is either a desert of absurdity or it has to be the game of the totally-other [*das Spiel des Ganz-Anderen*]. (1972: 16)

Moltmann observes the first (no longer seeing grounds and purposes, people experience life as a “desert of absurdity”) and, therefore, explores the latter. In doing so, he does not, strikingly enough, merely interpret Luther’s thinking in forensic or moral categories but also in *aesthetic* ones (he also interweaves Calvinist and Barthian motives into his interpretation). This offers a perspective on God (the Wholly Other), human beings and the world that, anthropologically speaking, puts the quest for the *meaning* of human life, for human *self-realization* and for a final *telos* of human life in a completely different light.

First, for Moltmann the question “For what purpose [*wozu*] did God create the world?” is not on target (1972: 15ff.). “The creator God is not *deus faber*,” who had to create something “to realize himself.” The *free* God chose to create the world *ex nihilo*, i.e. not because there was a clear purpose or reason to be grasped in functionalistic terms but because it corresponds to his very being. God “brought forth” the world to *enjoy* it and to be glorified in all things. Hence, the world is “groundless.” If creation is thus, as Calvin put it, a *theatrum gloria dei*, then the original “purpose” of human beings can primarily not be caught in goals, ends, achievements, or moral duties. As both Calvin’s *Geneva Catechism* and the *Westminster Catechism* of 1647 state, the “chief end” of human beings is to “glorify God” and “to enjoy Him forever.” For Moltmann, this perspective takes the sting out of Feuerbach’s critique, which held that “God” was the ideal of a future humankind and for whom the human purpose, accordingly, was to “realize God.” Moltmann’s answer to the question of the “meaning of life”—“joy is the meaning of human life, joy in thanksgiving, and thanksgiving as joy”—actually abolishes the very intent of such questions like: For what purpose have humans been created? For what purpose am I here? The answer does not indicate ethical goals and demonstrable purposes (*nachweislichen Zwecken*) but *justifies created existence as such*. In Moltmann’s view, “the important thing about this answer is precisely the *awkward surprise* it contains” (1972: 19, italics mine). In other words, it does not lie in purposes that establish my *usefulness* but in the joyful *acceptance* of my existence as such. In this way, Moltmann criticizes the modern achievement-centred society not by formulating different ethical goals and ideal purposes of life but by breaking through the very idea that life has a demonstrable

purpose (or better, perhaps, by claiming that life has no other purpose than living life itself).<sup>79</sup>

This “awkward surprise” is also the basis of Moltmann’s view of finding “true humanity” in an inhuman world. Moltmann interprets this idea Christologically (1972: 25ff.). Theological tradition, he writes, has focussed predominantly on the *necessity* of the incarnation as the remedy for human sin. Thus concentrating on the misery in which human beings have fallen, the main Christological task accordingly became to explain why God *had* to become human—not why he *desired* this. Consequently, questions remain unanswered, such as, notably, the question of the contingency of the salvation event (why in Jesus of Nazareth of all people? why then and there?). In contrast, Moltmann holds that the liberating message of the Christ event lies precisely in the *random element* that cannot be reconstructed in theological systems. He points to the freedom of God within the polarity of human need and divine redemption from that need. “God has no compelling reason to become man in Jesus of Nazareth and to turn away man’s need. Yet in his infinite love he is *well-pleased* to do just that.” With these lines he stresses that in his view God’s saving act in no way occurred under the force of circumstances. However, he continues, neither was it caprice. He sees a third possibility. God’s act in Christ proceeded from his “freedom which is love.” The story of Christ is not a “mere emergency measure” or “a matter of divine reparation.” God did not merely respond to human misery in this way but he created “*something new*” that corresponds to his love for his creation. This new creation (again “*ex nihilo*”) cannot be reconstructed in terms of a purposeful rational system but only in aesthetic and doxological categories.

How is this so? The cross should be left out of such an aesthetic approach. “In spite of Bach, the dying agonies of Jesus do not fit in the categories of song” (1972: 29). Easter, however, is a different story. Here begins the joy, the dancing, the laughing of the redeemed. “Death has become a mockery” (Luther). Easter means laughing at death, the mockery of hell, the provocation of destructing powers that rule the world (“O death, where is thy victory?” (1 Cor. 15:55)); it proclaims unassailable freedom precisely where the powers of the world reckon with fear and guilt feelings. This “rebellion of Easter” does not originate in an ethical imperative but in the

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<sup>79</sup> Moltmann acknowledges that, paradoxically, the Reformed tradition, whose aim had been to liberate human from justification through achievement turned out to be one of the most significant impulses of the modern world of work (1972: 11).

graceful and unexpected rejoicing of liberty itself. It is unexpected; it has no reason, no purpose. That makes the relief so overwhelming. Moltmann writes:

“It’s all *for nothing* anyway,” says the nihilist and falls into despair. “It’s really all *for nothing*,” says the believer, rejoicing in the grace which he can have for nothing and hoping for a new world in which all is available and may be had for nothing (1972: 33).

Moltmann thus interprets Luther’s *sola gratia* in a way that goes beyond the merely forensic and moralistic. However, that is not all there is to it. The cross may be excluded from the aesthetic and doxological play of freedom and resurrection, but it is not insignificant. On the contrary, for Moltmann the cross is the very condition for the laughter of Easter. He thus brings in the cross-resurrection dialectic once again. Easter is the resurrection of the *crucified* Christ. “The one who goes *before us* into the glorious and liberated future of God’s resurrected is also the one who died for us on the cross” (1972: 30). Therefore, the joy of Easter is not a flight from the world but the laughter of relief that resounds in the midst of the suffering of this world. If the meaning of the Christ event is understood in this way (i.e. not from the perspective of reasonable purposes but as a contingent new creation in the midst of suffering), then, Moltmann suggests, it is a sharp critique of modern society with its obsession for achievement and—consequently—its inability for both real unburdened joy and genuine solidarity (cf. §4.3.1). In the fellowship of Christ in whom the free God opened new possibilities humans experience real, unburdened joy, because it is the joy of Easter, i.e. the joy of the redeemed amidst suffering, crying and pain and not beyond and in spite of that.

Finally, there is the question of the *telos* of life. Moltmann points out that modern thinking in terms of attainable purposes hides the liberating message of Christian eschatology. Once again he seeks the solution not in a formulation of different purposes but in the Lutheran farewell to thinking in terms of purposes as such. The modern *homo faber*, in whose world of labour and achievement everything must have a purpose (*Zweck*), seeks the “ultimate purpose [*Endzweck*] of history.”<sup>80</sup> His “idol” must, therefore, be

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<sup>80</sup> In German there is a difference between *Ziel* and *Zweck*. For Moltmann, history has, of course, a *Ziel* (i.e. a goal). However, it is not the final realization of a demonstrable *Zweck* (a purpose) but the dawning of something completely new and purposeless.

a god who reveals his purposes for his history. We have registered Moltmann's unmasking of this *deus faber* (we could actually say that it is the projection of the *homo faber*). The free God who created this world without a demonstrable purpose and who in Christ revealed a new creation has no purpose for the history of this world. For the modern spirit this sounds rather bizarre. As Moltmann writes, "life which is made meaningful by purposes and goals must find the vision of heaven terrible, since that vision only invites infinite and purposeless boredom" (1972: 34). However, he claims that the liberating meaning of eschatology lies precisely in this purposelessness. "Christian eschatology," he writes,

has never thought of the end of history as a kind of retirement or payday or accomplished purpose but has regarded it as *totally without purpose* [*zweckloserweise*] as a hymn of praise for unending joy, as an ever-varying round dance of the redeemed in the trinitarian fullness of God, and as the complete harmony of soul and body. (italics mine)

In other words, eschatology does not aim at the result or the completion of this history nor at the final unveiling of its meaning. Referring to Rev. 21:4, Moltmann states that Christian eschatology responds to the suffering of this world by hinting at a totally new creation (a *novum* as he called it in his Blochian theology) in which there shall be neither mourning nor crying nor pain, for the former things have passed away. From the perspective of his Christology he argues that

the passion of Christ in the midst of the world's passion ending in the resurrection of the one whom the world crucified is the incarnate assurance of the dawn of that other history of joy in the very midst of the world's unanswered suffering. (1972: 36)

This Eastern joy of already existing in the new, redeemed, and liberating creation cannot be painted in the colours of modern society, oriented as it is solely to achievement. In line with Bloch, Moltmann takes the analogies for the "indescribable totally-other" from the life of childhood which precedes the life of *homo faber*: "unhindered laughter, devoted vision of the marvelous riches and goodness of God and of new innocence" (1972: 34). In other words, in the negation of the negativity of life by the laughter of Easter humans receive a "foretaste of unending joy." Such a view of the end of history is at right angles with modern teleology.

We may conclude that Moltmann goes beyond both theism and anthropotheism by theologically undermining views of humanity, the meaning of human life, human "self-realization" and future which are based on

categories of purpose. In other words, breaking through the *vicious circle of meaningless and godforsakenness* apparently means rejecting every attempt to think in terms of purposes in which God is pictured as the *deus faber* and the human being as the *homo faber* who has to “realize God.” The Feuerbachian critique can only be countered by breaking out of such a paradigm. The “real God” is the God who created this world out of overflowing love only, without further “necessity;” who out of love became human to create “true human beings out of proud and unhappy gods;” and who created a future that is a *novum*. The critical directive of Luther’s doctrine of justification in modern society is that true humanity cannot be grasped in categories of “doing” but only in categories of “being,” i.e. of being justified (or, as Moltmann puts it with Tillich, *accepted*) by God *for nothing*. Thus the psychological phrasing of the problem in §3.2.2 is theologically recuperated. Or maybe it is better to say that Moltmann shows how the psychological insights about “I-identity” and “ego-identity” can already be found in their basics in Luther’s *sola gratia* theology. Nobody has to keep up appearances to experience community with the living God. On the contrary, all ego-identities should be broken down to experience *new identity* as a human being in God (CG: 276). The presence of God in the vicious circle of alienation takes place in the experience of identity and acceptance, where people find themselves in a new identity as human beings. For Moltmann, the theological basis of this new human identity is thus the “awkward surprise” (“it is really all *for nothing*”).

The liberating aspect of this experience is rightly understood only if it is not immediately translated into new purposes and goals of action. With this, Moltmann apparently not only dissociates himself from modern anthropology as such (Marxism included<sup>81</sup>) but also from predominant “relevant” theologies in which the reign of God was one-sidedly conceived in ethical categories and, accordingly, only in the seriousness of ethical existence. Moltmann objects to the theological reflex that “freedom *from*” directly implies a “freedom *to*” (1972: 39). In contrast he aims at a cele-

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<sup>81</sup> In Moltmann’s view, Luther’s critical theory—based on the alternative between justification by works and justification by faith—is more radical than the Marxist, which in the end fails to break the “compulsion of works” (*necessitas operum*) and continues to be tied to Aristotelian virtue ethics according to which the human is what he makes of himself (1972: 57ff., 1979b: 55). In his view, “it makes little difference whether we are subjected to an outside law or whether we make that law our own so that it appears to be our own law. The results are about the same. Whether we are chased by others or begin chasing ourselves, we are still the same chased animals” (1972: 56).

bration of freedom *as such*. With Paul he emphasizes that “for freedom Christ has set us free” (Gal. 5:1)—not for a new set of laws.

This liberation for freedom is not just a liberation from an old law to a new one but also a liberation from the compulsion and coercion to act in the first place. We are not merely set free from an old, alien law, but we are, so to speak, set free even from the law of our own liberty. (1972: 39)

Thus the ethical imperative of the reign of God—which is, of course, significant—is only really an alternative for the laws of modern society when it is drenched in aesthetic and doxological categories that break through the obsession with purpose and achievement (Moltmann speaks of the “beauty” of God and the human vision of it, the *visio Dei*, 1972: 38ff.).<sup>82</sup>

This provides the outline of the theological foundation of Christian identity today (we could also say that this expresses what Moltmann, as a Christian theologian, regards as “true human identity”). It is supposed to constitute the anthropological basis of a critical social theory or a *relevant theology*. There is, however, more to say about “identity.” Christian identity is, as indicated, not contained in doctrines but has to be “lived” (cf. §3.2.1). Christian identity is a way of Christian existence. The basis is that one has been accepted, but, as Tillich already emphasized, the *acceptance* of this being accepted is the most difficult part (Tillich 1948: 153ff.). What happens after this declaration of justification, when life goes on and faith has to be practised in daily life (cf. §2.3.3a)? Again, we are compelled to rethink the relation between *justification* and *sanctification*. How can we be certain of this “acceptance” in daily life, when we stumble on our way to live a “Christian” life (the Calvinist question)? And how can we avoid ending up in a new justification by works instead of by faith (the Lutheran question)?

Moltmann develops his thought along two lines. On the one hand, he emphasizes that the theology of the cross always leads to an *identity crisis*. It is critical and destructive first. It does not lead to harmony with oneself or one’s environment but to contradiction. The new life in freedom and

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<sup>82</sup> Here Moltmann seems already miles away from the rigid theory-practice of his earliest political theological drafts. I think Michael Stemmeler—among others—interprets Moltmann’s view on the *telos* of human life too one-sidedly when he—even partly on the basis of *Theology of Play*—writes that the answer to the question “What is the human being?” can be found in the answer to question “What are human beings capable of doing given their qualified position in the whole of creation?” (Stemmeler 1989: 33).

acceptance can be expressed by pointing out and rejecting what it is most definitely *not*—in the “negation of the negative.” That will be examined in §3.2.4. On the other hand, he needs to say something positive as well. To do so, he does not ask primarily how to implement new strategies and how to work this freedom out but where we can *experience* it, where it is somehow perceptible. Much stronger than in his Blochian period, he seeks the “certainty of life” that enables us to live a life in hope and solidarity (the “re-embedding” of the “disembedded,” so to say) not predominantly in (a rather Spartan<sup>83</sup>) anticipation as such but in a *sacramental* eschatological worldview. I will come back to that in §3.2.5.

### 3.2.4. Identity in Non-Identity

It is necessary, in the first place, to examine how Christian identity (Christian existence) expresses itself in the negation of negative, dehumanizing structures. Obviously, Christian identity is somehow linked to the “imitation” (the *Nachfolge*) of Jesus Christ. At the core of Christianity, we find the history of Jesus, who proclaimed that the kingdom of God had come near to the poor, the sinners, and the victims of discrimination, who entered into the way of suffering and was killed as a blasphemer and as one abandoned by God, who was raised and in whom the future of God and of humanity’s freedom became flesh. For Moltmann’s theology of the cross, his reading of Philippians 2, the hymn on the “self-humiliation” of Christ, is important (*CG*: 16, 204ff.). According to Moltmann’s exegesis, Christ gave up his divine identity and found his true identity in the opposite, among those who lost their identity, the outcasts of society. He found his identity in non-identity with the powerful, the glorious, the mighty, i.e. with everything considered to be divine. In the extreme, the identity of Christ is recognized in what is most opposed to his divine identity: his godforsakenness on the cross.

Jesus’s call to discipleship was a direct appeal: “Follow me!” For Moltmann, the theology of the cross is, therefore, basically a call for “following the cross” (*CG*: 54ff.). He remarks that the idea of “following Christ” has been neglected by bourgeois Protestantism, because “it no longer recognized or wished to recognize the suffering church, the church of the martyrs, but established itself in a situation of apparent harmony with the ‘Christian world’.” In contrast, he takes up this idea in its most extreme radicality and not in a moralistic but in an *eschatological* way:

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<sup>83</sup> That was Cox’s remark, as we saw in §2.5.3.

It is a call into the future of God which is now beginning in Jesus, and for the sake of this future it is not only necessary but possible to break one's links with the world which is now passing away and abandon a concern for one's own life. The call to follow Jesus is the commandment of the eschatological moment. But as a call to follow Jesus, it is also a call to share his suffering and to stand beneath his cross.

For the sake of clarity, to follow Jesus is not to "imitate" him in the strictest sense of the word, i.e. to become a Jesus oneself, nor does it mean the admiration of a hero or some kind of mystical contemporaneity with him (CG: 60). "One follows Christ in one's own response to the mission of Christ at the present day and in taking up one's own cross."

Basically, "following the way of the cross" means solidarity with those people with whom Jesus identified himself. "Identification" with the crucified takes place in a *dissociation* from our alienated world and in *non-identity* with the demands of society. Therefore, true Christian identity can only be discovered by breaking through the petrified tradition, institutions, and beliefs in which identity used to be found. This state of non-identity should be endured instead of surrendering to new models of identification and ideologies. Always, even in the most ideal society, which, for Moltmann, is a classless society, Christians will be "aliens and homeless" (17); they are permanently critical of new ideologies and totalitarianism (here lies a problem raised by José Míguez Bonino and others, cf. §3.4).

However, Christian identity is more than just critical negativity with regard to societal structures. At the core of Christianity, Moltmann holds, we find not only the history of Jesus but also *the history of God* who humiliated himself by becoming human, who took upon himself the suffering of inhumanity, and who died in the godforsakenness of the cross (CG: 200ff.). The hymn in Phil. 2 treats not only the humility of Christ but also the *self-humiliation of God* in Christ. This God is the Exodus God, the God with "future as his mode of being," who liberated his people and identified himself with the "crucified" people. Hence, the divinity of God, knowable in the paradox of the cross, is revealed as his solidarity with those who are godforsaken (cf. §3.2.3).

Accordingly, Christian identity is rooted in a *double process of identification* (CG: 19, 28). Our identification with "crucified" people takes place because and in so far as it has been announced that in Christ God identified himself with the godless and the godforsaken. Our identification with Christ by following him in non-identity with the powers of this world is possible on the basis of the trust that our true identity is hidden but

secured because of God's identification with Christ. Moltmann holds that people who give up their old "identity," who step out of the circle of the like-minded, who endure non-identity and are inwardly and outwardly tempted (a temptation and *Selbstpreisgabe* that can be maintained in the power of the "Spirit of perseverance").

To sum up, in a society where humans are stigmatized by dehumanizing identifications Christian identity is found only in the sphere of non-identity, of self-humiliation and solidarity with others. It is not a set of principles but an *act of identification* with those without identity, i.e. with the dehumanized and the "non-persons," trusting in the God of the future who can be found there. Or, more precisely, it is an act of identification with *Christ* in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed. Here lies the starting point for a relevant theology. If Christian *identity* consists in the identification with the crucified in non-identity with this world, then a *relevant* theology based on this identity would make the cry of the tormented creation its own cry to God. In other words, theology is only relevant for contemporary society if it gives voice to the marginalized. As stated above, the *locus theologicus* is among the poor and the suffering—not only because Jesus identified himself with those people but also because the God of the future manifests himself among them, since he has identified himself with Christ in his godforsakenness.

Serious questions could be raised with regard to Moltmann's use of the term *identification* (which he, unfortunately, never clearly defines or explains, cf. Van Egmond 1992: 17). It would become a major issue in his debate with the Latin Americans, to which I will return in §3.4. The notion of "identification with the poor" smacks of annexation of the powerless by the powerful. Moltmann knows that it is a misapprehension that "we" can understand "them" and put ourselves in their shoes. Such an attitude not only overrates our capacity for empathizing with others but also underestimates the suffering of the poor and, moreover, our conscious or unconscious contribution to it. He, therefore, stresses that the other (i.e. the poor) must remain the other completely (Moltmann 1974c: 41ff.). For him, "identification with the poor" is not being just like them by making politically correct statements or whatever but identification *with Christ*, which is only possible in solidarity with the people with whom Christ identified himself. In fact, this is the classical Christian idea of discarding the old way of life, characterized by sin and death, and adopting a new way of life, namely the way of Jesus Christ leading to the "reign of God"—although here the "sinful life" has little to do with moralism but rather with maintaining the "status quo." Following Christ in "identification with the poor" is not intended to mean "incorporating" them but taking on the

new way of life paved by Christ though self-humiliation and non-identity with the old models of identification. The dehumanizing aspects of these structures can be known only by looking at the faces of those who are hit hardest of all.

Accepting this, one could further ask whether the “poor” do not therefore blur into epistemological objects.<sup>84</sup> Moltmann would object and argue that he intends to take them seriously as dialogue partners. In addition, since “the oppressed hold in their hand the key for the liberation of mankind from oppression,” they are fundamentally the *subject of theology* (1974c: 43).<sup>85</sup> Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that he makes an apparent distinction between “us” and “them.” As such, this was not the problem of his critics, among others Míguez Bonino (cf. §3.4.1). As we will see, for them the point was that he does it unthinkingly and accordingly presents his theology as the universally valid path to liberation.<sup>86</sup>

### 3.2.5. In the Counter-History of the Triune God

IN CHAPTER TWO I showed how in Moltmann’s early theology the question of the sanctification of human beings was raised in view of the existential search for “certainty in life.” How can we stumble on? Is there any “continuity of faith?” Similar questions arise in relation to Moltmann’s “critical theory of God.” The basic question seems to have changed slightly: how do we experience freedom under unfree conditions (cf. §3.1)? However, the answer Moltmann gives follows the answer given in his theology of hope and lies, again, in the doctrine of God (which now perhaps even more draws on Hegel’s speculative doctrine of Good Friday; cf. §2.4.2). I will briefly regard his—much debated—trinitarian theology from an anthropological perspective. A few pages about the “pathos” of God and the “sympathy” of

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<sup>84</sup> One gets the impression that the “poor” is more of a qualitative, normative term than a quantitative, descriptive one. Hans de Wit discusses this question with regard to certain Latin American theologies of liberation in De Wit 1991: 39ff., 135ff.

<sup>85</sup> As is generally known, this “preferential option for the poor” is the classical methodological starting point of liberation theology (cf. *e.g.* Sobrino 1993: 686).

<sup>86</sup> The question of “us” and “them” leads us also to the question of who the oppressed and the godforsaken are today. Is it only the poor and the oppressed of the Third World whom Moltmann has in mind here or also the apathetic, individualized, post-industrial human beings in Western societies (see Moltmann’s diagnosis in §3.2.3)?

human beings will serve as a key for opening the gate to Moltmann's trinitarian doctrine of God (CG: 267ff.).

The core of Moltmann's doctrine of God is the comprehension of God in the crucified Jesus, forsaken by God. He quotes Goethe: "*Nemo contra Deum nisi Deus ipse*" ("No one against God but God himself," cf. Goethe 1986: 1258). This requires a "revolution in the concept of God" (CG: 152). Again, Moltmann delineates his view of the biblical God over against the ancient Greek view of God. As he points out, in the ancient world early Christianity encountered *apatheia* as both a metaphysical axiom and an ethical ideal. To prevent any Babel-like confusion, it should be emphasized that there is a very significant difference between the Greek understanding of *apatheia* and *pathe* and our understanding of apathy and pathos. Moltmann, who acknowledges this, explains that for the Greek, *apatheia* did not connote the petrification of men or those symptoms of lethargy and indifference we use to associate with "apathy." Applied to the gods, it refers to their perfect, all-sufficient freedom (the Godhead was unchangeable and incapable of suffering). Applied to human beings—who strive to become similar to the divinity and participate in the divine sphere—it denotes their freedom and superiority to needs and drives, troubles and fear, anger and love. *Pathe*, on the other hand, was used to indicate the lower human drives and compulsions (it was unthinkable to apply them to the divine) and thus differed significantly from our understanding of "pathos," namely that which brings life alive and enhances it. But even taking into account this shift in meaning, Moltmann thinks it highly problematic that the early church took up the Greek notion of *apatheia* into its doctrine of God and, accordingly, into its anthropology.

To understand this problem and to go beyond it, Moltmann thinks it is crucial to go back to early Jewish traditions. He refers to Abraham Heschel, who described the prophets' proclamation of God as *pathetic* theology. In Heschel's book *The Prophets* Moltmann reads that the prophets had no "idea" of God but understood themselves and the people in "the situation of God." Heschel called this "situation of God" the *pathos of God*, which basically means the way God is affected by the suffering of his people in history. This interest of God in his people is expressed in the *covenant*. Since God entered into the world and the people of his choice in the covenant, the "history" of God can no longer be separated from the history of his people. On this basis Moltmann, therefore, understands that prophecy

is in essence not a looking forward into the future to see what is appointed in unalterable destiny or a predestined divine plan of

salvation, but insight into the present pathos of God, his suffering caused by Israel's disobedience and his passion for his right and his honour in the world.

This concept of God obviously affects his concept of humankind. Within the sphere of the apathetic God, Moltmann writes, the human being becomes a *homo apatheticus*; within the sphere of the pathos of God he becomes a *homo sympatheticus*. The sympathetic human being is open to this world, becomes a "friend" of God, suffers with God's suffering, loves with God's love and hopes with God's hope. For Heschel, Moltmann explains, this divine *pathos* constituted the basis of a bipolar theology, expressing a double bipolarity. God is free in himself and at the same time interested in his covenant relationship and affected by human history. Further, this covenant relationship has to do with the *pathos* of God and the *sympatheia* of human beings.

With the help of Jewish interpreters, Moltmann thus sketches the structure and character of the biblical God-human relationship. To elaborate on this idea of God being affected by human history, Moltmann introduces the Jewish notion of *Shekinah* (which would become a key element of his later theology; cf. §4.3.3). *Shekinah* expresses the presence of God in creation, in the call of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the history of Israel, in the exodus and in the exile. God does not only reside in heaven but also *dwells* on earth among his people. In his *Shekinah* God goes before Israel into the wilderness, descends into the burning bush, into the ark of the covenant and into the temple. He comes to those who are in trouble, to the lowly and the small. He suffers with the people, goes with them into prison, feels sorrow with the martyrs. Moltmann underscores the eschatological character of these "accommodations" of God to the limitations of human history. They are *anticipations* of his future indwelling in his whole creation. In other words, God's dwelling among his people anticipates the end when all countries will be full of his glory and he will live among his people. The *Shekinah* anticipates the future liberation.

Strikingly, this final liberation of Israel also means the liberation of the *Shekinah* of God from its suffering. In his "indwelling" God shares Israel's suffering and Israel's redemption. In this respect, Jewish tradition could even state that "God has redeemed himself from Egypt together with his people." It is important to highlight Moltmann's remarks here, since they are an implicit prelude to the necessity of (his) trinitarian theology. He maintains that rabbinic ideas on God's humiliation of himself lead to the notion of a *distinction in God* between God himself and his "indwelling." It was, he writes, not for nothing that Judaism in the rabbinic period

developed the notion of a *dual personality* in God in order to articulate the experience of the suffering of God with Israel. In Moltmann's opinion, the "intrinsic theological problem" is the *cause* of the suffering of the God who suffers with imprisoned, persecuted and murdered Israel. Concretely, does God suffer from human injustice and human wickedness or does the *Shekinah*, wandering with Israel through the dust of the streets, suffer *in God himself*? In the latter case suffering would not only affect God's *pathos* externally—God himself suffers at the human history of injustice—but it would *be the history in the midst of God himself*. Moltmann for his part is suggesting that the idea of the suffering of *God* leads *into* the "inner mystery of God himself."

What is the role of human beings in this rather mystical process of God cutting himself off from himself and "reuniting" himself in an eschatological history of liberation and final salvation? In *CPS* Moltmann refers to Franz Rosenzweig's interpretation of the *Shema Israel*:<sup>87</sup> "To acknowledge God's unity—the Jew calls it uniting God. For this unity is, in that it becomes; it is a Becoming Unity. And this Becoming is laid on the soul of man and in his hands" (*CPS*: 61, Rosenzweig 1954: Book III, 192f.). Our history of evil and suffering is determined by God's "differentiation" between himself and his *Shekinah*, by the rift which cuts the *Shekinah* off from God himself. This estrangement is overcome through human *prayer* and acknowledgement of "the one God" (Moltmann explains it more clearly in *TK*: 29). To pray the *Shema Israel* in the historical experience of God, in the existence of the Exile means *to unite God*. This prayer of acknowledgment that unites the persecuted *Shekinah* with God is prayed in a hostile, suffering world and is, therefore, a sign of hope for the coming glory in the future, when God will fully dwell among his people.

On the basis of these Jewish notions Moltmann develops his own Christian understanding of God (which made him the target of criticism<sup>88</sup>).

<sup>87</sup> Deut. 6. 4: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one."

<sup>88</sup> Is it really a dialogue which Moltmann fosters? Can one understand and use these ideas apart from the context of Jewish mysticism? Is it a Christian extrapolation of Jewish thinking? Is it an incorporation of Jewish notions into Christian trinitarianism? The least we can say is that Moltmann "all too quickly moves from questions through a supposition to conclusive statements" (Müller-Fahrenholz 2000: 139, cf. Deane-Drummond 1997: 203). The idea of the "separation of God from himself" was a topic in the well-known Lapide-Moltmann dialogue in 1978. The Jewish theologian Pinchas Lapide states that Moltmann had interpreted Rosenzweig correctly, but he himself finds it difficult

For him, the *pathos* of God, expressing both the bifurcation in God and the character of the relationship between God and human beings, must be the presupposition for the Christian doctrine of God. However, a major modification of Jewish pathos theology is needed to express the relation between God and human beings from a Christian point of view. For the gentile Christian the central presupposition of *election* to the membership of the people of God does not exist. A bipolar theology as Heschel's is, therefore, impossible, so Moltmann argues. He states that for Christians, "pathetic" theology is founded on the revelation of God in his *self-emptying (kenosis) in the crucified Christ*. Thus he links the idea of God's *Shekinah* to the theology of the cross. Following Phil. 2, he speaks of the final and complete self-humiliation of God in the person of Jesus. In Jesus Christ, God entered into the limited, finite human situation. Moreover, not only did he descend into it, but he also accepted it and *embraced* the whole of human existence with his being. God does not merely become the covenant partner of an elect people to which individuals must belong through circumcision and obedience to the covenant in order to enter into his fellowship. He humiliates himself and accepts the whole of humankind without limits and conditions, so that each person may participate in him with the whole of his life. In Moltmann's view, the Christ event thus involves a *universalization* of the relationship of the "pathetic" God with human beings. When God becomes human in Jesus of Nazareth, he not only enters into the finitude of humankind but in his death on the cross also enters into the situation of human *godforsakenness*. God humbles himself and takes upon himself the eternal death of the godless and the godforsaken, so that all the godless and godforsaken can experience communion with him. Thus the incarnate God is present and can be experienced *in the humanity of every human being*.

This interpretation of the pathos of God cannot be expressed in a bipolar theology but only in a *trinitarian* theology. Moltmann states that the event of cross and resurrection was not only an event initiated by God, but also one that took place "*within*" *God himself*. Referring to Phil. 2, he contends that in the *Son* the *Father* humiliated himself on the cross (CG:

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to believe in such a God of "self-distinction." In his view, the idea that God dwells "in the heights" (the "transcendent"), in the "holy place" (the temple of Jerusalem) and among those who are oppressed (Isa. 57.15) expresses the notion that our "tiny human brain" cannot comprehend the "All-Unity" of God and, therefore, divides it. It is not an act of self-distinction of God. With Moltmann, he sees the dangers of a rigid monotheism, but opts, instead, for a "dynamic monotheism," which is in his eyes genuinely Jewish (Lapide 1981: 61f.).

205ff.). The complete and hopeless godforsakenness of Jesus on the cross not only points to the abandonment (*paradidonai*) of the Son by the Father but in forsaking of the Son the Father also *abandons himself* (CG: 243). Moltmann argues that the Son suffers death in godforsakenness, while the Father suffers the death of the Son in the “infinite pain of love.” Thus for Moltmann, the cross is primarily an event *between God and God*. In a way analogous to Jewish mysticism, he can speak of a “burification” in God. It is the cross of the godforsaken Son in the middle of God’s trinitarian being that caused the deepest possible cleft within God’s self. In Moltmann’s theology the “uniting” of God takes place through the *Spirit* of resurrection and reconciliation. From the “cross event” between Father and Son proceeds the “spirit of life,” which “reunites” God. Through this process, Moltmann holds, the crucified God *took up into himself* all godforsakenness, death, damnation, and meaninglessness from which humans suffer (CG: 246). In other words, the *kenosis* of God created a tension within God in which human history can be included. In Moltmann’s own words, “The ‘bifurcation [*Entzweiung*]’ in God must contain the whole uproar of history within itself” (CG: 246). Thus the “history of God”—the “life of God within the Trinity” is described—became concrete in the Cross and includes all abysses of human history. Moltmann suggests that what Rosenzweig ascribed to the prayer of Israel, namely the “uniting of God,” can analogously be ascribed to the Holy Spirit, “who through believers ‘unites’ God by glorifying him” (CPS: 61). The glorifying of the Son and the Father in the Spirit of resurrection, liberation and fellowship is to be understood as the “union” of the triune God.

Like the Jewish reading, Moltmann stresses the eschatological and soteriological character of this unity. “The history of the kingdom of God on earth is nothing other than the history of the uniting of what is separated and the freeing of what is broken, in this being the history of the glorification of God” (CPS: 62). To understand this, we should no longer think God in history but *history in God*. Moltmann views God as an eschatologically open history that in a mysterious way embraces and characterizes our history. It is the history of the love of the Son and the pain of the Father generating the Spirit that liberates humans and opens them to the future. God is, so to speak, a counter-history (*Gegengeschichte*), a history of freedom in an unfree world.

Accordingly, Moltmann holds that the world is not separated from God. Nor do we discover mere resemblances and equivalents to his coming kingdom. In our reality real presences (*Realpräsenzen*) of God’s future reign can be found (CG: 337f.). Moltmann describes these real presences of God as the history of God making its way through the dust of our world and as

the history of the Spirit that is poured out upon all flesh (cf. §4.3.3). God's presence can be identified through material anticipations that point beyond themselves just as the real presence of God in the traditional sacraments. Moltmann can argue that our reality, taken up in the trinitarian history of reconciliation, is not only the *material* for Christian theology but also its *sacrament*. Thus, trinitarian theology enables us to interpret our reality as the *sacrament of God's liberating future*, i.e. as a reality qualified by God's word and embraced as realm of his presence. A concrete example that Moltmann himself mentions is "church" (cf. §3.2.6): as a community in which overstressed human beings find acceptance and "real human identity" the congregation is a sacrament of God's reign today.

The Jewish community can "sing the Lord's song in a foreign land." Through prayer and acknowledgement they "unite" God with his *Shekinah*, thus including their own suffering and pain in the history of God. That, at least, is the way Moltmann seems to interpret Jewish mysticism. As indicated above, he believes that Christians do something similar when they experience and acknowledge the Spirit of reconciliation moving through this world. Moltmann speaks of "participating in the trinitarian history of God with this world" (*CG*: 246ff., cf. *CPS*: 50f.). In order to trace this trinitarian history, we should try to observe the "identifications" (*Identifikationen*) of God in this world. As said, the criterion for distinguishing such presences is the history of the Crucified; their fulfilment the reign of the triune God, where God will be "all in all." Concretely, this means that the presence of God can be experienced where powers structures are unmasked in imitation of the rejected and crucified Christ. In other words, participation in the liberating history of God is possible only where enslaving structures that confuse humans lose their legitimacy. We participate in God's trinitarian history when we "identify" ourselves with Christ. In "suffering with the suffering" we experience the Spirit of freedom and resurrection. Moltmann refers to Paul: if we died with Christ, we also believe that we live with him (Rom. 6:8). Life in communion with the crucified and risen Christ is full life in the trinitarian situation of God; it is participation in the richness of the trinitarian community (later, in *EiT*, he would call Christ "the gateway to the Trinity" cf. §4.3.2). With Acts 17:48, Moltmann states that in communion with Christ it can truly be said that humans live *in God* and *from God*, "that they live, move and have their being in him." He even speaks of "a realistic divinization" (*theosis*) of the human being.

Thus we can conclude that where people find themselves in a new identity as human beings, they join in God's reconciling history and, conversely, where they are invited to celebrate the eschatological future of freedom, they will experience a new identity. As stated, reality can be seen

as the sacrament of God's presence. For Moltmann, concrete communities in which humans find *identity and acceptance* can, therefore, be viewed as the sacrament of God's liberating trinitarian history (*CG*: 336). For Moltmann, such a gathering of liberated humans is a feast anticipating the future reign of freedom (*CPS*: 108ff.). "For a particular time, in a particular space through a particular community, the laws and compulsions of 'this world' become invalid .... An alternative emerges and is presented in festal forms." Moltmann writes:

As an anticipation of what the redeemed life will be in the future it demonstrates the alternatives offered by the creative Spirit. The spell of destiny and the feeling of personal helplessness are lifted where the possibilities and powers of the creative Spirit are experienced in the feast. The helpless discover their power as they are seized by this Spirit. Those who have adapted themselves discover their own personalities as they begin to sing, talk and move within the feast. They discover that they are something and can do something. They "come out of their shells" in a way that surprises themselves. (*CPS*: 112)

Moltmann thus presents a *sacramental* theology that in a way complements his "negative theology." It clearly needs the "negation of the negative" as the criterion. The celebration of this feast can never be a flight from the suffering and pain of this world, because it is the feast of the Crucified (it is the anticipation of the crucified people that is celebrated). But on the other hand, "hope for the coming of the risen one ... forbids us to confine ourselves to a lament over suffering and earthly misery, and keeps us from simply attacking its causes without rejoicing in its future transformation."

### 3.2.6. The Church as "Messianic Intermezzo"

I will recapitulate the steps taken so far:

1. Churches are confronted with the dilemma of choosing between identity and involvement, often mistakenly pictured as a polarization of identity in faith and solidarity in action. According to Moltmann's analysis, both conservative and progressive Christians tend to flee from the tension between identity and involvement, either through unreflective dogmatism or reckless action. Evangelization and humanization are not alternatives. Inner conversion and changing social structures belong essentially together. But how do they belong together?

2. Moltmann thinks it is necessary to uncover the anthropological roots of the crisis. He holds that humans are deprived of real humanity because they are imprisoned in vicious circles of death. Focussing on the circle of "cultural alienation," we saw that humans fail to arrive at true

human identity because they have learned to define it in terms of “having” instead of “being.”

3. Apparently, psychological diagnoses and therapies do not help in breaking through these vicious circles. Moltmann believes we should dig deeper and lay bare their theological roots. The reason that humans base their own identity on categories of “having” instead of “being” is that they want to be gods themselves. To go beyond this anthropotheistic need for self-deification, Moltmann introduces the doctrine of justification as spelled out in Luther’s *theologia crucis*. God became human so that proud and unhappy gods may become true human beings. The fundament of Christian identity is the *sola gratia*, expressed in the surprise that one’s life is not meaningful because it has a demonstrable purpose but because it is unconditionally accepted by God. This creed not only affects the individual soul but, Moltmann believes, also the modern achievement-oriented society as a whole. He argues that God’s justification of human beings enables them to stop justifying themselves by clinging to dehumanizing and enslaving power structures.

4. To make this change, however, it must be pointed out how this doctrine of justification is expressed in daily existence (it is the question of the *acceptance* of the acceptance). It was argued that humans find true freedom in negating its opposite, i.e. in “identification” with the Crucified and finding identity in “non-identity.” Breaking through enslaving structures does not take place by submitting oneself to a God that is even higher, better, and stronger than these structures but by following the Crucified, i.e. being where he was and becoming involved with whom he was involved.

5. This “negative” theology is complemented by a “positive” sacramental theology. It is not simply a critical attitude of permanent non-identity in which humans may sample something of genuine freedom. The identification with the Crucified leads them into the fellowship of the triune God. Humans become free when they participate in God’s counter-history with this world.

Now the question arises whether these starting points for Christian identity are of any help to the church for moving beyond the identity-involvement dilemma sketched in §3.2.1. It has become clear that identity should not be equated with a fixed set of doctrines, habits or anything else along those lines. It is rather a way of Christian existence. Relevance is not simply an implementation of identity but intrinsically related to it. On the other hand, identity does not dissolve in revolutionary praxis. It is remarkable that Moltmann does not regard the tension between identity and relevance as the dilemma which all religious groups face in a pluralist society but pre-

dominantly as *the inevitable tension of Christian faith* (CG: 14, 24f.). Both the crisis of identity and that of relevance can be reduced to a common denominator: the *cross*. The way beyond the dilemma is thus a Christological one. Or better, it stems from a trinitarian theology with a strong Christological accent. If Christian theology is a genuine theology of the cross, i.e. worked out among the “crucified” people of today, then Christian identity (sharply distinguished from “unbelief” and “superstition”) is rooted in its relevance and *vice versa*. I will attempt to indicate how Moltmann sees this by focussing on the church as a paradigm for Christian existence.

The church has a message to proclaim. Moreover, it is itself an object, an article, of faith. At the same time, however, it is an empirical, historical power. How is the paradox that churches participate both in the ambiguities of historical life and in the “unambiguous life of the spiritual community” to be viewed? Whoever starts “from above” runs the risk of losing contact with the world; whoever starts “from below” runs the risk of losing the essence of the church in historical particularities. Basically, it is the question of the *boundary* between immanence and transcendence (cf. §2.4.1).

Moltmann sees three possible solutions. The first explores the notion of “paradoxical identity:” just as Christian existence is at once historical and eschatological, the church is at the same time an eschatological and a historical power (CPS: 21ff.). He shows that Bultmann understood this figure of paradoxical identity in the framework of the Lutheran doctrine of *justification*: “The paradox that Christian existence is at the same time an eschatological unworldly being and an historical being is analogous with the Lutheran statement *simul iustus, simul peccator*.” Already in the earliest stages of his theology Moltmann encountered the shortcomings of this paradigm, as we saw in §2.3.

The second type starts from the notion of anticipation (CPS: 24ff.). As Moltmann argues, this takes up the doctrine of *sanctification*. The church is at the same time object of hope and object of experience. Through the form it assumes in history and society, it continually both realizes and compromises, testifies to and betrays the promissory messianic history of Christ from which it stems. The church “lives from the surplus of promise over its own realizations of that promise.” The basic contradiction between the church’s faith and its experience is seen in the light of the paradoxical relation between hope and reality. This was the model of transcendence and immanence Moltmann himself explored in his theology of hope. In §3.1 I pointed out the problems he encountered.

The third type seeks a way out with the help of *sacramental thinking* (CPS: 26ff.). As Moltmann describes, “the whole church is orientated towards the sacramental representation of the history of Christ and the es-

chatological future in, with and beneath the word, the bread and the wine.” Sacramental thinking relates the remembrance of Christ to the hope of future glory in *present signs* of liberating and uniting grace. Moltmann writes: “The eschatological and the present, the particular and the universal, the heavenly and the earthly come together symbolically in the gospel and in the eucharist.” In this way sacramental thinking interprets the relation between the church in which one believes and that which one experiences as “the being of the one *in* the other.” This goes beyond the mere simultaneity of the church in paradoxical identity and the dialectical process of hope and experience of the church. In Moltmann’s opinion, these ways of thinking are “grounded and expanded through the sacramental statement about the existence of the one in the other.” The church is not identical with the coming reign of God nor a preliminary stage of it but an *anticipatory sign* of the definitive reign of God.

I think we can call Moltmann’s renewed approach sacramental, but only if we consider that it is a sacramental view that integrates the dialectical and anticipatory views. He has serious problems with traditional (Roman Catholic) sacramental thinking, characterized by the tension between “nature” and “form” and the question of how the essence of the real Church is expressed in the historical form. Stressing that essence and form can neither be separated nor identified, he claims that sacramental thinking is fundamentally dialectical and eschatological:

The difference between the form and the nature of the church, as well as between the church and the kingdom of God, always forces itself upon us when we look from the present into the eschatological future. But if, reversing the process, we look from the eschatological future which, in the history of Christ, has “already begun” in the present existence of the church, then we recognize the essential nature already existing in the form, and the coming lordship of God as already present in the historical church. (*CPS*: 27)

The sacramental event which makes the church the church thus takes place in the tension between the “already” and the “not yet” of the transcendent future of freedom. Thus we could say that the “boundary” between immanence and transcendence is this sacramental event. I would say that with this third type Moltmann takes up both the doctrine of *justification* and of *sanctification*. In order to experience the counter-history of God’s reign we must “accept” the gracious acceptance of ourselves by God and see ourselves in categories of “being.” Only from this perspective can we ask how we should “work” for God’s kingdom. Conversely, our justification

should only be articulated in the concrete eschatological perspective of God's history in which we are invited to participate (it does not express a static relation between God and humans but a dynamic covenant relation).

By "sacramental event" Moltmann means first of all "the preaching of the Word of God in the human word, the presence of the coming Christ in bread and wine, and the coming of the Spirit in baptism" (*CPS*: 27). But it is broader than that. Actually, being church as such could be regarded as a sacrament, i.e. as a sacrament of the trinitarian history of God with this world. It is evident that for Moltmann ecclesiology is a function of trinitarian theology (in his ecclesiological reflections in *CPS* he particularly emphasized the pneumatological aspect). He writes: "The church's first word is not 'church' but Christ. The church's final word is not 'church' but the glory of the Father and the Son in the Spirit of liberty" (*CPS*: 19). It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfil in the world but it is "the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father" that includes the church and creates a church "as it goes on its way" (*CPS*: 64). As Moltmann states: "The Apostles' Creed expresses this truth by integrating the *credo ecclesiam* in the *credo in deum triumum*. And no ecclesiology should think below this level" (*CPS*: 65). Consequently, we cannot say what the church *is* in all circumstances but only *where the church happens*. In the previous section it was noted that for Moltmann the places where humans find identity and acceptance can be regarded as a sacrament of God's liberating counter-history. When churches are "messianic communities," namely communities in which the eschatological feast of the liberated is celebrated, they could be regarded as such a sacrament. Churches are then an element within the double movement of cross and resurrection, resistance and hope, distorting ego-identities and founding new identity. Or, as Moltmann writes: "In this double function of resistance and consolation the liberating feast becomes a '*messianic intermezzo*' (Van Ruler<sup>89</sup>) on the risen Christ's way to the new creation of the world" (*CPS*: 113, italics mine). In this *universal*

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<sup>89</sup> For the sake of clarity, Moltmann only takes over Van Ruler's expression as such (Van Ruler 1947), without its Christological context. For him it is the anticipatory feast of freedom (cf. *CPS*: 275, 394), i.e. a "messianic intermezzo" on the way of the Resurrected to the new creation; for Van Ruler himself this whole way was the "messianic intermezzo" and in his view the revelation in Christ did not anticipate a new creation but the final restoration of the original one (in other words, the work of the Christ in its totality was seen as an "intermezzo" in the historical succession of God's acts of salvation, namely the period between the incarnation and the moment he will hand the kingdom to God the Father; so 1 Cor. 15:24-28). Cf. Berkhof 1986: 471.

context of God's trinitarian history, this messianic intermezzo of freedom in an unfree world, the church can grasp the meaning of its particular existence without asserting itself in a particularist sense or becoming dissolved in a "pseudo-universalism" (CPS: 19).

From this sacramental view on the existence of the church it becomes clear how identity and relevance are interrelated. On the one hand, the relevance of the church for people today stems self-evidently from its *messianic* identity. Moltmann develops the present significance of the person of Christ for the church (and the world accordingly) through the classic doctrine of Christ's threefold office (*munus triplex*), i.e. the prophetic office (*officium propheticum*), the priestly (*officium sacerdotale*) and the kingly (*officium regium*, CPS: 75, 372).<sup>90</sup> The prophetic office of Christ makes clear that the identity of the church lies in the manifest "partiality" of the gospel to the "crucified" of the world, i.e. in the promise for the future which is heralded to the poor and which demands a radical turn to the future. The priestly ministry is related to Jesus's self-sacrifice to death on the cross for the life of the whole creation. The church should not be the crown of society or its cement but a fellowship of godforsaken humans brought to community with God through Jesus's godforsakenness, a fellowship of sinners justified through Jesus who "was made sin" for them, of the accursed blessed through the accursed death of Jesus, and thus of "ambassadors of reconciliation in Christ's stead." Moltmann speaks of a "priesthood of all believers." The kingly office of Jesus becomes clear against the horizon of Easter, i.e. the resurrection and exaltation of the Crucified who is given "all power in heaven and on earth." The crucified Christ is the *Pantocrator*, the "Lord of the World" (cf. §2.3.2). Accordingly, the kingly ministry of the church involves a liberating alternative for oppressive power structures. The new freedom of his reign is experienced where the "schemes of the world" are breached, where the privileges of the world no longer have any power. From the perspective of this messianic reversal of all relations, Moltmann can speak of the "sovereignty of all believers." For the sake of clarity, in Moltmann's view a total reversal of societal structures is not the ultimate purpose. The goal lies on a more fundamental level. It is all about the "new

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<sup>90</sup> For Moltmann, this doctrine of Christ's threefold office has a "regulative function." As he claims, the restriction to Christ's prophetic office leads to liberal Protestantism "which overlooks evil and death;" the restriction to Christ's priestly office to "the danger of a religion of consolation which justifies existing injustice;" the restriction to Christ's kingly office to "clerical, moral or political triumphalism."

man" who no longer acts within the system of lordship and servitude but who, under the rule of Christ, is truly free.

On the other hand, Christian identity is experienced self-evidently in its manifest relevance. The issue at stake is the breadth of the horizon of hope and freedom opened up through Christ. For Moltmann, the reconciliation of the world in the trinitarian history of God includes the whole world. The focus on the centre must not lead to a loss of the horizon nor *vice versa*. In *CPS* Moltmann quotes Bonhoeffer once more: "The more exclusively we acknowledge and confess Christ as our Lord, the more fully the wide range of his dominion will be disclosed to us" (*CPS*: 133; cf. §2.3.2). Christian eschatology is not merely eschatology for Christians: "if it is to be eschatology of the all-embracing kingdom, it must also be unfolded as the eschatology of Israel, of the religions, of human social systems and of nature" (*CPS*: 135). In other words,

When the church talks about hope, it talks about *the future of Israel*, for it proceeded from Israel, and only together with Israel can its hope be fulfilled. When Christianity talks about hope, it is talking about *the future of the nations*—the whole of mankind—because it exists for the nations and its hope is given for mankind's sake. When Christianity talks about hope, it is talking about *the future of the world*, mankind and nature, in whose history it is, in practical terms, involved. (*CPS*: 134)

In this perspective the "world" and, among other things, accordingly the "world religions" come into view. Moltmann points out that we live in a "new world situation" (*CPS*: 150ff.). Looking at the economic, military, political and social web of global interdependencies, he writes, we cannot but speak about one "world history," a "single humanity," and one common world. In addition, there is a "general threat" (famine, class struggle, ideological imperialism, atomic wars, destruction of the environment) that can only be overcome by "common efforts" (cf. §4.4.3). In *CG* he speaks about the "necessity to be relational" (*CG*: 11). He interprets it as a kairotic moment: "either the nations will run aground on their diversity or they will survive in new community." In this situation, he maintains, the church should no longer think in terms of *quantitative* mission but develop a *qualitative* mission, i.e. a mission "directed towards an alteration of the whole atmosphere of life." This qualitative mission takes place in dialogue. In dialogue, Moltmann grants, religions change, Christianity included. One has to make oneself vulnerable in openness. This does not involve a loss of identity; "we acquire a new profile in the confrontation with our partner." The important qualification he adds is that the origin of the church's call lies

in the messianic promise and hope of Israel (we hear the echo of the Confession of the Netherlands Reformed Church of 1949, cf. §2.3.4) and that this will “give its stamp to the dialogue with the world religions.” I quote:

The dialogue cannot be determined by arbitrary and predetermined attitudes, but only by attitudes and judgments which are based on Christianity’s special promise and are directed towards the universal future of mankind in the kingdom of God. But just because of this we must note the changed world situation in which the world religions find themselves today and to which they are adapting themselves. (*CPS*: 150)

Further on Moltmann insists that Christians must not “formulate the Christian position before the entry into dialogue,” but “in the context of dialogue” (*CPS*: 159). Apparently, however, this context of dialogue is already stamped by the universal messianic promise. It marks the differences between what concerns the future of humankind in God’s reign and “arbitrary and predetermined attitudes and judgments.”

From the perspective of twenty-first-century debates on pluralism, questions could be raised with regard to the way Moltmann relates the identity and relevance of Christian faith. It is not my aim to discuss Moltmann’s proposals here in the light of these debates (as indicated in CHAPTER ONE, I am following Moltmann on his way through history) but a twenty-first-century sensitivity for the way he includes and embraces everyone in his messianic perspective on reality may sharpen the problem with which he would be confronted in the course of the 1970s, namely the problem of a *fundamental plurality of perspectives*. He aims apparently to offer a “universal” theology that avoids the pitfalls of an absolutist exclusivism and an Enlightened relativism. He firmly rejects the classical (absolutist) exclusivism (“outside the church no salvation”) as well as the inclusivism of Vatican II which held that “all men of good will can achieve salvation” (he labels it “a milder, opener, perhaps even ‘more enlightened’” absolutism). He also denounces the relativism of the Enlightenment, which he regards as a cloak for new absolutism (*CPS*: 155ff.; cf. *CG*: 11). “Absolutism and relativism are really twins, because both view ‘everything’ from a higher, nonhistorical watch-tower.” Apparently, he wants to descend from this watchtower. “In the open history of potentiality one can only move specifically from one relationship to other relationships in the hope that living relations will enable us to gain ‘everything’ and to combat the threat of ‘nothingness’.” Nevertheless, he has to sustain the universal perspective. It is, after all, the universality of Christ’s reign and, more broadly, of the

“new humanity” in the trinitarian history of God with this world, that constitutes the church’s identity and relevance. It is Christianity’s “particular vocation to prepare the messianic era among the nations and to make ready the way for the coming redemption.” Since the identity of the church is rooted in the trinitarian mystery of reconciliation in which the whole world is included, it can identify all resistance to inhumanity and all solidarity with dehumanized people as a fostering of God’s reign. Along these lines Moltmann maintains the universal perspective of his messianic theology. Mission is not an extension of the influence and power of the “visible church” but an invitation to the history of the triune God that the church proclaims (*CPS*: 153ff.). The church “is the *vehicle* of the gospel of freedom, not a schoolmaster of all nations” (italics mine). Others “will not be ecclesiasticized in the process, nor will they be Christianized either; but they will be given a messianic direction towards the kingdom” (*CPS*: 163).

In *CPS* a pneumatological perspective is offered as well.<sup>91</sup> He speaks of a “charismatic quickening of different religious gifts, powers and potentialities for the kingdom of God and the liberation of men” and a “charismatic activation of cultural and religious forces in the interest of the messianic future” (*CPS*: 163). Therefore, “no culture must be pushed out and no religion extinguished. On the contrary, all of them can be *charismatically absorbed* and changed in the power of the Spirit” (italics mine). Strictly speaking, he thus does not strive for christianization or churchification but for “messianization,” i.e. opening people up to the true life that has been opened up by Christ. What Moltmann does not acknowledge is that for an outsider (a Buddhist, for instance) this “messianization” is a form of christianization or even churchification, i.e. an equation of “real human identity,” “real future,” “real freedom,” etc. with the (Western) Christian perspective on humanity. The critique of universalist incorporation that could stem from this observation arose within the circle of Christianity itself, among “contextual” theologians. The following sections are designed to sharpen the problem of plurality and universality that arises when within Moltmann’s paradigm of Christian identity the quest for relevance of Christian faith is explored.

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<sup>91</sup> In his later theology Moltmann elaborates on this pneumatological perspective (§4.4.3).

### 3.3. *A Christian Perspective on Human Rights? A Case Study*

The search to implement a supposedly liberating theological view of humankind reaches its climax in the quest for a theological perspective on *human rights*. At least so Moltmann suggests:

The *political and social directions of the churches* gain their *universal significance* only in their relationship to human rights. As regards human rights the church necessarily becomes ‘church for others’ or ‘church for the world.’” (1971b: 349)

This section reviews Moltmann’s view of the liberation of humankind as indicated in his theology of human rights developed in the course of the 1970s. For the sake of clarity: this is my only concern here. I will not enter any discussion on the relation between Christian faith and human rights in general nor will I attempt to put Moltmann’s view in the perspective of ongoing debates on this subject. His theology of human rights will be used as a case study to test his Christocentric trinitarian “solution” to the identity-involvement dilemma.

In the 1970s Moltmann was occupied rather intensively with the issue of human rights. The occasion was a study programme of the Department of Theology of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), launched at the Nairobi assembly in August 1970. The apparent urge in Reformed churches to come into terms with the issue of human rights theologically was prompted by the dominance of this theme in recent ecumenical debates (concretely, for instance, in the anti-racism program of the WCC, the rather controversial “Program to Combat Racism” (PCR), cf. Moltmann 1984: 5). Furthermore, as Lochman writes in his description of the course of the study programme mentioned above, Reformed churches had historically always been concerned theologically with questions on public and political responsibility and the rights of civilians in a Christian perspective (Lochman 1976: 13). It is obvious that certain theological controversies play a part here (as is generally known, the Calvinist emphasis on sanctification made it possible to accept the so-called *tertius usus legis*—rather suspect in Lutheran circles—which creates space for a theology of human rights). A more systematic reflection upon the theological perspective on human rights today was, therefore, to be expected. Moltmann agrees. He points out that since the Puritan revolution the Reformed churches have had a direct part and interest in human and civil

rights, much stronger than, for instance, German Lutheranism (1984: 13) had.<sup>92</sup>

The purpose, as Lochman explains it, of the study programme was twofold. In the first place, the direct aim was not a new declaration but an examination of the (possible) *theological basis* of the human rights as expressed in the universal declaration of 1948. The motivation of such a Christian perspective was, as Lochman stresses, not to distance oneself from “other movements and fellow human beings” but to encourage a united and theologically responsible engagement on the part of the member churches (1976: 13). In the second place, the question of human rights was linked explicitly to the question of *liberation*. This says a great deal about the drive of the programme. It should not establish once more “the traditional values that glorify the status quo ideologically” or entertain the traditionally dominant natural law approach, seeking the basis for human rights in a common “human nature.” In contrast, it should start with the experience and possibility of liberation in concrete situations of oppression. Thus the quest for human rights was put in the “dynamic context of the search for greater justice.” Both starting points were to be explicated in a so-called position paper that was supposed to trigger the discussion in the different member churches all over the world. Moltmann was asked to write this paper. Accordingly, his theological reflection on human rights must be viewed within this concrete setting. In this section I will compare the position paper, published in 1971 (§3.3.1), with the concluding essay, published in 1976 (§3.3.2) in which Moltmann dealt with the many different responses to his earlier paper. The differences are striking. The comparison unveils a change in theological “method” and anthropology.

### 3.3.1. The Position Paper

Moltmann's original paper not only offered a brief overview of the origin and developments of the idea of human rights but also contained a proposal for channelling the discussion. The influences of his own political theology as well as the Latin American liberation theology that was reaching Europe at that time are very obvious, as we will see. The starting point is apparently

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<sup>92</sup> Both Lochman and Moltmann omit mentioning that Reformed theologians, and particularly Calvinist ones, have also objected in principle to human rights or rather, against the *idea* of human rights as stemming from the French Revolution for the very reason that it presumes that humans can establish rights and liberties for themselves, apart from the will of the sovereign God (cf. Van Egmond 1995: 192ff., who mentions examples of the Calvinist suspicion of the idea of human sovereignty implied in the notion of human rights).

*the problem of identity and relevance*, spelled out in two questions concerning the relation between Christian faith and human rights:

What theological relevance do declarations of human rights have for the political and social practice of Christianity in the world?  
 What relevance does the political and social existence of the church have for the spreading and realization of human rights?  
 (Moltmann 1971b: 349)

Moltmann thus seeks the mutual relevance of Christian socio-political praxis and the declaration of human rights. He implies that it should be kept in mind that both are rooted in a different concept of “humanity” (1971b: 350f.). The tradition of human rights is founded on the notion of the equality of all human beings on the basis of their common human nature. This concept of *humanitas* goes back to ancient times and was common to Greeks and “barbarians.” Biblical thinking on “humanity” developed parallel to this and took another route. According to Moltmann, the dignity, freedom and responsibility of human beings are not grounded primarily in human nature but in their being God’s image or, better, that they are *destined* to be God’s image. Secondly, because all people are created by the one God, all people are equal. Thirdly, late Israelite eschatology and the Christian proclamation of Jesus as the Son of Man and the new human being display a *future-oriented* notion of humanity. Contrary to “Greek” thinking, it is thus not common human nature that knits people together but “their common definition in terms of the similitude of God and their common future in the coming kingdom of God.”

Does this, principally speaking, involve an unbridgeable cleft between Christian faith and the human rights tradition as developed in Enlightened Europe? Moltmann’s survey of the history of human rights suggests that in spite of the fundamentally different (anthropological) starting point, there are unmistakable similarities. The Declaration of 1948, seen against the background of Fascist terror in Europe (Moltmann 1971b: 352), may obviate the protective side of the state vis-à-vis *individual* rights (the dominant trend in the European and American human rights tradition), but it also “represents social demands which go beyond the middle-class limitation to individual freedoms” and, as Moltmann concludes from the preamble, it also emphasizes the *future-oriented character* of human rights (the universal declaration is seen as “the common ideal to be attained by all peoples and nations”).

However, that does not pave the way for an easy reconciliation between the Christian faith and the human rights movement (which actually came into existence in protest against churchly heteronomy). Moltmann’s

hesitations concern the practical implications of the declaration of human rights and the critical question of whose rights it actually serves. Is it more than “only an ideal suspended above an inhuman world” (1971b: 354)? In his overview of the history of human rights Moltmann mentions the American *Declaration of the Rights of Virginia* (1776), which spoke of the equality of all men as the self-evident axiom of every human policy but lacked a “declaration of intention” with regard to the overcoming of concrete inequality (one could say that it was the rights of the white slave owners and not those of the black slaves that were protected). Moltmann is concerned that the 1948 Declaration seems to have a similar function, i.e. as an “*idealistic*” manifesto without any “*revolutionary* significance” (cf. 1971b: 354). Unconditionally compromising itself with respect to the declaration on human rights may thus turn the Christian faith into the religious legitimization of an abstract and idealistic statement which hides injustice instead of eradicating it.

Moltmann thus concentrates the search for a theological basis for human rights on the methodological and hermeneutical question concerning the character and locus of a possible alliance between the Christian faith and the human rights tradition. His proposal is in tune with his messianic, political theology at that time. He does not take the mainstream road of theological tradition, perennially connecting “Christian practice and universal humanity by means of a Christian *doctrine of natural law* and a Christian doctrine of *creation*” (1971b: 354). This connection, he maintains, “is *only a theoretical one*: the existing right of man is explained as a reflection of the right of God” (italics mine). According to Moltmann, such a Christian doctrine of natural law “really has nothing to add to the natural law” itself.<sup>93</sup> It may recognize, maintain, and explain human rights, but it cannot foster their implementation in the practice of liberation *because it starts with a universal declaration in order to arrive at a concrete situation of injustice instead of the other way around*. In contrast, Moltmann suggests beginning with the “concrete practice of the liberation of the unfree man through faith, love and hope” and then “sketch that theory which grounds this event of liberation and makes it universally binding”—concretely, by defining human beings in terms of the freedom entailed by their being the image of God. In other words, he wants to start with the concrete practice of liberation in order to outline that theory that combines this historical event with hope in the “Kingdom of the new,” thus making it accessible to

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<sup>93</sup> For a critique of thinking in terms of natural law see Moltmann 1974b: 68ff.

everyone (1971b: 354f.). Christian reflection upon human rights thus moves from “the concrete theology of liberation” to “the universal meaning of this freedom as universal human right and the common future of this freedom as new humanity.”

On this basis Moltmann conceives of the theological process of the study programme in terms of three basic insights:

1. Christian theology is the theology of liberation, for it understands Christ in the comprehensive sense as liberator.
2. The theology of liberation is the theology of humankind, for every human being is defined by his being the image of God.
3. The theology of liberation is the theology of the future, for the Kingdom of the Son of Man is the human future of humankind.

In summary, theology is liberating when its view of human life starts with the *concrete* history of the Crucified and arrives at the *universal* future of the Resurrected (cf. §2.4.2).

Moltmann intends to achieve this move from the concrete to the universal in questions that are to be posed to the three steps, thus opening the floor to discussion. With regard to the first step he indicates that if we want to understand Christian theology as a “theology of liberation” we first have to explain the *hermeneutical tools* we use to read the Bible. Concretely, this means:

How does the Bible look if we read it with the eyes of the poor, the hungry, the outcasts, and the oppressed? Do we not assume a false standpoint over against the Bible when we read it as a book of religion or as a book of law or as a book of dogmatic ideologies and do not stand in solidarity with the oppressed?

He claims that if the sick, the possessed, the leprous, the humiliated, and the godless experienced Jesus as a *concrete liberator* from their *concrete misery*, the real question facing the Christian faith at present is that of determining what it is from which Christianity seeks to liberate people in the discipleship of Jesus: “Do we understand faith as a concrete event of liberation or do we believe only in a freedom which does not really exist?” This view of liberation is obviously embedded in his “critical theology” (§3.2). For Moltmann, it is clear that although “the powers and the principalities of the world” no longer persecute Christianity today, “they nevertheless would like to take *the dangerous power of liberation* from it” (*italics mine*). Therefore, a critical theology must ask “on which side” the church stands:

Has it become the political religion of the powerful in order to receive their goodwill and money? In our land where and how does liberation for the oppressed proceed from ecclesiastical institutions and Christian actions?

With this Moltmann arrives at step two. Because, theologically speaking, every human being is defined as the image of God, a theology of liberation (read: a doctrine of the liberating God) is “a theology of man.” For Moltmann, this involves the position that “Church” and “Christian practice” will not be “realized” in Christian circles alone. In overcoming “Christian caste-spirit and mistrust of others” it must make “the question of man its own question.” In doing so, Moltmann states, it must be kept in mind that the question of humankind is the most important one for the inhuman, the dehumanized. “Consequently, a church which makes the question of man its own question, cannot simply ‘exist for all men’; *it must exist for those robbed of human rights and freedoms*” (italics mine). The critical question is therefore: “How can the church become the community of the poor and the oppressed and dissolve its ties with others who make them poor and oppress them?” Moltmann here apparently encounters a tension between “christianization” and “humanization.” If the aim of “christianization” is the “humanization” of the world, what then is specifically Christian about that compared to other attempts to humanize this inhuman world? Should the Christian faith associate itself with “secular” liberation movements?<sup>94</sup>

Having stated that theology is liberation theology and that liberation theology is a theology of human beings as such (and not just of Christians), Moltmann comes to step three, a cluster of questions on the meaning and purpose of this liberation. Concerning Christian intervention in the human rights debate, the question is which ideal of the future is depicted in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and whether it can “be combined in the ‘human kingdom of the Son of Man,’ which, according to Daniel 7, is to cut off the kingdoms of the world?” The question behind this question is: How can there be engagement in the human rights movement (be “relevant”) without the loss of Christian identity? In other words, how can a syncretism between the kingdom of God and human “kingdoms” be avoided? Molt-

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<sup>94</sup> This question comes most urgently to the fore in the issue of resistance to institutionalized tyranny (military cliques, a white minority, an exploiting class). As Moltmann asks: “If an evident tyranny has no right to power, is power then justified? Who is justified in and obligated to resistance? Is there a right of the people to revolution as earlier in the was a right of the congregation to reformation?”

mann therefore asks: “To what degree does the Christian hope in the kingdom of God support and to what extent does it criticise the hope in the coming society of humanity, which is expressed in human rights?” As noted above, the crucial issue is the *Praxisbezug* of the 1948 Declaration:

How can there develop out of the ideal of human rights a *concrete utopia* which relates the intended human future of man to the specific political, social and racial injustice of the present in order to overcome opposition and resistance? (italics mine)

In Moltmann’s eyes it is evident that if Christianity wants to represent this future of humankind today it should overcome all national, cultural and economic “identities”—Christians should find their common identity in the crucified Christ, the “Son of man,” the “new man.” At least, this is what his questions seem to imply:

Does the ecumenical bond of the churches give individual churches and Christians more independence over against the coercion of their own nation and social order? Does the struggle for the realization of human rights not presuppose an inner break in the national egoism and the class intellect or the racial mind-set? If Christians find their *identity* in the crucified Christ, then what *relevance* can national, cultural and economic identity still possess? (italics mine)

In summary, what is the purpose of these questions? They are unmistakably indicators for the completely different track Moltmann aims to take in the debate on the relation between the Christian faith and human rights, in line with the fundamentals of his political theology. First, a Christian perspective on human rights does not start with human “nature” but with the future of humankind and, second, does not proceed from the universal to the concrete but the other way around. The motive of liberation theology is manifest: a theology of human rights starts where people suffer from violations of these rights. But can the universality of human rights, theologically speaking, be based on eschatological unity alone? And can, theologically speaking, freedom be based on the “preferential option for the poor” alone? Does Moltmann, who wants to avoid “natural law” theology, not accordingly bypass (or underestimate) the Christian theological idea that the freedom and equality of all is rooted in the creation of all human beings as God’s image? And does a Christian perspective on human rights not need a more profound theological analysis of oppression (of “sin”) and liberation than the well-intended partiality of a Western theologian with the poor and oppressed (however important that may be!)? We will see how Moltmann encounters

these questions in his debate with liberation theology (cf. §3.4). In his second paper on human rights, significant changes can already be observed.

### 3.3.2. The Concluding Paper

Moltmann's position paper provoked a wide variety of responses from all over the world. He was asked to write a concluding paper. The draft version of this was discussed in February 1976 in London by representatives of the WARC Department of Theology. The differences between the position paper and the final paper ("Christian Faith and Human Rights") are obvious. What happened during the intervening years? Unfortunately, neither Lochman nor Moltmann reflect explicitly upon the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the position paper and the discussion on the draft of the conclusion. Their casual remarks tempt one to jump into conclusions about fundamental changes in Moltmann's thinking (what can be traced to inherent developments in Moltmann's theology and what is brought in by the various Reformed discussion partners?—the final paper is, after all, a compromise proposal). Since a close reading of the responses lies beyond the scope of this study, I will confine myself to a comparison of the two papers which I will attempt in the next subsection. I will first evaluate the concluding paper, "Christian Faith and Human Rights," in its own right.

Why is a Christian and even a Reformed perspective on human rights needed and in what does it consist? Why should theology have to present again what "thousands of experts, lawyers, legislators, and diplomats in the United Nations have already accomplished" (Moltmann 1976b: 20)? On the other hand, "can Christian theology allow itself to dispense with the discussion of and the struggle for the realization of human rights?" Moltmann's concluding paper suggests that in this tension between relevance and identity the quest for a theological basis of human rights should be explained. Its starting point is crystal clear. Christian theology cannot withdraw itself from the struggle for human rights, since

on ground of the creation of man and woman in the image of God, on the ground of the incarnation of God for the reconciliation of the world, and on the ground of the coming of the kingdom of God as the consummation of history, the concern that is entrusted to Christian theology is one for *the humanity of persons* as for their ongoing rights and duties. (Moltmann 1976b: 20, italics mine)

But, as Moltmann explicitly remarks, its task is more than to present what is "universally" accepted as the rights of human beings.

The specific task of Christian theology in these matters is grounding fundamental human rights in God's right to - that is, his claim upon - human beings, their human dignity, their fellowship, their rule over the earth, and their future. It is the duty of the Christian faith *beyond human rights and duties* to stand for the dignity of human beings in their life with God and for God. (italics mine)

Moltmann thus defines the specifically theological contribution to the struggle for human rights as *their being grounded in God's claim upon human beings* (Moltmann 1976b: 21f.). Apparently, he does not want to oppose the human rights as formulated in the universal declaration but to *ground* them. Does he make the implicit claim that only Christian faith can offer the true ground of the "humanity of persons?" I will come back to this.

To elaborate on this "claim of God," Moltmann starts with the theological idea of God's *covenant* with people (a notion that Moltmann had utilized already in the 1950s under influence of, amongst others, Otto Weber and Karl Barth, cf. §2.3). This outlook, from the perspective of federal theology, distinguishes the WARC document from contemporary Lutheran and Roman Catholic reflections, which seek respectively for analogies and correspondences between the Christian faith and secular human rights within the dualism of the "two kingdoms"<sup>95</sup> and present what is specifically Christian as the fulfilment of the *natural law* within a Thomistic nature-grace scheme (cf. Moltmann 1984: 12). In contrast, Moltmann relates human and divine history by presuming a covenant history between God and his people which puts human history under pressure. He relates the idea of God as having a "claim" on people explicitly to the Old Testament stories of the *Exodus* and of the *covenant* with the community that was liberated from Egyptian slavery as well as to the New Testament proclamation of liberation from sin, law, and death through the vicarious death of Christ and of the new covenant, the new rights and duties, the new fellowship of the Resurrected. In line with his *Theology of Hope* he sees Christ as the sharpening of God's promise of new humanity in the future kingdom of God to which human beings are destined. The universal character of human rights and the inalienable dignity of human beings is thus not grounded in nature but in the particularity of God's history with his people, which becomes most clearly visible in Christ.

But there is more to say about the biblical foundation of his argument. The notion of God's "claim" on people—and with this the very essence of being human—is also related to *creation*, to the human being's

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<sup>95</sup> Among others, the Lutheran theologian H.E. Tödt (Moltmann 1984: 12).

“original destiny through having been created in the image of God” (1984: 21), and is thus not only eschatologically (as in the position paper) but also protologically founded. *God the Liberator is also the Creator*. Moltmann now draws a line from creation to the eschaton (and not from only from the “exodus” to the eschaton), which, theologically speaking, the issue of human rights should be discussed. For convenience’s sake, the accent still lies heavily on the future. The future involves, so to say, not a restoration of the original human *essence*, as in more protologically founded theologies but, similar to Cocceius’ thought (cf. §2.3.3), the fulfilment of the original *destination*.<sup>96</sup>

On the basis of this notion of God’s claim on people Moltmann arrives at *four fundamental human rights*, i.e. rights (and duties!) that belong essentially to what it means to be truly human or, in other words, are needed to fulfill the original human destiny of having been created in the image of God (1984: 23ff.). *One*: “The image of God is human beings in all their relationships in life.” In the fulness of their lives—i.e. economically, socially, politically, and personally—human beings are destined to live “before the face of God.” Contrary to ancient political ideologies in which the king alone is called “image of God,” the Bible calls human beings as such the image of God. For Moltmann, “this constitutes a fundamental criticism of the divinization of the rulers and their ideologies of rule.” Mere democratization is thus given the perspective of biblical theology: not the king but the individual human being is the mediator between God and people in all the relationships of life. For Moltmann, such democratic freedom is related intrinsically to responsibility (“freedom and rights by themselves mean virtually nothing”). He mentions particularly the *right* and the *duty to resistance* to inhuman regimes (thus confirming his earlier question in the position paper).<sup>97</sup>

*Two*: “The image of God is human beings together with others.” Referring to Gen. 1:28, Moltmann stresses that the human person is truly an image of God not *over against* his fellow humans nor *apart* from them but only *in fellowship* with them (in CHAPTER FOUR we will see how he gives

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<sup>96</sup> Is this not in contradiction to his *Theology of Play*, in which he defended the “groundlessness” of life” (cf. §3.2.3)? I think that “destination” should not be understood under categories of purpose but under the *gloria dei* category of theological aesthetics category (as Cocceius himself did). Life has a goal (a *Ziel*) but not a purpose (*Zweck*).

<sup>97</sup> For Moltmann the right to resistance is a Calvinist doctrine (he refers to the Scottish Confession, 1560, art. 14, 1984: 25, 79).

this a more profound theological foundation). He repeats once again that liberalism errs in overlooking the “social side of freedom.” Democratization may not lead to the misunderstanding that every human being is his own absolute ruler.

*Three:* “Being created in the image of God is the basis of the right of human beings to rule over the earth and of their right to community with the non-human creation.” On the basis of the same Genesis text Moltmann points to the calling to “rule over the non-human creation.” Once more, the human *right* is most explicitly related to the corresponding *duty*. Human dominion should be conform to the “Creator’s lordship over the world,” “plundering, exploitation, and the destruction of nature contradict their right and dignity.” Although he speaks about “cooperation and community,” a “life-giving symbiosis between human society and the natural environment” and even about the “rights”<sup>98</sup> of the nonhuman creation, Moltmann does not reject the notion of “rule” and “dominion” as such. Within a decade this would change, as will be shown in §4.2.3. It is striking that he brings up the “economic” rights within the perspective of humankind’s relation to nature and not within that of individual rights. Apparently, the basic economic right is not personal wealth but the right to “a just share in life, nourishment, work, shelter, and personal possession.”<sup>99</sup> The notorious *dominium terrae* notion does not legitimate exploitation but, to the contrary, serves as basis for a *responsible society*.

*Four:* “Being created in the image of God is the basis of the right of human beings to their future and their responsibility for those who come after them.” This right to self-determination and responsibility for the future as the image of God encompasses the previous three fundamental rights. In human history, in which the kingdom of glory has not yet been realized, human beings correspond to their destination to be fulfilled in the future through their *openness* for this future and through their *responsibility* for the present in light of this future. They gain their dignity by virtue of their “citizenship in the kingdom of God” and thus have a right to this future as well as corresponding duties in the shaping of life in the present. A particular form of responsibility Moltmann mentions in this context is that for *future generations*. He calls this rejection of the so-called “egoism of the generations” a “temporal perspective” for human rights and points to the politics of economics, population, health and even genetics (in a later contribution

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<sup>98</sup> In his theology of the 1980s the quotation marks would disappear.

<sup>99</sup> In several places Moltmann writes about the right to meaningful work as a basic human right (cf., for instance, Moltmann 1984: 37-58).

to the human rights debate he will elaborate on this issue much more extensively; cf. Moltmann 1995). We can deduce from Moltmann's argument that God's claim on humans in covenant history—over against any determinism or fatalism—establishes the *destination* and *calling* of every human being in the past, present and future. This includes the right to “self-determination,” but also the responsibility to transform the present in light of the future.

Thus four fundamental perspectives of human life based on the theological idea of God's claim on people (the human being as person, as a fellow human, in his natural environment, and as being “open” to the future) appear to be the basis of four dimensions of human rights: individual human rights, social human rights, rights to economic, social and political self-determination, and the rights of future generations.

The striking difference between the original position paper and the concluding paper is that Moltmann now elaborates explicitly on the specifically anthropological aspect of this problem (1976b: 29ff.). Presumably, this had been a point of discussion at the consultation of the theological department in London, because there Moltmann was asked to rewrite the section on “justification and the renewal of man” (so Lochman 1976: 16). I will briefly summarize his line of thought. First, a Christian theology of human rights does not stop with the mere registration of violations and abuses of these rights but goes further and looks for the *anthropological roots* of these particular problems. As in *CG*, he holds that the apparent violations of humanity are rooted in *sin*. If the destination of human life is indicated by God's claim on people, then sin is basically the human failure to live up to one's destination to be God's likeness on earth (1976b: 30ff.). When people want to “be like God” instead of being truly human, they lose their true humanness (cf. §3.2.3). Sin perverts their relationship with God—“their Creator”—who becomes a judge, with fellow humans—“their neighbours”—who become their enemies, and with nature—“their home”—from which they are estranged. Secondly, if the violation of human rights is rooted in sin, “human rights can only be realized *when and insofar as* the justification of unjust human beings and their renewal of their humanness takes place” (italics mine). The real change is made possible by God's gracious act of justification. Through Jesus Christ God makes real “his claim upon people” in justifying unjust human beings by taking the judgement of people's sin on himself and reconciling them to himself. Thirdly, Moltmann stresses the sanctification of humans through the outpouring of the Spirit on all flesh. In the power of the Spirit, God “renews his likeness on earth, unites a divided humanity, and liberates his creation from the shadows of evil.” Consequently, history is put under pressure and—perhaps more than

in other Christian tradition—the practical implication of faith is emphasized. Moltmann writes: “Human rights in a hostile and inhuman world are first and foremost made real through the ministry of reconciliation.” In sum, only because sin is overcome through the justification of human beings does a restoration of the totality of human rights come into view through the renewal of life in the mission of reconciliation. This is basically the same line of thought as followed in §3.2.

Thus the humanity of human beings depends ultimately on Christ—on faith in Christ, on imitation of Christ, and on hope in the future of Christ. Moltmann puts it thus:

Faith separates the human person from inhuman sin. Love accepts the person and forgives the sin. Hope perceives the human future of the person and opens up new life. In this way—through faith, love, and hope—humanity, once betrayed and lost, is restored to the people.

It is evident that for Moltmann the messianic perspective of the reign of God is more than a Christian interpretation of a more general possibility of “humanization.” He wants to relate the proclamation of biblical history with our own history in such a way that “a common history arises, which has as its content the divine liberation, the covenant with the liberating God and the rights and duties of this freedom” (1976c: 281). God’s covenant history with people is the all-embracing perspective not only apparently for a *theology* of human rights but for the perception of human rights in general.

For Moltmann, this is not a matter of our being able to discuss human rights in an abstract and general way. He notes that in different parts of the world different dimensions are (over)emphasized. “Under the influence of the misery caused by fascist dictatorships,” the Western world stresses individual rights, in the “struggle against capitalism and class rule,” the socialist Eastern bloc social rights, the nations of the “Third World” demand the right to economic, social and political self-determination (1976b: 20). This often leads, he concludes (1976b: 33), to one-sided emphases. At any rate, “human rights ... cannot be viewed as abstract ideals but must be looked at against the background of the suffering and of the present struggles of individuals, nations, and states.” But how can one do this? In my reading, the answer to be distilled from Moltmann’s proposal starts from two presuppositions:

1. Christian theology postulates the one God, the one humanity, and the one universal future of humanity. That entails that although Christian theology must be aware of the different dimensions of human rights, it cannot end up merely acknowledging many particular perspectives in many

particular situations. The message of Christian faith is universal—and thus a Christian view of human rights should be as well.

2. Human beings are meant to reflect the image of God in all spheres of life, i.e. as individuals, in community, and in humanity (1976b: 33). Therefore, all human rights are bound up with and related to one another. In a universal theology of human rights, none of the dimensions may, therefore, be stressed more than the others, since all highlight just one aspect. Every overemphasis of the one perspective is, so to say, a “violation” of the others.

As stated above, people and nations responding to the needs in which they find themselves always set priorities (1976b: 33). Every progress in the one area of life causes “the structure of life to get *out of balance*” (italics mine). Therefore,

Whoever honors human beings as the image of God must acknowledge *all human rights in the same degree* and therefore view them in their indissoluble relationship to each other. Whoever heeds the inalienable dignity of human beings must, in the conflict between progress and balance, look to *the unity of human rights*, the human rights of people in *all their relationships of life*, and the rights of *the whole human race*. It follows that in the one-sided progress in the development of human rights in one area, human rights in another area of life should never be fundamentally suspended. To bring this partial progress in harmony with human rights then becomes an irrevocable demand, because otherwise the balance of the whole structure of life cannot be won back, nor can human dignity be wholly honored. (italics mine)

It is, in brief, the task of Christian churches, congregations, and ecumenical organizations to “develop strategies which eliminate the inequalities.” In various situations they should “press for the *restoration of those particular human rights* which through one-sided progress and established priorities have become neglected, weakened, or repressed” (1976b: 35).

In countries which purchase their sudden economic progress at the expense of political rights and individual freedom, one must press for the realization of political and individual human rights. In countries which secure the personal freedoms of their citizens at the expense of the social rights of the community, these collective rights and duties must be promoted. In societies which have established social rights at the expense of individual rights, individual human rights are to be promoted. In dependent and

underdeveloped countries, the rights of independence and self-determination have priority. (1976b: 34)

In stating this, Moltmann does not deny the importance of having different priorities in different contexts. Churches, however, should never compromise themselves by stressing one of the aspects but always put this matter in the broader perspective of the “totality of human rights” in the covenant history of God and his people. “The concept of the indivisibility and thus the unity of human rights should act as a pointer to the future of a universal established community of all people and nations.” Or, in other words, “the right to different concerns must be integrated into the higher right of the just *balance of concerns* because, without such balance, humanity will not survive its conflicts.” Moltmann therefore chooses to entertain a notion of universality that transcends and integrates all the different perspectives.

### 3.3.3. The Universal and the Particular

There are various remarkable differences between the position paper and the concluding paper. Besides the fact that the latter speaks explicitly of *duties* corresponding to the rights and also includes natural and environmental issues, three obvious differences are to be mentioned in view of the quest for Christian identity and its public relevance. First, the concluding paper acknowledges the multi-dimensionality of human rights and thus discusses human rights in a more differentiated way (cf. 1976c: 281). Secondly, the accent moves from the particular identification with Christ in solidarity with the crucified to a more “balanced” way of speaking about human rights as different perspectives within the one perspective of God’s universal reign. Thirdly, the concluding paper contains a more profound and general analysis from the perspective of theological anthropology, accentuating such Christian soteriological notions as sin, justification and sanctification.

It is apparent that motifs from liberation theology, dominant in the position, are pushed somewhat into the background (cf. Lochman 1976: 14). For the sake of clarity, these motifs are still present but in a different way. Although Moltmann still insists that a Christian theology of human rights must start with concrete forms of oppression, he now emphasizes that the specifically Christian contribution lies in a check and balance of the different perspectives from the one universal perspective of God’s reign. Such a position transcends the particular position. A comparison of both papers reveals, I think, a dilemma that may be labelled the dilemma of “humanization and christianization.” Christians must respond somehow to the manifest violations of human rights in the world in which they live and associate themselves with the broad endeavour for human rights as

expressed in the universal declaration. At the same time, Christian faith has its own perspective on human beings and on humanity as a whole and, accordingly, on the liberation of humans and on "true humanity." Is every "humanization" of the world a "christianization" (and thus all those who strive for a humane world are anonymous Christians) or is, conversely, every "christianization" a form of "humanization" (and Christian faith thus just one perspective with respect to the higher ideal of humanity)?

In another reflection on human rights at that time, Moltmann rejects two alternatives: a position "from below" (i.e. starting from human beings or human history) and a position "from above" (i.e. starting from a transcendent (to human experience) perspective). Over against the first he argues that human rights are not grounded in the "essence" of human beings or in their individual or collective achievements in history but in the covenant of the faithful God (1976c: 281). The "from below" position is unavoidably "limiting and selective, because our experience is limited." If one starts "from below," the only way to arrive at "the universality of the human" is "through extrapolations from that which people themselves consider can be extracted." On the other hand, the "from above" position involves a doctrinal and totalitarian universalism to which he also objects. In his view, we must acknowledge the universality of the Christian perspective (for him it is the only way to respect the dignity and rights of every human being) but not in a dogmatic way (there is thus apparently a difference between thinking "universally" and thinking "dogmatically"). To all appearances, we are again facing the identity-involvement dilemma as sketched in §3.2.1. As we have noted, Moltmann regards this dilemma as a tension inherent to Christian faith and resolves this tension Christologically. Jesus did not intend to found a new religion. His goal was the humanization of human beings. Following him, Christians do not find their identity by identifying themselves with institutions, doctrines, etc. but by fostering true humanity. The dilemma between christianization and humanization is, therefore, a false one (cf. *CG*: 22). A genuine "christianization" (read: a "messianization" and not a spreading of the Christian religion) is a humanization of this world.

But how does one arrive at true humanity? That is, accordingly, the second question that arises when comparing the two papers. Is fostering true humanity only possible by identifying oneself with the poor? As Moltmann claims in his position paper, the *locus theologicus* is found among the poor and oppressed, i.e. among those who suffer from dehumanizing structures (basically this is the (neo-) Marxist idea of the "subject of the revolution" (cf. §3.4.2): the truth is known by those who have no interest at all in the existing power structures). Or must a Christian (theologian) stand above the

different perspectives and try to integrate them within the single perspective of God's kingdom? That is what the concluding paper suggests. This presumes that there are different perspectives and that each perspective is limited. Although it is legitimate that in different situations different perspectives are emphasized, as such one perspective is never *the* perspective of God's kingdom. Moltmann postulates that these different perspectives do not conflict but can be integrated into a wider perspective and that Christians have to maintain this wider perspective. Anthropologically speaking, this change in perspective is rooted in a more general view of the human condition. Freedom and liberation are multilayered ideals and cannot be reduced to the freedom of the individual or the liberation of the oppressed from oppressive structures. A theological perspective on "sin" and "salvation" is needed (cf. §3.4.3).

We are thus faced with two questions. The first is the dilemma of humanization and christianization. In §3.2.6 I tentatively posed the question that would arise in today's pluralistic context with regard to the identification of "true" christianization (fostering the messianic ideals) and "true" humanization. To describe true humanity Moltmann starts with the typically Christian idea that in this inhuman world human dignity and rights are restored through the "service of reconciliation." He adds that "*wherever* people's dignity is recognized and their right restored, there this service of reconciliation takes place. Reconciliation is nothing less than justifying justice" (1984: 31f., italics mine). It is this self-evident connection between "true humanity" and the Christian perspective that would meet with opposition (cf. §5.1). Is the church the keeper of humanity and does, accordingly, the realization of human rights depend ultimately on Christians and their churches? If not, is the "ministry of reconciliation" only one way of making a case for human rights (cf. Reinders 1989: 197)?

The second problem seemed even more pregnant: How is the universal perspective of God's reign to be "materialized," by an unconditional identification with the poor or a "neutral" position that enables one to balance different rights? This, I believe, was the main issue of Moltmann's debate with Latin American liberation theologians. This discussion took place within the context of Christian faith. Like Moltmann, the Latin Americans presumed that humanization and christianization are identical. The question, however, was how to foster this humanization today.

#### *3.4. Long Marches into Freedom: On Universal and Particular Liberation*

In the fall of 1977 Moltmann went to Latin America and for six weeks he visited universities and seminaries. The journey made a deep impression on

him. He was confronted with the suffering of the Latin American people. He knew of their struggle from the increasing number of 'liberation theologies' he had read and discussed with his students. Moreover, he was confronted by the liberation theologians themselves.

A brief report of his journey relates the overwhelming poverty and the huge gap between poor and rich. "Whether one lands in Rio, in Buenos Aires or in Mexico, one is shocked by so much poverty in such rich countries or so much wealth in such poor countries," the first lines run. It apparently nourished Moltmann's sympathy for the Marxist image of society:

We often doubted whether "capitalism" was the right term to characterize modern economy. But when one does not only read about this but sees with one's own eyes how a whole continent is impoverished, one comes back to this term. (Moltmann 1978: 24; transl. mine)

The legal insecurity in Latin American military dictatorships was another issue on which Moltmann reported. He had been harshly confronted by this in Argentina where he began his journey and the military dictatorship of General Videla was in power. During Moltmann's lecture a student was sent to a shop to buy some paper. They had to wait until midnight before he returned, staggering and deaf. He had been grabbed by policemen who beat him on his ears with their hands. Moltmann's feelings were highly ambivalent. He experienced, on the one hand, the strength of the *base communities* which had served as a model for his own ecclesiology. On the other hand, he also noted widespread apathy and resignation as the result of failed experiments: Allende, Peron, Peru. He experienced hopelessness but kept on believing in the possibility of a breakthrough which, he argued, required a change in *theological* thinking, "from dream to reality," from rather abstract notions such as "people" and "exodus" to the "cross." "The hope of the people is the last thing that dies' is a Brazilian saying. Liberation theology can renew this hope if it [truly] becomes a theology of the people" (Moltmann 1978: 25; transl. mine).

It is tempting to interpret the last words as a stinging remark directed at the liberation theologians who had denounced Moltmann's theology of the cross in *The Crucified God* because of its supposed irrelevance for the daily struggle of the people (I will come back to this). What Moltmann seemed to imply here is that liberation theologians were overlooking the daily experiences of the people themselves. This reveals something of the distorted relationship between Moltmann and some Latin American theologians. There had been a growing friction between them which reached a climax during a conference in Mexico City, the final station of Moltmann's

journey. This was a conference of liberation theologians from North America and Latin America (among them great names such as Hugo Assmann, Enrique Dussel, the Cuban theologian Sergio Arce Martínez, and famous American scholars like Harvey Cox and James Cone). Impressed by his recent confrontation with Latin American reality and perhaps still dreaming of an alliance of progressive “liberation” theologians from all over the world, Moltmann must have been greatly expectant. He was invited to present two papers, one on the theological situation in Germany and one on his recent theology of human rights (Pixley 1979: 125ff., 53ff.). Both papers met with serious opposition. According to Moltmann’s retrospective, the theologians who were present tore the theology of human rights on which he lectured “to bits” (*EiT*: 219). If one reads the different reactions as published afterwards in Pixley 1979, it cannot be denied that they indeed had a rather grim overtone.

Moltmann attributed this hostility largely to the indignation concerning the “open letter” to Míguez Bonino he had published about a year before (*EiT*: 219). However obvious it may be to presume that this letter determined the sphere beforehand, it cannot be allowed to trivialize the severe critique leveled at Moltmann’s lecture on human rights lecture (which to a great extent repeated what he wrote in the “concluding paper” discussed in the subsection immediately above). Both Assman and Dussel argue that the universal notion of human rights, for which Moltmann was seeking a Christian perspective, is part of the ideological foundation of “the system,” i.e. the existing, global power structures that privilege the rich and oppress the poor (Pixley 1979: 64ff.). As we have seen, Moltmann offers a universal perspective that transcends the different dimensions accentuated in different contexts. It is this universalisation that his opponents reject. For them it trivializes the fundamental conflict between poor and rich, between socialist and capitalist societies. In their eyes, the key question is: Do the rights, as proposed, favour the oppressors or the oppressed? From a biblical point of view, they argue, the true human rights are the rights of the poor.

In analyzing this conflict, we should keep in mind the historical context. In recent decades both Moltmann’s theology and Latin American liberation theologies have changed. Reflections on each other’s theological ideas have been nuanced and the bonds have been strengthened.<sup>100</sup> Over the

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<sup>100</sup> Through the mediation of the editorial board of *Concilium* Moltmann engaged in a long, friendly discussion with Gustavo Gutiérrez, Leonardo Boff, and Jon Sobrino. Other theologians remained suspicious of Moltmann’s theology. In James Cone’s autobiographical *My Soul Looks Back*, for instance,

years Moltmann's frustration about the fact that the Latin Americans dissociated themselves from his theology made way for an appreciation of what is "specifically Latin American" in liberation theologies. In an interview with the Italian journal *Il Regno* in 1984, he declared:

The theologians of liberation have sunk their roots in the base communities, which are a promising sign of reform of the church and society, and which inject life in a way that has something of the miraculous about it in a rather apathetic, centralistic church. And that is where the theology of liberation now has its organizational relationship. Different from Marxism? I should say so! Today, then, I can state that liberation theology is a solid, sound theology, and I drop, part and parcel, the complexities I formulated in that letter of mine.<sup>101</sup>

However, to understand the importance of the conflict with the Latin Americans for the development of Moltmann's theology we have to look in the past. The reactions of the Latin Americans to Moltmann give a vivid impression of the first stage of liberation theology, which, among others, drew heavily on Marxist social analysis. They display a manifest engagement with the poor and the powerful spirit of liberation but also a rather rigid ideology which draws a sharp line between good and bad.<sup>102</sup> They set Moltmann thinking once more about the question of how the transcendent kingdom of God gives meaning to our lives in our immanent reality (in the words of the liberation theologians: how the kingdom of God can be

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the theology of Moltmann's is, among other theologies, still accused of limiting "the gospel and theology to a spirituality that has not been carved out of the concrete sufferings of the poor who are engaged in political liberation. When the sufferings of the poor are individualized or privatized, it becomes possible to identify their sufferings with God without challenging the existing sociopolitical arrangements responsible for their suffering. The idea of God's suffering and Jesus' cross become mere intellectual, theological concepts completely unrelated to the actual material conditions of the poor" (Cone 1982: 109).

<sup>101</sup> "Dalla teologia politica all'etica politica," in: *Il Regno*, no.507, 1984, pp.205-208. The English translation of this quote is given in Tamayo 1993: 43. Note the words Tamayo uses to introduce the quote: "Here is his testimony, which he expresses in terms by whose eloquence I personally am touched."

<sup>102</sup> Besides many contextual differences, there are also obvious denominational differences. Many Latin Americans were Catholic; Moltmann's ideas are on many points typically Protestant.

“materialized” here and now). But moreover, it burdened him with a relatively new problem, namely that of the relation between “universal” and “particular” liberation. That, at least, is my impression and in order to clarify this I will try to analyze the conflict. Therefore, we must go back to the early 1970s, when, as Moltmann regretfully remarks, “it began so hopefully” (*EiT*: 217).

#### 3.4.1. The Growing Conflict

Gustavo Gutiérrez’s *Theology of Liberation* (Gutiérrez 1988), widely acknowledged as a landmark of Latin American liberation theology, was published in 1972. Within a year, English and German translations reached Europe. Moltmann was delighted. Although he acknowledged its differences with his own political theology, he saw Gutiérrez as a new ally.

I read [Gutiérrez’s book] at once with great enthusiasm and held seminars on it, for I found there the perspectives of my own *Theology of Hope* and the praxis of a political theology such as Johann Baptist Metz and I envisaged, though here not in the European, but in the completely different context of Latin America (*EiT*: 217).

Translations of other Latin American theologies followed. At the beginning of the 1970s these theologians were working mainly with Europe’s revolutionary ideas, so “those of us belonging to the political-theology camp thought initially of a new ‘wonderful friendship’ with the new Latin American theology of this new departure” (*EiT*: 218). To understand the background of the growing conflict, these high hopes of Moltmann need to be stressed. Müller-Fahrenholz writes in his *The Kingdom and the Power*: “What was more natural than to dream of all those of like mind being shoulder to shoulder all over the world? With the slogan, ‘Liberation theologians of the world, unite!’” (2000: 124).

This hope was soon severely shaken (*EiT*: 218). Already in 1973 Assmann declared that, instead of dialogue with European theologians, the Latin American theologians would no longer communicate with them. Moltmann thought this was simply because the former were Europeans and therefore on the wrong side of the sharp line that was drawn between oppressors and oppressed (1976d: 57). From then on, in several writings liberation theologians openly dissociated themselves from European political theology with arguments that were, in Moltmann’s eyes, unfair and rather painful for him. Afterwards, looking back in 1999, he understands that in searching for their own identity, Latin American theologians needed separation initially and were not at all seeking to be integrated into a new community (*EiT*: 218). However, the tone of the discussion still seems to

grieve him even after more than twenty years. He apparently felt rebuffed for unfair reasons. "We came face to face with one cut-off after another." He remembers how Latin Americans called their own theology a theology of liberation and his "liberal theology" and how they considered their own theology to be the fruit of praxis and his political theology that of study. The conflict reached its climax when a group of theology students from ISEDET, Buenos Aires, made a visit to Tübingen in 1974. Moltmann remembers:

They came to inform us that they had to free themselves from all intellectual European influence, and would therefore no longer be reading Barth, Bultmann, Tillich—or Moltmann either; for Karl Marx had said that "all history is a history of the class struggle". When asked whether Karl Marx, then, had been born in Buenos Aires, and what country their forefathers had emigrated from, they were unwilling to provide an answer. (*EIT*: 218)

Moltmann was baffled. This was "the last straw." In his view, the necessary contact was frustrated by ossified ideologies that had been rigidly implemented. A confrontation between liberation and political theology was bound to come.

It will be helpful to have a brief look ourselves at the critique of the Latin Americans. Besides the need for space to develop their own theology without the well-intended advice of European colleagues, the general gist of their argument over against Moltmann was that in his theology of hope the concept of "liberation" fell short when it came to "proposing, beyond the prevailing project of political, economic, cultural, and gender liberation" (Tamayo 1993: 38). Eventually, they argued, it had no capacity to critique the present situation of suffering. This was clearly expressed by Rubem Alves in his *A Theology of Human Hope* (1969). Alves's problem with Moltmann was that he did not start from the negation of the present but from the transcendental promise (Alves 1969: 55-68). For the sake of clarity, Alves was talking about Moltmann's Blochian theology of hope. Contrary to this, he stated, history is not open but enclosed by active powers of a political nature. It has to be forced open—not by some transcendental promise to which our action should correspond (that would only lead to pacifism) but by conflict and struggle. In other words, the future is created out of the *negation of sinful structures*. The crisis of the present should give birth to the promised future and not, as Moltmann proclaimed, the other way round. In sum, Alves held that theologically speaking "resurrection" is too much detached from the "cross."

We have seen that at the time Alves wrote this critical reflection Moltmann was coming to more or less the same conclusion about the

shortcomings of his theology of hope (cf. §3.1). The events of 1968 turned out to be the turning point. We saw how he moved from Blochian dialectic to a “negative” dialectic, in which the present is not only the “not yet” but concrete injustice, poverty, and oppression. This move to the here and now was, apparently, not enough for many Latin Americans. In their view, Moltmann preferred a position on the sidelines, criticizing every “materialization” of the gospel from a presumed neutral position. *The Crucified God* may conclude with two chapters about the psychological and political liberation of humans, it still did not say anything about the real needs of the people who should be liberated: food, clothing, housing, etc. Moreover, can someone be truly on the side of the poor and the oppressed if he continues to have a “critical” attitude such as Moltmann advocated? In other words, does real engagement with the poor not require a radical choice for the concrete poor over against the concrete oppressors (at whom one could, so to say, point a finger) instead of coming up with some abstract notion of identification?

Such questions were also put forward by Míguez Bonino in his *Revolutionary Theology Comes of Age* (1975). It was to him that Moltmann wrote his famous open letter, which I will examine later on. Therefore, I will briefly outline his assessment of Moltmann’s theology. He portrayed Moltmann as “the theologian to whom the theology of liberation is most indebted and with whom it shows the clearest affinity,” referring to *Theology of Hope* but also to *The Crucified God*, in which Moltmann’s earlier insights were “brilliantly corrected and deepened” (1975: 144f.). Comparing Míguez and Moltmann, it is, indeed, obvious that they were struggling with the same problem: how to “materialize” concretely the “reign of God” in daily life? Over against the emphasis on “one single history,” in which the divine history of the kingdom and human history completely coincide, Míguez asserted that we should accept the tension of a “double historical reference,” namely to the history of the kingdom and the secular human history of poverty and oppression. Moltmann, for his part, defined this tension as one between identity and relevance. Searching for an identity which itself moves toward relevance and a relevance that is obviously rooted in identity, the *cross* proved to be the ultimate test of Christian identity *and* relevance. It marks the total bankruptcy of political and religious institutes. God has identified himself with the powerless, suffering, Godforsaken Christ and not with any institution. At the same time we are called to an identification with the Crucified and, consequently, with the crucified with whom he identified himself.

In spite of their similar starting points, both theologies diverged. According to Míguez, Moltmann’s “double identification theory” went

wrong because the “specific ‘Christ-reference’ trivialized the ‘present’ historical reference of our faith and action” (1975: 144). He writes that Moltmann “intends to become very concrete in the historical description of this identification,” namely in the section on the vicious circles of death in *The Crucified God*. Moreover, according to himself, Moltmann was writing in dialogue with Latin American theology of liberation at this point. Míguez casts his doubts with regard to both intentions. In his interpretation, Moltmann’s analysis “seems ... to fail to grasp the basic challenge of Latin American theological thought and to remain, therefore, within the circle of European political theology.” Apparently, he does not criticize the contextual determination of Moltmann’s theology but the fact that he is claiming *universality*. More precisely, he suggests that Moltmann incorporate Latin American theology and experience into his own thinking. The “dialogue” of which Moltmann is speaking is, so to say, merely a dialogue in his own mind. Relating his own theology to Latin American theology, Moltmann does not at all discuss the concrete socio-economic and political struggle of the Latin Americans *nor his own concrete context*.

Can we remain satisfied with a general description of “the demonic circles of death,” without trying to understand them in their unity, their roots their dynamics, i.e., without giving a coherent socio-analytical account of this manifold oppression? Are we not taking lightly the stark historical reality of the cross when we satisfy ourselves with an impressionistic description of man’s alienation and oppression? In other words, it seems that, if theology means to take history seriously, it must incorporate—with all necessary *caveats*—a coherent and all-embracing method of socio-political analysis. Moltmann does not seem to be conscious of this need. (Míguez Bonino 1975: 147)

Thus, Míguez’s argument is that without explicitly relating theological assertions concerning the political and social significance of the Gospel to actual suffering of people, actual churches, actual struggles, one (read: Moltmann) cannot claim to be historically significant.

One sentence in *CG* perfectly illustrates Míguez’s problem with Moltmann’s “critical theory:” “The crucified God is in fact a stateless and classless God. But that does not mean that he is an unpolitical God. He is the God of the poor, of the oppressed, of the humiliated” (*CG*: 329). He writes: “But the poor, the oppressed, the humiliated *are a class and live in countries*. Is it really theologically responsible to leave these two sentences hanging without trying to work out their relation?” In other words, can one identify oneself with the poor and the oppressed if one must always stay

“critical,” in “non-identity” with all human projects? For Míguez, it is impossible to demand critical non-identity and identification with the poor at the same time. For him, identification with the poor means identification with concrete people with a nation, a homeland, etc. and not the abstract idea of identification Moltmann puts forward. In his view, Moltmann’s desire to avoid hallowing a particular ideology or power leads to a “refuge in a ‘critical function’ which is able to remain above right and left, ideologically neutral, independent of a structural analysis of reality” (1975: 149). The heart of his critique is thus that Moltmann’s critical theory is a camouflaged *neutrality*.

Míguez goes one step further. If “critical freedom” is conceived as the form in which God’s eschatological kingdom impinges on the political realm, he declares, one particular ideology is chosen, namely *liberalism*. He states that what Moltmann was defending was the liberal social-democratic project. That, however, he does not criticize. On the contrary, he remarks that “they may be totally justified in this choice.” His point is that such liberal social democracy “should not be camouflaged as ‘the critical freedom of the gospel’ but analytically and ideologically presented and justified in human political terms in the same way as our own option for socialism and a Marxist analysis” (1975: 150). He thus asks Moltmann not only to stop incorporating the poor and oppressed of Latin America into a theological concept without describing and analyzing *their* social-economic and political context but also (and mainly) to spell out *his own* context and make explicit why he is preferring a certain socio-economic and political system.

From the perspective of my examination of Moltmann’s “critical theology” in §3.2 it could be doubted whether Míguez does complete justice to Moltmann’s approach. The problem seems to me that the hermeneutical framework within which he discusses Moltmann’s notion of “critical freedom” is the problematic relation between *eschatology* and *history*. How can we conceive of the future reign of God here and now? That question had been the starting point of Moltmann’s *TH*. From this perspective Míguez’s critique was understandable. If the reign of God is a future entity, indicated by terms such as hope, anticipation and promise, then “critical freedom,” or non-identification with any system, group or ideology, indeed leads to a rather noncommittal attitude. However, within this context the alternative is that we point out exactly those among whom the future reign of God is to be found in our society and where it is not to be found, that we indicate those with whom Christ identifies himself and those with whom he does not. In that case, I believe, the “double reference” Míguez wants is lost as well. God is no longer just on the side of the poor, but “the poor” are on the side of God (and others are not) and the future kingdom is not foreshadowed

among the poor but coincides completely with their communities. Within this hermeneutical framework one ends up apparently either in the neutrality liberalism advocates or in an identification of the divine with a certain group of people. Moltmann's notion of critical freedom was introduced precisely to go beyond both. It was rooted in a changed *hermeneutical* approach (cf. Witvliet 1987: 52f.). As we saw in the previous chapters, God is not only present in the future, which we can anticipate, but in our reality itself. God's history is a *counter-history* within our history. A critical freedom over against any human project does not lead to liberal "neutrality" but to participation in this counter-history of the trinitarian God. Moltmann did not call for identification with an institution or with human "kingdoms,"<sup>103</sup> but neither did he advocate solely a continuing critical attitude. His "sacramental" theology of the trinitarian history of God was intended precisely to go beyond that. Of course, how concrete this is after all remains to be seen. But Míguez bypasses the fundamental change in Moltmann's theological hermeneutics by viewing his "critical theory" from the question of the relation between eschatology and history as dealt with in *TH*.

These remarks do not take the sting out of Míguez's criticism. We are basically facing the problems I pointed out in §3.3.3. Must the liberating message of the Gospel be identified with a universal, just world order which transcends the different perspectives and should a theologian thus remain critically distant to any "materialization" of the Gospel? Or must theology—within the concrete history of conflict and struggle—identify itself with one particular perspective, namely that of the poor and oppressed? Although Moltmann can not be accused of "neutrality" in Míguez' sense, the question remains how the transcendent kingdom of God *does* receive concrete shape in our immanent reality. How does one materialize God's kingdom? And how is it "materialized" in the socio-economic, cultural and political context in which Moltmann himself is living? What is his own "particularity" within the "universal" horizon of God's reign?

### 3.4.2. The Open Letter

Moltmann expressed his view on the state of affairs in an "open letter" to Míguez Bonino (his "dear friend"), which was printed in 1976 in several journals and which, as he euphemistically notes, "caused something of a stir" (*EiT*: 218). In spite of his critical analysis, Míguez had explicitly stated that he appreciated a dialogue with Western theologians like Moltmann. That could be a reason why, of all liberation theologians, he was chosen to

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<sup>103</sup> As indicated, his view of the "preferential option for the poor" was based on identification with *Christ* who identified himself with the poor (cf. §3.2.4).

be the addressee of the letter (Moltmann 1976d: 57). It is interesting to evaluate the letter against the background of Míguez's criticism just outlined. How did Moltmann counter the conception of his "critical theory" by Míguez and others, which led to the reproach of liberal neutrality and how did he respond to the challenge to be more concrete? Moltmann discusses three points, all of which are very closely related. First, Moltmann notes that, although Latin American theologians distinguish themselves from European theologians, they were much more European than they claim ("Where is Latin America in it all?"). Secondly, he criticized the use of Marxism. Thirdly, the question of the *subject* of the revolution and the analysis of the historical situation was raised. I will briefly inspect the arguments.

1. In his own view, Moltmann acknowledges the need of indigenous Latin American theologies that are free from the European tradition and give full attention to the Latin American situation. "The sooner it is accomplished, the more European theologians will be able to learn from others" (1976d: 57). However, the destruction of European imperialism must not lead to a *provincialization* of theology, because,

if that were to happen, we in Europe would be able to abandon the rest of the world and Christianity as a whole and occupy ourselves with our own concerns and traditions. The destruction of that imperialism can lead in a meaningful way only to the construction of a common world-theology at the expense of the one-sided "West-theology".

Moltmann thus gives two reasons for rejecting the presumed theological provincialism of Latin American theologians. Explicitly, he states that most of his European colleagues would have an excuse to continue with *their* provincial theologies ("the tendencies toward a narrow provincialism with blinders are already strong enough among us"); implicitly, he suggests that he and other well-intentioned European theologians would be cut off from the worldwide community of progressive theologians.

Moltmann presupposes that the value of indigenous Latin American theology is that it challenges other theologies. It can offer new insights, because it arose in a specific situation asking for specific answers. In this way African theology has brought new insight to European theologians because "the African modes of thought have been entirely unfamiliar to us ever since Aristotle." The same can be said of Japanese theology, developed in the Buddhist context, because it "forces Western activists again and again to fundamental reorientations of their interests and thought forms." And in North American black theology "we have encountered new forms of com-

munication through the language and music of an oppressed community.” However,

Up to now scarcely anything comparable has come out of Latin America. We hear severe criticism of Western theology and of theology in general—and then we are told something about Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, as if they were Latin American discoveries. (1976d: 57f.)

Thus, Latin American theologians did not come up to the expectations Moltmann has of indigenous theologies and, moreover, everything used to criticize (his) European political theology (mainly Marx's philosophy) had already been used by himself and other political theologians but was now used against them. Moltmann claims that Latin Americans are much more European than they think (even in Gutiérrez's *Theology of Liberation*, highly valued by Moltmann, something truly Latin American is not found). He refers, among others, to Rubem Alves (who, according to him, ended up precisely at the point where Metz and he already were) and to Míguez himself, specifically to his critique that Moltmann's message of the kingdom leads to a neutral “critical function” in theology. Moltmann indicates the very same “Barthianism” behind their theologies, which forces them both to make a difference between what God does and what people do.<sup>104</sup> Míguez is neither able to “materialize” the message of the kingdom completely. In his book, Moltmann remarks, he ends up by saying that the only relation between the kingdom and human activities that is justified is the message of the kingdom as a “stimulus and challenge for revolutionary action.” Moltmann concludes that “one is ... inclined to agree fervently with you, but then ask what sense your criticism has after all” (1976d: 59). Moltmann therefore calls upon liberation theologians to stop writing European theologians off and to come up with something genuinely Latin American, because only if they can show what is so specific about their context can they *together* take some steps forward.

It would really be more meaningful to work in concert at a new construction of theology rather than in a rivalry to try to pass each other by on the “left” or the “right” or in the “middle” and in the process step on each other's toes.

2. In line with this Moltmann focusses on the way Marxism is used by liberation theologians (1976d: 59f.). Their claim (“again in the train of

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<sup>104</sup> Míguez Bonino is a Protestant (Methodist) theologian.

socialistic movements and their theories in Europe”) was that only Marxist class analysis leads to a theology that stands firmly within the concrete historical situation of the people. Moltmann, however, claims that they themselves do not implement this analysis at all in the history of their own people.

... they only quote a few basic concepts of Marx. And they do this in such a general way that one learns only something about the fruits of the theologians’ reading and scarcely anything about the struggle of the Latin American people. In them one reads more about the sociological theories of others, namely Western Socialists, than about the history or the life and suffering of the Latin American people. One is called upon to opt, in a moral alternative, for the oppressed against the oppressors and to accept Marxism as the right prophecy of the situation.

Moltmann thus counters the reproach that European political theology is the fruit of study and not of praxis. He lashes out:

But it is one thing to be involved in an incisive analysis of the historical situation of the people and quite another thing to make declamations of seminar-Marxism as a world-view .... Marxism and sociology do not yet bring a theologian into the people but, at least at first, only into the company of Marxists and sociologists.

Not only do liberation theologians lack real contact with the people, but their ideological preoccupation also leads them to a false interpretation of European theology. “It is simply not the case that European theologians prefer to remain politically neutral and to theorize only on the universal plane.” Such prejudice, Moltmann suggests, keeps them from seeing that they are fighting basically the very same struggle. Due to such overemphasized class thinking they do not acknowledge that a theologian such as Míguez actually quotes Metz when he states that “orthopraxis, rather than orthodoxy, becomes the criterion for theology” and, instead, accuses Metz of “propounding the ideology of the Common Market.” And the (Marxist) conviction that “theology has to stop explaining the world and to start transforming it” had already been proposed in the *Theology of Hope* of the “no less suspect Moltmann.” Moltmann has difficulty with the presumption that because they were European, such statements could not be authentic. Why can it not be acknowledged that for both true radical change is still ahead? Why not make a “radical turn toward the people” in a thoroughly mutual way? That is the question that resonates throughout this letter.

3. Finally, the reproach that European theologians are not “revolutionary” enough leads back to the evaluation of the different historical situations (1976d: 60f.). Historically seen, Europe and Latin America do not live synchronously, Moltmann explains. Consequently, there are different ways to realize what is good for everyone. Many Latin American theologians regard their situation as revolutionary. From an European point of view, it is hard to say something about that, Moltmann admits. But he can imagine that a socialist revolution is needed to put an end to economic imperialism and military dictatorships. And in Latin America, he writes, it seems to be a real possibility that “the people” become the *subject* of this revolution (they are the ones who have no interest in the existing system and thus able to know the “truth” of its damaging and alienating effects on people). However, the unavoidable tension between necessity and possibility cannot be solved everywhere and always in the same way (and definitely not by proposing universal solutions). The way in which the “revolution” is taken up by the people is crucial. “What use is the best revolutionary theory when the historical subject of the revolution is not at hand or not yet ready?” Moltmann holds that the subject of revolutionary liberation can only be the oppressed, exploited people themselves. Obviously, Latin Americans would not disagree. But, continuing the point he made already, Moltmann asserts:

The intellectuals and the students are certainly not the subject. They can at most throw the revolutionary sparks into the dried-up and parched woods. But if the people are not ‘burning’ and do not rise up the most beautiful sparks are of no use. The sparks then become sectarian candles around which elite circles gather ceremoniously in order to confirm themselves.

A revolutionary liberation to which Latin American theologians point can only become reality when everyone feels the misery and everyone is convinced that the time has come to change the situation. Moltmann explains that, therefore, the European situation could not be called “revolutionary” or “pre-revolutionary.” In the sixties, during the student revolts, the war in Vietnam and “socialism with a human face,” there had been such a situation with concrete alternatives for the existing dominant system—at least it seemed so. However, it has become clear that the most beautiful revolutionary theories find no basis in the people and therefore remain without a subject. In Europe “a socialism for the people” has appeared to be something for the elite. “The so-called leftist theoreticians did not suffer from a manifest loss of reality, as they were reproached by the conservative theo-

logians, but rather from a lack of contact with the people.” Therefore, Moltmann concludes:

... it seems more important to maintain a connection with the people than to travel alone into the paradise of the future. It is more important to live and to work in and with the people than to relish the classless society in the correct theories. Of course this sounds like a compromise but it is not, for a concrete step is of more worth than the most beautiful idea of possibilities.

Concretely, Moltmann argues for *democratic socialism*. Without socialism there is no democracy; but without democracy there is definitely no socialism. No European would sacrifice his freedoms for new dreams of a classless society. Therefore, a steady democratizing of political institutions and the socialization of economic relations was the best option for the European situation. Thus, Moltmann draws the consequences of a major credo of liberation theology for the European situation. If the only thing that counts in socialism and democracy is that the people should be the subject of their own liberating history, then calling for a revolution in Europe like in Latin America would mean alienating oneself from the people. Consequently, Moltmann states, it is unfair to reject European political theology because it does not call for revolution in the same way Latin American liberation theology.

To all appearances, Moltmann thus refutes the main reproaches levelled at him. Míguez himself has to assume a “critical distance” as well. If political theology is “neutral” for that reason then Míguez’s own theology is as “neutral.” If Míguez’s theology can be labelled as “engaged” in spite of (or perhaps due to) the critical theological distance he presupposes and which is similar to Moltmann’s eschatological reservation, then Moltmann’s theology cannot be brushed aside as “neutral” either. Furthermore, liberation theologians do themselves lack real contact with people at the grassroots and avail themselves of abstract ideologies which are, moreover, as European as can be. Finally, by not acknowledging that the “revolution” as proclaimed by Latin Americans does not work in Europe, they themselves entertain a universalism that transcends historical contexts.

It could be asked whether Moltmann for his part does justice to Míguez’s critique. Míguez did not write him off because he was not “revolutionary” enough. In fact, he admitted that in Europe social democracy may be a way to stand up for the poor. His point was that Moltmann should make clear his historical context, otherwise his own theology could be easily identified with the “critical freedom of the Gospel” itself. In fact, Míguez warned Moltmann of the same danger that he for his part noted in liberation

theologies: do not confuse human and divine history. In his letter Moltmann pointed out explicitly the historical context in which he was living. He therefore did what Míguez had asked, namely making clear his own context. It is, therefore, not surprising that Míguez was one of the few Latin Americans who appreciated Moltmann's letter.

One can go one step further and ask whether Moltmann's reflections on his own context could stand the test of his own (implicit) definition of genuine contextual theology. According to the open letter, contextual theology should, first, contribute to the liberation of *specific* oppressed groups so that they can join the *universal* community of liberated people. Secondly, it should point others to their limits so that they can *break through* these limits. Of course, over the years Moltmann had analyzed the attitude of whites, of Westerners and of men. In §3.2 I hinted at his psychological and theological analyses of oppression and the position of "oppressors." However, viewing these analyses from the perspective of his open letter, it could be questioned whether he himself remains faithful to the criteria he holds up for others. In the first place, the position of Western white men had been regarded in relation to the position of the oppressed who needed help to be liberated. In other words, the question was: How can we change ourselves so that the poor and the oppressed all over the world will be liberated? It is assumed that if "oppressors" stop oppressing others (how? when? where?) all people will find their identity as "people" in a "new community of all human beings." In the second place, for Moltmann black and feminist theologies were relevant because (and in so far as) they showed him the limits of his own theology, i.e. of his Western European theology. That was what he held out to the Latin Americans. It could be maintained that Moltmann implicitly viewed his own theology as the starting point of the open community of theologians he advocated. The different liberation theologians were appreciated because and in so far as they challenged Western theology. Moltmann did not explicitly ask what theologians from other parts of the world could learn from a possible contextual European or Western theology. Third, Moltmann analyzed the attitude of Western white men thus far with universal psychological and theological models. Dealing with the "oppressive" side of racism, sexism, and capitalism, he started with "the" human condition: insecurity, fear, longing for identity, etc. Even in his political theology, it could be argued, Moltmann hardly discussed the *concrete*, historically grown mechanisms that were the fruits of this human condition. At least he did not make clear how these structures oppressed him in the "concrete" and "authentic" way he demanded from his Latin American dialogue partners.

In any event, the letter had a very negative effect. “Unfortunately the spontaneous reaction proved to be hostile,” Moltmann remarks retrospectively (*EiT*: 219). The letter was interpreted as a pamphlet rejecting liberation theology in general. Moltmann himself was seen now as the one who had cut himself loose of liberation theology. He writes that Assmann was hurt and Alves embittered. At least that is how Moltmann remembers it. “Only Míguez Bonino and Gustavo Gutiérrez seemed pleased about this contribution to the discussion, because they felt that they had been taken seriously.” It was clear that the final word on this letter had not yet been yet said. The discussion was to be continued in Mexico City, where Moltmann’s Latin American journey ended. Probably he had expected serious opposition but not, apparently, the hostility. With Cone, for instance, he had had a long and friendly relationship, which went back to his visit to the USA in 1968. But Cone was apparently not amused by Moltmann’s latest writings. “[They] were waiting for me ... ‘to crucify me,’ as Jim Cone put it.” To all appearances, it was not the sharp critique of his paper on human rights that startled him most but the awareness that there actually *was* such a coalition of liberation theologians as he envisaged—the only thing was that he apparently did not belong to it. Sitting among black theologians, liberation theologians and feminist theologians he realized:

I don’t belong anywhere, since I’m not oppressed, not black and not a woman. I can support these liberation movements and learn from them, but my existence is not in them .... So what should I do? (1997a: 19f.)

Retrospectively, he called this experience a *turning point* in his thinking.

What was the “turn” he made? I think the major change was the insight that “contextual” theologies are not simply indigenous perspectives challenging “our Western theology.” The challenge of black theology lies beyond the discovery of a different language and music and that of African theology beyond additional “modes of thought.” Essentially, it compels a Westerner to reconsider his own thinking *within his own context*, as one particular perspective among the others. Doing ecumenical theology involves much more than a well-intentioned taking up of non-Western elements in the reflection on the Christian faith. From a twenty-first-century perspective one easily underestimates the impact of the challenge of “contextual theologies” on the worldview of Western people (which had been largely based on the self-evident dominance of the Western perspective) as well as the courage that was needed to question this self-evident universal perspective. Moltmann was certainly one of the first leading Western theologians who tried to do so. However, he drew a clear line. One has to

do justice to the variety of particular perspectives, one's own included, but not by giving up the notion of a universal perspective. But how can one do that?

### 3.4.3. The Exodus of Oppressors? Looking into the Mirrors

Already in the airplane on the way home Moltmann pulled himself together to consider the consequences of the Mexico City experience for his own theology. Apparently, being "pro-black," "pro-woman," and "pro-oppressed" was not enough to be accepted as partner in liberation theology (cf.: Müller-Fahrenholz 2000: 123f.). His longing for a worldwide union of progressive theologians turned out to be at least a little premature. The Latin Americans not only demanded room to develop their own theology but also asked him to clarify his own historical position. The confrontation in Mexico City, therefore, forced him to consider and accept his own place, his own context, his own history, his own position as a white male professor in the rich Western World (it was, of course, not true that he belonged "nowhere"). Instead of acting the injured party, he drafted a "'theology' for 'the liberation of the oppressors'." This programme for a new Western liberation theology was soon published in *Evangelische Theologie* as "Die Befreiung der Unterdrückten" ("The Liberation of Oppressors").<sup>105</sup>

The Mexico City conference made Moltmann realize that the true liberation of oppressors is more than just a matter of adopting the right attitude towards the oppressed. He writes:

That we allow ourselves to be frightened or [entertained<sup>106</sup>] by the black, feminist and socialist theologies of liberation, and have become tolerant and benevolent toward them, is a mark of callousness, not of intelligence. We need a "liberating theology for oppressors."

And he continues:

Thus far we have arrived no insights for a theology of oppressors from the theology of the oppressed. The reason of this is that we members of the white, masculine, middle-class world are indeed able to acknowledge the liberation of others, but are not willing to recognize ourselves as "oppressors". Thus we display good

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<sup>105</sup> I will use the English translation here as published in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* (1979a).

<sup>106</sup> In the translation the German *unterhalten* is, in my view, wrongly translated as "to be supported."

intentions but no real insight. We want to be liberal and neglect thereby our own liberation. Whoever wishes to help the oppressed to gain their freedom must begin with himself: he must cease being their oppressor. He must liberate himself. This is not a question of bad consciousness that allows itself to be blackmailed by demands for reparation. It is rather the question of one's own future. (*Die Umkehr zur eigenen Zukunft*, 1979: 25)

There are two things of importance to note here. First, Westerners should develop their own *theology* of liberation. An ethical appeal by itself does not help; real liberation goes beyond moralism. Secondly, they should develop their *own* theology of liberation. The word “own” (*eigenen*) is now added to the typical Moltmann phrase *Umkehr zur Zukunft*.

How does such a liberation theology for Westerners take shape? First, Moltmann claims that a theology of liberation may (and should) point to concrete manifestations of liberation but always within the broader horizon of God's universal freedom. Second, he also presumes that a liberation theology may (and should) single out concrete oppression but not without penetrating to *its deepest cause*. As already maintained in *CG* (cf. §3.2.2) and in his second human rights paper (cf. §3.3.2), the analysis of oppression has to go beyond sociological analyses of concrete enslaving social structures and focus, psychologically and theologically, on “the” human condition. Both “inhuman” persons (the oppressors) and “dehumanized” persons (the oppressed) are suffering from alienation from “real life.” What he seems to attack is the way liberation theologians use the distinction between “oppressors” and “oppressed” as an epistemological starting point for theology. If liberation can only be viewed from the victim's point of view, the “oppressor” easily turns out to be part of the evil that has to be annihilated. Such approach can never lead to “true humanity,” to the “true communion of mankind, in which there are no longer either oppressed or oppressors” (1979a: 24). Oppression is a crime against “life” because it destroys the human community. Alienation from this community (both of oppressed and oppressors) is the real problem; a new community of all human beings accordingly the final aim.

Moltmann articulates this theologically by claiming that oppression also destroys communion with God. It is a “destruction of the love of God: ‘For he who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen’ (I John 4.20)” (1979a: 24). Oppression is a “perversion of love because it wounds, offends, and destroys the image of God on earth.” The major part of Moltmann's air plane draft is devoted to the doctrine of *sin*. Basically, he recalls what he wrote in *CG* and *CPS*. Instead

of locating the deepest roots of sin in the social structure of society (as his Latin American dialogue partners seemed to do), he aims to analyze *the very being* of humans. The “sinful structures” (capitalism, racialism or sexism) are *expressions* of human alienation, “phenomena” of sin, but not alienation itself. The real alienation of humans lies in the one *sin* of “failed being” (*das verfehlte Dasein*). With Augustine, Moltmann defines the distortion of the human being as “disdained love for God” (*verunglückte Liebe zu Gott*; cf. *CG*: 272). The being of humans is a *passionate desire* that can be described as “joy of God.” This desire became disconnected from God and focussed on non-divine beings or things. Since finite beings can never satisfy eternal love, the love that was originally focussed on God was transformed into an all destroying rage (*Zerstörungswut*) that can never be stilled. Anxiously, humans seek to justify and secure themselves, clinging to all kinds of securities that never give them the self-assurance for which they long. This desperation expresses itself in lust for power and a possessive attitude. As Moltmann earlier claimed with Luther, the perverted love for God turned human beings into “proud and unhappy gods” (cf. §3.2.3). Oppressive mechanisms and structures are thus boiled down to their deepest root: anxiety and the need for self-preservation caused by the universal alienation between human beings and God.

From this perspective (and only from this perspective) Moltmann takes up the notion of the *double side of alienation* again (cf. §3.2.3). All human beings are alienated by oppression, but this alienation has two sides. The oppressor acts inhumanely (the evil he commits robs him of his humanity), the victim is dehumanized by the suffering oppression inflicts (it reminds one of the Hegelian “slave-master” relationship). If oppression has two sides, then the process of liberation towards the new community in justice and freedom has to start on both sides too. That is the main thesis of Moltmann’s air plane article. “Oppressors” who have alienated themselves from the human community will begin “their ‘long march’ into true freedom” when they begin “to comprehend the extent to which their perversion of freedom into mastery has imprisoned and isolated them” (1979a: 36).

Very soon after the Mexico City conference, Moltmann set up a plan to write a series of five books in which he would deal with the different loci of Christian dogmatics. It turned out to be a twenty year project. Between 1980 and 1999, respectively a doctrine of God, a doctrine of creation, a Christology, a pneumatology (originally not included), an eschatology, and a methodology were published. He baptized it “messianic theology.” A quick survey of the studies suffices to see the differences with his earlier books. The latter were programmatic, mostly written from one focus. The present volumes increasingly took the shape of theological companions:

detailed elaborations and extensive dialogues with all kinds of scholars. On his seventieth birthday, Moltmann retrospectively declared that his aim was to “overcome my ‘one-sidedness’ and to concentrate on long-term problems of theology” (1997a: 20). “I no longer wanted to be so controversial.” One could easily get the impression that the man who once left the “still waters of church history” because heated theological discussions were beckoning was now withdrawing into still waters again. But appearances can be deceiving. Whoever follows Moltmann’s own advice in *EiT* and reads the different forewords as justifications of his implicit method (*EiT*: xv), tends to see these remarks, as Müller-Fahrenholz suggests, as an ironic understatement (Müller-Fahrenholz 2000: 123). Much of the airplane article returns in the introduction of the first volume, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (1980) and in the last volume, *Experiences in Theology* (1999), the “epilogomena” to his project. Obviously, he takes a different, more systematic approach, but whoever reads his books must come to the conclusion that the overall concern is the “long march” of oppressors into true freedom: how can Westerners be liberated from the imprisonment that deprives them of “true humanity” (cf. Falcke 2001: 158)? It does not seem too farfetched to see “The Exodus of Oppressors” as an outline—an outline of a *liberation theology for the First World*.

It is not surprising that the problem of the “universal” and the “particular” runs through the entire project. If the kingdom of God is supposed to be liberating for people in unfree situations, it must be a contextual theology. “Contextuality” may, however, never become a legitimation for shutting oneself up in one’s own context. The future of God’s freedom for all people, Moltmann continues to maintain, is *universal*, but the way of liberation to this future is necessarily *particular*. In *TK* he calls his approach “ecumenical thinking:” everyone should recognize the limitations of his own position and the relativity of his own particular environment (no one can say any longer what is valid for everyone at all times and in all places and no one can cover the whole of theology), but the higher goal is the common striving for the knowledge of the *one and only truth* (i.e. “the truth of God”—“fellowship” and “freedom” are “the human components for knowledge” of this truth; *TK*: xiiiiff.).

On the one hand, Moltmann thus opposes “particularistic” thinking which he describes as “isolating, sectional thinking, which is hence self-complacent and anxiously self-justifying” (*TK*: xiv). Acknowledging one’s own contextual determination does not lead to many truths but to the awareness of one’s own limits and the limitations of one’s own perception of the truth. For Moltmann himself, this means acknowledging that he is a European but attempting not to be *Eurocentric*, a man but not *androcentric*,

living in the "First World" but not reflecting the ideas of the dominant nations (cf. *EiT*: xviii). To recognize one's own context is, in Moltmann's view, thus mainly the acknowledgement of one's own *limitations*. He mentions only the dangerous aspects (in his own case: Eurocentrism, androcentrism, and a ruler's mentality). Too much stress on one's particularities leads to "schismatic" thinking that deepens divisions through "controversial 'distinctive' doctrines" and absolute claims. Differences are then used to "stabilize our own limited identity."

To think ecumenically means overcoming this schismatic thinking, to which we have become so accustomed that many people do not even notice it any more, and beginning to think in the coming ecumenical fellowship. It means no longer thinking contrary to the others, but thinking with them and for them. It requires us to invest our own identity in this coming ecumenical fellowship. (*TK*: xiv)

"Ecumenical thinking" presents a concept of one's own identity not by stressing the differences but by participation in the "ecumenical fellowship," i.e. the "earthly body of Christ's truth." Differences must be shown, but the ultimate aim is to go beyond them. Moltmann concludes axiomatically: "Truth is universal. Only the lie is particularistic."

On the other hand, Moltmann's "ecumenical thinking" is also a protest against universalist theologies that "presuppose the absolute nature of [their] own standpoint in [their] own context." In the preface of *TK* Moltmann dissociates himself from the dominant academic way of theologizing in the West by calling the volumes of his new project "contributions to theology" (*TK*: xi ff.). In the first place, by means of the term *contributions* he rejects theological *systems*. He admits that they may have some aesthetic charm, but they also prevent readers from thinking critically for themselves. Secondly, he is hesitant about the common view of *dogmatics*. The term dogma obviously no longer has the same (original) meaning as in the political language of the Roman emperors (a "decree" that is not supposed to be questioned), but, Moltmann believes, "there is the odour—and often enough the attitude—of a judgement which is final and no longer open to appeal."

Even if it is not "dogmatic" in our everyday sense of the word, dogmatic thinking in theology likes to express itself in theses; not in theses for discussion, but in theses that are simply promulgated, which evoke agreement or rejection, but not independent thinking and responsible decision. They enforce their own ideas on the listener; they do not help him to formulate his own (*TK*: xii).

Calling his books “contributions” does not in any way entail a trivialization of his own theology or false modesty (“it is not simply meant to be a rhetorical understatement”). For Moltmann, particular contributions to “the one truth” of God’s freedom, invoking critical reflection and dialogue, is the only future for a theology that aims to be ecumenical. As already pointed out in CHAPTER ONE, he rejects any attempt to build theological systems (cf. §5.3). His aim is to reflect on historical challenges from the biblical perspective of God’s reign. If I interpret Moltmann correctly, his way beyond the dilemma between universalism and particularism as presented here is a contextual theology that on the one hand acknowledges and clarifies one’s contextual embeddedness but with the purpose of going beyond it and, on the other hand, presumes one universal truth but only in the knowledge that it can never be completely understood within one particular context. It is thus necessary that contextual theology is open to and fosters dialogue with others. Moltmann writes:

I must be honest with myself and my limitations, for only then will it become possible for me to overcome these limitations .... One can go beyond them only by recognizing a wider fellowship of mutual hearing and speaking, receiving and giving, and enter into it. This is what I have attempted to do since 1980 in my series of “Contributions to Theology” (1991: 180)

The way beyond the dilemma between universality and particularity is thus “understanding one’s own ‘whole’ (*Ganze*) as part of a whole that is much greater.”

Moltmann’s aim is, consequently, “to set himself with his own time and his own place within the greater community of theology.” That requires a self-critical attitude. A Western liberation theology goes beyond allowing oneself to be entertained by Third World theologians (that, Moltmann states, is “a reflection of ‘hardness of heart’ in the biblical sense of the phrase;” *EiT*: 187). It is a matter of *one’s own liberation*, one’s own long march to freedom. To keep on offering theologians of the Third World a helping hand means wasting “the chances for our own liberation which would free us for community with the people in the countries of the Third World” (*EiT*: 188). Existing theologies of liberation (black, feminist, socialist) are obviously and necessarily one-sided, Moltmann admits. They express the faith of the oppressed and *their* hope. Westerners should, therefore, stop complaining that they do not fit in and develop their own theology of liberation. That is not a matter of political correctness but of *conversion*, of “striking out a new direction towards the future of one’s own humanity” (*EiT*: 188). Instead, they must develop their own theology of liberation.

However, that is not possible to do in isolation. Oppression, so it was argued, has two sides and hence, Moltmann claims, the process of liberation towards the “new community in justice and freedom” has to start on both sides as well. To find their own humanity, the *oppressed* must free themselves from oppression and cut themselves off from their oppressors. Moltmann realized apparently that he had talked too quickly about “integration,” thus incorporating the struggle for liberation by blacks, the poor, and the oppressed into his own theology. True humanity in God’s reign of freedom may be the ultimate goal, but it is now far too early. Every liberation theology, he argues, needs *separation* from dominant, oppressive theology and should then search for its own *identity*. “At the end of these two processes we may then one day arrive at a new common theology in reciprocity and with equal rights in the sharpening of this community” (*EiT*: 269). Meanwhile,

the oppressors will first of all have to see themselves in the suffering eyes of their victims, and recognize themselves as oppressors, so that by surmounting their compulsions to oppress the others they can then overcome the isolation they have brought on themselves. (*EiT*: 186)

That is only possible if they look into the mirror hold before them by the oppressed.

About one-third of *EiT* deals with what Moltmann calls the “mirror images of liberating theology.” It is a frank account of his own personal search for liberation. The mirror of liberation theologies confronts the “oppressor” not only with the suffering of the oppressed but also with his own inhumanity. It is striking that he uses the metaphor of the mirror. The dialogue with others does not only offer him new insights to incorporate into his own thinking, but it compels him to see himself through the eyes of the other, thus confronting him with the fundamental question who he actually is. A liberation theology for oppressors is not merely a white Western male theology with African, Latin American and feminist ingredients, but a “black theology for whites,” a “Latin American liberation theology for the First World,” a “Minjung theology for the ruling classes,” and a “feminist theology for men.”

First, the mirror of black theology showed him a person who is part of the minority of white people who hold on to the privileges based on centuries of oppression of black people. Through James Cone and others Moltmann began to realize that the political and religious problems of the descendants of the African slaves are “in fact the inner problems of the whole Western world on the downside of the modern history it shares” (*EiT*:

190). Neither in the past nor in the present has European theology made slavery at the beginning of modern times one of its chosen themes.

Luther took no notice of the ‘discovery’ of America, and Schleiermacher was equally unconcerned about the slave-trade, which was at its height in his time. For Barth, Bultmann and Tillich too, this was not a subject for theology.

Only in the post-war ecumenical context and in the light of the apartheid regime in South Africa did a discussion on Christianity and racism begin to emerge. However, as I understand Moltmann, such a discussion in the Western world should go beyond public indignation about what is happening under regimes far away and beyond politically correct interest in black people and their culture. It should start introspectively with a critical survey of one’s own history and the dubious role of the Christian church and of the way the white world still defines humanity in terms of whiteness (*EiT*: 215).

Secondly, the mirror of Latin American liberation theology unmasked him as a member of the dominating Western world. It showed him the real meaning of the “discovery” of America in 1492: a whole continent impoverished by centuries of Western exploitation. Westerners should not only express compassion with the poor and oppressed of Latin America but also search for elements and remnants of the way of thinking that made the *conquista* of America possible and justified it. How far is our thinking, our theology, still stamped by the very same principles that lead to the conquest and exploitation of Latin America? Such introspection is the only way the people of Latin America can be liberated from age-old mechanisms that enslave them.

Thirdly, the mirror of Korean *minjung* theology (a Christian response to the oppressive element of the forced and rapid industrialization of South Korea) pictured him a member of the privileged “ruling class.” *Minjung* theology made Moltmann aware of the special nearness of the *ochlos* (the “crowd,” the “many,” the “people,” the *minjung*) to Jesus. “The people” were the addressees of Jesus’ mission, as the dissertation of Korean New Testament scholar Ahn Byung-Mu on *Jesus and the Ochlos in the Gospel of Mark* taught Moltmann (*EiT*: 249). Ahn argued that the Greek *ochlos* is a relational term, “a ruler’s term for the subjugated and dominated.” Jesus was unconditionally on the side of those who did not belong to the ruling class. This leads to an “inclusive solidarity Christology of the divine brother.” Jesus does not represent us exclusively, as most Western Christologies proclaim, but inclusively. As the brother of the poor he is related to them. As such, this was not new to Moltmann. But the consequences of the “Jesus-in-our-midst” Christology of Ahn and others were much more far-reaching.

The faces of the crucified *minjung* confront the ruling class with the fact that its sins are borne by these people. Moltmann relates that it “somewhat took [his] breath away” when Ahn told him that the *minjung* is “God’s suffering servant” of which Isaiah 53 speaks.

Who, then, must bear the sins of the First World? The Third World. Who must endure the exploitation and violence of those in power? The *minjung*, the poor, forsaken people. When we sing “Thou who bearest the sins of the world”, we must in a realistic sense think of *minjung*. (*EiT*: 258)

Fourth, the mirror of feminist theology showed Moltmann a “halved” human being who has learned to suppress his feelings, his senses, his bodily nature (*EiT*: 270ff.). Discussions with leading feminist theologians, his wife Elisabeth notably, made him realize that his upbringing had transformed the “young human” he once was into “a man” (“often enough I became the test case and prime example of ‘typical male thinking’ and an academic ‘objectivity’ without ‘subjectivity’”). Not only women, he learned, but also men are enslaved by patriarchy (“an institutionalized system of sexual hierarchy and a psychological mechanism for its justification”) which penetrates and dominates everything, from religious ideas to the picture of the human being, from the legal and economic system to the structure of the family, from medicine to the relation to nature. Thus feminist theology is not only about liberating the woman from her subordinate position but also man from his master’s role. A “masculine liberation theology” should aim to overcome the estrangements on both sides brought about by patriarchal traditions.

For this, one precondition is essential: the power games must stop, the master in the man must vanish, power must be distributed justly and equally, so that everyone, men and women alike, get the chance to fulfil their talents and callings, so that they can be used.

But that is just one side. Men should get rid of “the imaginary yet frequently cherished delusion of ‘manliness’” called sexism. True liberation is not possible as long as men keep on defining humanity in terms of their masculinity (thus excluding women), as long as they oppress the so-called “femininity” of their feelings, senses, and inner needs (which are “soft”). In other words, the double oppression does not stop if only external sexism is banished. Internal sexism, i.e. the “psychological mechanism of male self-justification and complacency.” In fact, that is the deepest cause.

The drama of the male self lies in the permanent search for security by way of control and repression, because there is no other

way of preserving the conscious self, which has been split off from the whole.

Taking Moltmann's reflections in the different mirrors as a whole, we can say that a liberation theology for oppressors should liberate "oppressors from anxiety and the false securities to which they cling. For Westerners, liberation means overcoming their "superhuman pride" and "God-complex" which is the reverse of their "inhuman anxiety" (*EiT*: 290f.). This "God-complex" alienates both themselves and the oppressed people from real humanity. The aim of a liberation theology for oppressors is the "conversion to one's own humanity," that is, a humanity that is not based on whiteness, superiority, exploitation and profit, achievement, or the suppression of one's "soft" side. The only way to such a liberation is to look frequently into the mirrors the victims of oppression hold up to us.<sup>107</sup> What is striking in Moltmann's mirror images are the historical exposés on the conquest of Latin America, slavery, and patriarchy. These do apparently not mean to show how wrong our fathers were and how they misused the Christian faith. Moltmann's main question seems to be if colonization, exploitation, aggression, annexation, etc. can be boiled down to principles that are inherent to modern Western thinking and if these principles still determine our thinking. In the next chapter I will elaborate on this (cf. §4.2.1).

In sum, Moltmann aims to develop a *contextual Western* theology with a *universalistic* horizon. Over against universalist theological systems he stresses the importance of context; over against "provincial" theologies he emphasizes the importance of the universal horizon. The way of liberation is particular, the goal universal. As will be shown in the next chapter, Moltmann continued to maintain this basic presumption over against emerging Western "postmodern" theologies. Theologians may never accept the mere plurality of contexts, perspectives and truths. Whoever surrenders "the unity of history" surrenders the unity of the eschatological freedom for all. As he recently wrote, "it is true that according to the Johannine Jesus 'in my Father's house are many dwelling places', but it is the *one* house of the one God for all that" (1999b: 264).

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<sup>107</sup> Moltmann acknowledges that many oppressors are at the same time themselves oppressed and *vice versa*. They are "oppressed oppressors" and "victimized perpetrators" (*EiT*: 188).

### 3.5. Exercises in Critical Anthropology: Evaluation and Preview

How can one “materialize” the liberating message of the “kingdom of God” in a suffering world that longs for freedom? How can one do so within one’s own context, accepting the diversity of particular perspectives without falling into indifference and fostering some kind of universality without claiming absoluteness? This chapter falls into two parts. In §3.1 and §3.2 I evaluated how societal changes forced Moltmann to readjust his view of Christian “identity” (i.e. the liberating mediation between What We Have Become and the ideal picture with which we want to identify ourselves). In §3.3 and §3.4 I examined Moltmann’s theology of human rights and his conflict with liberation theologians in order to point out how he became confronted with the problem of universality and diversity (within a Christian context) and how he outlined an ecumenical approach in which both the diversity of perspectives and the one universal perspective of God’s reign could be acknowledged. In this final section I return to the fundamental anthropological perspectives I indicated in §2.5.1 and explain how these have altered and I also once more spotlight the problem of universality and particularity, prefacing the following chapter.

1. *The Human Being and the Deus Absconditus*. The fundamental experience of the “hiddenness” of God and his future reveals the “sinfulness” of our existence, the bondage, the alienation from true humanity. As Moltmann explains (much more profoundly than in his theology of hope), *sin* means that humans do not live the life for which they were intended. The “turn towards the future” is not simply a matter of anticipation and holding fast to God’s promise. It demands breaking through the so-called “vicious circles of death.” This is only possible if the most fundamental vicious circle is laid bare, that of *godforsakenness*. Moltmann takes up again the notion of the “death of God.” He sees the atheist critique stemming from this as necessary part of a contemporary theology. However, he sharply criticizes the modern *anthropocentrism* that replaced classic philosophical theism and transferred all the attributes of God to human beings. Only knowledge of the true God—that is the “pathetic” God of the Jewish and Christian traditions—unmasks the modern human being as non-human, as an apathetic image of an apathetic God, as a proud and unhappy god instead of a true human being. An important characteristic of this apathetic human being is that he understands himself in categories of “having” and “doing” instead of “being.” We need to accept the fact that we are accepted by God exposes modern society as an achievement society and the modern human being as one who has learned to base his self-esteem on the sum of his successes and failures.

2. *The Human Being and the Revelation of the Wholly Other.* Humans find true humanity at the boundary of the transcendent future in our immanent reality. The “knowledge” of this transcendent future can only be described in a dialectical way. The dialectical relation between transcendence and immanence is not “static” (as in Barthian and Bultmannian thinking) but neither is it simply a dialectic of future and present, as in Bloch’s thinking. God is experienced in the *sacraments*, the real presences, of his kingdom in this world. Moltmann’s sacramental theology is a cumulation of these earlier stages: it is fundamentally dialectical and eschatological. With Hegel, Moltmann presumes that the dialectic between immanence and transcendence is overcome in God himself. From the “re-uniting” of God in the Easter event stems the Spirit of reconciliation which moves its way through history towards future fulfilment, as a counter-history in which humans can find true humanity. Anticipation is still essential to describe Christian identity, but it is anticipation in participation.

3. *The Human Being in Christological Perspective.* More strongly than in the theology of hope, the cross is introduced as the criterion of the Christian view of humankind. Humans find true humanity in identity with Christ, which means solidarity with the poor and the oppressed in non-identity with the power structures of this world. The cross is the criterion for experiencing the “real presences” of the history of the triune God with this world.

4. *The Human Being in Pneumatological Perspective.* Moltmann follows up on earlier pneumatological notions. It is the “Spirit of perseverance” who sustains believers on their way into “non-identity” (cf. §3.2.4). At the same time the experience of “God’s trinitarian history with this world” is the experience of the “Spirit of life” (cf. §3.2.5). This Spirit fosters liberation, reconciliation and fellowship and opens people up to the future of God’s kingdom. The “real presences” of this kingdom can be described as the history of the Spirit poured out on all flesh. The possibilities and powers of this “creative Spirit” are experienced in the “feast” when shut-in individuals “come out of their shells” in a way that surprises themselves.

5 *The Human Being in Eschatological Perspective.* The human being has no nature; he has a history. Or, better, he participates in a history. Important for Moltmann’s ongoing rehabilitation of history in theology is the Jewish notion of Shekinah, which he introduces in his trinitarian theology. Not only humans participate in the covenant history, driven by the promise of the faithful God. God himself “wanders” with them through the dust of this earth towards future glory. They find true humanity when they identify themselves with this history (or better, when they accept and experience that they *have been identified* with it).

6 *The Human Being in the Perspective of the Apostolate.* The human being finds real humanity when he remains faithful to the earth. I think that Bonhoeffer's Christocentric idea of the universal rule of Christ is pushed somewhat to the background. What still stands remains central is the idea that because of God's unconditional "yes" to this world true worldliness is an essential aspect of Christian identity. This is deepened by Moltmann's trinitarian theology. Human beings find "true identity" when they are faithful to the world through which God himself "wanders."

7. We should add a seventh fundamental perspective, although it is inherent to the other five just mentioned. Much more than in his earlier theology Moltmann views *the human being from an eucharistic perspective.* The human being is, so to say, an *eucharistic being.* He comes to himself in thanksgiving, in purposeless play, in glorifying God, in singing to God in a foreign land, in participation in the mystery of the triune God, by noticing the "sacraments" of God's kingdom. This contemplative, mystical dimension of Moltmann's anthropology—which complements the "Spartan" anthropology of his Blochian period (§2.5.4)—will become increasingly important, as we will see.

How Moltmann sketches Christian "identity" differs radically from the kind of identity defended by those Christians who

with their anxious concern for their own identity, cling to forms of church received from the past, opt for religion against politics and associate themselves with the forces of social and political conservatism. (CG: 13)

Moltmann calls it a widespread misunderstanding that Christian identity coincides with a set of beliefs, rituals and morals preserved by the church. For him, Christian identity is a way of existence, characterized by love and solidarity, by hope and anticipation, by participation and play, by praise and thanksgiving. It is a way of life which restores the humanity of dehumanized human beings by destroying their inhuman concern for self-deification through knowledge and works. The human is set free from his inhuman *hybris* to restore his true human nature. As Moltmann formulates it, "it makes the homo incurvatus in se once again open to God and his neighbour, and gives Narcissus the power to love someone else" (CG: 72). But how does this view of Christian identity lead to a liberating presence of the Christian faith in modern society?

As shown in §3.2, Christian identity and relevance stem from the one history of Christ. In fact Moltmann translates the problem in terms of the cross-resurrection dialectic we have come across in CHAPTER TWO. The

identity-involvement dilemma, he argues, is not a dilemma “but the inevitable tension of Christian faith” (*CG*: 24f.). The crises of relevance and identity are complementary. Where identity is found, relevance is called into question; where relevance is achieved, identity is called into question. Defining this double crisis more closely with regard to the Christian faith, Moltmann states that “each of these crisis is simply a reflection of the other” and that “both crises can be reduced to a common denominator.” Christian theology can only be identified as Christian when it is a theology of the *cross*. On the other hand, a theology of the cross is a “critical and liberating [and thus relevant] theory of God and man.” Moltmann thus develops his anthropology from the theological “truth” that the cross—as a criterion of Christian theology and also of true humanity—unmasks inhumane and enslaving structures and in this “negation of the negative” reveals the reality of the “resurrected” life, of true freedom and humanity. What he indicates is that the church should not “protect” this truth by building a defensive wall around it. Neither, however, should it bring this truth into the public domain by kneading it in such a way that it fits in with more or less generally accepted views of humanity. Christian theology has something to say about “true” humanity and, consequently, about the humanizing of humanity *within the public arena* and on the basis of its own presuppositions, *its own “truth.”*

This claim is challenging, but problems arise concerning the idea of universality. The key issue is the problem of universality and plurality. For the sake of clarity, I am not concerned with the pluralization of social roles and images in modern society. Moltmann addressed this problem already in the early 1960s and continued to do so in *Man* as well as in *CG* (10f.). There we find traces of the Heideggerian view of the questionability (*Fraglichkeit*) of humankind that we already came across in his earlier writings (cf. §2.4.1, 1974b: 2ff.). This is positively evaluated, because it generates curiosity and creativity and guarantees human freedom. However, paradoxically it also obstructs true freedom. “People grow tired of maintaining the open situation of dialogue and co-operation with others, in which the boundaries are always fluid” (*CG*: 21). The constant self-questioning and the abundance of possibilities forces them “to cut the Gordian knot with the sword of a decision taken in isolation” (*CG*: 20) or they are sledgehammered into apathy, indifference and alienation (cf. *CG*: 269). The problem is thus finding an “equilibrium between the fundamental self-questioning of man, and the answers by means of which he takes control of himself.” This, Moltmann observes, has become increasingly impossible. The major problem seems to be that the traditional frames of reference in which people used to seek this equilibrium are crumbling: “... what concerns everyone

absolutely, and what society must absolutely desire, is more difficult to identify than in earlier and more homogenous societies" (*CG*: 10). More than ever, the human lives "in a hall of a thousand mirrors and masks" (Moltmann 1974b: 2). Moltmann could view the modern feeling of god-forsakenness (the "death of God") within the universal theological frame of the kingdom of the triune God. The universality of this (Western, European) perspective—which touches on the socio-political relevance of faith—was questioned by the Latin Americans and in my view would become increasingly problematic in the years to come.

In this chapter the clash with the liberation theologians was presented as the major cause of a turn in Moltmann's theological thinking. It could be asked whether this conflict was not blown a bit out of proportion, leading to a somewhat oversimplified reconstruction of a change in Moltmann's theology. Despite the fact that Moltmann himself presents Mexico City as the fourth "turning point," the question could arise as to whether the shift was not caused more by gradual changes in the academic and political climate in which he was working. Is it not more likely that across the board the rise of postmodern thinking within academic circles caused a general farewell to making one's own context absolute and that it was this general development that made Moltmann suspicious of both his own "modernist" features and that of the liberation theologies of the 1970s? And did the breakdown of Eurocentrism and the astonishing discovery that Europe itself could be an object of interpretation (caused by decolonization, liberation movements, etc.) not lead to a rethinking of what was specifically European in all kind of academic and political circles? Since Europe is no longer the only frame of reference for the whole world, plurality is a fact of which all theologians have to be conscious. And should we not take into account the personal circumstances of Moltmann as a busy professor, occupied with an increasing number of students wanting to do their doctorates under his supervision, ecumenical obligations, and scholarly bodies and journals, as Müller-Fahrenholz suggests? Could the "burdens" of his theological thinking not lead back to the burdens of his time and abilities? In other words, should we, instead of stressing a U-turn in his thinking, not take into account that it could also be

a concession that a man who is past fifty can no longer play with all possible options but has to find his place and then accept it as a given. And this place was Tübingen, it was the Faculty of Protestant Theology, and in it the chair of Systematic Theology. (Müller-Fahrenholz: 124f.)

These factors probably played a role as well. Nevertheless, I believe the focus on the debate with the Latin Americans was rather crucial. Whatever influence the change of academic climate and his personal circumstances may have had, it was this particular discussion that forced Moltmann to reconsider the question how people find their humanity at the “front” of the transcendent kingdom of God and the immanent reality of crises and new possibilities and, moreover, to face up to the tension between “universality” and “particularity.” Both questions would continue to determine Moltmann’s later theology, as I will try to point out in the following chapter.

# In the Spacious Place of the Triune God

## Exercises in Sabbatical Anthropology

### 4.1. *The Point of No Return: Flowing Harmony and Faith in History*

To start from scratch, to make a clean sweep, to do it all over again, more thoroughly and less one-sidedly this time—that was Moltmann’s intention behind his new “messianic” project. As I have shown, there were two related problems when he plotted the course of this project (cf. §3.5). First, how can human beings find true humanity at the “boundary” of God’s transcendent kingdom in our immanent reality? Or, more precisely: How can a Westerner do so within his own context? Latin Americans based their messianic identity on the *opcion preferential de Dios*, the Minjung of Korea on the special nearness of the *ochlos* to Jesus, feminist theologians on the rediscovery of female figures in the biblical image of God (*ruach* and *Sophia*); and black theology on the “black Messiah.” But how is “entering the kingdom of God” liberating for a well-paid, Western, white, male professor of theology? Does the messianic identification of the Son of Man with the suffering touch the human being who “belongs nowhere?” Second, how does his own particular conception of “true humanity” fit into the universal horizon of liberation and reconciliation? Or how can a Western theologian foster his own perspective on humanity without either subduing “the other” to his own homogeneity or ending up in indifference? How does one do justice to the manifest diversity in the expressions of faith without giving up its unity and, conversely, how does one preserve the unity without subjugating the diverse views to homogeneity? Moltmann’s “solution” as outlined in his airplane draft and in the first pages of *The Trinity and the Kingdom* was an “ecumenical theology.” Basically, his intention was to offer a contextual theology that acknowledged and clarified his own contextual embeddedness without giving up the universal perspective (which, admittedly, can never be completely understood within one particular context). A liberation theology for Westerners—that was, in brief, the task ahead.

As Moltmann writes, his theology of the 1960s and 1970s was stamped exclusively by “historical categories:” “promise and hope, protest and exodus, movement and liberation” (2002a: 29). “History” was the symbol of reality as a whole. As the previous chapters have shown, a liberating

theology was a “right theology for the right time.” It was developed in critical association with the emancipatory strands of the modern project of progress in world history. Anthropologically speaking, this led to a stress on liberation as *emancipation* from social, political and economic structures. Humans beings are “contemporaries” of God and although they must “remain faithful to the earth,” their “home of identity” lies in the future of God’s kingdom. In CHAPTER THREE I showed how Moltmann changed the lay-out of his theology as presented in *Theology of Hope* significantly. However, these changes were modifications within this historical paradigm.

In the course of the 1980s, Moltmann began to experience the limits of this paradigm. Turning his mind to the problems of his own context, he associated himself with the European peace movement and the ecological movement. “Only gradually,” he declares, did he begin to understand that human history takes place within ecological preconditions and that there are, consequently, limits to the growth of human culture. Reluctantly, he had to admit that even the future of history is not a “land of unlimited possibilities” (2002a: 29). To understand this, it is necessary to go back to the early 1980s. At that time many people experienced their age as a time of crisis—not only of social crises but, increasingly, also of an *ecological* crisis. The Cold War was at its frostiest (resulting in a growing threat of nuclear warfare), mass scale poverty in Africa was shown on television (it was the “Live Aid” age) and the environmental problems, indicated by the Club of Rome in the 1970s became more and more part of the general public consciousness (terms like CO<sub>2</sub>, the greenhouse effect, and acid rain became part of the everyday vocabulary of journalism). This atmosphere did not leave Moltmann’s theology untouched. On the contrary, even up to his more recent works the possibility of a worldwide catastrophe is the thunderous sky on the horizon (see, for instance, 1999a: 92f.). A documentary broadcast by Dutch television in 1987 depicts this situation quite accurately.<sup>108</sup> It gives an impression of the rather apocalyptic way in which many people saw the humanitarian and ecological crises of those days. An interview with Moltmann included both beautiful and attractive snapshots of Tübingen as well as pictures of people wearing gas masks and demonstrating against nuclear pollution, Moltmann entering the “nuclear-free” university, and the polluted river Neckar that runs through the picturesque village. This contrast effect seems typical for the spirit of the age. The film suggested that the

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<sup>108</sup> “De adem van het protest,” broadcast by the IKON on June 5, 1987. The text of the interview is published more or less in full in *Hervormd Nederland* (Brugsma 1987).

world was moving rapidly towards a *point of no return* and that the many good and beautiful things of life would soon be beyond retrieval (if they were not already). This anxiety is expressed in Moltmann's writings: "Will our children one day have to experience spring without butterflies, summer without birdsong and autumn without apples?" (1989: 51). The "signs of the times" at this time were signs of a crisis that would not just be temporary but

... a crisis of life on this planet, a crisis so comprehensive and so irreversible that it can not unjustly be described as apocalyptic ....  
As far as we can judge, it is the beginning of a life and death struggle for creation on this earth. (*GiC*: xiii)

Moltmann thus articulated a fundamental anxiety shared by many people these days, an existential feeling of unrest, an inarticulate awareness that the world is moving towards a catastrophe. Somehow, he had to respond to this apocalyptic perception of a total, all embracing crisis *theologically*.

In *God in Creation* (originally the Gifford Lectures he gave in 1984/85), he accordingly provides the legitimation for a new doctrine of creation—or an "ecological theology of nature"—which had been quite a suspect topic in post-war Germany (*GiC*: xiii). For decades the theological debates had been dominated by the dispute between the "German Christians" and the Confessing Church of the 1930s. The choice was either a "natural theology" proclaiming that God's order could be discovered in the natural conditions of nature and race or a "revealed theology" holding fast to Jesus Christ as "the one Word of God." For Moltmann it has become evident that questions have come to the fore that were completely unknown at that time and, therefore, Christian theology is forced to break through this paradigm: "in the 1930s, the problem of the doctrine of creation was knowledge [*Erkenntnis*] of God. Today the problem of the doctrine of God is knowledge of creation." Therefore, he states:

The *identity* of the Christian belief in creation has become questionable in today's ecological crisis and must therefore be given a new definition in that context; while the *relevance* of belief in creation must prove itself in ideas about the present ecological crisis and in suggested ways of escape from that crisis. (*GiC*: 22)

Once again, we are thus facing the problem of centre and horizon or of identity and involvement. How can Christian theology be open to the horizon of faith, now extended to cosmic breadth, without losing its centre, God's revelation in Christ?

It is evident that Moltmann, *as a theologian*, aspires to participate in the public debate on ecological issues between politicians, ecology groups

and scientists. His aim is to offer a *public* theology, i.e.—according to Moltmann’s definition—a theology of the kingdom of God.<sup>109</sup> Therefore, he has sought to grasp and interpret the current crisis theologically, first in *GiC* and then in several lectures and articles.<sup>110</sup> The central presupposition of all these publications is, first of all, that the social and ecological crises are interrelated in *one total crisis* of humanity and, moreover, of life on earth as a whole, and should, therefore, not be viewed separately (*GiC*: 21f., 1999a: 13, 93ff.). Human life takes place within the “frameworks [the *Rahmenbedingungen*] of nature.” Moltmann’s own perception of this framework has increasingly been based upon the *Gaia* hypothesis of James Lovelock, presented in 1979.<sup>111</sup> In line with Lovelock, Moltmann defines nature rather broadly and abstractly as “the ecosystem of the earth,” which he further represents as a system of “mutual and reciprocal relationships,” an organic and energetic whole (1999a: 107).<sup>112</sup> The total system of our planet is a system of interactions and feed-backs, which strives to create the best possible environmental conditions for life on earth. It is one big super organism into which every single being is integrated. It is from this perspective that Moltmann’s conviction that socio-economic and ecological crises are inextricably interwoven should be viewed (cf. *GiC*: 20ff.). He indicates how the global market compels poor countries to give up their own subsistence economy by planting monocultures for the world market. In his words, “they have to sell not just the apples but the apple tree as well—and that means that they can survive only at the cost of their children.” The

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<sup>109</sup> Moltmann opposes two kinds of theology: theology which is viewed solely as a “function of the church” (it can only present itself to the public forum of its own society by the church’s proclamation and mission) and theology which is viewed as a “function of *the kingdom of God* for which Christ came and for which the church is, after all, there” (it must then be developed as a public theology in public life, *EiT*: 79, cf. 1999a: 1f.).

<sup>110</sup> Reading these texts, there are certain developments to be noted. However, the major issues and claims as well as the general tenor are similar. We can therefore use the different texts (written between 1985 and 2003) interchangeably.

<sup>111</sup> The *Gaia* hypothesis has been seriously criticized by scientists and is certainly not as “generally accepted” as Moltmann suggests (1999a: 107).

<sup>112</sup> In *GiC*—written only a few years after Lovelock launched his theory—Moltmann refers to it only twice (*GiC*: 340, n.9 and 300). The real fascination is apparently of more recent date (see e.g. Moltmann 1993).

devastating effects of such economical developments eventually affect the whole world

... because no human civilization can cut itself free from the ecosystems of the one earth we share, the downfall of the Third World means the downfall of the First World too; and the destruction of the earth will also mean the extinction of the human race. (1999a: 13)

The only way to survive is, therefore, to integrate human life once again into this presumed super organism. In other words, humans should seek *inhabitation* and *embodiment* within the “framework of nature.”

Moltmann describes this total crisis further exclusively as *a crisis of modernity*. He argues that the manifest distortion of the well-balanced “equilibrium” of nature is related explicitly to the modern attitude to life and he thinks it is necessary to go back to the origins of the modern project to understand this. According to him, the most significant pre-Enlightenment sources for the modern period were the conquest of America and the scientific and technological seizure of power over nature (1999a: 6). Apparently, science and power form a mammoth alliance. At least, Moltmann affirms this regularly and it is Francis Bacon who is used to illustrate this: “Knowledge is power” (*GiC*: 27; 1999a: 99). The intrinsic link lies in the heart of the scientific method as such; it is based upon the Cartesian dualism of *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, for Moltmann a new variant of *divide et impera*. The scientific observer is placed over against the very thing he observes, nature included. In fact it is a double movement: the reduction of the natural environment to the status of mere object corresponds to the subjectification of the human being. He confronts creation (his own body included) as its lord and owner (*GiC*: 27).

In Moltmann’s view, the acquisition of power is the concern prompting the scientific search for knowledge (sciences are *machtförmig*, he says with C. F. von Weizsäcker, cf. Von Weizsäcker 1977: 253f.), not just in their technological application but also in their methodological basic principles.<sup>113</sup> He does not hold science and technology as such responsible (he admits that scientific curiosity in itself can be described as pure, detached pleasure in knowledge). It is the *social context* of the sciences, in which non-scientific interests are always involved.

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<sup>113</sup> I will leave aside the question of whether it is justified to lay the blame for today’s crisis on Descartes. Was his *cogito ergo sum*—paradoxically— not meant as a philosophical way to undermine power structures and to offer a solution to the religious wars in Europe?

In the struggle for existence [*Kampf ums Dasein*], scientific and technological progress is not used merely for the enhancement of living; it is also utilized by the political will to achieve or secure power. In terms of social reality, there is no such thing as “value-free science.” (*GiC*: 25)

Moltmann thus holds that sciences are not value-free and, in addition, they serve the values of the modern achievement society in particular. They are embedded in the will to dominate that is expressed in endlessly developing production and increasing efficiency. It is thus the *concerns* the sciences serve that should be disclosed (*GiC*: 20ff.).

Moltmann goes one step further. These concerns, he continues, are governed by the *basic values* of modern societies, which “derive from fundamental human convictions about *the meaning and purpose of life*” (*GiC*: 23, italics mine). He defines ‘religious’ as “the things in which people in the West put their trust” or that which everyone in Western society somehow “takes for granted.” Thus the socio-ecological crisis can be defined as a *religious* crisis (cf. 1999a: 95f.). What, then, are these basic values and how do sciences interact with them? In Moltmann’s view, it can all be traced back to “the boundless will towards domination” (1999a: 97). Modern Western civilization, he argues, is one-sidedly being programmed for development, growth, expansion and conquest. Science and technology are used by the political will to acquire, secure and extend power and to foster the “American pursuit of happiness.”

In order to characterize modern society’s obsession with growth, Moltmann sets it off against “pre-modern” societies, which, as he puts it in a generalizing way, are based on *equilibrium* (*GiC*: 26; 1999a: 97ff.). For him, these societies were (and are) not at all primitive or underdeveloped, but “highly complicated systems of equilibrium” which ordered the relation of people to nature and to the gods. In *God for a Secular Society* he sharpens the contrast by opposing Descartes and the Indian chief Seattle (1999a: 99). For Descartes, human beings are “masters and possessors of nature” (*maîtres et possesseurs de la nature*), as he wrote in his *Treatise on Scientific Method* published in 1692 (cf. *GiC*: 27). Contrary to this, Chief Seattle—two centuries later—proclaimed that “every part of the earth is sacred” and that the hills, the meadows, the ponies, and people “all belong to the same family.”<sup>114</sup> Thus he characterizes modernity as an aggressive culture

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<sup>114</sup> Moltmann refers to a lecture that is incorrectly ascribed to chief Seattle himself. It is a—probably slightly romanticized—reconstruction by a journalist who published it about thirty years after a public appearance of the chief in 1855

of growth over against harmonious cultures of equilibrium. I will not go into the question how romanticized this picture of pre-modern cultures is (many would argue that Moltmann has been carried away by what Shepard Krech calls “the myth of the ecological Indian;” cf. Krech 2000) and confine myself to the conclusion that for Moltmann the devastation of nature is caused by the modern scientific-technological attitude to life, which is directed by the concern for power. This concern is rooted in the “basic value” of domination (I will come back on that in §4.3.1).

Moltmann’s comparison between Descartes and Chief Seattle shows that in his conception there are two basic attitudes to life: the modern and the pre-modern (or better, perhaps, the non-modern). The first is based on growth and expansion, the latter on equilibrium and harmony. The contrast between both became even more evident to him during a visit to China. “China between Tao and Mao,” he called his reflections upon this journey (1989: 87-101). It is worthwhile to focus on this essay for a moment, because it touches on the sore spot exactly. Generally speaking, it regards the situation in the People’s Republic as exemplary for the modern clash of two “basic models” (*Grundmuster*) of human culture: “the culture of harmony in nature” (the traditional Chinese religious worldview) and “the culture of progress in world history” (this is the one time that Moltmann seems to refer only to Mao’s Chinese version of classical socialism; for the rest he also has the modern culture of progress in general in mind). The basic problem of the modern world (and of his own theology as we will see) is the conflict of *ecological equilibrium* implied in the first and *modern faith in history* deriving from the second.

Behind his description of Taoism and modernity lies a presumption that characterizes his entire theological project, namely the idea that it is a *religious basic principle* (harmony or progress) that determines the way a society is organized economically and politically. Harmony and progress are paradigms that express the unity of culture, ideology, and religion. Traditional Chinese culture is founded on the ideal of harmony (1989: 88ff.)—not a static, pre-stabilized harmony but the “flowing harmony” (*Fliessgleichgewicht*) of Yin and Yang, “which embraces pulsating life, the rhythms of nature and the cycles of history, and through which human beings attempt to attune themselves to life, nature and history and influence them.” This longing for harmony is expressed religiously in, for instance, the architecture of the “forbidden city” (displaying “the one, timeless, uniform harmony”); economically in the cult of the rice paddy, presuming a close

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(cf. Furtwangler 1997).

harmony between humans and nature (human activity is geared to the seasons and monthly cycles), among humans (“no one may ‘dig the water away’ from another”—the rice paddies thus resist the capitalist and individualist principle of competition and individualism), between humans and their ancestors (the rice terraces are thousands of years old), and politically in the emperor cult (till 1911) - as “Son of Heaven” the emperor represents the human being who stands between heaven and earth as centre of the cosmic order, which means that he does not rule “through active intervention but through ‘*effective non-intervention*’ as an abiding pole in the centre of the world” (in Moltmann’s view, this priestly emperor represents an archaic but *ecological* rule and, as will be shown, it shows some remarkable similarities with his own theological image of the task of human beings on earth). Over against this culture of harmony Moltmann places the modern Western culture of progress with its future-oriented, linear concept of time, in which humans are called to be the *subject* of their own history (1989: 92ff.). The basic principle of progress and emancipation is economically articulated in industrial production, in the free market (the “fight of all against all”), in profit and efficiency, and politically, as will be spelled out in this chapter, in growth, expansion, and power. In brief, the first pattern of human culture is metaphysically embedded in the harmony of nature, the second in the idea of progress in the concept of history.

Anthropologically speaking, the consequences seem obvious. In the first paradigm, true human “identity” is attained by “identifying” oneself with the existing harmony, by seeking habitation in nature and in the age-old culture of one’s ancestors. In the latter paradigm, true human identity lies ahead, in identification with the future. One has to emancipate oneself from existing structures that keep one immature, surpass the merely given and find oneself in progress and self-fulfilment. Moltmann apparently faces a dilemma. His organic view of these paradigms makes it all the more difficult to see how they could ever be combined. Nonetheless, *that is what he aims to do*. On the one hand, he sees that “we” cannot go on as we have done up to now without arriving at “a universal catastrophe.” His trip to China made him realize again the catastrophic *social* consequences (for instance, how the people of large cities are disembedded from family culture) as well as the *ecological* consequences of the limitless exploitation of nature. A continuation of the project of progress in history is not the way to “the true future, i.e. the future of the survival of humankind and nature on this earth” (1989: 97f.). On the other hand, a complete return to the paradigm of harmony, thus giving up the modern idea of progress in the

concept of history, is—if ever possible<sup>115</sup>—not an option either. He believes that withdrawing oneself from this project would mean that the world would be destroyed as well, for “the visions of modern times are impossible visions, but they are none the less necessary ones.” As he argues:

There is only one alternative to the humanitarian ideas of human dignity and the universality of human rights, and that alternative is barbarism. There is only one alternative to the ideal of eternal peace, and that is a permanent state of war. There is only one alternative to faith in the One God and hope for his kingdom, and that is polytheism and chaos. (1999a: 17)<sup>116</sup>

We thus cannot go back before modernity and its project of faith in history (the “project” of Western civilization has become “humanity’s fate;” 1999a: 22; cf. *GiC*: 28). Rather, given the social and ecological side effects it has generated, a thoroughgoing revision is needed. This goes far beyond the badly needed coat of paint—it is the rotten foundation that should be replaced. For Moltmann, such a “fundamental reformation of the modern world” is the task of Christian theology, perhaps not exclusively but certainly undeniably. Public theology must answer the question: “What must we keep, of the project of modernity, and what must we throw out? What must we re-invent, *so that the project does not founder*” (1999a: 17f., italics mine). If I am not oversimplifying the matter, we can say that in Moltmann’s early political theology an alliance was concluded with the emancipatory strand of modernity in order to save the Christian story of liberation, while now, conversely, the origins of Christian faith are to be unveiled to rescue modernity. Moltmann’s ambition is, therefore, to offer a Christian perspective on God, humans and world that itself is a paradigm in which the two contrasting public theologies of faith in history and habitation in the cosmos are integrated.

In his theological development, Moltmann points out a move “from historical hope in God’s promise to the spatial experience of God’s indwelling” (*EiT*: 313, 2002a: 29ff.) or, more precisely, a broadening of the historical to the spatial. He does not want to depart from his early messianic-historical theology but aims to extend it. This is the obvious friction in

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<sup>115</sup> For Moltmann, advocating such would display a rather naive underestimation of the irreversibility and continuity of cultural processes (“the person who rides the tiger can never get off again;” 2003a: 31, cf. §2.4.1).

<sup>116</sup> It is striking how easily general notions about the humane—dignity, rights—blur into biblical and Christian notions.

Moltmann's later theology. How to mediate between a future-oriented view of life (in which liberation is cast in terms of emancipation) and a holistic one (in which liberation is equated with habitation in nature)? Some interpreters suggest a rather strong distinction between "Moltmann I" and "Moltmann II." William C. French, for instance, speaks of a "seismic shift." "If Moltmann is right now, he was wrong then" (French 1988: 78). He points out where the shoe pinches. How can Moltmann's early theology, which is so explicitly historical, ever be "broadened" by spatial categories without ending up in a hopeless contradiction? Or conversely, how is a holistic view of the cosmos to be "dynamized" by historical categories? What he bypasses too much is the plain fact that Moltmann has continually struggled with this problem himself. In my reading it is even the underlying dynamics of his entire project. Is a public theology that seeks its relevance in ecological issues and its identity in a reformulation of the doctrine of creation not at odds with a public theology that focusses on the "problems of history" and seeks its identity in eschatological hope and anticipation? Or, more strongly, does a theology that seeks its "home in existence" by exploring "historical" categories not exclude one who does so by probing spatial categories?

In §4.2 I will sharpen the problem anthropologically. In §4.3 I will follow Moltmann in pursuing this problem into the doctrine of God, thus eventually spotlighting his theological view of human beings. In §4.4 I will consider how this is supposed to lead to a liberating Christian commitment in an endangered world. I will return then to the two questions I raised at the beginning of this chapter.

#### 4.2. *The End-Times of Modernity: Towards a Revaluation of Values?*

The world is facing

a crisis of the whole system with all his part-systems, from the dying of the forests to the spread of neuroses, from the pollution of the seas and rivers to the nihilistic feeling about life which dominates so many people in our mass cities. (*GiC*: 23)

We are confronted with an *either-or* situation:

Either we shall create a world of social justice, human solidarity and Christian love, or this world will perish through the oppression of people by people, through a-social egotism, and through the destruction of the future in the interests of short-term, present-day profits. The alternatives are either social justice or increasing crime and continually more expensive security; either interna-

tional justice or revolts by the hungry in the poor countries; either long-term investments today for the future of our common life, or short-term profits today and the calculated bankruptcy of humanity in the near future. (1999a: 69f.)

Thus the motive of Moltmann's public theology has become clear, which is, we may conclude, fundamentally kairotic: "unless there is a radical reversal in the *fundamental orientation of our human societies* ... this crisis is going to end in a wholesale catastrophe." The intention behind Moltmann's renewed kingdom of God theology is nothing less than offering a way out for a society in crisis—for the entire cosmos in fact. A reevaluation of values is what theology has to offer, for (the kingdom of) God's sake. A radical move towards a future for all the living (*eine Umkehr ... zu einer Zukunft des Lebens!*) is needed (*GiC*: 21).

Moltmann perceives the total socio-ecological crisis as a crisis of the scientific-technological civilization as developed in the Western world from the late fifteenth century onward (*GiC*: 21f.; 1989: 51f., 1999a: 95). The entire crisis is a "crisis of the whole major project of modern civilization" (1999a: 15) In order to point modern society to the way to such a turn towards the future, pleas for a mere change of attitude are insufficient. The *implicit theology* of modern times must be unmasked. The urge to keep on offering "contributions on the public relevance of theology" is prompted by Moltmann's conviction that there is such "an *implicit theology* of modern times" and that the "unmistakably theological, and hence universal" task of the kingdom of God today is to grasp this theology, understand why and how it was born, "so that we can recognize both its vitality and its congenital defects" (1999a: 5, italics mine). This theology is an inner-wordily eschatology, a messianic vision of *a new time* and *a new world* to be realized by conquest and scientific domination over nature. It is this messianism that eventually has to lead to the crisis of meaning that lies beneath the socio-ecological crisis. To overcome the total crisis we must first lay bare the theological root of the crisis of meaning (§4.2.1) and then consider how Christian theology can go beyond it (§4.2.2 and §4.2.3). Again the question of a theological rehabilitation of "history" and "world" comes to the fore, although concerning the latter the scope has to be broadened to include the whole cosmos. Apparently, Moltmann has to enter a new theological field of language ("spatial" categories, as stated above). More sharply than before, this raises the problem of how both anthropological insights of humans finding identity in the "home of the future" and in the "home" of this world (of nature) can be conceived together. That question, to be dealt with in §4.3, will be previewed in §4.2.4.

#### 4.2.1. The Crisis of Modern Messianism

In recent publications, Moltmann has elaborated on the crisis of modernity (1999a and 2003a). These are a sharpening and actualization of insights he has put forward in the course of his “messianic theology.” What is striking is the apocalyptic setting. He speaks of economic and ecological “end-times.” These end-times are, so to say, the climax of a contradiction between modernity and what he calls “submodernity,” the other process the “new time” has called forth. “The glossy messianic surface of European history has its ugly apocalyptic downside” (2003a: 23). The enormous debts of Third World countries, the “new iron curtains” that protect the ‘fortresses’ of Europe, the USA and Japan, and malaria and AIDS herald the economic end-time. It is the results of centuries of basically unequal economic progress. Moltmann acknowledges that the so-called *dependence theory* as put forward in classic liberation theology may be rather one-sided (*EiT*: 228), but he does not go as far, apparently, in his reservations as many Latin Americans themselves have recently done (Gutiérrez 1999: 23; cf. De Schrijver 1998: 17ff.).<sup>117</sup> He continues to stress the direct, monocausal relation between the advent of modern times and the deplorable situation of the Third World nowadays. Centuries of exploitation, plundering, and slave-trade have led to a world order in which “some live in the light and others in darkness” (1999a: 12). It is the Third World that is, moreover, confronted most with the consequences of ecological destruction. The annihilation of plants and animal species, the greenhouse effect leading to climate changes, the cutting down of rain forests, the poisoning of the soil, and the vast growing of the world population and its urbanization (1999a: 14, 76) are the signs of the ecological end-time.

To understand this situation we must, as stated before, go back to the origins of the modern project. We have already noticed the most significant in Moltmann’s eyes: the conquest of America and the scientific and technological seizure of power over nature. He now goes a step further. He stresses that both the conquest of the world and the scientific and technological seizure of power over nature were motivated by a *messianic* vision of a new world and a new *time*, a vision that holds good *right down to the present*. Columbus, he writes, was seeking both Eldorado, the “golden city,” and

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<sup>117</sup> Gutiérrez: “For many today it represents - without denying its contribution at a specific moment - an instrument that fails to explain the complexity of the present situation. [...] While it would be a serious error not to acknowledge the contribution of this theory, it would be worse to remain tied to a toll which clearly no longer responds adequately to the diversity of the present situation, and which pays no heed to new aspects.”

God's Garden of Eden (1999a: 8f.). His gold rush was not only for personal gain; it was legitimated by claiming that it was a way of winning back Jerusalem, thus appealing to *Joachim of Fiore's* prophecy: "From Spain will come the one who will bring the Ark to Zion" (1999a: 8). Jerusalem was to be the capital of the new, everlasting and universal "thousand-year" empire that was to come, the new heaven and the new earth. This mission was nourished by the millenarian expectation that swept through the whole of Europe at that days (1999a: 10). The central message was that the time of fulfilment is *now*; we can achieve our hopes today. "The lordship of the saints over the nations is going to be realized *now*; the lordship of human beings over the earth will be restored *now*." After the "ancient times" and the "medieval times" the third and final stage was believed to have dawned, the "Neu-zeit," Joachim's "reign of the Spirit" (cf. §4.3.3); world history is coming to its end. The European seizure of power over the world was further strengthened by the amazing scientific and technological developments. "From science and technology, Europe acquired that instrumentalizing knowledge which enabled it to use the resources of the colonized world to build up a world-wide civilization." Moreover, technology was seen as the key to realize heaven on earth.<sup>118</sup>

Moltmann points out that this "Iberian messianism" was based on a highly questionable interpretation of *Daniel 2* and *7*: after the rise and fall of the empires of Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome, the redemptive, worldwide and everlasting reign of the divine Son of man was believed to be dawning (*EtT*: 222f.). The discovery and conquest of the new world was seen as one of the final acts in this eschatological drama of salvation and the inconceivable shedding of blood was justified by this apocalyptic interpretation. Thus the "empire of the Son of man" in *Daniel* was not read as the great divine *alternative* to the "bestial" empires of the world, as Moltmann thinks it should be, but as the *fifth empire*, the consummation of all previous attempts at worldwide rule. Consequently, "'Babylon' was Christianized, and declared to be itself 'the thousand years' empire'" (1999a: 18). We will see how Moltmann himself already in *TK* had picked up the theology of Joachim in order to undermine such this-wordily interpretations (cf. §4.3.3). For now it is important to point out the thread he sees running

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<sup>118</sup> This is confirmed by e.g. Margaret Wertheim in *The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace*. She sees a new variant of this eschatological hope among those who regard *cyberspace* as space in which community, freedom and democracy can be fully explored. Similar metaphors are used: "the new continent," "the new border," "the New World," "the Wild West," "no man's land" (so Wertheim 1999: 281ff.).

though history. Moltmann finds an immediate connection between the *quintomonarchianism* just described and the attitude of today's Western world. The "inner-worldly eschatology" of previous times still determines, in his view, the way the Western world sees itself (from Francis Fukuyama's famous *The End of History* (1989) to an advertisement for the Internet he once saw: "The future is now!" *EiT*: 41). He points mainly to the USA, where the old messianic vision of the new world and the new era are still alive ("*novus ordo saeculorum* is impressed on the seal of the United States and printed on every one-dollar note," 2003a: 21). For Moltmann, it is clear that the way the modern way of life is forced upon the rest of the world is rooted in the *religious*, messianic ideal of a *redemptive* nation.

This lays bare the religious foundation of modernity. Today's problems are related intrinsically to the rise and development of modernity, especially to its inherent messianic ideology. As indicated, the starting point of Moltmann's public theology is that solving the problems is a matter of changing attitudes, which can eventually only be really fostered by exposing the *religious* foundations of modern society and offering a new foundation—a *genuinely* Christian one this time. In the perspective of this book, it may be fruitful to focus a little more on the anthropological aspect of this fundamental religious crisis ("religious" involves, I repeat, "the things in which people in the West put their trust"). In his recent writings Moltmann emphasizes that, although modern messianism may still rule international politics and economics (for him the manifest socio-economic and ecological crises are evidence of that), the "ugly apocalyptic downside" proves, in the meantime, that it has passed the best-before date. In view of Moltmann's writings as a whole, we could say that the "end-times" of which he speaks about are resulting in a *double* crisis. Inside the Western world Moltmann observes a spreading *apathy* and outside of it a growing *anarchy*. As regards the latter, he points out that recently many countries and even whole continents have become uninteresting for the industrial West—here live the *surplus* people of today's world. This, he notices, is the main cause of the growing anarchy. That is, however, not my primary concern here. I will focus on the supposed apathy inside the Western world. From the historical perspective just outlined, Moltmann puts it down to the crisis of modern messianism: "Surviving on islands of prosperity planted in a sea of mass misery," we are confronted with existential meaninglessness instead of the glorious era for the whole human race (1999a: 16). The great messianic dreams of humanity underlying the project of modern times "asked too much of human beings:"

Mexico was not Eldorado, and the Garden of Eden was not to be found in Venezuela. The United States is not ‘the new world’ in the messianic sense, and the modern age never became a ‘new time’ in any messianic sense at all. The scientific discovery and technical mastery of nature did not make human beings the image of God. The humanitarian notions of the Enlightenment neither improved the human race morally, nor did they “consummate” history. (1999a: 17)

Moltmann thus suggests that modernity envisaged a new time and a new world and that its disappointment has led to a *crisis of time and space*. “Confidence in time is lost if we don’t know whether there is still any future. Confidence in the earth collapses once the earth is turned into a rubbish dump” (1999a: 16). Moltmann concludes:

That is why end-of-the-world scenarios, catastrophe fantasies and *Apocalypse Now* films seem to us more realistic than the fine, hopeful images of the nineteenth century about the golden age and eternal peace. (2003a: 25)

I will briefly elaborate on this supposed crisis of meaning, presented as a crisis of time and space. As far as the crisis of time is concerned, Moltmann touches on “our present electronic culture” which makes “every effort to end the *anamnetic culture* of history, and to abolish the culture which lives in remembrance and hope, absorbing it into a *postmodern culture* of ‘the present’” (*The future is now!*; *EiT*: 41). Apparently, the crisis of modern messianism has led to a culture in which the *now* “holds all the past within itself, and no longer has any future ahead, other than itself.” Concretely, Moltmann observes three ways of abolishing time. First, there is the transferring of historical remembrances “to processes in museums.” Today the future is closed by historicizing “the processes of historical ‘becoming’ into hard facts and circumstances of the past.” In doing so, Moltmann argues, “we reify—concretize—the processes which are open to the future, turning them into facts of history which, being finished and done with, have had their time.” Second, there is the transformation of unique events of history (“events which open up a new future or call for one”) into the eternal return of the same thing. Today’s “remembrance days,” he holds, are mostly a wrong way of ritualizing history, because contingent events are transfigured into “ritualized rites of passage.” Thus “the present ritual then suppresses the very thing that is made present in that ritual, as ... German children in their Christmas carols sing of the yearly return of the Christ Child.” Third, there is the “computerization” of history, which “liquidates the awareness of time, brings the different times into the space of eternal

simultaneity.” Culture is no longer moulded by living remembrances but by data-processing. Through the computerization of all the facts we can lay hold of, historical facts are retrievable at any time. However,

the computer’s “memory” does not remember, for it does not forget—it merely “stores”. It can make present the whole of the past we know. It can also extrapolate, and simulate the possible futures which emerge from it.

In other words, through the computer we can make the whole of past reality present and every possible future. But what it cannot do is make us feel at home in time.

This abolishment of time, Moltmann continues, has led to a “spatialization of the world.” He does not mean a rehabilitation of space here but rather the “endlessness” of time, which “becomes a poor infinity,” is in his view matched by a limitless, homogenous conception of space (cf. 2003a: 29f.). He concludes that “*omnipresence* and *simultaneity* are apparently the God-complexes of modern men and women when they wish to be ‘modern’ or ‘postmodern’” (*EiT*: 42).

Besides the manifest differences, there seems to be a striking parallel with the situation Moltmann was facing in the 1950s. Time and space have been “abolished.” It is the individual, dislodged from history and world (or at least in an ambivalent relation with it) who is the only place where meaning can be found. He lives in an Eternal Now. In his publications Moltmann also points to similar reactions: a growing apathy and a clinging to time-tested securities. Hence, the task of public theology is, once again, a theological rehabilitation of “history” and the “world” (albeit that the latter is not limited to the social, human world, but includes the whole cosmos). Theology must prevent the “*shutting down of history*” (the transporting of past and future into present possibilities). Christian faith proclaims a future that transcends human history and is thus a future for the whole of history. But it is a transcendence that in Christ has interrupted the history of the world and thus created a new beginning that, although not latent in human history itself, is already present. This dialectic between past and future, between remembrance and hope, between cross and resurrection offers a meaning-giving framework in which our “little hopes” do not fall victim to resignation and cynicism (2003a: 28). By placing human history (past, present and future) in context of the kingdom of God, public theology could provide the “culture of remembrance” which many people are seeking. Theology must also prevent the “*emptying of space*” by developing an *ecological* (i.e. a ‘homely,’ see §4.3.3) concept of space which stresses that spaces are determined by what happens in them (“There is no such thing as empty time

without happening, and in the same way there is no empty space without objects that rest or move in it," *CoG*: 299f.). In sum, theology must develop an *ecological concept of space* and a *kairotic concept of time* (*GiC*: 145).

For Moltmann, this is only possible if it is acknowledged that this crisis of time and space is fundamentally a *theological* crisis. As a theologian, he interprets the situation as one of "terrifying Godforsakenness" (*GiC*: xiv) and with Metz he speaks of the "God crisis" of the modern human being (1999a: 16). The crisis of time and space has led to a "loss of assurance of God and the self." Moreover, he argues that

because this growing apathy is not confined to Protestants or Catholics, Christians or Moslems, Europeans or non-Europeans, but is becoming more and more universal, it has to be based upon an *objective alienation from God*. (1999a: 17; italics mine)

The "frigidity towards the disadvantaged and the humiliated" is not only an "expression of our frigidity towards God" but also of the reverse: "God has hidden his face and is far from us." One could ask questions with regard to the notion of universality Moltmann presumes here (cf. §5.1) but that does not alter the seriousness of his claim. In view of the world-threatening crisis and the growing apathy in the Western world, Christians must ask the question: where is God and why has he hidden his face from us?

In the following subsections I will try to examine how Moltmann has done so during the course of his messianic project. I will focus on the anthropological problems concerning the "abolishment" of both history and the world and consider how Moltmann proposes the biblical God as a way of going beyond them. As noted already, it will prove to be problematic to integrate the two fundamental insights stemming from that. Bringing both history and the world into theology is no longer possible within the old field of language. "Spatial" categories are to be explored.

#### 4.2.2. Once Again: A Theological Rehabilitation of History

The first volume of Moltmann's "contributions to messianic theology," *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, offers a "social doctrine of the Trinity" in relation to the kingdom of God. As we have seen, the paradox of humankind is that in suppressing others and, eventually, also himself, the human being believes himself to be free. As Moltmann has stressed since the advent of his political theology, oppression leads to isolation and deprives oppressors of true freedom. In the previous chapter it has become clear that for him the concept of freedom is connected to the problem of suffering and the problem of suffering to the reality of oppression. Oppression is at its deepest not letting the other be other but seeing him as property to be disposed of as one likes. In *The Crucified God* he pursued this problem in the doctrine of God

in his case against theism, against the omnipotent God who can only be thought of at the expense of humans beings. The freedom of the triune God is, over against that, the free relationship of passionate participation, as was spelt out in §3.2.5 (cf. *TK*: 52ff.). Correspondingly, true human freedom is demonstrated through love, suffering and self-giving. It is this concept of freedom he now develops further.

In *The Trinity and the Kingdom* Moltmann distinguishes three “dimensions” of freedom: freedom as *lordship*, freedom as *community*, and freedom as “passion for the future” or “in relation to a *project*” (*TK*: 214ff.; 52ff.). For the sake of clarity, what he intends here is an analysis of “dimensions in the concept of freedom” as it has evolved historically. The first definition, which equates freedom with “lordship,” derives from *political* history. The key word is *domination*. Moltmann views “all previous history” as “a permanent struggle for power and still more power:” the winner rules and is free, while the loser is unfree. As he explains, the linguistic history of the word “freedom” shows that it originated in a slave-owning society. In such a society, only the master is free; being free is being “not a slave” (it reminds one of the Hegelian slave-master dialectics). The free person defines himself as distinct from the non-free. Even when we say that a person is free if he is not determined by any inner or outer compulsions, we are interpreting freedom as *mastery*: “each person is his or her own king or entrepreneur” (1979a: 36). Moltmann hastens to add that this is not only characteristic of our absolutist and feudal past but also of its successor, middle-class liberalism. We noted already his critique of the liberal concept of freedom in his contribution to the Marienburg conference (§3.1). In *TK* he writes similarly:

Everyone who bears a human visage has the same right to liberty, say the liberals. This liberty of every individual only finds its limits where it infringes the liberty of others. Anyone who lays claims to his own freedom must respect the same freedom on the part of the other person. But that means that for this middle-class liberalism too, freedom means lordship. Everyone finds in the other person a competitor in the struggle for power and possession. Everyone is for everyone else merely the limitation of his own freedom. Everyone is free in himself, but no one *shares in the other*. In its ideal form this is a society of individuals who do not disturb one another who are themselves solitary. No one determines the other, everyone determines himself. Freedom has then really become general. Everyone has the right to be free. But is this true freedom? (*TK*: 215; italics mine)

Although the Enlightenment meant liberation from the feudal past (as he had stressed with Metz in the 1960s), Moltmann claims that basically liberals apply the very same concept of freedom. To defend this he points at what he considers to be the essence of the liberal image of the human being: individuality. For the last two hundred years, he later writes in *EiT*, Western industrial society “has experienced one thrust towards individualisation after another. The last of them bears the name ‘postmodern’” (*EiT*: 332f.). He admits that the opportunities for choice open to individualized men and women have increased enormously, and “*anyone who has the means* can also take advantage of these opportunities” (italics mine). But, he observes, “this power is paralleled by the growing powerlessness of the individualized people, who can certainly look on events in the world through the media, but can do nothing to change them.”

In Moltmann’s view, the basic mistake of the liberal view of human beings is that “individual” and “person” are seen as equivalents, which, he states, they are definitely not (*EiT*: 333). As the Latin word *individuum* says, the individual is something that in the final analyses is *indivisible* (it means the same as the Greek “atom”). With Gideon Freudenthal, Moltmann sees an internal connection between the atomization of nature and the individualization of the human being in early modernity, between Newton and Descartes (*EiT*: 383, Freudenthal 1982). The individual is the end product of divisions and has, thus, no relationships, no attributes, no memories, and no names. “The individual is unutterable.” A person, however, according to Moltmann’s definition is “a human existence living in the resonant field of his social connections and his history.” A person has a “name” through which he can *identify* himself. He is a social being. For Moltmann, the modern thrusts towards individualization “prompt the suspicion” that what is at stake here is just a new variant of the age-old principle of dominance: *divide et impera* (cf. *TK*: 216).

Hence, in analyzing the modern concept of freedom Moltmann emphasizes the notion of *domination*. As indicated in §4.1, it is “the boundless will towards domination” that is the main interest, concern and value of modern society (cf. 1999a: 97). This goes beyond the manifest oppression of the Third World and of nature. For Moltmann, domination is a *definition of freedom*. In the democratic revolutions of Europe and the United States, the freedom of the feudal lord was democratized—each one’s freedom is his independence from others and each is related to others only insofar as they are the limits of his freedom (cf. Bauckham 2002a: 190). This definition of freedom determines the very nature of modern human individuals. For the sake of clarity, Moltmann does not want to abolish this notion of freedom completely. Modern notions such as free choice and self-determination are

important for a present-day concept of human dignity and human rights. It is individualism as such that needs to be tackled. As such, this view of freedom is, therefore, far too one-sided.

The same is true for the obvious alternative, namely the *second dimension of freedom* Moltmann describes and which, as he explains, derives from *social* history. It defines freedom in terms of *community*. Over against the “desolateness of middle-class liberalism” it describes the truth of freedom as “love that breaks down barriers” (TK: 216). One is free only if one is respected and recognized by others and if one respects and recognizes others oneself. Only in this reciprocal participation in life, humans are, beyond the bounds of their individuality, free. Liberation leads to open community, not to the privileges of the autonomous individual. As Moltmann explains, being free (*Frei-sein*) has the same etymological root as “friendly” (*freundlich, lieb, geneigt sein, sich erfreuen*). The German word for hospitable, *gastfrei*, still retains this meaning (TK: 56). Thus,

I am free and feel myself to be truly free when I am respected and recognized by others and when I for my part respect and recognize them. I become truly free when I open my life for other people and share with them, and when other people open their lives for me and *share* them with me. Then the other person is no longer the limitation of my freedom; he is an expansion of it. In *mutual participation* in life, individual people become free beyond the limits of their individuality, and discover the common room for living which their freedom offers. That is the social side of freedom. We call it love and solidarity. In it we experience the uniting of isolated individuals. In it we experience the uniting of things that have been forcibly divided. (TK: 216, italics mine)

Freedom as community thus means freedom as experienced in the *uniting* of all that is separated, beyond the alienation of person to person, the division between human society and nature, the dichotomy between body, and ultimately the estrangement from God. To be truly free means, as Moltmann states in *The Liberation of Oppressors*, unhindered and open community with *other people*, with *oneself*, with *nature*, and with *God* (Moltmann 1979a: 37). As he writes: “It is only this freedom as community that can heal the wounds which freedom as lordship has inflicted, and still inflicts today” (TK: 216). But he also acknowledges the danger and argues that a “total abolition of having [i.e. freedom as lordship] in being [i.e. freedom as community]” is not possible and even not desirable (viewed historically, he notes, the abolition of property by means of a society that has become socialist has always lead towards social regression; cf. TK: 217).

In practice, compromising adjustments are simply unavoidable. In the preface of *God For A Secular Society*, he articulates this problem ironically:

When the modern world was born, three good fairies came along, bringing their good wishes. The first of them wished the child individual liberty, the second wished it social justice, and the third prosperity. But then, on the evening of the same day, the wicked fairy turned up and pronounced: "Only two of these three wishes can be fulfilled." So the modern world of the West chose individual liberty and prosperity. The modern world of the East chose social justice and prosperity. But the philosophers and theologians ... chose for their ideal world individual liberty and social justice, and consequently never arrived at prosperity (1999a: 2).

Moltmann, therefore, does not resign himself to a *static dualism* between individual liberty and social responsibility. What he intends is a dynamic dialectical relation between individual freedom and community. He therefore puts forward a *third dimension of freedom*, namely freedom as "becoming," which regards our history from the perspective of a possible future, a critical horizon. Besides freedom as subject-object relation (lordship) and as subject-subject relation (fellowship), there is thus also freedom of subjects in relation to a *project*.<sup>119</sup> Freedom as project of the future is creative: "anyone who transcends the present in the direction of the future in what he thinks, says and does is free" (*TK*: 216f.); it is "creative passion for the possible," not directed to what already exists nor to fellowship of existing people but to "the kingdom of not yet defined potentialities."

Moltmann's analysis of the "dimensions in the concept of freedom" reveals implicitly much of the road he takes. The dimension of freedom as a "function of property" is distinguished from its social and creative dimensions, suggesting that modern humans are socially closed in and not open towards the future (or at the most to their own achievable future). We will say more about this "closed-in" character of modern humans in the following sections. For now, the diagnosis has been made: modern human beings suffer from a "lordship" syndrome which deprives them of true humanity, i.e. true freedom. The modern, liberal concept of autonomous man and the concept of individual liberty is too one-sided. On the other hand, a totalitarian communitarianism is not an alternative either (as com-

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<sup>119</sup> The term "project" refers to Roger Garaudy's book *Le projet espérance* (Garaudy 1976).

munist experiences, which equated true freedom with socialism here and now, show). Moltmann comes to the conclusion that true freedom can only be conceived of as “passion for the future.” Being human is thus intrinsically related to expectation for the future, where true freedom and identity will be found.

Following up his earlier theology, Moltmann links the biblical image of the *covenant* God (who has “future as his mode of being”) and his kingdom to this concept of freedom as a project. Moltmann thus makes clear that although the kingdom is immanent in our world, it remains something transcendent that cannot be reduced to either individual freedom or communal freedom (further on, we will see how he now links this special dimension more explicitly with the experience of the Spirit, the “pledge of glory”). What most fundamentally grounds human identity is neither individual freedom or community as such, but *participation* in the history of God and humans in the future. Again, the covenant history of God with people is thus the paradigm of true humanity (1999a: 88). In the historical movement towards the future kingdom of God, individual freedom and sociality are dialectically related. As we will see, Moltmann explores the theological notion of *perichoresis* to express this individuality-in-community.

#### 4.2.3 Once Again: A Theological Rehabilitation of the World

Is nature our property or are we one part of the wider family of nature? Do the rain forests belong to us or to the earth to which we also belong? Is the earth *our* planetary home or are we merely guests (Moltmann 1999a: 99)? As stated above, in view of today’s ecological problems Moltmann’s focus on “the world” has been expanded beyond the social, human world to include the entire cosmos. In debates on environmental issues, two perspectives usually pop up as two opposed positions, namely *anthropocentrism* and *ecocentrism*. Moltmann follows this typology and rejects both extremes. He opts for a third possibility: a *theocentric* approach. I will briefly examine Moltmann’s characterization of these positions.

Moltmann understands anthropocentrism as something typically *modern*. It even serves as the key word to understand modern, Western scientific-technological civilization. He holds that the modern world is based ideologically on the *new image of God* offered by the Renaissance and nominalism: “God is almighty, and *potentia absoluta* is the pre-eminent attribute of his divinity” (*GiC*: 26f.). It was this monotheism that paved the way for the modern attitude to the environment. God moved more and more into the transcendent sphere, while the world was understood in a purely immanent way. God was thought to be “world-less” and thus the world

could be thought to be godless (1989: 54). Consequently, God's *image* on earth, the human being (in actual practice the man) had to strive for power and domination so that he might acquire his divinity. In other words, modernity pictures God as the triumphant God (1999a: 8) and accordingly, humans must model themselves after that picture: they resemble their God only through power and sovereignty, not through goodness and truth, patience and love (1999a: 99). The result is alienation from the "community of nature" to which they belong. To tackle this God-complex is the critical—not to say prophetic—function of public theology.

*Ecocentrism* is the usual alternative. One could think of a wide scope of scientific theories, eco-feminist theologies, New Age cosmologies, and the aggressive ideologies of certain environmental groups. Although their strategies differ fundamentally, they all somehow share Moltmann's analysis that the current crisis of meaning is caused by human alienation from nature, i.e. from the entire cosmos in general and one's own body in particular, as well as his conviction that in order to overcome this humans should be put in their "proper" place again. It is, therefore, harder to determine why Moltmann eventually rejects ecocentrism as well. As far as I can see, his problem is that ecocentric views regard the cosmos too much as a more or less *closed* system which is perfect and perhaps even morally good *in se*. The most rigid forms of ecocentrism, therefore, trivialize the problem of concrete "physical evil" from which humans suffer. Earthquakes and epidemics are regarded from the perspective of the totality of the system. Although Moltmann also acknowledges the care for the well-balanced equilibrium of the ecosystem and the need to seek habitation in it, he stresses that this system is *open* and imperfect. He brings up scientific reasons to support this (for instance, the evolution of species, *GiC*: 127ff.). However, the main reason for referring to these is theological. Rigid ecocentrism is not rejected for mere humanistic reasons (the unique position of the human being has been subordinated to an abstract system) but because God and his future has no place in such a closed system. Just like human beings, the whole creation is open to the messianic future (with Rom. 8:22, he holds that the "whole anxiously waiting creation"—the *creatio mutabilis*—is longing together with us, e.g. *GiC*: 101). This messianic perspective—on which I will elaborate in the next section—marks the difference between Moltmann's "holism of creation" (2003a: 32) and theologians who sanction cosmological theories by making them the basis of their own religious cosmologies. As Moltmann maintains, they dissolve Jewish and Christian belief in creation (which is fundamentally messianic) into "a generally religious elevation" of such cosmological worldviews (*GiC*: 22).

Anthropocentrism and ecocentrism are presented as extreme and opposed ways to portray the relation between humans and nature. In Moltmann's theology, both positions serve to profile his own alternative: *theocentrism* (*GiC*: 31). A genuine Christian doctrine of creation, he claims, focuses attention not primarily on the ecosystem itself nor on human beings but on God.

Theologically speaking, the meaning and purpose of human beings is to be found in God himself, like the meaning and purpose of all things. In this sense, every single person, and indeed every single living thing in nature, has a meaning, whether they are of utility for evolution or not. The meaning of the individual is not to be found in the collective of the species, and the meaning of the species is not to be found in the existence of the individual. The meaning of them both is to be found in God .... We have to overcome the old anthropocentric world picture by a new theocentric interpretation of the world of nature and human beings, and by an eschatological understanding of the history of this natural and human world. (*GiC*:197)

For Moltmann, the (politically and religiously) critical question a public theology must raise is: *Which God?* As noted above, the modern Western world is thought to suffer from a God-complex. Humans adhere to a distorted image of God and, consequently, of themselves as the image of this God. It is obvious that we should go beyond the manifest anthropocentrism of the Christian religion that grounds the modern world. Moltmann holds that this anthropocentrism is not inherent to the Christian faith. He argues that the concept of a "triumphant God" and of the little lordship as his image is a typically *modern* invention. The God of the Bible has nothing to do with this triumphant lordship. In §5.2.6 I will pose some questions about this claim. Here I will focus on the biblical concept of God that Moltmann presents instead. As far as "setting human beings in time" is concerned, things are rather evident. Biblical narratives are evidently "historical" (the wandering Abraham, the Exodus, etc.). But what about setting people "in space"? Should Christians consult Eastern religions or the Indians of Latin America? Moltmann certainly fosters a dialogue. But, he believes, "our souls [do not need to] take wing to India [so that] we overdriven denizens of the West can be healed." "We can 'drink from our own wells' too. Only we must discover them once more" (1999a: 77).

In *GiC* Moltmann offers a striking interpretation of the creation narrative in Gen. 1 (*GiC*: 29ff., cf. 1989: 61ff.). Modern anthropocentric theology regards creation as an event occurring in six days—the seventh

day, the sabbath, is not part of the creation process. Moltmann, however, claims that it is this sabbath day is the motif for the whole creation. God “completed” his work by resting from it and “blessed and hallowed” this seventh day. Moltmann compares it with the work of an artist:

Every artist puts his soul into his work of art. Therefore he or she has only finished with the work of art when it is possible to stand back and return to oneself, to retreat and be pleased with the work. Only then one can leave a work of art as it has become, without correcting it or improving it any further. (1989: 84)

Thus God “rests” from his work and does not intervene in it. In this rest he experiences all the creatures he has made. After action comes “letting things be.” In a certain way, he argues, this is also creative; a creative “let it be.” Just as parents have to draw back so that children can develop themselves, so the creator completes his creation by letting be what has become and by finding pleasure in it. But there is more. God also rests *in* his creation—he is present in it. “They are mutually present.” His creatures exist for him and he exists before them. The Old Testament prophets, Moltmann points out, grasped this by entertaining the image of the earth becoming God’s *dwelling place*. Thus God created his work not for the sake of humans but for the sabbath’s sake, i.e. to enjoy it and indwell in it. God is not *deus faber* but the *resting God*.<sup>120</sup>

Accordingly, humans do not find their *telos* as the image of the *deus faber*, focussed on production, achievement and progress, but as the image of the resting God, in the “creative let-it-be.” Moreover, they come to themselves in God’s dwelling in his creation, in the sabbath as the “feast” of the whole creation. Not human beings themselves but the sabbath is the *crown on creation*. Seeing the earth as dwelling place of the resting God involves a viable symbiosis with all his creatures, “letting them be.”

Living in accordance with God means living truly human lives, but we can live in accordance with God only if we also live in accordance with nature, in and with which we are made and through which God speaks with us. (1989: 80)

In my view, the most important aspect of Moltmann’s anthropology is thus the *enthronement* of modern humans, who see themselves as the image of the omnipotent Lord God and thus as rulers themselves who are the very

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<sup>120</sup>For the sake of clarity, this is something completely different from the deistic *deus otiosus*. The ‘resting’ of God is a creative let-it-be.

goal of creation that is made for their sake. The world is created for the sake of God's *glory* (*GiC*: 31). The *telos* of creation is the *gloria dei*. Moltmann had worked this notion out already in his *Theology of Play* (cf. §3.2.3). In a certain way his view on Gen. 1 continues his theology of play in which the doctrine of justification was interpreted as a liberation from "having" and "doing" to mere "being." He regards the sabbath as the "Jewish doctrine of justification" (*GiC*: 286; cf. §4.4.1). The meaning of life is no longer identified with work and busy activity but with "rest, the feast, and their joy in existence," which are no longer pushed away and relegated to insignificance because they are not useful (cf. *GiC*: 277). "Just being, without planning or being useful, is splendid" (1989: 85). The difference is that he now suggests that the songs of praise do not only arise from human throats. The "song of praise to God was sung *before* the appearance of human beings, is sung *outside* the sphere of human beings and will be sung even *after* human beings have—perhaps—disappeared from this planet" (*GiC*: 197). Humans are created to participate in the "joyful paeon of God's creation." For modern Westerners such joyful odes will stick in their throats as long as their hierarchical thinking keeps isolating them from this community of creation. Those poor souls, who believe that all has made for and revolves around them, will never be at the right pitch of the song of praise for which they are created.

#### 4.2.4 Exodus and Sabbath: A Preview

I have sketched two basic anthropological insights. The first suggests that human beings must be "set in time;" the second that they should be "set in space." Hence the dilemma between equilibrium and progress—how to mediate the modern project of "progress in the concept of history" and the wisdom of the old scheme of "harmony in the concept of nature"—is pointed out. We can be at home in existence only by anticipating on our true home of identity in the future and at the same time we can be at home in existence only if we feel ourselves at home in nature and seek habitation in the "rhythms and cycles" of nature. Both ideas can be founded in the biblical image of God. Moltmann holds that "Israel has given the nations two archetypal images of liberation: exodus and sabbath" (*GiC*: 287). The first is the symbol of *external* freedom, the second of *internal* liberty; the first the elemental experience of God's history, the second of creation; the first the experience of the God who acts, the second of the God who is and is present. What must be made clear is *how Exodus and sabbath are related*.

No political, social and economic exodus from oppression, degradation and exploitation really leads to the liberty of a humane world without the sabbath, without the relinquishment of all

works, without the serenity that finds rest in the presence of God. But the reverse is also true: men and women never find the peace of the sabbath in God's presence unless they find liberation from dependency and repression, inhumanity and godlessness. (*GiC*: 287)

The relation between both anthropological insights lies in the answer to the question of how the "God of the exodus is the Creator of the world, and God the creator is the God of the exodus" (*GiC*: 285). The next section will make clear that *sabbath* is eventually the central notion that integrates the temporal and the spatial.

#### 4.3. *The Liberating Indwelling of the Triune God: A Divine Ecoogy*

Two fundamental insights of human life have been explained: humans find identity by actively anticipating on their future "home of identity" and by contemplative participation in their natural home. As noted throughout this book, the knowledge of humanity and the knowledge of God are two sides of the same coin. The revelation of humans "hidden" to themselves depends on the revelation of the hidden God. *Ecce homo is ecce Deus* (Moltmann 1974b:19). It is, therefore, evident that in the search for a way to relate both insights, Moltmann's once more asks who and how God is. Here I will examine his doctrine of God or, more precisely, his doctrine of the Trinity from this perspective. I will first need to ask again how humans can "know" God (§4.3.1) and how Christ is the access point to our knowledge of God (the "gateway to the Trinity," §4.3.2). I will then show how the historical line and the ecological line come together in the doctrine of the Trinity (§4.3.3). I can then portray Moltmann's theological view of humankind (§4.3.4).<sup>121</sup>

##### 4.3.1. Trinitarian Hermeneutics: How One "Knows" God Once Again

As noted above, Moltmann considers the modern individual to be an *isolated* being, who is left completely to his own devices, who can only counter "the other" (fellow humans as well as nature) by subduing it but who nonetheless entertains the illusion of being free. As in his main works of the 1970s, Moltmann propounds the idea that mainstream theology is unable to penetrate the real cause of modern humans' misery, let alone offer them the way to freedom, because it is utterly *theistic*. In some way or another it always proclaims the omnipotent, perfect, and infinite God that can be con-

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<sup>121</sup> I am well aware of the fact that the way I have ordered the sections is (unavoidably) rather superficial. After all, in order to understand how we can know God we imply already who and how God is in our view.

ceived only at the expense of human beings and thus supports both political and clerical monotheism (cf. §3.2.3). This has direct repercussions for the way humans view themselves: as the “image” of the omnipotent Lord God, they can only come into terms with themselves by being lords themselves. Moltmann’s remedy is, therefore, a fundamental change in the concept of God, i.e. a trinitarian theology that should be presented as a “true theological doctrine of freedom” (*TK*: 192).<sup>122</sup> For Moltmann, “trinitarian” involves much more than the particular section of the doctrine of God it has become in modern theology; it is a way of thinking, an *epistemology*, a liberating hermeneutic which forms the basis of an all-embracing social programme. It is “the matrix of a new kind of thinking about God, the world and man” (*TK*: 16). This subsection deals in particular with the epistemological problem how the liberation of modern humans is supposed to be rooted in a fundamental change in thinking, i.e. a move towards “integrating” and “comprehensive” instead of isolationist and particularizing thinking (*GiC*: 38), “a change from lordship to fellowship, from conquest to participation, from production to receptivity” (*TK*: 9).

Modern humans have become monotheists.<sup>123</sup> In many modern apologies of the Christian faith, the doctrine of the Trinity is disregarded as a speculative decoration of Christian faith.<sup>124</sup> To the modern world, it has appeared to be hard enough to communicate faith in one God—let alone in “three.” Moltmann does not attempt to deny this. On the contrary, he fully acknowledges that trinitarian thinking does not fit into modern patterns of thinking. But instead of kneading it in such a way that it does, he intends to burst through the modern intellectual framework itself (*TK*: 9). In his view,

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<sup>122</sup> I will leave aside the entirely appropriate question as to whether trinitarianism is really the only alternative for the kind of philosophical theism Moltmann attacks.

<sup>123</sup> Once again, Moltmann has modern philosophical theism in mind. But in addition, his writings imply that only trinitarian thinking can express the different Christian insights with respect to God. For the sake of clarity the term “unitarian,” instead of “monotheism,” may have been better here.

<sup>124</sup> It must be noted that in recent decades there has been a renewed interest in trinitarian theology, not only in Western theology but also for instance in Latin America (Leonardo Boff among others). It has also been a starting point for dialogue between the Western and the Eastern Church (cf. Moltmann 1991: xii). As far as the problem of identity and plurality (of “the one and the many”) is concerned, the doctrine of the Trinity is taken up in e.g. Gunton 1993, Vanhoozer 1997 and D’Costa 2000.

the Trinity is not speculation about “some impenetrable obscurity” (*TK*: 161; *undurchdringliches Dunkel*); it is a soteriological term (*TK*: 96). Only an epistemological paradigm shift towards trinitarian thinking can open us to the liberating transcendence of God’s kingdom in our immanent reality. The doctrine of the Trinity is, therefore, not the problem but, properly understood, the solution (Bauckham 1995: 171).

It is important to remark that Moltmann’s ambition to break open the modern patterns of thinking apparently presumes that the “reduction” of Christian faith to monotheism is not merely an internal theological development but the result of developments in modern epistemology to which Christian theology has adapted itself.<sup>125</sup> He points to two major developments: the modern notion of *experience*, which he traces back to Schleiermacher (*TK*: 2ff.) and the modern urge for the *practicability* of truth (*TK*: 5ff.). I will briefly sketch both developments as described by Moltmann (the idea that modern autonomy is a form of “domination” of the self resonates continually).

1. For the modern individual, Moltmann maintains, experience means “perceptions which *he himself* can repeat and verify” and which “affect *him himself*, because they crystalize out in some alteration *of himself*.” Truth must be something that the modern subject can experience. But can we thus “experience” God—and a triune God at that? For Schleiermacher, Moltmann states, “God is indirectly experienced in the experience of the absolute dependency of our own existence.” That involves, he continues, “that all statements about God are bound to be at the same time statements about the personal existence determined by faith.” If pronouncements about God do not include statements about the immediate self-consciousness of the believer and are not verified by personal experience, they are nothing but mere speculation.

But what does the modern individual actually experience? Moltmann objects that if we hold that faith is a living relationship, faith conceived as immediate self-consciousness grasps only one side of this relation. The other side, “God,” “remains unknown if we ascribe to it no more the reason behind the definition of one’s own self.” Apparently, what he suggests is

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<sup>125</sup> This is a rather disputable argument since the theology of feudal Europe was apparently as monolithic as that of modernity. Gunton is more convincing when he puts that, paradoxically, the attempted liberation from cosmic and theological heteronomy has resulted in a new form of heteronomy, i.e. the modern displacement of God by “the monism of the finite individual” (Gunton 1993: 32, 35).

that if one can perceive only those experiences that *affirm and justify the self*—and that is what the modern notion of experience in his view implies—then the Wholly Other can not be experienced. As assumed throughout his whole theological enterprise, God can only be “known” in a *dialectical* way, when he, as the Wholly Other, shows himself in the crisis of human knowledge of themselves and God.

In contrast to the modern view, Moltmann therefore states that our notion of experience does not only determine our faith but, conversely, our faith changes our notion of experience as well. He argues that questions such as “How do I experience God?” and “What does God mean to me?” are related to the questions “How does God experience me?” and “What do I mean for God?” Of course, this should not be understood univocally: divine experience is not equal to human experience. Moltmann’s claim is that “God’s experience of us” stamps our experience of him, perhaps not exclusively (the relation is reciprocal and not a one-way street) but certainly in a decisive way (the initiative of the relationship is taken by God).

Of course, the question is: How do we know how God experiences us? Must we not first assume a certain concept of God before we can argue that this concept changes our experience of God and ourselves? Obviously, for Moltmann the testimony of God’s history with us is the Bible. His conviction is that God’s experience with us is most profoundly expressed in the biblical accounts of God’s history of *suffering* with us (his *Shekinah*), which is an expression of his passionate love (cf. §3.2.5; §4.3.3). The times when God reveals himself most profoundly, Moltmann claims, are times of suffering: the slaves in Egypt, the cry of Jesus on the cross, the sighing of the enslaved creation. In the mirror of God’s revelation the history of this world thus makes itself known as a history of God’s suffering. Therefore, as soon as humans seek the passionate love of God in the suffering of this world, they enter the mystery of the triune God. As pointed out in §3.2.5, Moltmann can only understand this in a trinitarian way because from a Christian point of view the *cross* has a place in God. God’s history of suffering is the history of the self-emptying and self-surrender of the Father in the Son and of the Spirit of reconciliation springing from that.

The fundamental question about the access of modern humans to the doctrine of the Trinity is thus carried on in the context of the question about God’s capacity or incapacity for suffering. From what has been said about the “pathos” of God and the “sympathy” of humans in §3.2.5, we may conclude that for Moltmann the modern view of God as absolute Lord makes humans—as his image—“apathetic” lords. To understand this, Moltmann goes back to premodern thinking (or at least to his conception of that).

“From time immemorial,” he claims, “experience has been bound up with *wonder* or with *pain*” (TK: 5; italics mine).

In wonder the subject opens himself for a counterpart and gives himself up to the overwhelming impression. In pain the subject perceives the difference of the other, the contradiction in conflict and the alteration of his own self. In both modes of experience the subject enters entirely into his counterpart. The modern concept of experience, which has discovered and stressed its subjective components, threatens to transform experience into experience of the self. (TK: 5)

Moltmann maintains that it was the modern discovery of and stress on the subjective components of experience that has transformed it into experience of the self, which has resulted in a cult of narcissism. As stated, the only experiences perceived are those which affirm the self. For Moltmann, the “interest in experience of the self is then in fact *fear of experiencing the other*” (italics mine). Accordingly, the human capacity to wonder and the readiness for pain are lost. The modern culture of subjectivity is in danger of making the self its own prisoner and supplying it merely with self-repetitions and self-confirmations. Moltmann thus claims that the modern notion of experience is too limited to see the other as other, to meet him in wonder and suffering with him. He remarks that where suffering is concerned, the Western world only perceives a single alternative: either essential incapacity for suffering or a fateful subjection to suffering. Modern individuals have largely lost the notion of a third form, namely “active suffering,” i.e. “the voluntary laying oneself open to another and allowing oneself to be intimately affected by him,” “the suffering of passionate love” (TK: 23).

This is a biting criticism levelled at the modern culture of happiness and the disappearing values of solidarity and care. For Moltmann, “it is therefore time for Christian theology to break out of this prison of narcissism, and for it to present its ‘doctrine of faith’ as a doctrine of the all-embracing ‘history of God’.” Only if there is an attempt to understand this mystery of the triune God, he states, is an integration of the experience of the self into the experience of God possible.

Then God is no longer related to the narrow limits of a fore-given, individual self. On the contrary, the individual self will be discovered in the over-riding history of God, *and only finds its meaning in that context.* (Italics mine)

2. The second reservation concerning the doctrine of the Trinity comes from the sphere of practical application (*TK*: 5ff.). The modern world, Moltmann claims, has become pragmatic, which basically means that “what does not turn into act has no value.” For modern people, the only possible correspondence between being and consciousness is to be found in actual historical practice. Truth must always be concrete, be “performed.” But, Moltmann asks, “is the truth which God himself is, so ‘practicable’ that people have to ‘realize God,’ ‘put God into practice’?” Moltmann holds Kant responsible for elevating the notion of moral practice into theology as the ultimate test of statements about God. Without further discussing Moltmann’s interpretation of Kant, we can conclude that in Moltmann’s eyes, it is only in the postulates of practical reason that Kant brings God to the fore. Concerning the Trinity, Kant remarked that for the conduct in life of the believer, it makes no difference whether God must be praised in three or ten persons, because “it is impossible to extract from this difference any different rules for practical living.” Moral monotheism suffices to provide the foundation for free and responsible conduct. In Moltmann’s opinion, this moral pragmatism has led to an understanding of the Christian faith as the practice of living. The world is the domain in which humans are sent to proclaim the gospel, to love their neighbour, and to liberate the oppressed. The future is the “domain of open possibilities;” it depends on humans as to which of these are realized. “Whether it is a question of ethical theology or political theology or revolutionary theology, it is always *the theology of action*.” Thus practice takes precedence over reflection. Accordingly, says Moltmann referring to Gutiérrez, the obligation to love and serve comes first; theology is a “second act.”

Moltmann does not deny the importance of action or even its priority (cf. *EiT*: 24), but he states that it is only half the truth—theology cannot be reduced to critical reflection on the praxis. He thus affirms his critique of the one-sidedness of political theology (the Marxist theory-practice) he had already made in his *Theology of Play* (cf. §3.2.3) by stating that Christian faith is more than the point from which action takes its bearings; it also involves “gratitude, joy, praise and adoration.” Without this *vita contemplativa*, Moltmann writes, Christian faith surrenders itself to the pragmatism of the modern achievement-oriented society (“truth must be done!”).<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Moltmann’s formulation may raise the suspicion that Gutiérrez’s theology is poor pragmatism in which this is overlooked. As us widely known, the opposite is true (in the first sections of his *Theology of Liberation* Gutiérrez discusses the synthesis between contemplation and action, 1988: 3ff.).

Christian theology must thus not adapt itself to the modern concept of practicability but must pursue its own perspective on God, humans and the world. But how does one acquire this different perspective? This would certainly demand a fundamental change in attitude, a *metanoia*. Moltmann underscores this. He describes Christian faith as a process of “dying” and “rebirth.” In contemplation humans open themselves to God’s reality and experience the joy of God. The classical credo “knowing God is suffering from God” is interpreted as experiencing the “death pangs” of the old and the “birth pangs” of the new human being. The closer humans get to the heart of God’s reality, the more they become involved in this process of death and resurrection, of repentance and new beginning. This process becomes concrete in the crucified Jesus. For Moltmann, Christian meditation is, therefore, *meditatio crucis* (as we will see in the next subsection, the passion history of Christ is the key to the trinitarian experience of God). Thus, the practice of life becomes part of a *doxological* theology. For the liberation of our practice of life, reduced to ethical monotheism by modern ethicism and pragmatism, such rediscovery of doxology is necessary. In glorifying God humans experience the joy of God’s fellowship (cf. §3.2.5). Moltmann speaks of “the doxology of liberated life in the fellowship with God” (*TK*: 162). He concludes that the practice of life is much more radically changed by a trinitarian theology of doxology than by any moral motivation for action.<sup>127</sup>

This liberation from activism has consequences for the nature of knowing itself. In the pragmatic thinking of the modern world, to know something means *to dominate* it (“knowledge is power”). Modern thinking has made reason operational; it has become a *productive* organ instead of a *perceptive* one. “It builds its own world and in what it has produced it only recognizes itself again.” Moltmann notices that in many European languages, to understand a thing means to grasp it (*Be-greifen*).

We grasp a thing when “we’ve got it”. If we have grasped something, we take it into our possession. If we possess something we

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<sup>127</sup> Against this background of dying and rebirth, it becomes clear why for Moltmann *baptism* is “the practice of the doctrine of the Trinity” (*EiT*: 312). “The concept of the Trinity is formulated first of all in a person’s confession of faith in baptism, in prayer, and in praise.” Humans are drawn into the “trinitarian history of God with the world” through baptism in the name of the triune God (*Matt.* 28.19). Moltmann does not really work this idea out. See for an elaboration on the link between baptism and liberation *e.g.* Brinkman, 2003: 69-80.

can do with it what we want. The motive that impels modern reason *to know* must be described as the desire to conquer and to dominate. (*TK*: 9)

Again, Moltmann goes back to premodern thinking. According to the Greek philosophers as well as to the Church Fathers, he maintains, to know means to know “in *wonder*.” By knowing, one *participates* in the life of the other. It does not transform the counterpart into the property of the knower, but, on the contrary, the knower is “transformed through sympathy” and becomes “a participator in what he perceives.” Thus *knowledge confers fellowship*.<sup>128</sup> As Moltmann writes,

Where the theological perception of God and his history is concerned, there will be a modern discovery of trinitarian thinking when there is at the same time a fundamental change in modern reason—a change from lordship to fellowship, from conquest to participation, from production to receptivity. (*TK*: 9)

Thus the trinitarian concept of God is supposed to lead us beyond “pragmatic trivialization.”

Allow me to sum up the discussion so far. We have discovered that modern humans have a limited notion of experience and a pragmatic conception of truth, which makes it impossible to experience wonder and pain and which obstructs the experience of the “truth” of God’s kingdom of true freedom. It is trinitarian thinking that breaks through the patterns of thinking that deprive modern humans of true humanity.

For the sake of clarity, it is a certain form of trinitarian theology that Moltmann intends here. For him the problem with the monotheistic image of God is that it subdues every particularity to the one. Trinitarian theology rooted in “metaphysical” concepts actually does the same (*TK*: 129-150). It starts with the axiom that God is *One* and then arrives at his “threefold-*edness*.” This is true for the ancient formulation “one *substance*—three persons” as well as for the Hegelian “one *subject*—three persons.” Both the concept of substance and of subject lead to the logical priority of the unity of the Trinity, which, in Moltmann’s view, basically ends up in a monotheism in disguise. Such concepts of the Trinity can not break through ethical monotheism, because they are based upon the very same *hermen-*

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<sup>128</sup> By this Moltmann suggests that is not specifically trinitarian theology that must break open the modern way of thinking but more generally a premodern way of thinking into which trinitarian thinking fits.

*etical presumption*: “history is the work of a single, prevailing subject, whether it be the work of man, in the realization of his moral potential, or whether it be the work of the God who reveals himself” (*TK*: 64; Moltmann includes Barth’s doctrine of the Trinity). Instead, Moltmann starts with “three” and then attempts to arrive at “one-ness.”<sup>129</sup> He wants to show that the history of God is “the history of the reciprocal, changing, and hence living relationship between the Father, the Son and the Spirit.”

To explain this, Moltmann—once again—draws a sharp distinction between “Greek” thinking (synonymous with speculation) and “biblical” thinking and claims to adhere to the latter. Biblical thinking is concrete: “We have to remain concrete, for history shows us that it is in the abstractions that the heresies are hidden” (*TK*: 190). He begins with the statement that “the touchstone for dogmatic constructions is the hermeneutics of the biblical history” (*EiT*: 321). “Retelling” the “trinitarian history” as transmitted in the biblical narratives, he sees a movement from “three to one” and not the other way round. “We understand the scriptures as the testimony to the history of the *Trinity’s relations of fellowship*, which are open to men and women, and open to the world” (*TK*: 19). It is not surprising—as will be demonstrated in the next subsection—that for Moltmann the story of Christ (his call, sending, surrender, raising, future, *TK*: 65ff.) is the key passage of this narrative of the trinitarian relationships. The Gethsemane account, for instance, could not be understood from the perspective of a metaphysical doctrine of the Trinity. Rhetorically, Moltmann asks whether it is “one mode of being of the one God who prays there to the other” and how we can assume that in the triune God there is only “a single will” and “a single consciousness” when Jesus’ prayer to the Father ends with the words: “Not my will but thine be done” (*EiT*: 322). Supposing that this should be understood in a trinitarian way, he concludes that “the biblical starting point for the development of the doctrine of the Trinity is that there are three different actors in the divine history, Son—Father—Spirit.” It is only after having recorded this that the question of their unity follows.

Leaving aside any discussion of the exegetical foundation of Moltmann’s ideas, I emphasize that with regard to this question of “unity” im-

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<sup>129</sup> Is Moltmann not developing a form of tritheism? Is God is still “one”? Referring to the Greek words for being “one”—*eis* and *hen*—Moltmann states that God is not *eis* but *hen* (*TK*: 95). That means that the Trinity is not a monastic unity but a one-ness in community. Precisely in this idea of God as a community lies the soteriological significance of his doctrine. The trinity is so broad (in German: God is not *eins*) that the whole creation can be united with it and become *einig* in it.

portant notions of his earlier trinitarian theology are pursued here. As spelled out in §3.2.5, Moltmann sees biblical history as a history of overcoming the self-differentiation between God and his *Shekinah*. He refers to Rosenzweig again. When the Jew recites the *Shema Israel* (Deut. 6.4), he does not confess an Absolute Ruler but depicts God as “one,” i.e. he “unites” God and his *Shekinah*. In other words, he acknowledges that his life is embedded in the reuniting of God and his *Shekinah*, which was cut off from himself to suffer with the suffering people (*TK*: 23). We have seen how Moltmann, hesitatingly, links this Jewish idea to the Christian notion of the Holy Spirit, who through believers “unites” God by glorifying him. God the Father separates himself from the Son in the cross in order to suffer with the godforsaken and is reunited with the Son in the reconciling activity of the Spirit. The key word in this reuniting is *love*. The triune God is a God of love. Together through eternal love, the one-ness of the three persons of the Trinity is their concord with each other. Their community is determined by their self-giving to one another. As we have seen (and on which we will elaborate in §4.3.4), Moltmann believes that humans find true humanity in participation in this trinitarian history.

It is thus the “concrete Biblical history of the Trinity’s relationships” that offers the epistemological basis for the knowledge of God and thus for the liberation of modern individuals. In Moltmann’s interpretation, the Bible does not picture God as a solitary Lord of heaven, who subjugates everything in the same way as earthly despots have always done in his name nor as a cold and silent force of destiny which determines everything and is touched by nothing but as a God in community who is rich in both inner and outward relationships (*EiT*: 309). The critical function of such an image of God is that it undermines the religious legitimation of submitting the many to oneness (here lies the root of oppression, patriarchalism, etc.) and instead offers the basis for a way of thinking in relationships. Where monotheism stands for subjection, power, and isolation, trinitarianism involves relation, community, and embodiment. The way the trinitarian persons are united with one another constitutes the paradigm for interhuman relationships: bound by a love that joins those who are different and distinguishes those who are joined (*EiT*: 310). We may conclude that in Moltmann’s opinion, trinitarian thinking overcomes estrangement and separation but acknowledges and appreciates diversity and particularity. It is believed to foster and legitimate communal egalitarian relationships in which people, however different they may be, are united by self-giving love. This spells out the epistemological starting point for Moltmann’s public theology.

4.3.2. Christology After Chernobyl: Cross and Resurrection Once Again  
 Monotheists that they are, modern individuals can only encounter “the other” by subjugating it to their own homogeneity. They lack a basis for communal, egalitarian, symbiotic relationships. Oppression (of women, of nature, of one’s own body) is the inevitable effect. How can one change one’s way of thinking? We have seen how Moltmann relates modern epistemology to the modern image of God. But we cannot simply trade our concept of God for another and alter our lifestyle accordingly. Where is the entrance to this new understanding of God, the world and humans that Moltmann advocates? It has been rightly emphasized that the Holy Spirit figures largely in Moltmann’s later theology (so *e.g.* Yoo 2003). He even revised his original plans in order to include a book on the ‘Spirit of life’ (as can be deduced from the outlook of his project in *GiC*: xvii). Nevertheless, it seems justified to state that Christology remains the key to his trinitarian theology. “Christ is the gateway to the trinitarian experience of God,” he writes in *EiT* and only “through Christ, their brother in the humiliation and their redeemer in guilt” are humans admitted into the divine fellowship (*EiT*: 325; cf. §2.2).

However, a very significant change can be noticed. His renewed Christology is, so to say, a *Christology after Chernobyl* (1994: 88). As a clear-cut example of ecological and nuclear disaster, Chernobyl is for Moltmann apparently a symbol of the crisis of the project of scientific and technological civilization as such. It forced him to an interpretation of Christ’s death and resurrection that takes us beyond the framework of history (a “modern christology”) and leads us to an interpretation within the framework of nature (he calls it a “postmodern christology,” *WJC*: xvi). The question is not only how Christ and creation are related but also how a “historical” Christology can be combined with a “cosmic” one. We will answer the first question here and deal with the second—which goes to the heart of Moltmann’s doctrine of God—in the next subsection.

We have seen how Moltmann translated the problem of *identity and relevance* into the theological problem of identifying the Resurrected with the Crucified (cf. §3.2.6). Theologically, we can only speak about suffering when we speak about the Crucified who is risen and about hope when we speak about the Resurrected who was crucified. Out of the Christ event comes the movement of the reconciling Spirit, in which we participate when we identify ourselves with Christ who identified himself with the suffering. This messianic truth, placed in historical categories, is now gathered “into something more, which will overcome its limitations and preserve its truth” (*WJC*: 275). It is a messianic theology from the perspective of “Chernobyl,” i.e. a Christology provoked by the fact that “Chernobyl’s children [are]

handicapped and born for an early death” and that “the half-life of plutonium is 24,000 years” (1994: 89). In this light, the only relevant Christological question is: “Who really is Christ for dying nature and ourselves today?” (*WJC*: 68).

In his attempt to answer this question, Moltmann proposes the ancient notion of the *cosmic Christ* (he refers to the classical texts in the letters to the Colossians and the Ephesians as well as 1 Cor. 8:6 and even the 77th Logion of the Gospel of Thomas, 1994: 107). He had reflected on the idea of a cosmic Christology already in his earliest theological attempts (cf. §2.3.2). With Bonhoeffer he stressed the need to overcome the narrow focus on the “centre” of Christian faith and to discover its horizon. Now his motive is similar, but his concern is not so much bringing the human, social world into theology (giving it theological importance by highlighting Christ’s reign as universal and that Christians, thus, live everywhere in the liberty of Christ).

Today a cosmic christology has to confront Christ the redeemer with a nature which human beings have plunged into chaos, infected with poisonous waste and condemned to universal death; for it is only this Christ who can save men and women from their despair and preserve nature from annihilation. (*WJC*: 275)

The universalistic dimension of the reign of Christ today thus expresses the crucial place of *creation* in the process of salvation, not only for nature’s sake but also with regard to the liberation of human beings.

For Christian faith, it is cosmic christology itself that provides the spiritual foundations for the conversion of men and women from their ruthless exploitation of nature to a caring reconciliation with nature. (*WJC*: 306)

How does it do this? In the 1970s a historical Christology pointed the way beyond a privatized religion and a dissolution of Christian faith in revolutionary movements. The suffering Christ identified himself with those suffering from oppression and poverty and, as the first to be resurrected from the dead, he opened human beings who followed him to the messianic time and sharpened the promise of their future resurrection. Now a cosmic Christology is believed to help us go beyond the anthropocentric concentration on the salvation of the human being (and particularly his “soul”) on the one hand and all kinds of “religious cosmologies” on the other (*GiC*: 22). “Cosmic christology does not abolish personal faith in Christ, and does not replace it by a religious *Weltanschauung*; what it does do is to set personal faith in the *wide horizon* of the lordship of Christ” (*WJC*: 306; italics)

mine). In other words, the suffering Christ identifies himself with the whole suffering creation (through his death on the cross Christ has “slain enmity;” the enmity of human beings towards themselves and one another, the enmity of human beings towards nature, and the enmity between the forces of nature itself) and, as the first to be resurrected from death, he opens “all things, whether on earth or in heaven” (Col. 1.20) to the messianic reality (*WJC*: 304). The future resurrection is the resurrection of *all things* that are broken (“God forgets nothing that he has created. Nothing is lost to him. He will restore it all;” *WJC*: 303). If one thinks this through, it is evident that Moltmann makes quite a claim here: The Christian hope of the resurrection not only concerns the broken human being, who has ended up on the “dung-hill of history” but also the ape that died after a vivisection, the defoliated tree and the poisoned piece of land.

The central claim of Moltmann’s cosmic Christology is thus: “only as a whole ... will creation be reconciled, redeemed and recreated” (*WJC*: 304). Or, to put it even more sharply: “Unless the whole cosmos is reconciled, Christ cannot be the Christ of God” (*WJC*: 306). It is the redemption of all things “from the fetters of the transience of the times which leads to the gathering together of all things in the messiah, and therefore to the completion of creation.” Theologically, he thus not only suggests a connection between resurrection and the human world but also between resurrection and creation as a whole. It is, again, the “Easter experience” of the risen Christ that forms the starting point. Moltmann believes that “what was ‘seen’ there goes beyond all historical remembrances and experiences, and touches the innermost constitution of creation itself” (*WJC*: 281). He points to the fact that the light of the resurrection appearances was identified very early on with the light of the first day of the new creation. Christ, the first to be resurrected from the dead, is “the first-born of all creation” (Col. 1,15), who now reigns universally and whose “therapeutic powers” are to be made explicit for the whole threatened earth.

But Moltmann’s notion of the cosmic Christ involves more. He sees Christ as “creator-mediator” and refers to 1 Cor. 8:6: “For us there is only one God, the Father, *from whom* are all things and *for whom* we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, *through whom* are all things and *through whom* we exist” (*WJC*: 280). Moltmann refers back to the text in Prov. 8 about the “Wisdom” who was beside God *before* the creation of this world and *through* whom God made all things. The creator “makes fast” the universe through the immanent presence of his Wisdom in all things. Seeing Christ as the “Wisdom Messiah,” Moltmann regards Christ as the *mediator* in creation. The Christ of God who reconciles all things can only be Christ if he is also the *foundation of all things*.

Many exegetical and dogmatic questions could be raised here. I will leave them aside and limit myself to the conclusion that for Moltmann, *resurrection and creation are closely linked* (this relation is of vital importance for his view on human life). Creation and resurrection explain each other mutually and may not be separated. The God who raises the dead is the same God who calls into being the things that are not (Rom. 4:17). The glorification of creation through the raising of the dead is creation's perfecting and the goal of creation is bound up with the resurrection of the dead. For Moltmann it is important that the one is not subjected to the other. Creation is more than just preparation for redemption and redemption is not merely the restoration of creation's original order (this reminds one of Cocceius, cf. §2.3.3). In order to see this relation between resurrection and creation, creation must not be understood rather one-sidedly as only creation-in-beginning but also as continuous creation and as the "consummated new creation of all things."<sup>130</sup> Moltmann outlines a unified process of creation in which beginning, continuing, and consummation are three distinguishable stages. Accordingly, he understands Christ's mediation in creation in three separate movements: Christ as the *ground* of the creation of all things, as the *driving power* in the evolution of creation, and as the *redeemer* of the whole process of creation. He holds that seeing things this way is basically doing no more than taking up the old Protestant doctrine of the threefold kingly office of Christ, that is to say: Christ ruling in the realm of nature (*regnum naturae*), in the realm of grace (*regnum gratiae*), and in the realm of glory (*regnum gloriae*). He calls it an "integral viewpoint" that makes it possible to avoid the one-sided emphases that have hitherto characterized cosmic Christology (*WJC*: 287). If Christ is described only as the ground of creation, our chaotic world is transfigured into an illusionary home; if only as an *Evolutor*, as Teilhard de Chardin did, then the evolutionary process itself takes on redemptive meaning, which leaves no room for redemption for all the victims of faulty developments (Moltmann rejects any teleologically conceivable perfect being at the end of evolution if it does not involve the perfection of all things, *WJC*: 302f.); if only as the coming redeemer, then we see our world only as a place in need for redemp-

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<sup>130</sup> I will not go into all kind of questions about the concrete relation between this new creation and the old (is it a completely new creation *ex nihilo* or is there a continuity? What about creation as we know it? Will the trees continue to exist and thus continue to grow forever? Or will there be a different kind of trees, or no trees at all? But then what about the tree in front of my house? As Moltmann claimed, "God forgets nothing that he has created. Nothing is lost to him. He will restore it all," *WJC*: 303).

tion and overlook the many traces of the goodness of the Creator in all things. His integral viewpoint thus enables him to demonstrate a connection between creation and eschaton from a Christological perspective.

This cosmic view of the salvific work of Christ has crucial consequences for the liberation of human beings. If this is the foundation of Christian soteriology, then people can be truly free only if “all things” are healed and saved. For Moltmann, this implies that “Christians cannot encounter other creatures in any way other than the way they encounter human beings.” In his view, “every creature is a being for whom Christ died on the cross in order to gather it into the reconciliation of the world” (*WJC*: 307). Moltmann gives no concrete examples here, which induces us to speculate about his ideas. Is the veal calf, who lives out his short life in a pen barely large enough for his body included in the salvation process? Why not? But what about the malaria mosquito or the cholera bacillus? Or is this too anthropocentric a question and should we see the mosquito and the bacillus from the broader perspective of the super organism of the earth? I will come back to such questions in §5.2.7. For now I will confine myself to the central claim that Moltmann is making here: the liberation of humans can be viewed only from a cosmic perspective. What is at stake in the process of reconciliation is nothing less than “the restoration of the *righteousness* and *justice* of the cosmos,” which has been disrupted by human beings who began to consider nature as an object. Moltmann suggests that as long as they do not understand that “none of these other creatures has been destined to be ‘technologically manipulated’ material for human beings” and that “they themselves are nature, and nature is in them” they will not be free. “The aggressive ethic of the modern world reflects the mentality of unreconciled human beings and their nihilistic dreams of almighty power,” while “an ethic of reconciliation serves the common life of all created beings” (*WJC*: 307).

Thus by following the path of a Wisdom Christology, Moltmann arrives at a cosmic Christology that, rather than abolishing his former historical Christology, broadens it. Christ is not only the Lord who fills all the *times* of creation with the messianic extension of redemption but also the Lord who fills all *spaces* of creation with “the messianic intensity” of the divine peace, with *shalom* (*WJC*: 304). Christ’s sovereignty is “the only true *dominium terrae*” (*GiC*: 227). The two images of Christ are equally significant.

In the Epistle to the Colossians, the spatial picture of the cosmic Christ is dominant, in Paul the temporal picture of the eschatological Christ (1 Cor. 15). The two images must complement one another if they are to comprehend the risen and exalted Christ in

his spatial and temporal dimensions: his messianic intensity pervades the spaces of creation to their depths; his messianic extensity pervades the times of creation to their furthest origins. (*WJC*: 304)

Christ is the gateway to the Trinity. His history shows us the triune God and, moreover, he leads us into the fellowship of the Trinity. If Christ is not only the historical Messiah but also the Wisdom Messiah, who was the ground of creation itself, then the triune God cannot be perceived only in temporal (historical) categories. Spatial categories are to be explored as well, as I will show now.

#### 4.3.3. The Home of the Trinity: The Revelation of the Inhabitable God

The question I postponed and that now urges itself forward is how the “historical” line in Moltmann’s thinking can be connected with the “cosmic” perspective rediscovered in his later theology. This question penetrates to the deepest level of his theology, the doctrine of God. I will not present a detailed reconstruction of Moltmann’s rather complicated concept of God. My particular concern in this study is the liberation of modern human beings. But following Moltmann, the question of how we are supposed to be “at home” in a messianic “counter-history” and in the rhythms and cycles of nature can be answered only after we have dealt with the problem of how a historical theology in which the triune God is believed to leave his marks in human history can be combined with a pantheistic theology in which the Trinity embraces the whole of creation. In my view, the crucial step Moltmann takes is to tie together Joachim of Fiore’s doctrine of the “three kingdoms” and the Eastern Orthodox concept of *perichoresis*. The latter—implying, an ontological claim about the world’s very being—is “dynamized” by the first, while the first is “widened” by the latter. I will briefly evaluate both lines of thought (historical dynamic and mutual indwelling) and then outline how they converge in the notion of “consummation,” the eternal sabbath, the eternal “home” where “God will be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28<sup>131</sup>).

##### a) Historical Dynamic

As indicated, Moltmann claims that his trinitarian theology is a “retelling” of the history of God’s relations of fellowship (*EiT*: 309). In CHAPTERS TWO and THREE we outlined how Moltmann’s earlier theology starts from this idea of a history of God that is yet unfinished. Linking this history of God

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<sup>131</sup> This is, as Bauckham notes, the eschatological text Moltmann has cited most frequently throughout his writings (Bauckham 1999: xv).

with the history of the world, the latter is qualified and receives its fruitful tension. Time is not just a homogenous sequence of moments but it is moved by the movement of the triune God. In *TK* Moltmann takes up Joachim's doctrine of the three kingdoms to elaborate on this relation between secular and divine history.<sup>132</sup> He reviews Joachim's theology as "a historical dynamic which seeks to reconcile human history eschatologically with the eternal history of God" (Moltmann 1991c, xviii). For Moltmann, Joachim's major contribution is the creative way in which he combined the classic doctrines of salvation and the Trinity by developing the idea of a sequence between the kingdoms of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. God's "history" is "a movement from initial *creation* through historical *reconciliation* to eschatological *consummation*" (italics mine). What Joachim basically did was unite two different eschatologies, that of Augustine and that of the Cappadocians. Augustine had posed that analogue to the creation of the world: world history has seven stages; on the last, the "sabbath of world history," history comes to an end and the kingdom of endless glory will begin. The Cappadocians had introduced the idea of three different periods and modes of revelation, three kingdoms so to say, which were related to the three persons of the Trinity. Linking both concepts, Joachim suggested that the last of the three kingdoms, that of the *Spirit*, was Augustine's "great Sabbath." He thus "dynamized" the Cappadocians' doctrine of three kingdoms. History has a *telos* and passes through different stages to reach it.

To all appearances, the same two obstacles loom up which Moltmann had to avoid in his earliest attempts to "historicize" theology (cf. §2.3.3) and in his debate with the Latin Americans (cf. §3.4). On the one hand, God's history may not be identified with human histories. Joachim could be read this way, as the "Iberian messianists" did (cf. §4.2.1). They equated their own historical kingdom with this final kingdom of the Spirit. Contrary to these Spanish court theologians, Moltmann therefore has to insist that the *telos* in world history is not an immanent reign. On the other hand, the relation between God's kingdom and human kingdoms may not rest in a static dualism. Moltmann points out that this was the case in "Protestant orthodoxy." Of course—as noted above—the threefold typology of a trinitarian doctrine of the kingdom is reechoed in the triplet *regnum naturae—regnum gratiae—regnum gloriae*, but, in Moltmann's view, in a far

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<sup>132</sup> *TK* does not contain references to the texts of Joachim himself; Moltmann bases his view upon early 20th century interpretations, mainly upon studies of E. Benz (*TK*: 251).

too narrow Christocentric approach. The three kingdoms were thus no longer three strata but only different expressions of the threefold kingly rule of Christ (cf. §4.3.2). Due to this Christocentric concentration only two historical kingdoms actually remained, i.e. that of nature (the universal rule of God through his providence) and that of grace (the particular rule of God through “word and sacrament”); the kingdom of the Spirit was either equated with the kingdom of heaven or combined with the kingdom of grace. Moltmann implies that—although it prohibits a too easy identification of the profane and the sacred—this resulted in an unfruitful dialectic between immanence and transcendence.

Introducing Joachim into his theology, Moltmann thus apparently runs into the same difficulties of transcendence and immanence which we have encountered in the course of this book. God’s history and that of the world coincide but have to be clearly distinguished. The kingdom of the Spirit may not be thought completely immanent, because that would legitimate the identification with human, powerful kingdoms and would not be completely transcendent, because that would make it a Never Never Land. It could be asked whether the reference to Joachim does not eventually raise more problems than it solves. At least, Moltmann is forced to make some fundamental adjustments to Joachim’s concept. First, he skips the *chronology* and, second, he no longer sees the three kingdoms in a modalist way. Like Joachim, he views “the kingdom of nature,” “the kingdom of grace,” and “the kingdom of glory” as three stages on the way to its consummation—and not just as three aspects of the one kingdom of God!—but unlike Joachim, he regards these as “continually present strata and transitions in the kingdom’s history” (*TK*: 209) and he does not link the three stages *exclusively* to the “work” of, respectively, Father, Son, and Spirit. The whole Trinity is always involved. So Moltmann speaks of a “trinitarian creation,” a “trinitarian incarnation,” and a “trinitarian glorification.” The kingdom of the Father involves the creation and preservation of existence and its openness to the future glory, but the Father creates and preserves the world through the Son in the energies of the Holy Spirit (humans are God’s *creatures*, his image); the kingdom of the Son liberates humans from sin, from their situation of being closed in, through vicarious suffering and “the liberty which vicarious suffering alone throws open,” but the Son is sent into the world by the Father through the Holy Spirit and in his turn sends the Holy Spirit from the Father into the world (humans are adopted as God’s *children*); the kingdom of the Spirit is experienced in the gift of the Spirit’s energies, in rebirth, in the “direct presence of God,” but the Holy Spirit glorifies the Son and the Father and leads the world into the eternal life of the Trinity (humans become God’s *friends*, *EiT*: 310). Thus although there

are differences between the three kingdoms, it is hard to distinguish them. The three kingdoms are different ways of the “indwelling” of the *triune* God.

But if Moltmann does not want to see the kingdom of the Spirit, the eschatological reign of freedom, as a purely spiritual, transcendent reality nor as a purely immanent fulfilment of history (but only as its “anticipation”), then he is compelled to introduce a *fourth kingdom* (and he claims that Joachim did so as well, which, he says, has been mostly overlooked, *TK*: 207). This kingdom is the final *consummation* of all the works and ways of God’s trinitarian history with this world. All three kingdoms point beyond themselves to this fourth (*TK*: 212). The creation—the reign of the Father—is the “material promise” (*Realverheissung*) of this glory, “being full of cyphers and signs of the beauty to come” (already in *The Crucified God* he saw our reality as the sacrament of God’s trinitarian history, but then it was predominantly related to human reality; cf. §3.2.5); the reign of the Son is the historical promise of glory, “being full of the experiences and hopes of brotherhood and sisterhood;” the reign of the Spirit is the actual dawn of the kingdom of glory under the conditions of history and death. In short, “the trinitarian doctrine of God, therefore, sums up ‘the works of the Trinity’ (creation, liberation, glorification) and points them towards *the home of the triune God*’ (*TK*: 212; italics mine). This “eternal kingdom of glory” (Moltmann’s use of “reign of glorification” and “eternal reign of glory” is a little confusing) *replaces* current history (*TK*: 207).

This evokes questions concerning the relation and continuity between the current creation and history and the new creation. Understandably, Moltmann rejects a mere continuation between the old and the new. However, a radical discontinuity seems as untenable (as Bernard Williams (1973: 96) wrote: “it should be me who lives for ever” and “the eternal life should be in prospect of some interest;” cf. §2.4.2c). Moltmann does not reject any continuity when he speaks of a new creation *ex nihilo*. The continuity in discontinuity Moltmann assumes seems similar to what is expressed in the image of the grain of wheat in 1 Cor. 15:42ff. (so *e.g.* *CoG*: 66ff.). What is sown here is perishable, but it is raised imperishable. As Moltmann writes, our being in eternity is not a continuity of being here and now—it is a new creation, a new body—but just as the wheat is related to the grain of corn that is sown so we will be brought back *to ourselves* for eternity (*CoG*: 67). That does not take away from the fact that alternating terms such as

annihilation, glorification, transfiguration and consummation make Moltmann's elaborations on this point rather confusing.<sup>133</sup>

Moltmann appropriates Joachim of Fiore's ideas in this way into his doctrine of God. The notion of the three kingdoms—be it no longer chronologically and modalistically separated—is placed over against every static dualism of “two kingdoms” (nature and grace, old life and new life, immanence and transcendence). The reign of the Spirit bursts apart such dialectics. This reign is, however, not the final kingdom of God itself. Like the other two kingdoms, it points forward to the fourth kingdom, *the kingdom of consummation*.

#### b) Mutual Indwelling

According to *CG* and *CPS* God “dwells in time” (so *EiT*: 313). As noted, in his new project Moltmann intends to explore the idea of God's dwelling in space as well. The notion of *mutual indwelling*, not only between the three persons of the Trinity but also between the triune God and humanity as well as between God and the entire cosmos, is central. In fact, Moltmann regards reality as such as *perichoretic* (e.g. *GiC*: 16f.).

Moltmann takes up the notion of *perichoresis* as developed by John of Damascus in the middle of the eighth century, which expresses the mutual indwelling of the three Persons. The noun literally means vortex (*Wirbel*) or rotation; the verb means to reach round, to go round, to surround, to embrace, to encompass (*EiT*: 316). What it is intended to grasp is the eternal and continual cycle of divine life and the constant exchange of divine energies: “the Father exists in the Son, the Son in the Father, and both of them in the Spirit, just as the Spirit exists in both .... It is a process of most perfect and intense empathy” (*TK*: 174f.). The unity of the three persons does not lie in their one lordship but in the circulatory character of divine life. “The doctrine of *perichoresis* links together in a brilliant way the threeness and the unity, without reducing the threeness to the unity, or

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<sup>133</sup> Questions can arise especially from an ethical point of view. Douglas Schuurman, for instance, asks how we are supposed to *hope* for a new creation if that implies the annihilation of our world. Such a question, he maintains, does not only arise out of anxiety for continued personal existence (that was Williams's point) but also “out of concern for the value God bestows upon the world and thus the valuations human beings should discern in the world” (Schuurman 1991: 101ff.). I think Schuurman makes too strong a distinction between the “consummation of this world” and “its annihilation in preparation for a new and different world.” In Moltmann's theology both appear to be held together in a Pauline notion of sowing and reaping.

dissolving the unity in the threeness” (*TK*: 175). Once—at the quarter-century celebrations at Trinity College, Dublin—Moltmann saw three women performing a “fantastic trinitarian round-dance,” dancing “all the trinitarian figures dogmatically used since the time of Basil” (*EiT*: 381, n. 27). Whatever it is supposed to convey, the image of a continuing *round-dance* of three dancing figures seems a powerful image for grasping the very concept of *perichoresis*.<sup>134</sup> The three persons are both three and one in their mutual indwelling. Another image—in front of Moltmann when he wrote *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (*TK*: xvi)—is the famous icon of the fifteenth-century Russian painter Andrei Rublev, showing the three persons sitting around a table. According to Moltmann, it reflects a *social understanding* of the Trinity. What we see is the “tenderly intimate inclination towards one another” of the three divine Persons through which they “show the profound unity joining them, in which they are one.” It is impossible to discover who depicts the Father, who the Son and who the Spirit. Moltmann therefore calls it an “incomparable portrayal of the unportrayable God” (*EiT*: 305).

The concept of *perichoresis* is for Moltmann not restricted to divine life. Interpreting Rublev’s icon he states:

Anyone who grasps the truth of this picture understands that it is only in the unity with one another which springs from the self-giving of the Son “for many” that men and women are in conformity with the triune God. He understands that people only arrive at their own truth in their free and loving inclination towards one another. (*TK*: xvi)

Moltmann concludes first that it is in community that humans reflect the triune God. They can be truly human only when they enter into a *perichoretic* relation with one another, i.e. when persons can be themselves but *in and through* others. Thus Moltmann’s social doctrine of the Trinity serves as the legitimation for egalitarian relationships that undermine totalitarianism (liberal individualism included) but do not fall into the trap of communitarianism. *Perichoresis* becomes a strategy for dealing with multiplicity and oneness, diversity and homogeneity. I will return to this in §4.4.3.

Secondly, human communities are not only the mirror image of the divine. Moltmann applies the notion of *perichoresis* also to the relation between God and humans. Since the unity of God is defined in terms of

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<sup>134</sup> Moltmann borrows this metaphor from feminist theologians (*EiT*: 381, n. 26) and clings to it, although he knows that semantically it is not correct (‘round-dance’ is derived from *perichoreúo* and not from *perichoréo*, *EiT*: 318).

perichoretic love, it is a unity which opens itself to humans and includes them in itself. The love that binds the three persons together is not limited—the Trinity is open “in the superfluity and overflow of the love which gives created beings the living space for their livingness” (*EiT*: 323). Humans participate in God’s mutual indwelling. In other words, they join the dancing God. We will discuss this further in §4.3.4.

In *GiC* Moltmann extends the notion of mutual indwelling to the relation between God and creation, thus giving the notion of *perichoresis* a panentheistic meaning (*GiC*: 13ff., 155f.). All life is understood in *perichoretic* terms. Analogous to the relationship between the triune God and humanity, he not only assumes that creation itself is a *perichoretic* community (as noted above, Moltmann embraced the Gaia hypothesis: the cosmos as one life-system in which everything depends on and lives in and through one another; cf. §4.1) but also that the whole creation participates in God’s “round-dance” in mutual indwelling. To understand the latter, it is important to remark that Moltmann extends the historical categories of *kenosis* and *Shekinah*—which we discussed in §3.2.5—to the whole creation. We noted that God cuts himself off from himself, gives himself away to his people, suffers with their sufferings, goes with them into the misery of the foreign land. The history of God is a history of self-emptying. This axiom of the pathos of God, also taken up in *TK* (*TK*: 25, 36ff.), changes significantly in *GiC*. By incorporating Isaac Luria’s notion of *zimzum* (“concentration,” “contraction”)<sup>135</sup> the initial act of creation itself is seen as a condescension, as a self-limitation of God (*GiC*: 86ff., *CoG*: 298ff.). Creation is not an act of God *ad extra*, as the Christian tradition has usually stressed but an “inward” act of God. To create space “outside” himself, the—omnipotent—God has to create room for finitude within himself. God withdraws himself from himself *within* himself. “He ‘creates’ by *letting-be*, by making room” (*GiC*: 88). The space within God created by his self-limitation is wide enough to take up not only the whole of human history but even the entire cosmos within himself.

Many objections could and have been made against the way Moltmann uses ancient kabbalistic and early Christian notions such as *zimzum* or *perichoresis* in his panentheistic theology of the inhabitation of God and the mutual indwelling between God and the whole of creation. Does he not wrench Luria’s notion too easily from its specific context, a Jewish mystical tradition (so e.g. Deane-Drummond 1997: 203)? Is there still any distinction

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<sup>135</sup> Moltmann draws on Luria as interpreted by Gershom Scholem (*GiC*: 334 n.25, Scholem 1956: 115ff.).

between Creator and creation? A further discussion of Moltmann's pantheism goes beyond the limits of this book. One thing, however, should be highlighted once again. We should see the *perichoretic* community from a *messianic perspective*. Moltmann speaks of a *creatio mutabilis*, an *open system* with a goal beyond itself in the future. The inhabitation of God is not yet complete. Creation is God-less by definition; God "let it be" in a space within himself that was necessarily "not-God" which is then penetrated by God. We live in a creation that is penetrated by God but in which God is not yet "all in all" (as stated above, the problem of natural evil must be viewed from this perspective).

This indicates that the notion of *perichoresis* is historically dynamized. A central metaphor which Moltmann explores to grasp the indwelling of God in creation is the notion of "home" (*Heimat*) or inhabitation (*Wohnen*). His *ecological theology* involves far more than merely taking up the ecological crisis into his thinking. It means considering the idea that the earth is destined to be God's home ("eco" is derived from the Greek *oikos*, meaning "house (hold)" or "dwelling;" *GiC*: xiv). By picturing creation as God's home-to-be, Moltmann holds that creation as a whole will be liberated from the bondage to the powers of negation and death. The "inner secret" of creation is the eternal and final indwelling of God amidst all his creatures, which is now experienced temporarily when the dualistic tendencies between the divine and the profane, humans and nature, body and soul are overcome (*GiC*: xii). Thus creation is seen in an eschatological, *messianic* perspective; it is, potentially, the renewed creation, the new heaven and earth, God's eternal dwelling place, the "temple" where he comes to rest (*TK*: 104).

### c) Sabbath Theology

Moltmann links the concepts of historical dynamic and mutual indwelling. The Orthodox conception of *perichoresis* alters significantly when combined with the historical line in Moltmann's thought. It is no longer an eternal circulation of the divine life but a movement that overcomes dichotomies and brings everything together into the future kingdom of glory. Relationships within God are not an eternal game but a work-in-progress, a movement forward through a messianic longing for freedom and fulfillment. As noted above, Moltmann can call his doctrine of creation *messianic* (*GiC*: 4f.). That means that his ecological theology is also stamped by Jesus's proclamation and history. It is, in other words, a doctrine of creation in the light of the messianic time which has begun with Jesus the Messiah. Such a doctrine of creation is "directed towards the liberation of men and women, peace with nature, and the redemption of the community of human

beings and nature from negative powers, and from the forces of death.” The soteriological understanding of creation points to the universality of salvation—it is not just “my” or “our” salvation but the salvation of everything and everyone (*TK*: 100). This universal significance is always inherent in the particular experience of salvation. The universal *pre-supposition* of particular experiences of salvation (Exodus, the Christ event) is that the liberating God is also the “Creator of all people and things;” the universal *goal* is based on the belief that the liberating God is the “One who will complete and fulfil the history of all people and things.” As Bauckham comments: “Humanity’s eschatological goal does not lift us out of the material creation but confirms our solidarity and relatedness with it” (1995: 18, 188).<sup>136</sup>

The central notion that combines both lines is the *sabbath*. Moltmann claims that the history of creation will eventually end in God’s *eternal Sabbath*. We have seen how the history of the world is embedded in the history of God. Both histories have the same *telos*. The history of the world is not yet finished—but neither is the history of God. In other words, God himself is not yet *at home* but will come to rest only in the final kingdom of glory, in the eternal sabbath. The notion of sabbath thus serves to incorporate the time and space of creation in the history of the unfolding of God. It shows that all *times and spaces* are open; they point beyond themselves and creation’s “consummation will be to become the *home* and the *dwelling-place* of God’s glory” (*GiC*: 5; italics mine). The Spirit opens us for this future but also for one another, for nature, for the community of creation in which God’s eternal sabbath can already be sensed. It is the Spirit that makes the world an inhabitable place. Ecology goes with the indwelling of God. “Ecology” and pneumatology touch on and explain each other (cf. Müller-Fahrenholz 2000, 154).

If we understand the Creator, his creation and the goal of that creation in a trinitarian sense, the Creator, through his Spirit, dwells in his creation as a whole, and in every individual created being,

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<sup>136</sup> As indicated above, the broadening of a theology with its emphasis on history and time by spatial categories requires a stronger elaboration on pneumatology. The Spirit is, on the one hand, the Spirit of freedom, of hope, the prefiguration of glory, the Spirit that keeps everything open to the future (as already discussed in CHAPTER THREE) but also the Spirit of embodiment, of inhabitation, of indwelling (“the God who is present in the world and in every part of it, is the creative Spirit;” *GiC*: 212).

by virtue of his Spirit holding them together and keeping them in life. (*GiC*: 12)

The world, transfigured through the indwelling of God's glory, will be the final "home of the Trinity" (*TGK*, 105).

These doctrines of the Creator who "rests" on the sabbath, of the Son who included the entire creation in his messianic reign, and of the Spirit who opens all creatures for one another and the future glory, have obviously far-reaching anthropological consequences. The human being is not the goal of creation; he is intended to rest among the other creatures. The consequences of this idea will be worked out in the following subsection.

#### 4.3.4 *Gloria Dei* on Earth: Revealing True Humanity

The concept of God mirrors the concept of humanity. I just outlined the major change in Moltmann's doctrine of God (a broadening of the "historical" image with spatial categories). The corresponding change in Moltmann's view of human beings could be sketched by spotlighting five major characteristics of his later anthropology: the human being as *imago mundi* (1), *imago dei* (2), *imago satanae* or *mammonis* (3), *imago Christi* (4), and *gloria dei* on earth (5).

1. With respect to the salvation of the human being, it is theologically of vital importance to see him as a "creature in the fellowship of creation" or as the *imago mundi* (*GiC*: 186). This is the first characteristic of Moltmann's anthropology. Apparently Moltmann has two important sources which serve to ground his notion of the human being as the *imago mundi*: Bloch's acknowledgement of nature as "subject" and the understanding of the human being as *microcosm*, for which he uses both biblical and scientific sources. Drawing on Romantic concepts of nature, Moltmann explains, Bloch "anticipated important ecological principles" (*GiC*: 43). He rejected the strict subject-object division in Western scientific thinking and sought to replace the hard ontological Cartesian dualism between *res cogitans* and *res extensa* by a historical dialectic, in line with the Marxist tradition. This dialectical conception of the difference between subject and object, however, covered only the human *relationship* to nature, not nature itself; in communism, says Moltmann, nature remains the human being's slave, since it can conceive only of a practical human relationship to nature: *work*. But, as Moltmann points out, "the human being has not merely a right to work; he has a right to *habitation*" (*GiC*: 47, italics mine). Bloch meant something similar when—over against orthodox Marxism—he acknowledged the substantiality of nature and thus its independency from the working human being as subject. He linked dialectical materialism with Schelling's philosophy of nature, a line of thought in *The Principle of Hope* that had re-

mained rather underestimated in Moltmann's earlier theology (Bloch 1986: 625-698). Discussing this in detail would go beyond the limits of this book. Suffice it to say that in Bloch Moltmann finds an ally in recognizing nature as a subject of its own. Since we can only be in community with a subject and not with an object, it is only when we recognize nature as a fellow subject that a community can come into being in which both humans and nature can find their "home country" (*GiC*: 42).

That does not take away from the traditional idea that the human being has a special position (a *Sonderstelle*). In Moltmann's opinion, the human is "a microcosm in which all previous creatures are to be found again" (*GiC*: 186), the "embodiment" of all creatures. To argue this way, Moltmann assumes a "history of creation," a temporal sequence of stages (*toledoth*, Gen. 2:4a), in which the human being appears on the stage last of all. On the one hand, all the other creatures are a preparation for the creation of the human being—he is the apex of creation (not the crown!); on the other hand, he is dependent on all the others (without them his existence would be impossible). According to Moltmann's reading of Gen. 1 and 2, the *dependence* becomes clear in his name, *Adam* (creature "taken from" *adama*, the motherly earth; Gen. 2:7), in the fact that he is clearly portrayed as an "animated body" and not as a soul that has taken on flesh, in his dependence on food (Gen. 1:20, 30; 2:19), and in the bi-sexuality and fertility given to human beings (Gen. 1:28). What *distinguishes* the human being from other creatures is, in the first place, the divine charge to "subdue" the earth (Gen. 1:28), although, according to Moltmann's exegesis, it means "nothing but the injunction to eat vegetable food" (as already been remarked in §4.2.3). Second, the human being is distinguished by the task to give the animals their names (Gen. 2:19), which is not an act of rule but one of bringing animals into a "community of language" with human beings (whatever that may involve). Thirdly, the human being is distinguished by being a social being—only about human beings is it said that it is not good that they be alone; Gen. 2:18.<sup>137</sup>

2. We can speak about what makes the human being special and unique compared to animals (namely, his being the *imago dei*—the second major characteristic of Moltmann's anthropology) only if we see this within the framework of his being part of nature, his being the *imago mundi* (*GiC*: 188). The designation *imago dei* is thus not identical with natural differ-

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<sup>137</sup> This is explicitly a qualification that is derived from theological anthropology. Every lay biologist knows that the human being is not the only "social" animal.

ences. It affects the whole human being, both in his community with other creatures and in his difference from them. In other words, the central Christian anthropological notion of *imago dei* can only be discussed from a *holistic* perspective—and the same goes for the biblical notions associated with it, mainly the notorious *dominium terrae* (cf. §4.2.3). In Moltmann's view, this "dominion" is not a divine mandate for domination. It is expressed in communitarian language and it legitimates the subduing of the rest of creation only if this act is related specifically to the human need for nourishment. Humans are thus the image of God—but in community with creation, in love, participation, integration, and mutual indwelling.

This central anthropological idea presented in *GiC* is a broadening of Moltmann's social doctrine of the Trinity in *TK*. There it was concluded that the triune God is not a solitary ruler in heaven who subjugates everything (as earthly despots do) but a God in community, rich in relationships. If Father, Son and Holy Spirit live with one another, for one another and in one another in the perfect community of love, then humans correspond to God not through domination and subjugation but through community and relationships. God's image on earth is not the solitary human subject but the "true human community." In other words, God's image is not an isolated monad, but humans reflect the triune God when they are deeply grounded in sharing, in receptive relationships. This is the first aspect of Moltmann's concept of *imago dei*: humans mirror the divine as an open, *perichoretic* community (cf. §4.3.1).

But there is more to be said. There is a second, "mystical" dimension. Christian fellowship does not merely correspond to the trinitarian unity of God but also *exists in it*. Humans participate in God's mutual indwelling. They join the dancing God. Moltmann writes:

In the community of Christ and in the energies of the life-giving Spirit we experience God as *the broad place* which surrounds us from every side and brings us to the free unfolding of new life. In the love which affirms life we exist *in God* and *God in us*. (*EiT*: 330)

Moltmann bases his ideas on Johannine theology. He refers to 1 John 4:16 ("He who abides in love abides in God and God abides in him" (*EiT*: 323)) and to the high priestly prayer in John 17:21 ("That they may all be one, even as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, *that they also may be in us*, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me (*EiT*: 328; italics mine)). In *God in Creation* Moltmann extends this idea of *perichoretic* indwelling in God to the whole creation (*GiC*: 150f., 244ff., 276ff.; cf. 1999a: 102). The intratrinitarian love is never fulfilled; it is not a closed circle but over-

flows. Moltmann can even state that God in a certain way “needs” the world and human beings. “If God is love, then he neither will or can be without the one who is his beloved” (*TK*: 58). As such, the intratrinitarian love is love of “like for like.” But if this love “goes out of itself,” then it is not only engendering and productive but also creative and it is not only necessary but also free. Then “like is not enough for like.” The eternal love seeks fellowship. That is why creation exists:

Creation is a part of the eternal love affair between the Father and the Son. It springs from the Father’s love for the Son and is redeemed by the answering love of the Son for the Father. Creation exists because the eternal love communicates himself creatively to his Other. It exists because the eternal love seeks fellowship and desires response in freedom. (*TK*: 59)

This mutual indwelling between the triune God and his creation should, of course, not be understood univocally. “The triune God will indwell the world *in a divine way*—the world will indwell God *in a creaturely way*” (*EiT*: 311).

What can be concluded from Moltmann’s concept of *imago dei*—we noted this above—is that the connectedness between God and the world is expressed through *love*, a love that “communicates itself by overcoming its opposite” (*TK*: 106). God longs, so to say, for “the other” and the human response to this longing is related to their being God’s image (again, we may be reminded of Moltmann’s article on Cocceius; cf. §2.3.3). The character of human existence is *symbiotic*. The term *imago dei* is thus a *relational* term. It says something about God’s relationship to humans—and not primarily something about the human relationship to nature. Stating this, Moltmann distances himself from the dominant view in the Christian tradition (the Fathers as well as the Reformation) which regards *imago dei* basically as *substance*.

3. It is important to highlight this in view of Moltmann’s interpretation of the classical notion of *sin*. Christian anthropology does not suffice with the mere statement that humans are created as God’s image; it is also and mainly concerned with the distortion of this image and its restoration. If *imago dei* refers to a special relationship to God and not to substance, then, consequently, human sin is not a distorted nature but a perverted relationship or, more precisely, the relationship of human beings to God (which

turned into idolatry), not God's relationship to human beings (*GiC*: 233).<sup>138</sup> This is the third characteristic of Moltmann's anthropology. Moltmann writes that "... turning away from the Creator to a life that contradicts God always means ... being imprisoned in one's own existing being, and closed against the future (*incurvatio in seipsum*)" (*TK*: 210). In §3.4.3 sin was already defined as channelling the love for God in a wrong direction. Here Moltmann pursues this idea. The relationship of human beings to God becomes fixed on other created beings, on works or on its own self instead of the Creator. This "destroys the finite beauty of created things, because it demands more of them than they can give" (*GiC*: 234). With Flacius he holds that humans remain "an *imago*" but now turn into an *imago satanae* or an *imago mammonis*. Sin—resulting in hate, superstition, oppression—is "love-gone-wrong." More than in his early theology he describes sin as *closedness*, as imprisonment. Liberation is liberation from "closedness" and "liberation for primal openness." Whereas openness means a life that is vital, receptive, expectant, closedness means death. "If unfree, closed, introverted people are opened for this future of theirs in God, they achieve unimagined liberty" (*TKG*, 211).

4. How do we change? In Moltmann's view, it is not a matter of simply adopting another concept of life. What is needed is nothing less than the "liberation of individualized men and women" and "the development of a new sociality" (*EiT*: 333). This liberation, he claims, cannot come about through superior strength or compulsion but "only through vicarious suffering and the call to that liberty which vicarious suffering alone throws open" (*TGK*, 210). Here the messianic perspective of his anthropology comes into view. It is the fellowship of the suffering Christ that releases us from sin, i.e. our closedness. This is the fourth characteristic: humans become *imago Christi*. Only the Son fulfils the destiny of the human being to be image of God. "Christ is the 'true man' in this perverted and inhumane world" (*TK*: 116). That involves that being *imago dei* is only possible through the incarnation. In fellowship with the Son the human being enters into his *imago dei*. This is the anthropological significance of Moltmann's statement that Christ is the gateway to the Trinity (cf. §4.3.2). On the one hand, humans thus enter the fellowship of Christ's suffering (they become "cruciform") but, on the other, they hope to become like the transfigured body of Christ in glory. We become *imago Christi*, that is, the image of "our crucified Brother" and "our risen Brother." What Moltmann thus suggests

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<sup>138</sup> I agree with Deane-Drummond that the idea of a one-sidedly perverted relationship is rather puzzling (cf. Deane-Drummond 1997: 160).

—and this also links up with Cocceius’ view (cf. §2.3.3)—is that the initial creation does not yet depict the human beings as true image of God. This is only fulfilled in Christ’s incarnation. In other words, our destination to be the *imago dei* becomes possible only after the reconciliation and liberation through Christ (*TK*: 118).<sup>139</sup>

5. Although all three persons of the Trinity are involved in this recreation of the human being in the image of Christ, it is thus the person of Christ that opens the way to share in the life of the triune God. In *WJC* Moltmann distinguishes three dimensions of the person of Christ. The first is the *eschatological* dimension. Christ is the fulfilment of Israel’s longing for the Messiah and thus the bearer of hope for this world. This hope is reflected in the “messianic” human being. The second dimension is the *theological*. Christ lives wholly in God and God wholly in him. Those who believe in Christ share in this unique relationship and, as Paul put it, become “adopted” as God’s children. The third dimension is the *social*. Christ healed the wounds of the sick, the forsaken, the poor. Humans become aware of themselves through Christ as those who share in his “brotherly” and “sisterly” nature. Since “a strong eschatological drive pervades the messianic present” (*GiC*: 228), the notion of *imago Christi* brings the eschatological into the concept of the human being as the *imago dei*. In the fellowship of Christ, “the image of and glory of the invisible God on earth,” people become what they are intended to be, namely *gloria dei* on earth. The future horizon of the glorification of human beings is the fifth dimension of Moltmann’s anthropology. “Their glorification is promised them with their justification and in the process of their sanctification” (*GiC*: 225). It is through Christ that the new, true creation begins. Justification (in Moltmann’s thinking the renewed relation between God and humans, not the regaining of an original state) is, therefore, the beginning of *glorification* here and now, in the present. This glorification is the consummation and goal of creation, as we have seen in previous subsection. Between the experienced justification of the sinner (basically his enthronement, cf. §4.2.3) and the glorification of the person justified “lies the path of sanctification, which has to do with ‘putting on the new human being, created after the likeness of God’ (Eph. 4.24; cf. Col. 3:10)” (*GiC*: 227).

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<sup>139</sup> This obviously provokes the question: What do we say about the people before Christ? Moltmann argues that the incarnation has a “retroactive effect” on the initial creation. Creation was “open” for the appearance of the *imago dei* in Christ; the intention of the incarnation precedes creation.

Moltmann uses the term *theosis*, the eschatological becoming-one-with-God.

... we can say that as God's image human beings conform to the presence of the Creator in his creation, and as God's children they conform to the presence of God's grace; but when the glory of God itself enters creation they will become like God, and transfigured into his appearance. The *imago per conformitatem gratiae* points beyond itself to the *imago per similitudinem gloriae*. (*GiC*: 228f.)

Thus the process of justification, of liberation, is, as stated previously, more than merely the forgiveness of sins. It leads to new life. With Paul Moltmann speaks of the "added value of grace" (*TK*: 116). The liberation of the human being is not static but is directed towards the future where the indwelling of God's Spirit which we now experience only partially and provisionally will become complete and eternal. This future thus involves the breakdown of the alienation between God, humankind and nature; the "embodiment of the messianic promises" is "that the world should be 'home'. This means being at home in existence—that the relationships between God, human beings and nature lose their tension and are resolved into peace and repose" (*GiC*: 5). Thus Moltmann stresses the process character of the *imago dei* through the *imago Christi*. The human being as the image of God is "a historical process with an eschatological termination" (*GiC*: 227). "*Being* human means *becoming* human in this process." We already live in the process of resurrection and in this very process "experience themselves as accepted and promised, wholly, bodily and socially" (*GiC*: 227). But it remains incomplete *and cannot be completed* until the eschatological annihilation of death, the redemption of the body in a new earth and heaven, which will consummate this process and fulfill the destiny of creatures.

Allow me to summarize the discussion so far. The real destiny of human beings is to be *gloria dei* on earth. "Gloria dei est homo," Moltmann holds with Irenaeus. "Just as creation is creation for the sabbath, so human beings are created as the image of God for the divine glory" (*GiC*: 228). In other words, "in glorifying God, the creatures created to be the image of God themselves arrive at the fulfilment of what they are intended to be." This has a process character. The *imago mundi* becomes the *imago Christi* through Christ, the true *imago dei*, and by doing so the human being anticipates his role as *gloria dei* on earth. Human beings are beings in becoming (*GiC*: 265). But now, unlike in his earlier theology, Moltmann refers to the anticipatory structure of the human beings whole physical, mental and spiritual existence. The whole human being is directed to the future of

fulfilment and glorification. He anticipates it by seeking embodiment not only in social structures based upon equal footing and reciprocity *but also in his own body and nature, in the community of creation*. Human identity thus stands in direct relationship to humans' natural and cosmic receptivity, to their valuing of the reality around them. If they regard nature as something to be dominated, they deprive themselves of true human identity.

In this section we explained that for Moltmann's anthropology his ecological doctrine of the Trinity is of vital importance. His "ecology," his "doctrine of the house" (*oikos*), involves seeing God the Creator not as opposite to his "work" but in a trinitarian sense as the Creator who, through his Spirit, dwells in creation as a whole and in every created being in particular. The indwelling of God, the *Shekinah*, is the inner secret of creation: God's Sabbath, God's eternal home, is its ultimate purpose. The anthropological side that corresponds to this theological side of Moltmann's ecological doctrine of creation is that existence should become a home ("*Wohnlichkeit im Dasein*"), which is, as we can now conclude, possible only

if the relationship between nature and human is without stresses and strains—if it can be described in terms of reconciliation, peace and a viable symbiosis ... [if] the indwelling of human beings in the natural system of the earth corresponds, for its part, to the indwelling of the Spirit in the soul and body of the human being. (*GiC*: xv)

Only this would put an end to "the alienation of human beings from themselves."

#### *4.4. Towards a Habitable Existence: A Divine Therapy*

Christian faith does not introduce a new concept of humankind nor does it fix humankind into an ideal portrait; it "finds" humans before that "final unavoidable reality" and shows them how to transform themselves in face of this reality. So far this chapter has described Moltmann's attempts to bring history and the world into theology and to integrate both lines into a liberating picture of human life. We showed how humans are placed in time and space by the liberating presence of God, which is, in Moltmann's theology, no longer limited to the "historical" *Shekinah* but extended to God's spatial indwelling. The ills of modernity, we have seen, are due to the monistic conception of the relationships between God, fellow humans and nature. Modern humans are unable to experience the liberating presence of God because of their closedness. In contrast, Moltmann developed an idea of human "likeness to God" based on the embedment of human beings in the community of nature. At the end of the last section Moltmann's theological

portrait of human beings was presented. Their “meaning and purpose” is to be *gloria dei* on earth. This notion holds together the basic insight that humans find themselves in hope and anticipation of the future *gloria dei* when God will be “all in all” and the insight that humans find their home by seeking habitation in nature and by participating in the song of praise that is sung by the whole creation. However, this picture is truly liberating only if it is somehow implemented, experienced, lived. Or better: It will lead to a liberating Christian “identity” only if it is shown how the “self-immunized” modern individual (*GiC*: 24) can *identify* himself with this picture of human life. In §4.3.1 it was already pointed out that this demands a *trinitarian* way of thinking, i.e. a contemplative way of thinking, a thinking in relationships, opening oneself to wonder, joy and suffering. In §4.3.2 it was indicated that this way of thinking is related to following Jesus, who is the “gateway” to the experience of and participation in the community of the triune God. Christians make the cry of the suffering creation, with which Christ identified himself, their own cry and the resurrection of Christ compels them to hope for the final liberation of all things. But what does this involve concretely? How do we “identify” ourselves and how can this lead to a relevant and liberating Christian presence in society? This question is not easy to answer, the more because, as Bauckham remarks, Moltmann’s theology “is disappointingly, sometimes frustratingly, lacking in concreteness” when specific recommendations for (ecological) *practice* are concerned (1995: 184).<sup>140</sup> Basically we are confronted with the two questions I formulated at the beginning of this chapter concerning the “boundary” of God’s transcendent kingdom in our immanent reality and the relation between the particular and the *universal*. *Taking* the entire messianic project as a whole, we may say that the pillars of Moltmann’s answer are a *sacramental worldview* (§4.4.1 and §4.4.2) and *ecumenism* as a *counter-model* (§4.4.3, cf. 2003a: 32ff.).

#### 4.4.1. The Sabbath-Sunday as Paradigm of Christian Identity

A liberating theological view of human life for modern Westerners must integrate two basic insights: a “passion for the future” and habitation in the “community of creation.” We have seen how Moltmann pursues this

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<sup>140</sup>Bauckham writes: “Indeed, at its worst [*GiC*] is a book whose argument takes flight into a kind of pure speculation in which Moltmann in his more recent work seems to have developed a tendency to indulge. But at its best, it achieves an understanding of ‘God in creation’ which critiques the *attitudes* to the natural world that underlie the ecological crisis and promotes alternative attitudes, from which a different kind of praxis can emerge.”

problem in his doctrine of God. How does it receive shape in daily life? A possible prism through which we can view the challenge of Moltmann's new theology of integration and embodiment is a line of thought he develops in *GiC*. It places the problem of how to relate the two basic insights in a more or less *liturgical* context. In order to understand this we must take up the theological connection between creation and eschaton I sought to demonstrate in the previous section. Humans are "set in time and space" by the double movement of God's history with this world: the history of creation open to future consummation and the history of redemption intended in creation. By suggesting an intrinsic theological link between *sabbath* and *Sunday* Moltmann gives this theological connection a liturgical perspective. Within this liturgical frame the relevance of his anthropology comes into view. To highlight this I will evaluate what he means by "sabbath" and "Sunday" and how he combines both. In §4.4.2 I will, accordingly, focus once more on the fundamental insight that life is gift to be conceived in categories of "being."

#### a) The Sabbath

For Moltmann, *sabbath* is "the presence of eternity in time," "a foretaste of the world to come" (*GiC*: 276). It is crucial that he links the notion of the sabbath explicitly to creation. Thus creation and redemption are related. "The sabbath opens creation for its true future." Accordingly, liberation is not only conceived of in temporal but also in spatial categories—it has not only to do with history but with nature as well. Redemption is not liberation *from* this world, but liberation *with* it. With Rosenzweig Moltmann can describe the sabbath as "the feast of creation" (*GiC*: 278), i.e. of a creation "which took place *for the sake of the redemption*" (italics mine). This indicates the first movement, i.e. from creation to redemption. Redemption is intended in creation; it is its very meaning. The God of liberation is the God who "rests" on the sabbath, as the blessing and rejoicing God, who "delights in his creation, and in his exultation sanctifies it."

I will elaborate on this supposed intrinsic link between sabbath and creation a little more. In Moltmann's view they belong together in three ways. The sabbath is, first, the *completion* of creation, a completion through "the Creator's rest" (*GiC*: 278). As stated before, God's "rest" is not only a rest *from* his creative activity. It is also a rest *in the face of* creation, which affects this creation. God lets his creatures exist before his face and coexist with him—he thus lets them be what they are on their own account. In God's present rest, all created things can come to themselves and all acquire their essential liberty. God makes himself "wholly receptive for the happiness, the suffering and the praise of his creatures." Moreover, God rests *in*

his works by making his dwelling in it. The sabbath points to the Creator's immanence in his creation. "Creation can be seen as God's revelation of his works; but it is only the sabbath that is the revelation of God's self. In his rest his glory becomes present—it is the beginning of the kingdom of glory." In sum, regarding the sabbath as the completion of creation—which means rejecting the view of creation as a work of six days (cf. §4.2.3)—leads us beyond the identification of the meaning of life with work and busy activity. God is, after all, not solely a *creative* God, but also—and seemingly more importantly—a God who rests. Rest, feast, and joy in existence can, therefore, not be relegated to insignificance simply because they are non-utilitarian.

The sabbath is, secondly, the *blessing* of creation (*GiC*: 281ff.). Blessing, Moltmann explains, is something extra, something on top of mere creation itself. In Gen. 1 the blessing of the Creator is conferred to animals and human beings; thus the Creator "affirms the potency of his creatures," their "independent power." But what is blessed on the sabbath is something different—not a living thing but a *time*, the seventh day. This is remarkable, since time is something invisible and transitory, not an object or a counterpart of God. Moltmann explains that, contrary to other blessings, time is not blessed through God's activity but through his *repose*. Moreover, the Creator does not impart particular creatures a degree of independent power but "here the resting God imparts to the day of his rest the power to allow *all his creatures* to find rest" (italics mine). Thus the seventh day receives "its particular quality" through God's "complete, though reposing, presence." What makes this blessing of the existence of the whole creation through God's presence so important? Moltmann here extends Augustine's statement about the restless heart to the entire creation. Everything that exists (i.e. "called from non-being to being"), he argues, is menaced by the threat of "non-being," which makes him restless (thus he breaks through anthropocentric Western anthropology). Referring to Romans 8:18ff., Moltmann claims that "the whole creation is filled with this same unrest, and transcends itself in the search for the rest in which it can abide." This resting place, Moltmann continues, is not a world beyond, a heaven, or—in the mystical sense—God himself but God's sabbath. In the resting presence of God, all created beings "find their dwelling," "their sustaining foundation."

The sabbath preserves created things from obliteration, and fills their restless existence with the happiness of the presence of the eternal God. On the sabbath all creatures find their own place in the God who is wholly present.

Thus the sabbath is a “prefiguration” of future redemption; in the here and now humans can “enter God’s rest” (Heb. 4:10) and thus come to rest.

Thirdly, the sabbath is the *sanctification* or “hallowing” of creation (*GiC*: 283ff.). Analogous to what has been said about the blessing, this “hallowing” (i.e.: electing, separating off for oneself) on the sabbath is not applied to a particular creature or space but to the seventh *day*, which gives it a universal perspective. On the sabbath the whole creation is hallowed. This hallowing means a turning away from cultures aligned to holy places and divine areas (as Moltmann had already worked out in *Theology of Hope*). Israel represents the divine in time. But now—and here lies the crux—Moltmann argues that the sabbath commandment (Ex. 20:8-11) is not limited to people; the *land* is included. It is not a particular stone or mountain or anything else that is hallowed but the whole creation itself through the hallowing of time. And the very reason why the sabbath day is hallowed is to give not only humans but the land as well the possibility to recover and to regain its breath. The weekly sabbath corresponds to the “sabbath year” (Ex. 23:10f.) and the sabbath year to the “Year of Jubilee” (Lev. 25:8ff.; cf. 1989: 62ff.). The sabbath, Moltmann holds, is the “*law of creation*.” This has significant consequences for human life. Lev. 25:1ff., for instance, spells out the restrictions to human activities that follow this law of creation. Humans are allowed to sow the fields, to prune the vineyard and to gather the crops, but in the seventh year the land is to have “a Sabbath of rest.” Apparently, Moltmann notes, the “sabbath of the earth” was the framework of the laws of the “promised land.” He agrees with the common view that these laws put an end to fertility cults but stresses that the hallowing of time, the sabbath, that came instead involves the hallowing of the earth. Moreover, according to Lev. 26 God will punish his people if they disobey these sabbath laws. He will “ruin their cities.” “Then the land will enjoy its sabbath years all the time that it lies desolate and you are in the country of your enemies; then the land will rest and enjoy its Sabbaths” (Lev. 26:34). In II Chron. 36:19-21 it is similarly suggested that the Babylonian exile was caused by the human refusal to give the earth its sabbath rest. So Moltmann interprets the text.

Moltmann’s exegesis induces him to argue that the land is not given to the people but the people to the land in order to care for it. The sabbath refers to the *Lebensgeheimnis* of the earth. Respecting (hallowing) it is God’s “ecological wisdom” that does not only concern the land but also humans, not because the unlimited exploitation of the land will eventually lead to the extinction of humans (that possibility was far beyond the scope of Biblical understanding) but because humans thus remove themselves from the “community of creation.” Moltmann remembers that when he was

a child, the farmers around Hamburg still applied the old ecological “wisdom of fallowing the land” every fifth year, “so that plants and animals could return, and we children could play there” (1999a: 115). Although this seems to me to be more of an example of pragmatic farming in an age without artificial fertilizers than of a desire to enter the community of creation, it is undeniable that Moltmann has a point. Today the fallowing principle of the sabbath laws may become a matter of life and death for human beings. Throughout history it was the great empires of the world which exploited the land until the soil was exhausted and became a desert (Moltmann mentions Persia, Rome, Babylon, and with a slight hesitation the Mayas on the Yucutan peninsula, and he adds that these empires broke down precisely because of the unsparing exploitation of the land; 1989: 64; 1999a: 115). Although extremely devastating, the policy of these empires was not as life-threatening as today’s agricultural practice. The industrialization of agriculture has led to the introduction of more and more chemical fertilizers into the soil, while monocultures have replaced the old rotation of crops. The result, Moltmann emphasizes, is that artificial fertilizing has to be intensified and the soil and the crops are increasingly polluted. One does not need to be an expert to predict that such exploitation may have catastrophic consequences in the long term. Moltmann fears that the end of it will resemble the end that Israel of old experienced: the unlimited exploitation of the land will lead “to the exile of the country population, and in the end to the disappearance of the human race from the earth” (1999a: 115). After the death of the human race, he adds, “God’s earth will then celebrate the great sabbath which modern humanity has hitherto denied it.” This is a striking comment that evokes the question of how seriously Moltmann reckons on the extinction of humanity. Should we conclude that God’s history will be consummated in the great sabbath either with or without human beings? But does his soteriology not rest upon the very idea that the future of glory is secured? This is a tension that pops up more often in Moltmann’s theology. If we want to take seriously the doom scenarios, how sure can we be that everything will eventually turn out alright? In any event, humankind has been warned. For our own sake and that of future generations we should adopt an attitude of “sabbatical restraint,” of a “praising ‘Let it be’” (1989: 65).

From the perspective of this “ecological wisdom” it becomes clear how this sabbath theology is supposed to offer a liberating frame in which disembedded modern human beings may be re-embedded. God sanctified the sabbath, he set it apart from other days—thus humans are called to sanctify it too, a feast that can only be celebrated together with the whole creation. People sanctify the sabbath by abstaining from every kind of produc-

tive work, by recognizing the whole of reality as God's creation, by resting in community with all creation. The celebration of the sabbath leads to "an intensified capacity for perceiving the loveliness of everything—food, clothing, the body and the soul—because existence itself is glorious." Being wholly present in the presence of God, sanctifying the sabbath means "being entirely free from the striving for happiness and from the will for performance and achievement." This is of soteriological significance for modern Westerners. Moltmann suggests that the sabbath, sanctified by God, through *grace*, alone can be viewed as "the Jewish doctrine of justification" (*GiC*: 286). As stated above, it leads beyond a "righteousness of works," because on the sabbath questions about the possibility of "producing" something or about usefulness are forgotten in the face of the beauty of all created things, which have their meaning simply in their very selves (Moltmann claims that when the Reformed catechisms of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries define "the chief end" of human beings as "to glorify God to enjoy him forever," this applies preeminently to the sabbath). The liberating power of the sabbath thus lies in the sanctifying of time, in the "setting apart" of one day. It divides up human time (which, as indicated in §4.2.1, is experienced as an endless repetition of the present moment); it brings "interruption, interval and rhythm" into human temporal experience. Moltmann wants to distinguish the sabbath from all kinds of other festal divisions (which actually do the very same) by claiming that what is special about the sabbath is, on the one hand, the *remembrance* of God's sabbath of creation, from which the command to sanctify the sabbath springs, and, on the other, the *promise* of the eternal sabbath of the *messianic* era (in other words, it qualifies time by constructing an arch between the beginning and the end. Thus the crucial difference from season festivals and other ritualistic interruptions of time is that, although the sabbath day belongs to the cycle of the week (and thus of *human time*), "its nature allows it to break through the cyclical rebirth of natural time by prefiguring the *messianic time*" (italics mine). Human time is placed under the pressure of messianic time. The sabbath day "bursts the law of time." The human sabbath is "the rhythm of eternity in time," "the presence in history of the future world of glory." Thus in an age in which time has been "abolished" (cf. §4.2.1), the sabbath involves a *rehabilitation of time*.

Thus the sabbath stands in time, but it is more than time, "for it both veils and discloses *an eternal surplus of meaning*" (italics mine).

In the sabbath stillness men and women no longer intervene in the environment through their labour. They let it be entirely God's creation. They recognize that as God's property creation is inviol-

able; and they sanctify the day through their joy in existence as God's creatures within the fellowship of creation. (*GiC*: 277)

In the sanctification of time *place* is sanctified. What is celebrated is the peace of the sabbath. This peace encompasses not merely the soul but the whole body, not only individuals but family and people, not only humans but animals as well, not only living things but the whole creation of heaven and earth. Thus, in an age in which space is homogenized, a rehabilitation of time could involve a rehabilitation of space.

I will summarize what we have discussed so far. Explicitly linking the sabbath with creation, Moltmann relates creation to redemption. The sabbath is both the completion of creation and the revelation of God's reposing existence; if combined, both elements point beyond themselves to a future "in which God's creation and his revelation will be one. *That is redemption*" (italics mine). Redemption is both the "eternal sabbath" and the "new creation." God is manifest in the whole creation and the whole creation is the manifestation and mirror of his glory. Thus the sabbath has primarily *retrospective* significance. On the sabbath we can truly say, "*All's well that ends well*" (Moltmann 1989: 86). The sabbath is tuned to thanksgiving for God's gifts (Moltmann compares the sabbath wisdom with Hegel's owl of Minerva: it takes its flight only when the shades of night are gathering). But in its retrospective, completing, and soothing character the sabbath conceals "an unheard-of promise for the future." The sabbath opens the whole creation for the coming kingdom of God. In this messianic and eschatological hope, Israel's sabbath was "futurized and universalized." The whole cosmos came into view. The weekly sabbath corresponds to the sabbath year, in which the land regains its breath; the sabbath year to the Year of Jubilee, in which (as Moltmann says with reference to Is. 61:1-11) the imprisoned will be set free. The image of the sabbath thus pictures the messianic era which involves the liberation of the oppressed and God's righteousness (the Jubilee), the freedom of the land (sabbath year), and rest and peace in the presence of God (sabbath day). Thus *in retrospective* the consummation of the messianic reign is anticipated.

#### b) The Sabbath-Sunday

So far Moltmann has argued for a movement from creation to the eschaton. But, as stated above, there is also *an opposite movement*, from the eschaton to creation. The sabbath is the feast of completion, *Sunday* the "feast of the beginning" (*GiC*: 292ff.). Moltmann takes care not to interpret the Sunday as a Christian variant of the sabbath or to see it as a replacement for it. Sabbath and Sunday are both essential and, if Moltmann's historical analysis is correct, closely connected from the very beginning, at least among Jewish

Christians. After the sabbath celebration, they gathered in their homes as a special Christian community. It was on this evening, Moltmann assumes with W. Rortorf, that they broke bread, while the next morning they met for the celebration of baptism. So, contrary to the separation of sabbath and Sunday in the history of the church (“a visible sign of Christianity’s abandonment of Judaism”), initially they belonged together. In order to give Sunday its real meaning (and not fall into its “paganization”), this original link should be preserved. The Sunday is not the supplanting but the “*messianic extension*” of the sabbath. In Moltmann’s view, Sunday is not merely the anticipation of the eternal sabbath rest but also the “beginning of the new creation.”

This new creation begins with the raising of Christ from the dead, “for the new creation is the world of the resurrection of the dead.” Whereas Israel’s sabbath “turns our gaze back to God’s works in creation and to our own human week-day work,” the Christian feast of the resurrection looks forward to the future of a new creation; whereas the sabbath “confers a share in God’s repose,” the Sunday “confers a share in the power of the new creation of the world;” where the sabbath is preeminently a day of remembrance and thanksgiving, the Sunday is preeminently a day of a new beginning and of hope. On Sunday, “all’s well that begins well.” With approval Moltmann quotes Rosenzweig: “the Christian is the eternal beginner” (Rosenzweig 1954: Part III, Book II, 127). The day of the Christian feast of the resurrection is regarded as “the first day” of the week—thus “every week is set within the vision of the new creation, and is begun in the hope of resurrection and eternal life.”

Thus Moltmann distributes the weight of the “completion” and the “beginning” between the seventh day and the first. That enables him to say that the day of creation’s completion is *open* for the day of new creation, while the first day of the new creation has as its *precondition* the day when the original creation was completed. It is in this way that he constructs an arch between creation and the eschaton liturgically. Creation already implies the consummation in the eschaton (on the sabbath one, so to say, “looks back in anticipation”), while the eschatological freedom is already prefigured in creation (on Sunday one looks forward but from the perspective of what preceded). We already saw that creation and eschaton presuppose each other—the one may not be dissolved into the other. Accordingly, both the sabbath and Sunday are essential.

The practical consequence is that in order to give the Sunday its full weight, Christians must find a way of sanctifying the sabbath. Practically speaking, Moltmann proposes to spend the *eve* of Sunday (Saturday night according to the Jewish division of time) in a “sabbath stillness,” to ex-

perience “something of the rest and happiness of Israel’s sabbath.” After the week’s work, one comes to rest in “God’s presence” if one senses on this evening something of the divine “completion” of creation. One looks back on the week behind, in contemplation. With regard to what has been said about the relation between the sabbath and the earth, this involves an ecological “day of rest,” a day without pollution of the environment, a day, Moltmann suggests, for leaving the car at home, so that nature too can celebrate its sabbath (he does not put things more concretely). “Worship on Sunday morning can then be set wholly in the liberty of Christ’s resurrection for the new creation. This worship should spread the messianic hope which renews life.” In short, “Sunday will again become the authentic Christian feast of the resurrection if we succeed in celebrating a Christian sabbath the evening before.”

I will summarize Moltmann’s view so far. He sketches the contours of a worldview that is liturgical or *sacramental* (cf. 2003a: 34). It combines participation and anticipation, “rest” and hope, enjoying and eagerly looking forward, slowing down and preparing oneself. The surplus of meaning that Christian theology may offer is thus put in a liturgical, sacramental context. In the hustle and bustle of modern life, being pushed along by consumption and the pressure to achieve, humans must tune themselves to the sabbath rhythm, which is, so to say, the heartbeat of creation. That means a different experience of *time*; time is no longer an eternal sequence of similar moments (in which one ought to “realize” oneself) but time qualified by the beneficent interruption of the double moment of looking back, of *Wohlgefallen*, on the one hand, and of looking forward on the other. It also means a different experience of *space*; space is no longer a homogenous expanse of similar places, but creation qualified by the presence of God; creation made into God’s *home*.

Living in accordance with God means living truly human lives, but we can live in accordance with God only if we also live in accordance with nature, in and with which we are made and through which God speaks with us. (1989: 80)

On the day of rest, the “feast of creation,” humans rediscover the beauty and intrinsic value of all things “which they have seen during work only in terms of utility” (1989: 83, cf. *GiC*: 286). In summary, the Sabbath-Sunday involves a different experience of time and space. The salutary reign of God is experienced on this day of rest, when the noise of daily work dies down, when the dominating “reflecting and projecting thinking” comes to rest, when people learn to be silent. Only then, Moltmann writes in a mystical mood, will they hear what they otherwise fail to hear, “the silent presence

of God and his nearness in the stillness all around” (“die schweigende Gegenwart Gottes und seine Nähe in der Stille ringsum”<sup>141</sup>). The sabbath experience of God is for Moltmann comparable to the “gentle whisper” Elijah experienced on Mt. Horeb (I Kings 19:12; he cites Martin Buber’s translation: “die Stimme eines verschwebenden Schweigens” (“the voice of a hovering silence”). The Sabbath-Sunday is thus a consciously created time-out that resembles the rhythm of creation and “plays” with the promise of the eternal Sabbath rest—“instrumental reason is then out of a job and the perceptive reason again perceives the ground of all things” (1989: 86). Liberation is thus not merely conceived in categories of *emancipation* but in categories of “rest,” *embodiment and participation*.

#### 4.4.2. Priests and Priestesses in the Community of Creation

The *telos* of life is, as we have seen, “God’s eternal sabbath, in which the whole creation will find bliss” (*GiC*: xiv). “The Creator, through his Spirit, *dwells in* creation as a whole and in every individual created being by virtue of his Spirit holding them together and keeping them in life.” The *telos* of human life lies in this secret of creation. In God’s “rest,” “God’s ecological strategy” (1989: 66), the creative letting-be, all his creatures can come to rest, at present only in a temporary way but at one point forever. Without the sabbath, Moltmann states straightforwardly, life is meaningless (1989: 85). We have seen that this meaning of life is expressed and celebrated in the liturgical setting of the Sabbath-Sunday. This Sabbath-Sunday offers a transcendental frame in which humans can “identify” themselves, as human beings, as creatures of the earth, as God’s glory on earth. The Sabbath-Sunday celebration means the salutary, liberating interruption of an achievement-oriented life, in which one’s identity is preeminently determined by the sum of one’s successes and failures, i.e. one-sidedly by “having” and not by “being.” As indicated in §4.2.3, Moltmann’s ecological theology contains a significant broadening of the fundamental anthropological insight that humans find themselves in the “game of the totally-other” (§3.2.3). On the Sabbath-Sunday the human being is set in time and space when he takes a “rest” to experience the presence of God, “eternity in time.” This blissful interruption may have consequences for the way humans see themselves and their own role in the “community of creation.” Let us have a closer look at that.

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<sup>141</sup> Moltmann is quoting a famous hymn by the Lutheran mystic Gerhard Tersteegen here: “Gott ist gegenwärtig, alles in uns schweige.” The English translation is the well-known hymn “God himself is with us; let us now adore him.”

In the Sabbath-Sunday lies the point of departure for a critical public theology. It is obvious that it gives restless people a break. However, it is more than a day off in order to be fit again on Monday. On the contrary, the working days serve the holy day, the “feast of creation,” on which people experience a mode of existence free from purposes and benefits and see things in their own beauty. Moltmann is, therefore, worried about the gradual disappearance of the Sunday rest in Western society. In his view, this involves much more than the evaporating of a collective day of rest or the opportunity to gather in the church; it affects the *dignity* of human beings, i.e. their being the *imago dei* (1989: 86ff.). Humans are not only the image of God in their work, their doing, their creative acts (that as well—unemployment is for Moltmann also a violation of human rights) but also and even more so in their resting on the seventh day. In “rest” they “accord with the God who completes, rests, celebrates.” Whoever removes the Sunday rest deprives people of their “right to rest” and accordingly of their being the *imago dei*. It relegates people to a *restless* life, whether as a workaholic or otherwise—at any rate, to a life as a “caricature of God” instead of as his image.

But, one could object, most Western people have plenty of leisure time in which they can find their own way to rest. Moltmann would not be impressed by this protest. Nothing is worse than leisure time when there is nothing to celebrate (cf. §3.2.3), when it is just a break from work (he even remarks that it is dangerous: most of the murders that occur within families are committed on Sunday evening; cf. 1989: 81). Moreover, the sabbath is a communal experience, as the fourth commandment states: “On [the sabbath day] you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates” (Ex. 20.8). On the sabbath all creatures are equally blessed. It is the very *community* of creation that is at stake on sabbath. “The sabbath is celebrated together or not at all” (1989: 82). What is at stake is thus the very essence of being human. By doing ourselves and creation out of the day blessed, sanctified, and hallowed by God, we rob ourselves of our own dignity.

Much more strongly than in his theology of play, the “bodily” existence of humans plays a part (the influence of feminist theology is plain, cf. *EiT*: 268ff.). Moltmann maintains that the divine “ecology” of the sabbath corresponds to a “divine therapy” (1989: 80). Modern human beings must first learn to see themselves in a different way, i.e. not as “halved” human beings but as persons who “are their own body.” In other words, the “viable symbiosis” should be mirrored in the relation between humans and the nature they themselves are—between soul and body (*GiC*: xv). As noted,

the human being is the whole cosmos writ small. In Moltmann's eyes, "the alienation of the human being from his bodily existence must be viewed as the inner aspect of the external ecological crisis of modern industrial society" (*GiC*: 48). We all carry the ecological crisis in our own body. So-called "civilisation diseases" are in fact the symptoms of a sick civilization (1989: 71). Moltmann refers to psychosomatic medicine (*GiC*: 47ff.). In medicine, the hard and fast distinction between the human being and nature cannot be applied to the human being itself, because the patient always remains a person. In medicine the man or woman who is the subject applying the treatment confronts the man or woman who is the subject undergoing that treatment. However much a person is made to become the object of medical treatment, he remains a sick *person* and cannot be degraded to some disease. In Moltmann's eyes, medicine shows that the human being can objectify the bodily existence he *is* into the body he *has*, but he still remains his body and the body is still himself. That has to do with the notion that the concept of "having" must be complemented by the concept of "being." In other words, one must take account of the *totality* of the human person. An important aspect of the large-scale ecological crisis—from an anthropological point of view definitely—is thus the "psychosomatic" crisis of modern humanity. Just like nature as a whole, our own piece of nature has to be controlled. The Cartesian dualism of *res cogitans* and *res extensa* that prompted the modern process of differentiation between humans and nature also leads to our alienation from our own body. Moltmann quotes Franz Baader: "The non-spiritual view of nature which Descartes especially brought into vogue was bound to result in the non-natural view of the mind and spirit, and the godless view of both" (*GiC*: 27; Baader 1958: 49). Moltmann remembers that for his father illness was a matter of will power (1989: 73). His grandmother taught him the following verse:

The war with oneself  
is the hardest war;  
to conquer oneself  
is the finest victory<sup>142</sup>

Thus, the mind rules over the body, the conscious over the unconscious. The main virtue is self-control. Consequently, "receptivity, spontaneity, and wholeness of being" are lost. Humans have become alienated from "the

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<sup>142</sup> *Sich selbst bekriegen - ist der schwerste Krieg - sich selbst besiegen - ist der schönste Sieg.*

rhythms and cycles of their bodies” (*GiC*: 49). For Moltmann, the “external” ecological crisis and the “internal” alienation from bodily existence are so closely related that he can maintain that “if human society is to find a home in the natural environment, the human soul must correspondingly find a home in the bodily existence of the human person” (*GiC*: 49). If person’s own physical nature is not liberated from its subjugation by the subject, nature in the environmental sense will not be liberated either and *vice versa*.

Moltmann acknowledges, by the way, that this dualism of body and soul is of course much older than the modern, Cartesian dualism of *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. It dominates the entire Western theological anthropology from Augustine to Thomas Aquinas (*GiC*: 234ff.) and is largely based on a dualistic thinking practised by the ancient Greek philosophers. Contrary to Eastern theology (the Cappadocians mainly), Western theology arrived at a hierarchical “anthropology of domination” which presupposed a dichotomy between body and soul. For Augustine and Thomas the *imago dei* is the sexless soul that dominates the body (*GiC*: 238). Bodily existence was, positively speaking, of no theological significance at all any longer. In the light of today’s psychosomatic crisis (which requires a view of the “total human person”), Moltmann thinks it necessary to get behind the dichotomy of body and soul that characterizes the Christian tradition (a theological decision with “far-reaching and tragic consequences,” *GiC*: 239) to the biblical (i.e. Old Testament) concept which forbids any spiritualizing of the human subject and instrumentalizing of the human body. Persons do not have a soul but *are* a soul and persons think with their body as well as their mind (*GiC*: 256). Further questions could be asked with regard to biblical anthropology at this point,<sup>143</sup> but I will confine myself to the conclusion that the “holistic” view of the human being is crucial to Moltmann’s ideas about the *telos* of humans in this world.

We can say that Western theological anthropology is characterized by unbalanced growth. Moltmann writes that being human is related one-sidedly to the soul at the cost of the body and to active capacities at the cost of receptive ones (cf. §4.3.1). It could be asked whether this is still the case in our hedonistic culture today, in which bodily appearance is very important. However, that seemingly does not trivialize the point Moltmann

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<sup>143</sup> Steven Bouma-Prediger holds that Moltmann does not follow the Old Testament view either, because for him body and soul are not a unity but “refer to differentiable structures *within* the human person.” Moltmann’s “perichoretic pattern of body and soul” assumes a distinction that is overcome in the spirit. So the spirit becomes the central unifying principle (Bouma-Prediger 1995: 221).

wants to make. His problem is the distinction between body and soul as such. Whether this leads to a spiritualization of one's being human at the cost of the body or a materialization by body (as in present-day television programmes on plastic surgery), the point is that humans try to fix their humanity and self-esteem in categories of "having," not of "being." Over against this, Moltmann proposes that being truly human is a *gift* (cf. §3.2.3). God intended humans for something and this precedes everything that they themselves make of their lives. This intention is, as we have seen, the *love* of the triune God who seeks fellowship with his creation. Being human is, moreover, related to both body and soul and is only experienced in relationship with fellow humans and in community with the entire creation.

Thus, only as complete human beings, i.e. as soul and body, do humans arrive at their *telos*, i.e. being the *gloria dei*. The liberation of humans is thus expressed in categories of embodiment; accordingly, the meaning of their life is grasped in terms of receptivity and participation. However, for many people it has become impossible to see their life as a "gift". For the sake of clarity we must stress that for Moltmann this acceptance of oneself in categories of "being" is not the same as accepting one's fate. His anthropology seems first of all a critique of the modern achievement society. Humans are not truly human—or, theologically speaking, the *imago dei*—because of what they do and achieve but because of what they are (handicapped fellow humans are for Moltmann the image of God in the fullest sense of the word, *GiC*: 233<sup>144</sup>). But what they are is what they are *intended* to be, the *gloria dei*. This assumes an eschatological perspective. What humans are intended to be is not something they already possess or can possess but a promised future to be experienced in both *anticipation and participation* here and now. Thus the religious identity of human beings is embedded in the tension-filled arch between creation and eschaton, the broken world and the glorious future (which I outlined in §4.3). Human beings are seen within the framework of the sacramental worldview that relates the two fundamental attitudes of contemplation and anticipation. What is said about the final destiny of humans (raised with Christ to glory) is already implied in creation and what is said about the origin (humans made in the image of God) is consummated in the end. Thus humans participate in the trinitarian

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<sup>144</sup> Moltmann dissociates himself in this way from, for instance, Helmut Thielicke, who called the severely handicapped person an "off-duty image of God," an "*Ebenbild Gottes außer Diensten*" (*GiC*: 350 n.32; Thielicke 1979: 63). J.S. Reinders has sharply criticized such a view (which relates the *imago dei* rather exclusively to human capacities) with regard to mentally challenged people (e.g. Reinders 2000, mainly pp.74ff.).

community on its way to future consummation. The starting point for religious anthropology, consequently, does not lie in human *capacities*, in human agency, but in the *relationship* with fellow humans, creation, and God. In contrast to today's achievement society the *telos* of human life is thus defined not in categories of "having" but in those of "being;" it is not a *habitus* but a gratuitous *relation*. Moltmann thus acknowledges the fundamental ambiguity of human existence. Over against the modern achievement society he emphasizes that true humanity is not what we make of it but what we already are. At the same time this is not merely accepting our fate, What We Have Become, thus trivializing the pain of people who cannot accept this as a "gift." Moltmann's writings show that our "identity," i.e. the "mediation" between what we want to be and what we have become, lies in the eschatological history of the triune God. Truly being human, being the *imago dei*, can be described only in this rather mystical way: it means being embedded in the trinitarian community of love and fellowship that moves towards final consummation (cf. §4.3.3). If I understand Moltmann correctly, understanding our existence as a gift means that accepting that we, among all creatures, *have been "identified"* with this trinitarian community.

If the eternal Sabbath, the future "feast of creation," is the goal and meaning of life, if the Trinity is an "open fellowship" dwelling in creation and moving towards final consummation, and if thus all creatures will become what they are intended to be in this future glory and already now anticipate that by participating in this indwelling of the triune God, then the question arises as to how human beings differ, theologically speaking, from other creatures. If the *imago dei* is relational, determined by the relationship to God and creation, is there still any reason not to refer to all creatures as the *imago dei*? As we have seen, Moltmann holds fast to the idea that human beings are somehow unique (thus claiming that the *imago dei* is a title reserved exclusively for human beings), be it that this uniqueness must be seen in the perspective of their being part of nature, their being the *imago mundi* (cf. §4.3.4). This uniqueness is basically related to their special task and responsibility in this world. Unavoidably, Moltmann thus has to smuggle certain notions of "doing" and certain human *capacities* into his concept of the *imago dei*.<sup>145</sup> As already described, he provides a theological and a scientific argument to distinguish human beings from the rest of creation.

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<sup>145</sup> Of course, the following question arises immediately: if the *imago dei* is somehow based upon certain capacities (reason, language, moral agency, or whatever), are people who lack these capacities then not the *imago dei* in the full sense? This is the difficulty that Thieliicke faced.

They were the last creatures to be created and called to name the animals, etc. (the theological argument; cf. §4.3.4) and the complex system “human being” contains within itself all simpler systems in the evolution of life (the scientific argument). On this basis he attributes to humans a specific role. As I understand Moltmann, humans are capable of understanding the divine history that occurs between creation and the eschaton and thus they can consciously look backward and forward, remember and anticipate. In other words, humans are creatures who are not shut up in their environment; they can arise above the mere anthropocentric and think “theocentrically” (unlike tortoises which, supposedly, can only think tortoise-centrally). Therefore, they are called to glorify God and celebrate the feast of creation not only *with* all other creatures but also *on behalf* of them. In Moltmann’s own words, they are the *priests* and *priestesses* of creation (2003a: 34; cf. *GiC*: 190).

This concept of human beings remarkably resembles the emperor in traditional China (cf. §4.1). The difference is that Moltmann presupposes, so to say, a “priesthood of all believers.” Moreover, their task is not an “active non-intervention” in order to preserve the balance as it is but an anticipation of what will be. I will summarize what Moltmann writes about the meaning of human beings for creation and about what they are “destined or called to be” (mainly *GiC*: 189f.). As a matter of fact, humans are intended to play a *double role*. The human being is both the *imago mundi* and the *imago dei*, as argued in §4.3.4 (*GiC*: 190). For Moltmann this entails, on the one hand, that humans be aware of the plain fact that they are embedded in the natural world. Therefore, modern Westerners should replace their “metaphysics of subjectivity” (which has objectified the natural world, thus sanctifying its domination) by a “relational metaphysics based upon the mutual relativity of human beings in the world” (*GiC*: 50). This involves the acknowledgement that—as noted in §4.3.4—we are creatures of the earth (*adam* formed from *adamah*). Moltmann suggests that it is liberating to see ourselves as “nothing other than one of nature’s products.” But beyond that, he stresses the great responsibility of being “the highest of evolutionary products” (scientific and biblical arguments are mingled). As the image of the world, human beings stand before God as representing (*stellvertretend*) all other creatures, living, speaking and acting on their behalf. They are “priestly creations and eucharistic beings,” interceding before God for the community of creation in which they live and of which they are part. On the other hand, human beings are the *imago dei*, be it such “in progress.” I repeat that this does not refer to a certain property and that it concerns the *whole person*, not just the soul. Basically, it means that humans are God’s “proxy,” God’s counterpart in creation. That entails that they represent

God's glory and will, interceding for God before the community of creation. They are called to cultivate and protect the garden (*GiC*: 188; cf. 30). This "strange double function" of standing before God on behalf of creation and before creation on behalf of God is, in summary, humans' *priestly calling*. Consequently, "in a Christian doctrine of creation human beings must neither disappear into the community of creation, nor must they be detached from that community." They are the *imago mundi* and the *imago dei* at the same time. Thus Moltmann intends to go beyond a "one-with-nature-primativism which completely subsumes humanity into creation" and "a brave-new-world-technocism which lifts humanity completely out of creation" (so Bouma-Prediger 1995: 228).

Moltmann leaves pregnant questions concerning this "priesthood" of human beings unanswered. For instance, why do other creatures actually need such a representative if God is in all his creatures? And is this priestly function only related to the Sabbath-Sunday celebration or are humans "priests and priestesses" during working days as well? In what other ways are they priests and priestesses? Moltmann acknowledges that human beings simply have to intervene in nature in order to survive. Nature is not self-evidently a "home" for them (*e.g.* *GiC*: 46f.). Outside the Western world, relatively speaking, people experience the whims of nature more directly than within the Western world. At the same time, however, the consequences of recent human exploitation of nature have become most sharply visible here. These world-threatening ecological disasters are manifestly the perspective from which Moltmann's image of priests must be viewed. One cannot deny that it seems indeed liberating for both humans and nature if humans learn to seek habitation in the rhythms and cycles of nature, thus anticipating the messianic future. However, that such anticipation also demands an—unavoidable—active and responsible intervention in nature remains theologically understated. I will come back to this tension between activity and receptivity in §5.2.7.

#### 4.4.3. Unity in Diversity and Diversity in Unity: Charismatic Fellowship

We have seen the sacramental framework in which humans are embedded (§4.4.1) and what, within this frame, their position is in this world (§4.4.2). We must now ask what this entails for the role and position of Christians in our society. In Moltmann's public theology, the relevance of Christian theology is indicated at different levels which are dealt with rather indiscriminately:

1. The way of life within Christian congregations and smaller groups (families for instance).
2. The role of local congregations in society.

3. The role of the church as ecumenically united church in the world.

They are all rooted in the sacramental worldview that is Moltmann's alternative for the "religion" of modern society.

In CHAPTER THREE we have seen how the issue of *plurality* entered Moltmann's theology. Contextual theologies confronted him with the fundamental polyphony of perspectives *within Christianity itself*. His acknowledgement of secular worldviews (Marxism notably) and their perspectives was already older and in *CPS* the world religions came into view for a moment (*CPS*: 150ff.). But, as in most theological publications, attention for the radical plurality of present-day society with its multifaith character is of recent date. Evidently, Moltmann concludes, the role of the Christian faith in Western societies has changed radically. The separation of church and state and the right to religious liberty have finally turned the old denominationally unified "religious" states of the Christian world into multi-faith societies (1999a: 231 ff.). For clarity's sake, Moltmann does not regret this development as such. He affirms that all people have the right to join a religious group or to leave it and that all religious communities are to be treated equally within a certain frame of reference (most notably, the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*). He remarks that this general frame of reference has considerably modified the life of religious communities. He applauds the fact that they have lost their total claim on society and that religious participation is no longer a civic duty but a free choice. But, to his annoyance, he notes how in the meantime religious life has become "a spiritual offer in the service sector of the market society's supermarket economy." Spiritual resources are offered for "the mastery of contingencies." He writes:

The earlier absolute, in our case the Christian claim in a Christian world, has been replaced by the secular world's claim to religious pluralism, which is maintained just as exclusively. It is impermissible to make anything absolute—except pluralism.

Religions are tolerated, but, as Moltmann says with reference to Herbert Marcuse, it is the "repressive tolerance of the consumer society" (1999a: 233). The Christian religion processed for the religious market of this multifaith society is "a Christianity without the expectation of the kingdom of God." The "repressive tolerance" turned Christian faith communities into a "personal 'do as you please'."

Here we touch upon the problem of universality (cf. §5.1). In a debate with Volf on (post)modernity and theology Moltmann remarks:

Perhaps I belong to the people whom my friend Johann Baptist Metz calls “the last of the universalists” .... After that come the “post-modern pluralists”. But I believe that for the sake of the one God and his one, coming kingdom, and his one single righteousness, I have to try to think universally - to be catholic, in the best sense of the word. This thinking leads me to a “public” theology which discerns the common dangers which affect us all in a world which is increasingly becoming a single world—discerns them in order to establish hope in God at the place of nothingness. (1999b: 264)

Moltmann thus sees two alternatives: a universalist position or a post-modern pluralism. He remains a “universalist” for two reasons: the universality of the kingdom of God and the “common dangers” affecting us all. His universalistic thinking stems from the definition of public theology that he holds. Public theology that gives up its universal character loses its public relevance. “Its public character is constitutive for theology, for the kingdom of God’s sake” (1999a: 5). It is a theology that is “public, critical and prophetic” both in its complaint to and its hope in God (1999a: 5). For Moltmann the mere conviction that a *theologia publica* should become involved in the public square means that it thinks about “what is of general concern” in the light of the “hope in Christ for the kingdom of God,” that it becomes “political” in the name of the poor and the marginalized, and that it thinks critically about the religious and moral values of society and present its reflections as a “reasoned position.” In his view, we are facing a worldwide catastrophe and rapidly moving towards the point of no return (cf. §4.1). In the negative sense, humanity has entered the age of a single humanity. “Now it has a future only in the singular” (1999b: 264). This is literally a matter of life and death. This explains his problems with postmodern pluralism. Accepting the restrictions of the Western multireligious society (which are, as he holds, welcomed by “certain church leaders and theologians”) would mean giving up the public relevance of theology and with this the concern for the future of this world (1999a: 5). Therefore, theology must refuse “to fall into the modern trap of pluralism, where it is supposed to be reduced to its particular sphere.” Although everyone can and must develop liberating perspectives within their own context, the universal horizon is the messianic ideal of peace, righteousness, and the wholeness of creation. Theologians should, therefore, claim their position in the public debate, a position that “has to be defended against both atheists and fundamentalists” (1999a: 5).

The universal horizon of theology is the kingdom of God. In the biblical writings, Moltmann claims, the kingdom of God is “the broadest horizon of hope for the *general well-being* of the world” (1999a: 352). Therefore, he again dismisses any churchification or christianization of the world. The aim of his public theology is “life” as such. The differences with his earlier kingdom of God theology are, however, remarkable. Although Christ is the “gateway to the Trinity” (cf. §4.3.2), *pneumatological* motives are dominant when he describes the public relevance of his theology of human participation in the movement of the Triune God (in *SL* obviously but also in e.g. *GiC*). Of course, Christological notions such as hope of resurrection and fellow-suffering do play a significant part. However, in describing the role of the church, for instance, the emphasis lies no longer on liberation as emancipation from unjust structures (although this is certainly not trivialized). This seems embedded in the broader idea of liberation as *embodiment* in the network of relations that is already given in nature, in the “eschatological Springtime of the whole creation.” In a nutshell, Moltmann’s approach is characterized by the motto: “To everyone their own, and all hand in hand for the kingdom of God!” (*SL*: 194). This kingdom is “as brilliantly variegated as the creation which we know now,” so the consequence is not homogeneity but “unity in diversity and diversity in unity.”

The translation of Moltmann’s anthropology as sketched so far into a relevant Christian presence can be summarized in two central notions: *fellowship* and *charismata*. From this it becomes clear that a relevant theology acknowledges and fosters a unity-in-diversity and a diversity-in-unity. “Ecumenism” is, for Moltmann, the keyword to describe this. I will first elaborate on both notions and then analyze what it involves, according to Moltmann, for the four levels I have distinguished.

1. Throughout this chapter the *theological* importance of the term *fellowship* has become evident. In Moltmann’s social doctrine of the Trinity, it refers first to the intratrinitarian relationship and secondly to the interpersonal community that mirrors this divine fellowship as well as to the *perichoretic* relation between the divine and the human. True freedom, it was argued, is unhindered solidarity and open community with other human beings, one’s own body, with nature and with God (cf. 1979a: 37). Such “fellowship” (“church” in concrete) “happens” in the space in which the whole Trinity dwells. Fellowship, Moltmann writes,

does not take by force and possess. It liberates, and draws others into the relationships that are essentially its own. Fellowship means opening ourselves for one another, giving one another a share in ourselves.

It thus creates respect for one another and it lives in reciprocal participation and from mutual recognition. Fellowship, he argues, “comes into being when people who are different have something in common, and when what is in common is shared by different people” (*SL*, 217). In other words, both unity and diversity are of vital importance for genuine fellowship.

In my view, the main thing he aims to foster is egalitarian communities. This makes it necessary to undermine epistemological, clerical and political structures that lead to hierarchical orders of subordination and power, authority and obedience and that obstruct participatory, communal, and democratic structures, which, as Moltmann implies, are more humane (*TK*: 196). As stated above, he claims that it is the “monotheistic” image of God that legitimizes hierarchical, oppressive structures (cf. §4.3.1).

It is only when the doctrine of the Trinity vanquishes the monotheistic notion of the great universal monarch in heaven, and his divine patriarchs in the world, that earthly rulers, dictators and tyrants cease to find any justifying religious archetypes any more. (*TK*: 197)

Moltmann thus suggests a close connection between the way humans experience and depict God and the way they see and arrange their community. Contrary to unitarian concepts of fellowship, trinitarian thinking offers a model for dealing with diversity, because it is inherently critical of powers that abolish the differences and regard unity in terms of “integrating and integral thinking” (*GiC*: 4), embodiment and participation. Instead of the mechanical modern worldview it is “ecological” and instead of patriarchal structures it fosters new egalitarian, democratic forms of social organization, based on a “comradely community” (*GiC*: 320). “The trinitarian principle replaces the principle of power by the principle of concord. Authority and obedience are replaced by dialogue, consensus and harmony” (*TK*: 202).

The ideal of trinitarian fellowship is not limited to the church. We saw how Moltmann applied the notion of *perichoresis* to the relation between God, humanity and creation as a whole. The experience of God reaches out *beyond* experience of the self and of sociality, and becomes experience of nature too. Experiences of nature are inseparably bound up with experiences of the self and the experience of sociality and are a constitutive element in these experiences. Moltmann writes:

Anyone who disparages this community of creation compared with a community of soul is quenching God’s creative Spirit and denying him the fellowship which he seeks with all created being, so as to redeem them.

In other words, anyone who neglects the “it” in favour of the “I-Thou relationship” overlooks the essentially material nature of the salvation that heals and saves. Consequently, bodily and sensuous experiences and experiences of other creatures enjoy the same rank in experience of God as experience of the self or the social experience of love.

One may cast some doubt with regard to the axiom of a correspondence between the image of God and the way human relations are organized (such doubt will reappear). The least we can conclude is that for Moltmann it is impossible to arrive at an egalitarian human community as long as it is required that it correspond to a monotheistic God or, as he adds, to a trinitarian image in which one of the three Persons is dominant (either the monarchy of God the Father or of Christ the Son as in sixteenth-century Reformation movements, or the Holy Spirit as in today’s Pentecostal movements, *EiT*: 328ff.).

2. Crucial for the development of Moltmann’s public theology is, I think, the statement that the Holy Spirit descended “*on all flesh*” (*SL*: 242). If my interpretation is correct, this is believed to ground both the unity and the diversity of all beings. On the one hand, all creatures *differ* because of the multiplicity of gifts, *charismata*. Moltmann not only has in mind the variety of talents, possibilities, and potentialities; being a woman or a man is also a charisma. The fellowship of the Spirit is the free space in which the manifold aspects of life—understood as the “many-faced gifts of the Spirit”—can be awakened and grow. “Everyone according to his abilities, everyone according to his needs” (*SL*: 193). Diversity is valuable in itself. That means that every attempt to reduce the many to homogeneity should be undermined and that *freedom* must be guaranteed to let everyone’s *charismata* blossom. On the other hand, all creatures are united by the power of the one Spirit who offered the multifarious gifts. This is not the unity of the one God, the one pope, the one faith but a unity through *love*. Thus the “power of unity” is *love*; the “power of diversity” is *freedom*.

Here it is once again significant to stress that Moltmann has the whole creation in view. The Spirit has descended on all flesh and, therefore, the *charismata* are not limited to the church but given to humanity as a whole and even to the whole creation. We may conclude that thus being a hippopotamus is a charisma and so is being a rabbit, a mussel or an orange tree. In saying this I do not mean to ridicule Moltmann’s view but to sharpen it (I will ignore the (antropocentric) question of how one is to imagine the *charismata* of a malaria mosquito or an influenza virus). If I understand Moltmann correctly, “charisma” is basically that what one is *intended to be*, i.e. that what one potentially is, what one in the here and now can be in a

provisional way by participation in God's liberating indwelling and what one will be in the future of God's kingdom. Exploring one's charisma is arriving at "real life."<sup>146</sup> From this perspective Moltmann can say that the fellowship of the Spirit is the unity-in-diversity and diversity-in-unity of all creatures.<sup>147</sup>

The fellowship of the Spirit or the *charismatic* community is thus essentially a "unity in diversity and a diversity in unity" (SL, 193). Moltmann maintains that in this fellowship, foreshadowing eschatological freedom, creatures do not simply live alongside one another as isolated beings nor are they given over to an overriding homogeneity or dissolved in "an oceanic, cosmic feeling of symbiosis" (SL: 226). For Moltmann, the problem of unity and diversity is a matter of *love* and *freedom*. Both are essential characteristics of the Holy Spirit and its live-giving fellowship:

The fellowship of the Holy Spirit is experienced by those who know it as both *the love* that binds and *the freedom* which allows everything to arrive at itself, in its own unique nature. Love confers that which is held in common, freedom opens up the scope of what is individual and singular. (SL: 220)

Love and freedom (or sociality and individuality or community and singularity) are, I conclude, both equally important and indispensable. "Without freedom, love crushes the diversity of what is individual; without love, freedom destroys what is shared and binds us together." In the fellowship of the Spirit they are not opposites but dialectically related to each other. "Community which serves life" can *only* be understood as integrating and differentiating at the same time, as creating unity in diversity and making diversity in unity. To be a community involves not only the uniting of what is different but also the differentiation of the One. As I understand it, this fellowship of the Spirit is not a static equilibrium of all things in their diver-

<sup>146</sup> Theologically speaking, it could be asked whether one may stretch the Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit in such a way that "life in the Spirit" becomes identical with "life as it is meant to be" and the New Testament notion of "charisma" with that what every being is "intrinsically." I will leave aside such exegetical and dogmatic questions without trivializing their importance.

<sup>147</sup> Thus Moltmann seems to find an entry to current debates about the *intrinsic dignity* of nature. Moreover, it may be a theological point of departure for entering the current discussion on *biodiversity*. In this light he develops his ideas on the *rights* of creation (an extension of his earlier concept of human rights; cf. Moltmann 1995, cf. *WJC*: 305ff.).

sity but a process (*SL*: 225). It is, so to say, a unity-in-diversity-and-diversity-in-unity-in-progress—a progress with a purpose, a *telos*: the eternal sabbath in which all creatures come to “rest” in and through one another in a world transformed into the *Heimat* of God, the definitive kingdom of freedom.

One could object that although he intends to do justice to diversity, Moltmann only acknowledges others within his universalistic scheme which is unavoidably a *homogenous* utopia (according to their own way of thinking, Buddhists do not “work for the kingdom of God”). On the basis of *SL* Moltmann could counter this critique by pointing out that the *telos* he has in mind is not something extrinsic to all creatures but the realization of *what they intrinsically are*. The kingdom of God is nothing else than the recreation of all things, the renewal of everything that exists (*SL*: 194). The kingdom of God is identical with “life.” Due to his pneumatological broadening, he can do more justice to differentiation. Life as such has a common purpose—the messianic future community of all living beings—but every single being is made for this purpose in its own particular way (he does, after all, argue that creation and eschaton are closely connected; cf. §4.3). I will come back to this issue of universality in §5.1.

What are the concrete consequences for a liberating Christian presence in society? Moltmann follows up his thoughts in *CPS* (*SL*: 338 n. 19). In the fellowship of the Spirit, he writes, two movements are “rhythmically related” to one another, namely the gathering of the Christians in the church and the mission or sending out of the church to Christians in the world. These belong together “like breathing in and breathing out” (*SL*: 234). By “Christians in the world,” he writes, “we mean the church as it is dispersed in families, vocations, work and friendships” (*SL*: 234). Thus he acknowledges the relatively independent and differentiated “spheres of life” and their different callings. We noticed this already in his earliest writings. Bonhoeffer’s doctrine of the *mandates* was important (cf. §2.3.2). There is a difference or, better, a broadening. The theological basis for the acknowledgment of the different spheres is no longer only the universal reign of the cosmic Christ but now also the conviction that the Spirit has descended “on all flesh” and is thus also present and working outside and apart from the church (Moltmann draws close to the Dutch neo-Calvinist argument for “sphere sovereignty”). This relativization of the central importance of the church as institute is also indicated by apostolate theology (cf. §2.3). Whereas Moltmann cited Van Ruler and Hoekendijk explicitly in *CPS*, now their influence is only implicitly noticeable in expressions such as “the important thing today is to orientate the church toward the kingdom of God” (*SL*: 248) and to register the “wider operation of the Spirit in the world” (*SL*:

231). Both the theology of the mandates and apostolate theology are constitutive for the perspective from which Moltmann views the place of the church in society, with regard to both its social organization at different levels as well as its position over against other groups such as “natural communities” (families), voluntary groups, and self-help groups. I will briefly demonstrate how his renewed—i.e. pneumatologically broadened—public theology makes itself felt at the three levels I indicated at the beginning of this subsection.

1. For Moltmann the archetype of true fellowship is the first Christian community as described in Acts 4:32-37. This “early Christian communism” was not just a social programme, he holds, but basically “the expression of the new trinitarian experience of community” (*EiT*: 331). Characteristic of this “communism” was not merely that people put community above the individual and his private possessions but mainly that they no longer needed these possessions to *secure* their existence (cf. §4.3.4).

In the Spirit of resurrection their fear of death disappeared, and with it their greed for life. That is why they had “enough,” “more than enough.” In this community the competitive struggle which turns people into lonely individuals is ended, and the social chill of a heartless world vanishes.

Of course, Moltmann knows that this early Christian communism did not last very long, but he refuses to admit, apparently, that it was and is just utopianism. Christian monastic orders, the radical Protestant communities of the Hutterites and the Koinonia Farms, communities of Mennonites and Moravians and also Latin American base communities serve as historical evidence. A striking example of such a monastic order is the order of the Trinitarians he once came across in Granada, Spain (the *Ordo Trinitatis redemptionis captivorum*, *EiT*: 324). Ever since its foundation in the twelfth century, the monks of this order have devoted themselves to the liberation of prisoners (originally Christians in Moorish prisons). The arms on their church in Rome, Moltmann tells us in *Experiences in Theology*, show Christ sitting on the throne of his glory while on his right and left hand are prisoners with broken chains—on the one side a (white) prisoner with a cross in his hand (assumably a Christian), on the other a (black) prisoner without a cross. Christ frees them both, Moltmann comments, and takes them into fellowship with him and each other. “Trinity,” he concludes, was the name of an “original liberation theology more than eight hundred years ago.” But also today liberation theology is essentially trinitarian, as the words on posters of a meeting in Trindade, Brazil, 1986, demonstrate: *The*

*Trinity is the Best Community* (*EiT*: 331). There is thus a clear causal link between trinitarian faith and egalitarian communities.<sup>148</sup>

2. The local congregation has a responsibility in and for society. What, from the perspective of the trinitarian theology outlined in this chapter, is the position of local communities and how they should relate to their larger groups? For Moltmann, it is a denial of the work of the Spirit *extra muros ecclesiae* to neglect the work of peace movements, environmental groups, Third World committees. From the perspective of his doctrine of Spirit—descended on all flesh!—such groups should be accepted as “life-furthering communities” (*SL*: 231). The problem that still bothers Moltmann, apparently, is the fact that such groups have a hard time in finding acceptance in mainstream churches. As in *CG* he notes the tension between identity (does our faith not become politicized?) and relevance (does it not become petrified? Cf. §3.2.1). The advantage of his pneumatological approach is that he can go beyond the Christological paradigm of emancipation and thus acknowledge the ideas of others, or some of them, without incorporating them in his own story of liberation. At the same time, a congregation does not need to be transformed into a peace, environmental or Third World group. Not everyone shares the same vision and that is not necessary. A local congregation consists of people “who think differently about justice, peace and the integrity of creation—or who do not think about

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<sup>148</sup>On this point exegetical and historical questions may be raised with respect to such a link. First, Moltmann’s exegesis of the few Bible texts he mentions seems hardly convincing to prove that the first Christians had a trinitarian understanding of God that was already developed in such a way that it could serve as the foundation of their communal life. To give one example, in various places he quotes John 17:21, the high priestly prayer (*EiT*: 328, *SL*: 219): “That they may all be one, even as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.” According to Moltmann’s reading, the fellowship of the disciples with one another is intended to correspond to the reciprocal dwelling of the Father and the Son in the Spirit. At least, “so we may be permitted to add” (*EiT*: 328). But why we are permitted to do so is not based on exegetical arguments. Secondly, historical references seem disputable as well at this point. The fact that the vast majority of Christian churches do not at all resemble the first Christian community, *even though they entertain(ed) a trinitarian concept of God*, could be countered by disqualifying their trinitarianism as a monolithic distortion of original trinitarian thinking. More problematic is that, conversely, the *unitarianism* of, for instance, the Mennonites—mentioned by Moltmann here—raises the question of whether a trinitarian basis is needed for egalitarian fellowship.

them at all.” That is no problem, “for they do not come to church in order to meet people who have similar views about political and social questions.” It is not necessary and not even desirable that a local congregation as a whole becomes a congregation especially committed to peace or a Third World group (social harmony is at least of equal importance).

Social movements and churches can thus co-exist (Moltmann mentions Greenpeace as an example). Nevertheless, he views this coexistence within a universal horizon. He has two reasons, as we have seen: the universality of the kingdom of God (cf. *SL*: 243) and the universality of life-threatening dangers. He writes that there are just “two ways of access to the community of Christ” (*SL*: 242): through faith in Christ (mediated through Word, sacrament, and fellowship) and through “shared work for the kingdom of God.” The groups must be recognized and respected “in the light of this wider horizon:” they are also doing “Kingdom of God work.” They are linked not only by a common concern but also “in experience of the life-creating Spirit” who has descended on all flesh (*SL*: 242).

Here the groups make the churches sensitive to the perils of the present, and make many Christians feel uneasy, so that they cease to accept poverty and misery as a matter of course. And the churches for their part can give these groups protection, and make their concerns more general, so that the groups do not turn into sects. (*SL*: 242)

In sum, Moltmann thus states that churches can acknowledge, appreciate and support action groups without incorporating them or becoming action groups themselves. In the locality of one’s neighbourhood, one can work together for the universal kingdom of God and face the universal problems of this world (as he learned from the Greens: “Think globally, act locally” (in Brugsma 1987: 23)). Such a cooperation is in his eyes far more fruitful than “many pastoral letters and memoranda” (*SL*: 246).

3. That does not mean that churches should be active only in “narrow local contexts.” Ecumenical contacts are necessary since no congregation has a monopoly on the truth and since most conflicts transcend the local context. Because of the military, ecological and social dangers in the world, we have entered an “age of world-wide humanity” (*SL*: 247f.). The dangers threaten us all and thus we have entered the “ecumenical age.” Joint efforts are demanded.

At this point the world religions come into view (1999a: 243). Does a pneumatological theology of the religions (*theologia religionum*) have the potential to go beyond the pitfalls of exclusivism and postmodern Western pluralism? Moltmann admits that he feels torn by such a dilemma (1999a:

226). In India, standing in front of the Vishnu temple in Sriganar or the Jain sanctuary on Mount Abu, he found himself asking:

do I as a Christian really want these religious marvels to disappear and to be replaced everywhere by Christian churches? And yet, does this mean that I don't want all these people to hear the gospel of Christ, and experience the Spirit of life, and hope for the new creation and the fullness of life? (1999a: 226)

The *pluralist* position means, for Moltmann, “to relinquish Christ’s command to go out and preach the gospel, and to my utmost through interfaith dialogue for religious tolerance and understanding between the religions,” while the *exclusivist* position means to “reject the dialogue, and devote myself entirely to mission.” He suggests that this contradiction between dialogue and mission is surpassed in a charismatic theory of religion. As I understand it, the purpose of such a theology is not primarily to mark off one’s own identity or to learn to know others better (although both are important and should reinforce each other<sup>149</sup>). But the higher goal of “the future of *life*” (italics mine).

To make himself clear, Moltmann distinguishes between *direct* and *indirect* dialogue. The direct dialogue is the religious dialogue between so-called world religions. The Christian-Jewish dialogue is, for Moltmann, the most promising, since both religions share—as Martin Buber put it—“a single book and a single hope” (1999a: 236). And with Muslims Christians have “a shared father in faith” in Abraham. Dialogue with Eastern religions he regards as exceedingly difficult. At any rate, most cases of interfaith dialogue are, in his eyes, characterized by “imbalances.” The first is a manifest one-sidedness. Moltmann knows “a well-known pioneer” of Christian-Jewish dialogue in Germany who concluded after twenty years: “The Jews never asked me anything” (Moltmann 1999a: 235). For Moltmann, this is typical:

We all know the dialogues which run according to the following pattern: A Christian puts questions—a rabbi, a mullah or a swami readily replies. But they ask nothing on their own account, because they aren’t interested in Christianity. At most they may make critical remarks about the decadence of the Western world, which they take to be the Christian world.

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<sup>149</sup>Moltmann (1989: 228) writes: “It is only from the other that we become aware of what we ourselves are, and sure of our identity.”

Often self-criticism is foreign to the dialogue partners of Western Christians, while the latter are often too much veiled in an arbitrary pluralism to be a serious dialogue partner.

The second imbalance is that apparently only minorities are interested in public dialogue. At least so it is in the examples Moltmann gives. Within Christian countries, he remarks, Muslims are interested in dialogue and demand tolerance for Islam, while they notoriously deny such tolerance in their own “house of Islam.” Moltmann remembers that the Archbishop of Canterbury told him that he had to change on the plane when he once visited Riyadh (apparently because religious symbols other than the Muslim were forbidden in the “public domain”).

The problem in Moltmann’s eyes is that such a “direct” dialogue is free of obligations. Dialogue has no higher goal than itself; “in interfaith dialogue faith the common path is also the goal” (1999a: 234). In Western countries—developing multifaith societies—such a dialogue for the sake of dialogue (the deepening of mutual understanding for instance) may be helpful and even practicable, but in view of the problems at a worldwide level it is not sufficient. Therefore, he pleads firmly for an indirect dialogue at global forum conferences, at conferences on the environment, on “Earth Day.” The underlying concern of indirect dialogue is “a shared perception of the perils in which the world stands today, and the common search for ways out of their perils” (1999a: 237). Religions do not talk about themselves but about *a third factor*. Moltmann points primarily to the ecological crisis, which in his view requires religions “to return to earth” (therefore, Moltmann for his part wants to include “the Mayas from Central America, Africans from the Cameroons, and Aborigines from Australia”).

Thus far on (direct and indirect) dialogue. Christian presence includes, as indicated, another aspect, namely *mission*. Obviously, Moltmann acknowledges the bad experiences of this world with classical imperialist Christian mission, but he cannot cast the idea of “mission” aside (as many Christians advocate). According to his analysis, the different forms of Christian mission in history (the spread of the Christian imperium, the spread of Christian churches, and the nineteenth-century evangelization of humanity) were all messianically and apocalyptically motivated (1999a: 238f.; cf. § 4.2.1). They start from something which exists only in *particularist* form and then try to *globalize* it. Moltmann claims to do it the other way round. This reveals the *pneumatological broadening* of his theology. Although the Christ event remains decisive as a particular event announcing the universal messianic future, the church, as the vehicle of this future, no longer has to bring this message of the kingdom to the world by including others in this movement from the one particularity to the one universal focus—it can

proclaim the kingdom of God within the universal horizon of the Spirit who has descended on all flesh.

If we understand mission, not as an aggressive appropriation of the whole, but as an invitation to God's future, then we begin with that universal future of the nations and the earth, and give it present force in the gospel of hope and in the service of love. We invite people of other religions and ideologies to work together for that future which we try to imagine in the symbols of the kingdom of God, eternal life, and the new creation of heaven and earth. The religions and cultures of other people will not thereby be destroyed; they will be *interpenetrated by the Spirit of hope, and opened for the future of the world.* (1999a: 239f.; italics mine)

In Christian mission the concern is thus not a religion but "life."

The mission to which God sends men and women means inviting *all* human beings, the religious and the non-religious, to life, to the affirmation of life, to the protection of life, to shared life, and to eternal life. (1999a: 243)

Thus Moltmann assumes that the Christian faith is not one religion among many others but the window to "true life." "Jesus didn't bring a new religion into the world. He brought new life .... Christ is the divine Yes to life" (1999a: 241). In theological terms, mission—*mission dei*—means God's sending. What God sends is the Spirit, who is the life-giver and is, therefore, called *the Spirit of life or the source of life*. Christian mission therefore *invites* people to a "fulfilled life—the wholly and entirely living life—the shared life—the eternal life—the fulness of live" (and apparently, Christianity knows how people can attain this "fulfilled life," each in his or her own way, cf. §5.1).

This sketches the relevance of the Christian faith at three levels. It is remarkable how the historical, prophetic line in Moltmann's earlier view of Christian presence—presupposing a movement from the particular Christ event to the universal messianic future—is broadened by a universalist pneumatological perspective. The intention to emancipate people from oppressive structures is included in the broader aim to *open people up* to the liberating indwelling of the Spirit in which everyone—each in his own way—can "find" himself. He calls the Trinity "our social programme." Only as an egalitarian community are humans the image of God; they mirror the fellowship of the three Persons but also participate in their *perichoretic* unity, which must be seen not as something ahistorical and eternal but as a movement towards the messianic future in which God will be "all in all." To

this it must be added that the trinitarian “round-dance” included not only humanity but the whole creation. Christians participate in this community and they are called to invite others into it as well.

It should be noted that on some occasions Moltmann goes a step further. The Trinity is then not only the spiritual basis for Christian fellowship but also the model for a “truly humane society in freedom and equality” (e.g. *EiT*: 332f.). It forms the basis for a liberating alternative to Western individualization. The background is the idea that Western societies are based on the model of a monarchical God, according to which humans are little lords who have to dominate everything—themselves included—to be truly human (as noted above, Moltmann sees modern liberal individualism this way, cf. §4.2.2). Moltmann’s ambition was to “re-invent” modernity, i.e. to replace its religious foundation (cf. §4.1). Starting from the idea of the trinitarian fellowship into which humans are drawn by grace, this could be done by *showing an alternative way* and from that perspective enter the public debate on the shape of society. One can also present the “Trinity” as a socio-political model for a society as “a community without privileges ... where liberty is not infringed” (*EiT*: 332). I will not elaborate on this. Among others, Bauckham has criticized this direct link between the theological notion of Trinity as an interpersonal fellowship and the idea of Trinity as model for a humane society (1995: 176ff.). Apart from the question of whether “God” does or should supply a model for society, it could be asked how such a model is supposed to be implemented. In this context, Moltmann himself eventually cannot but refer to the “ecumenically united church” in which this ideal “resonates” (*EiT*: 332). It should present itself as the “avant garde of a redeemed humanity.” Again, relevance thus lies in showing in an alternative way of life.

#### 4.5. *In the Spacious Place of the Triune God:*<sup>150</sup> *An Evaluation*

Moltmann was confronted with two major questions. One: How do I find Christian “identity” (i.e. how can I “identify” myself with the messianic kingdom of God in my own situation here and now)? Two: How do I, with my particular perspective on the world and human beings, relate to others with their own perspective? We have seen how ecological issues began to dominate his theology. Anthropologically speaking, it confronted him with the problem of how to do justice to the fundamental insight that humans are

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<sup>150</sup>The title of this chapter refers to a biblical expression found in Ps. 18:19, Ps. 31:8, and Job 36:16 and applied to the triune God by Moltmann in *GoD*: 299 and *EiT*: 323: “a broad place where there is no cramping.”

historical beings whose identity lies before them and the fundamental insight that humans belong to this earth (including the natural world). In his theological reflections Moltmann is prompted to extend his horizon and even to tap a new field of language. First, categories of space enter his theology and broaden his “historical” perspective. Secondly, pneumatological motives become increasingly more important. Moltmann offers a renewed doctrine of the Trinity. Humans not only mirror the Trinity but also participate in the fellowship of the triune God into which they are graciously drawn. This fellowship includes the entire creation. Humans find their identity in a fellowship that indwells in the whole creation and at the same time moves towards the final consummation, the final “Sabbath.”

The seven fundamental perspectives summed up in §3.5 all return in Moltmann’s “messianic project.” Apparently, a “new” perspective has to be added, the “ecological.”

1. *The Human Being and the Deus Absconditus.* The socio-ecological crisis we are facing today is fundamentally a *crisis with respect to God*. Here Moltmann does not merely mean the loss of religious certainties but the loss of the assurance of God and the self in a profounder sense: “God is dead.” “We have lost God, and God has left us, so we are bothered neither by the suffering of others we have caused, nor by the debts which we are leaving behind us for coming generations” (1999a: 16). For Moltmann, the fact that the growing apathy “is not confined to Protestants or Catholics, Christians or Moslems, Europeans or non-Europeans, but is becoming more and more universal” proves that it is based on an objective alienation from God.” “God has hidden his face and is far from us.” Again the question is: Which concept of God actually determines which concept of human beings? Moltmann’s trinitarian theology is intended to undermine the “theistic” God and his image, the little lord who can perceive reality only anthropocentrically. His basic value is domination, which is, as Moltmann presupposes, a certain distorted definition of freedom. He includes modern liberal individualism in this: “Everyone is free in himself, but no one *shares in the other*” (cf. §4.2.2) This kind of freedom—expressed in categories of “having” instead of “being”—isolates human beings from one another. Even more strongly than in his theology of the 1970s, Moltmann emphasizes that “sin” means alienation from the community with God, fellow human beings, creation and one’s own body. What is at stake is the liberation of the self-immunized human.

2. *The Human Being and the Revelation of the Wholly Other.* How can we know God? Where is the “boundary” of the transcendent kingdom in our immanent reality? Moltmann’s ecological theology is panentheistic. Humans

find true humanity at the boundary between immanent reality and the transcendent future of the *triune* God who *indwells* creation (the spatial broadening of the *Shekinah* notion u *CG* is important here). We could say that the traditional dichotomies between God and world, transcendence and immanence, are overcome by the indwelling of God's Spirit (*CiG*: 182). Participation in this indwelling demands a fundamentally different way of thinking, i.e. not a "dominating" way of thinking but a "participating" way (cf. §4.3.1). This view is fundamentally *sacramental*. Human life is viewed within the perspective of the "Sabbath-Sunday" (cf. §4.4.1). The shape of this sacramental theology is, however, fundamentally dialectical and eschatological. First, the dialectic between the transcendent future and the immanent present is pursued. The transcendent moment lie in the experience of freedom as a "project" for the future (cf. §4.2.2). Second, there is a dialectical relation between God's indwelling and nature (cf. §4.2.3). The anthropocentric position is rejected. The transcendent is not an extrapolation of immanent greatness and power. Ecocentrism is denounced as well. The ecosystem is not divine. The transcendent God is present *in* creation.

3. *The Human Being in Christological Perspective*. True humanity is found in "imitation" of Christ. The important change is that now it is a Christology after Chernobyl (cf. §4.3.2). We noted the cross-resurrection dialectic. Identification with the Crucified means solidarity with the broken, imperfect, longing, suffering world—not simply all of humanity but the entire creation. At the same time, identification with the Resurrected means hope for a future resurrection from the dead into God's glory, i.e. the resurrection of all things that are broken in a future where God will be "all in all." For Moltmann this quote from 1 Cor. 15:28 is a messianic statement.

4. *The Human Beings in Pneumatological Perspective*. In CPS pneumatology plays an important part and so it did in earlier writings in which Calvin was introduced as the "theologian of the Spirit" (cf. §2.3.3). But Moltmann works out the role of the Spirit as a "independent" Person within the community of the Trinity more in his later theology and this has important anthropological implications (once again, a book on the Spirit was originally not included in the outline of his "messianic" project). I see two major reasons for this. First, the broadening of his theology to include ecology compels Moltmann to rethink the role of the Spirit in creation as the power which heals and renews. Second, the growing problem of *plurality* became important. With notions like charismata and fellowship he was able to develop a trinitarian view of human fellowship in which both unity and diversity are respected. Humans find true humanity in a community which

not only reflects the *perichoretic* community between the three Persons but also participates in it.

5. *The Human Being in Eschatological Perspective.* Moltmann's theological anthropology involves a theological rehabilitation of history in an age in which time has been "abolished" (cf. §4.2.1). He presupposes a history in God, a history which has not yet been fulfilled. The trinitarian community, dwelling in creation, moves towards final consummation (cf. §4.3.3). This indwelling takes place in a *creatio mutabilis*, a creation fundamentally open to and longing for the messianic future. In this world humans are historical beings, contemporaries of God and creation. Under the conditions of our broken reality, all their charismata can blossom in anticipation of the future fulfilment by participation in God's indwelling creation.

6. *The Human Being in Ecological Perspective.* This perspective is not completely new (Deane-Drummond analyzes traces of an ecological theology of creation in Moltmann's earlier works, 1997: 71ff.). But evidently it did not become a major issue until the 1980s. This ecological theology touched crucial anthropological questions (it could even be defended that *GiC* is largely an anthropology). The human being is still a pilgrim walking towards the future "home of identity" but not a pilgrim through a "barren land." The human being is an *imago mundi*. He comes to be "at home" in the dwelling of God which transforms this world into God's home, i.e. a network of relationships without stresses and strains: "I am 'at home' where people know me, and where I find recognition without having to struggle for it" (*GiC*: 46). Such "relaxed" social relationships allow people to live in an "equilibrium" that sustains them. Or so says Moltmann. For him, "the home of the natural environment is such a network of tranquillized social relationships." It becomes clear that Moltmann is no longer concerned only with a "temporal" but also with a *spatial* "home" of God in this world in which humans can be at home in fellowship with other living creatures.

7. *The Human Being in the Perspective of the Apostolate.* Humans are once again called to be "faithful to the earth." This is not limited to humanity. Much more sharply than before Moltmann emphasizes that we are part of the "shared house of all earthly created beings" (2003a: 34). Moreover, it is not the Christocentric notion of the kingdom of God that offers the universal framework of the new theology of the apostolate but the (pneumatological) notion of "Life." Life (identified with the "indwelling" of God) becomes the "common denominator" with which hope for the future Sabbath of life can be implemented in a secularized and pluralized society. The "apostolate" means inviting people to life.

8. *The Human Being in an Eucharistic Perspective.* Moltmann's theological anthropology depicts human beings as *eucharistic beings*. I introduced this label in §3.5 to point out the apparent doxological, aesthetic and pneumatological motives in Moltmann's anthropology. These are broadened here. Nature is included (also the nature that one is oneself, namely one's body). Humans should not conceive of themselves in categories of having and doing but in categories of *being* (cf. §4.4.1). It is from this perspective Moltmann describes the role of humans as "priests and priestesses." It is a double role: they represent both God and world. As "whole" beings (both body and soul), participating in the "feast of creation," they are "*gloria dei* on earth" (cf. §4.4.1).

Participation in the fellowship of the Trinity is thus the basis of a liberating view of Christian existence. "Our hearts are captive until they become free in the glory of the triune God." Thus Moltmann paraphrases Augustine's famous words (*TK*: 222). With his socio-spatial doctrine of the Trinity he claims to offer a paradigm for human existence in which humans are intimately connected with God, their fellow human beings, and the whole of creation. In *GiC* he summarizes it this way:

The embodiment of the messianic promises to the poor and the quintessence of the hopes of the alienated is that the world should be "home". This means *being at home in existence*—that the relationships between God, human beings and nature lose their tension and are resolved into peace and repose.

If the creative God himself dwells in his creation, then he is making it his own home, "on earth as it is in heaven". All created beings then find in nearness to him the inexhaustible wellspring of their life, and for their part *find home and rest in God.* (*GiC*: 5; italics mine)

"Coming home" in the triune God, human beings are thus beings set in time and space.

Thus being "re-embedded" they are able to relate to "the other" without dominating it and to be free without subduing the other. The lines from *GiC* just quoted are continued as follows:

Then at last the true community of created beings with one another also begins: a community which Jewish and Christian messianic traditions have called "the sympathy of all things". The bond of love, participation, communication and the whole complex warp and weft of interrelationships determines the life of the

one, single creation, united in the cosmic Spirit. A many-faced *community of creation* comes into being. (*GiC*: 5, italics mine)

The “relevance” of Christian faith is expressed in an open, *perichoretic* community. Life in *perichoretic* community (with God, fellow humans, one’s body, nature) is the most fundamental anthropological perspective underlying all other perspectives. Christians are called to demonstrate this community as the alternative way of life (they are the “avant garde of a redeemed humanity”) and to invite other people to share their charismata in a common effort for the kingdom of God.

## Re-embedding the Disembedded?

### Concluding Debate

Christian anthropology can be liberating only if it succeeds in bringing its own specific perspective formed by the reality of God's kingdom of which the Bible and the Christian tradition speak. In other words, if it is able to "have its own issues which are not already on the agenda of the common self-consciousness."<sup>151</sup> And Christian anthropology can be liberating only if it speaks in a contextual way, registering the sufferings and hopes of its concrete historical context. These were the starting points of Moltmann's theological search for a liberating anthropology within the conflicts of his age. The purpose of this study was to offer an analytical description of this search. In this final chapter I will take up the different questions raised and evaluations made in the previous chapters and attempt to discover what clues my description of Moltmann's theology may offer for further reflection on this problem. In §5.1 I will look briefly back at the junctions and sticking points of Moltmann's anthropological reflections and elaborate on a few questions that arose from my analysis. In §5.2 I will evaluate the different theological perspectives on human life yielded in the course of this book in order to find clues for following up on Moltmann's theology today. In §5.3 I will make some concluding remarks.

#### *5.1. In Search for a Liberating Anthropology*

Ever since his "root experiences" during the war and his years of imprisonment, the mutually reinforcing themes of *suffering* and *hope* form the two complementary sides of Moltmann's theological thinking. In §2.2 I sketched how he crossed his Jabbok and how he, like Jacob, went on limping but blessed. In the experiences of death, in the feelings of guilt, in the inner per-

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<sup>151</sup> So Michael Weinrich, who provides sound reasons for why theologians should not stumble onto the "way into psychology" that is present in many contemporary theologies by presenting the current quest for "identity" as a genuine application of a contemporary understanding of Christian soteriology (Weinrich 2004: 238). For Weinrich, that reduces Christian anthropology to the question of what kind of trust is needed to make someone self-confident.

ils of utter resignation, so he writes in his retrospectives, he struggled with the dark sides of the “hidden face of God;” an encounter that had awakened a new hope that went beyond all shattered human hopes, a “hope against hope.” He could never speak about suffering anymore without, so to say, seeing the glare of the sun rising above Peniel. Neither, however, could he speak about hope anymore without engagement in the suffering world and its longing for liberation—a longing awakened by this “hope against hope.” But how can one relate hope and suffering and the contradictory experiences of the God of hope in the midst of the deepest agonies? It has become clear that that is the fundamental theological question that runs through Moltmann’s thinking about humanity.

In §2.2 I showed how the unavoidable and self-evident initiation in Barth’s theology determined Moltmann’s thinking, but also how already in the course of the 1950s he explored ways that went beyond Barth. Among the ruins of nineteenth century culture Protestantism, Third *Reich* utopias and blood-and-soil ideologies, Barth’s theology of catharsis appeared to be the only credible way of translating his root experiences theologically. The starting point of his *Trümmertheologie* was that knowledge of God (and, accordingly, that of humankind) cannot be derived from philosophical or anthropological reflection. Conversely, any human reflection must start with the revelation of the Wholly Other. The only “point of contact” between the transcendent God and our immanent, godless reality is God’s self-revelation in Christ. For Barth, being truly human involves the acknowledgement that in Jesus we find our fellow human through whose *crucifixion* our old life is crucified and in whose *resurrection* we ourselves are resurrected to new life. Moltmann and many of his fellow students regarded this cross-resurrection dialectic as the only way beyond churchly restoration theology on the one hand and widespread resignation and apathy on the other.

The limits of Barth’s transcendentalist, personalistic and actualistic theological paradigm became manifest to Moltmann as soon as he tried to give “positive theological answers” to the political possibilities and cultural challenges of the post-war period. The focus on the “center” of theology had been purifying, but it had apparently also led to a loss of the “horizon” of faith and theology: the world and human history. Moltmann wanted to relate the cross-resurrection dialectic to human history and the world. For him, the “cross” had to do with the conflicts of our age; the “resurrection” with hope for the world. If the eschatological event of revelation is exclusively located in a subjectivity that transcends time and space, it is of no relevance to the affairs of the world. But how does one bring in the world and history into theology without going back before Barth’s “first commandment theology”

and once again basing “certainty of life” on human projects and human hopes?

In §2.3 I examined Moltmann’s earliest work, thus demonstrating how he, with Bonhoeffer and Calvinist theologians, explored the horizon of theology. Bonhoeffer urged him to acknowledge the “real worldliness of faith.” Since God’s “yes” to the world in Christ, the world is under the universal rule of Christ (has a *messianic character*). Whoever speaks about Christ speaks about the world and *vice versa*. Calvin and Calvinist covenant theologies helped him to acknowledge a “continuity” of faith in history, beyond any *actualism* in which faith is presented as an ever new act and a *habitualism* in which faith is regarded as “a confessionally, traditionally or emotionally habitualised pattern of behaviour.” By adopting the Calvinist view of history and, accordingly, the view on the God-human relationship expressed in the notions of predestination, perseverance, hope and life “in the Spirit” he could speak of a history of revelation, a salvation history in which believers can participate.

Such theological exercises were, as Moltmann later remarked, still “loose threads.” Theological speaking, he was still unable to give a satisfying critical and *theological* assessment of and response to the challenges of his context. In §2.4.1 I analyzed Moltmann’s diagnosis of modern humankind at the end of the 1950s, thus trying to define the theological challenges he was apparently facing. The context had significantly changed. Germany had been transformed into an economic miracle (*Wirtschaftswunderland*) and a spectacular revival of modern life was taking place. These developments nourished both unlimited hopes and existential fear. Where will it end? Apparently, Moltmann noticed, many humans no longer seemed able to come into terms with the society they themselves had made. Modern life had swept away traditional answers and patterns of behaviour. Humans were confronted with a terrifying *Heimatlosigkeit*. With Heidegger, Moltmann observed that “no time has known so much and so many different things about human beings than the present—and no time has known less what human beings are than ours.” The modern human being was overwhelmed by the pluralism and antagonism of the images of humankind which manipulated him. How could theology mediate God’s kingdom as a “horizon of expectation” that liberated people from technological chiliasm on the one hand and apathy on the other?

Moltmann pointed frequently at the increasing irrelevance of the church in this situation, i.e. its *theological* irrelevance (§2.4.1d). In his view, it failed to place the daily situation of people in the horizon of God’s kingdom in a way that is both critical and liberating. Or differently put, the church was not present at the “boundary” of transcendence within our im-

manent reality, where the “apocalyps of man” could be achieved (§2.4.1c). Instead, it adhered to roles that were justifiable only sociologically and not theologically. Preaching either clung to the classic metaphysical, cosmological “model of transcendence” (locating the “boundary” between transcendence and immanence between a static finitude and an immutable infinitude) or followed prevailing existentialist paradigms (which situated the “boundary” inside human beings themselves). According to Moltmann’s diagnosis the manifest inability of the modern subject to get hold of his life and the increasing closeness of the immanence of its man-made world evoked the quest for a new model of transcendence.

In §2.4.2 I pictured how Bloch’s dialectic of hope helped Moltmann develop a new “model of transcendence.” I tried to profile this theology of hope by showing the significant differences with Bloch’s *The Principle of Hope* which became particularly manifest in his anthropology. We saw how Bloch presented the *future* as the paradigm of transcendence; not the future as *quantitative extrapolation* of the present but the *prolepsis* of something *qualitatively new*, the *novum*. Reality is not static, a *Gewordenheit*, a “world of repetition,” a “great Time-and-Again,” but a history of conflicts, a process open to the future. Transcendence, then, is the qualitatively different, transforming new future (a *novum*) that can be experienced in the antagonisms of modern life. Thus a dialectic between the transcendent future and the immanent historical presence was assumed. The present is the “front line” of this transcendent future. Human beings gain their humanity by anticipating their future “home of identity” through grasping the possibilities of the present in hope and action. Following Bloch, Moltmann replaced the “yet” of Barth by the “not yet” of Bloch. Human beings are not brought into harmony and consonance with the given situation but are drawn into the *conflict between hope and experience*, between the transcendent future and the immanent present of suffering. Thus the transcendent “toppled forwards.”

The anthropologies of Bloch and Moltmann were both *messianic* but in rather different ways (§2.4.2c). For Moltmann, it was not the Promethean human being but Christ who is the “Archimedean point of reality.” In his theology Christ was not an anthropological archetype but a way to *Menschwerdung*. First, *hope* is based on the transcendent Word of *promise* of the faithful covenant God, a promise which is focussed in the Christ event. Second, *action* is the “self-emptying” service to one’s neighbour. One gains oneself by losing oneself.

Moltmann did not go beyond the aporias of the Barthian Word of God theology but only sharpened them. For him, hope has no empirical verification in reality, but it is based upon God’s word of promise. It does not

result from experience, but it is the very condition for new, qualitatively different experiences. Christian hope is liberating and relevant for our own situation because it attacks the unjust structures of this world and embraces the world *in its own horizon of justice*. Therefore, the mission of theology and church does not lie within the horizon of expectation provided by the social roles which society concedes to the Church, but within its own peculiar horizon of the eschatological expectation of the coming kingdom of God. In this way, Moltmann could claim that being “Church for the kingdom of God” is being “church for the world.”

At the end of CHAPTER TWO I formulated two questions which arose from my analysis thus far. How could one “grasp the possibilities of the world open to the future” in a world that was not at all open to the future but enclosed by dehumanizing structures, patterns, and habits (so Alves)? And in line with this: Is this theology of hope—and particularly its anthropology—still not too “Spartan” (so Cox)?

In §3.1 I indicated that such questions, affirmed by the disillusion caused by several socio-political developments at the end of the 1960s, forced Moltmann to rethink his theological paradigm and to consider how the freedom of the transcendent future can be experienced within the “vicious circles of death” which keep the future closed. How can freedom be realized under the conditions of unfreedom? Or, with Psalm 137: “How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?” The “political theology” Moltmann developed in collaboration with Metz meant a move away from the Blochian dialectic of hope to the “negative” dialectic of the Frankfurt School. Anthropologically, the emphasis lay on the dehumanization and alienation of the “one-dimensional man” in capitalist society. The transcendent future of freedom that determines the humanity of human beings only opens up in a “negation of the negative.” In Moltmann’s “critical theory of God,” God and his reign of freedom are revealed in the experience of the cross.

§3.2 was designed to examine how this “critical theory of God” was supposed to provide a liberating anthropology. I did so in six steps. First, I pointed out how, according to Moltmann, churches were confronted with the dilemma of choosing between identity and involvement, in his view often mistakenly pictured as a polarization of identity in faith and solidarity in action (§3.2.1). He claimed that both conservative and progressive Christians tended to flee from the tension between identity and involvement, either through unreflective dogmatism or reckless action. Evangelization and humanization are, however, not alternatives. Inner conversion and changing social structures belong essentially together. But how?

For Moltmann it was necessary to uncover the anthropological roots of the crisis, so I showed in §3.2.2. He maintained that humans are deprived of real humanity because they are imprisoned in vicious circles of death. Focussing on the circle of “cultural alienation” (racism in particular) we saw that humans fail to arrive at true human identity because they have learned to define it in terms of “having” instead of “being” (or: their ego-identity suppresses their I-identity).

For Moltmann, psychological diagnoses and therapies eventually appeared to be insufficient, as I recorded in §3.2.3. We should dig deeper and lay bare the theological roots. The reason that humans base their own identity on categories of “having” instead of “being” is that they want to be gods themselves. To go beyond this anthropotheistic need for self-deification, Moltmann reintroduced Luther’s doctrine of justification. God became human so that proud and unhappy gods may become true human beings. In his “theology of play” he went beyond forensic interpretations of Luther’s *theologia crucis*. The fundament of Christian identity, the *sola gratia*, he maintained, is expressed in the surprise that one’s life is not meaningful because it has a demonstrable purpose but because it is unconditionally accepted by God. This creed not only affects the individual soul but, Moltmann held, also the modern achievement-oriented society as a whole. God’s justification of human beings enables them to stop justifying themselves by clinging to dehumanizing and enslaving power structures.

This lead us to the question how to actuate this theological view of humanity in daily life. In §3.3.4 I worked out Moltmann’s critical theory: humans find true freedom in negating its opposite, i.e. in “identification” with the Crucified and finding identity in “non-identity.” Breaking through enslaving structures does not take place by submitting oneself to a God that is even higher, better, and stronger than these structures but by following the Crucified, i.e. being where he was and becoming involved with those with whom he was involved.

Apparently, however, for Moltmann a liberating theological anthropology had to be more than simply a critical attitude of permanent non-identity in which humans may sample something of genuine freedom. In §3.2.5 I examined how his “negative” theology was embedded in a sacramental, trinitarian theology. Moltmann developed a trinitarian theology of the cross in which the fundamental contradiction between the transcendent God and the immanent godless reality is overcome *within* God himself. This demands a “revolution” in the concept of God. Referring to Phil. 2, Moltmann contended that in the *Son* the *Father* humiliated himself on the cross, thus creating a division within himself in which all of human history, with all its doom, godforsakenness, death, damnation, and meaninglessness from which

humans suffer is included (he drew on Hegel, as already explained in §2.4.2c, but also on Jewish *Shekinah* theology). This division is overcome by the Spirit of resurrection which moves through our history towards future fulfilment, as a counter-history in which humans can participate. The trinitarian history of God with this world can be experienced if we notice the *sacraments*, the “real presences,” of this history. These can only be noticed in “non-identity” with the power structures and idols of this world. Humans thus become free when they participate in God’s counter-history with this world. This participation “makes the homo incurvatus in se once again open to God and his neighbour, and gives Narcissus the power to love someone else.”

This analysis finally brought us back to the question how theology and church could move beyond the identity-involvement dilemma. As I explained in §3.2.6, Moltmann regarded the tension between identity and relevance as *the inevitable tension of Christian faith*. Both the crisis of identity and that of relevance can be reduced to a common denominator: the *cross*. The way beyond the dilemma is, therefore, a Christological one. Or better, it stems from a trinitarian theology with a strong Christological accent. If Christian theology is a genuine theology of the cross, i.e. worked out among the “crucified” people of today, then Christian identity (sharply distinguished from “unbelief” and “superstition”) is rooted in its relevance and *vice versa*. Thus Christian theology is “relevant” because it strives out of its own “identity” for the “humanization” of this world.

The search to implement a liberating theological view of humankind reaches its climax in the quest for a theological perspective on *human rights*, so Moltmann himself suggested. Therefore, I included a case study on the different papers on human rights he wrote in the course of the 1970s (§3.3). The comparison of these papers, first, laid bare the problem of “christianization” and “humanization.” The question was how to relate the Christian perspective of humanity (of sin and justification, of renewal of life in the mission of reconciliation) to the worldwide striving for “human rights.” Evidently, for Moltmann, the messianic perspective of the reign of God was more than a Christian interpretation of a more general possibility of “humanization.” However, he did not want to play off “christianization” and “humanization” against each other. A genuine “christianization” is a humanization of this world. That evoked the question: Is every “humanization” of the world a “christianization” (and thus all those who strive for a humane world are anonymous Christians)? Or is, conversely, every “christianization” a form of “humanization” (and Christian faith thus simply one perspective with respect to the higher ideal of humanity)? Such an implicit identification of “true” christianization and “true” humanization seemed

problematic: either the Christian “ministry of reconciliation” is only one way of making a case for human rights or the realization of human rights depends ultimately on Christians and their churches. Moltmann rejected the first, but, apparently, did not want to emphasize the second in an explicit way. It was this rather hybrid connection between “humanization” and the Christian perspective on human life that would become even more problematic in his later theology.

Secondly, the case study unveiled the problem of how to “materialize” the universal perspective of God’s kingdom: By an unconditional identification with the poor or a “neutral” position that enables one to balance different rights? This problem came to the fore in his debate with Latin American liberation theologians in the course of the 1970s, as I demonstrated in §3.4. I explicitly focussed on this debate because Moltmann regards it a turning point in his thinking. The Latin Americans argued that theology can be liberating only if it unequivocally sides with the poor and the oppressed and if it starts with their suffering and hopes. The heart of their critique was that Moltmann’s critical theory was in fact a camouflaged *neutrality*. It never concretely engaged with the struggle of the poor. The confrontation compelled Moltmann to reconsider his own thinking *within his own context*, as one particular perspective among others. However, he drew a clear line. One has to do justice to the variety of particular perspectives, one’s own included, but not by giving up the notion of a universal perspective. The future of God’s freedom for all people is *universal*; the way of liberation to this future is necessarily *particular*. He called his approach “ecumenical thinking:” everyone should recognize the limitations of his own position and the relativity of his own particular environment, but the higher goal is the common striving for the knowledge of the *one and only truth*. The aim of his own “contextual theology for oppressors” was, therefore, the “conversion to his own humanity,” that is, a humanity that is not based on whiteness, superiority, exploitation and profit, achievement, or the suppression of one’s “soft” side. The only way to such a liberation, Moltmann stated, is to look frequently into the mirrors the victims of oppression hold up to us.

CHAPTER FOUR started with two fundamental questions that apparently urged Moltmann to reconsider his theological enterprise once again in a fundamental way. First, how can human beings find true humanity at the “boundary” of God’s transcendent kingdom in our immanent reality? Or, in other words, how is “entering the kingdom of God” liberating for a well-paid, Western, white, male professor of theology? Second, how does one’s own

particular conception of “true humanity”—one’s own long march to freedom—fit into the universal horizon of liberation and reconciliation?

In §4.1 I indicated how ecological problems had in the meantime made Moltmann aware of the limitations of the historical paradigm of his theological thinking so far. He assumed that the manifest social and ecological crises are interrelated in *one total crisis* of humanity and of life on earth as a whole. Moreover, he considered this total crisis to be a crisis of modernity, i.e. of the basic values of modernity, of its one-sided focus on growth and development. The entanglement of modernity and Christian tradition forced him to expose the theological, *messianic* roots of modernity. Subsequently, his intention was nothing less than a radical reevaluation of values, for (the kingdom of) God’s sake.

In §4.2 I showed how Moltmann, following this track, was confronted with the question of how to integrate two fundamental insights of human life and, accordingly, even two ways of “public theology,” the one focussing on *modern faith in history* and the other on *ecological equilibrium*. In other words, how can one relate Exodus and Sabbath. On the one hand, he could not but follow up his historical theology of freedom, presuming a dialectical relation between the transcendent future and our immanent reality. *What most fundamentally grounds true human identity is the anticipatory participation in the “counter-history” of the triune God.* On the other hand, he searched for a way beyond anthropocentrism and ecocentrism and presented a theocentric view based upon Genesis 1. Not human beings but the Sabbath is the crown on creation. God “completed” his work by resting from it and “blessed and hallowed” this seventh day. For Moltmann, this involved the *enthronement* of modern humans, who see themselves as the image of the omnipotent Lord God and thus as rulers themselves who are the very goal of creation that is made for their sake. In a certain way, this line of thought continued his theology of play in which the doctrine of justification was interpreted as a liberation from “having” and “doing” to mere “being.” Moltmann regarded the sabbath as the “Jewish doctrine of justification.” *What most fundamentally grounds true human identity is inhabitation in the rhythms and cycles of God’s creation.*

How does one relate both paradigms—the one determined by promise, hope, exodus, anticipation and action and the other by embodiment, rest, feast and joy in existence. I postulated that Moltmann’s theology of the 1980s and 1990s can be regarded as an attempt to come into terms with this problem. In §4.3 I analyzed the main works of the 1980s and 1990s from this perspective. As we have noted throughout this book, the knowledge of humanity and the knowledge of God are two sides of the same coin. The revelation of humans “hidden” to themselves depends on the revelation of

the hidden God. It is, therefore, evident that in the search for a way to relate both fundamental insights, the question of God comes to the fore once again. We observed a significant broadening of Moltmann's trinitarian thinking. §4.3.1 recorded that, for Moltmann, "Trinity" implied a liberating hermeneutic, a matrix of a new kind of thinking about God, the world and humanity, an "integrating" and "comprehensive" instead of isolationist and particularizing thinking. In §4.3.2 I showed how Christ was still considered as the access point to our knowledge of God (the "gateway to the Trinity"). By following the path of a Wisdom Christology, however, Moltmann now arrived at a cosmic Christology that, rather than abolishing his former historical Christology, broadened it. In §4.3.3 I then outlined how the historical line and the ecological line came together in the renewed doctrine of the Trinity which tied together Joachim of Fiore's doctrine of the "three kingdoms" and the Eastern Orthodox concept of *perichoresis*. Both lines converged in the notion of "consummation," the eternal sabbath, the eternal "home" where "God will be all in all." Finally, from this perspective I portrayed Moltmann's theological view of humankind (§4.3.4). According to his ecological doctrine of the Trinity, God the Creator should not be seen as opposite to his "work" but in a trinitarian sense as the Creator who, through his Spirit, dwells in creation as a whole and in every created being in particular. The indwelling of God, the *Shekinah*, is the inner secret of creation: God's Sabbath, God's eternal home, is its ultimate purpose. Consequently, the "meaning and purpose" of human beings is to be *gloria dei* on earth. This notion holds together the basic insight that humans find themselves in hope and anticipation of the future *gloria dei* when God will be "all in all" and the insight that humans find their home by seeking habitation in nature and by participating in the song of praise that is sung by the whole creation.

In §4.4 I focussed on the "implementation" of Moltmann's renewed anthropology. The two questions I posed at the beginning of CHAPTER FOUR reappeared. How can human beings find true humanity at the "boundary" of God's transcendent kingdom in our immanent reality? And how does one's own particular way to "humanization" fit into the universal horizon of liberation and reconciliation? The answers I distilled from Moltmann's writings were respectively a *sacramental worldview* (§4.4.1 and §4.4.2) and *ecumenism* as a *counter-model* (§4.4.3).

The prism through which I viewed the challenge of Moltmann's new theology of integration and embodiment was a line of thought he developed in *GiC*. It placed the problem of how to relate the two basic insights in a more or less *liturgical* context. Humans are "set in time and space" by the double movement of God's history with this world: the history of creation open to future consummation and the history of redemption intended in cre-

ation. By suggesting an intrinsic theological link between *sabbath* and *Sunday* Moltmann gives this theological connection a liturgical perspective. The surplus of meaning that Christian theology may offer was put in a liturgical, sacramental context. Within this framework the relevance of his anthropology came into view. It combines participation and anticipation, “rest” and hope, enjoying and eagerly looking forward, slowing down and preparing oneself. Humans must tune themselves to the sabbath rhythm, the heartbeat of creation. That involves a different experience of *time*: time is no longer an eternal sequence of similar moments but time qualified by the beneficent interruption of the double moment of looking back, of *Wohlgefallen* on the one hand and of looking forward on the other. It also means a different experience of *space*: space is no longer a homogenous expanse of similar places but creation qualified by the presence of God; creation made into God’s *home*.

As already indicated in §4.3.4, humans are intended to play a *double role*. The human being is both the *imago mundi* and the *imago dei*. As the image of the world, human beings stand before God as representing all other creatures, living, speaking and acting on their behalf. They are “priestly creations and eucharistic beings,” interceding before God for the community of creation in which they live and of which they are part. On the other hand, human beings are the *imago dei*, be it such “in progress” (it does not refer to a certain property but to the relation with God and it concerns the *whole person*, not just the soul). Basically, it means that humans are God’s “proxy,” God’s counterpart in creation. That entails that they represent God’s glory and will, interceding for God before the community of creation. They are called to cultivate and protect the garden. This “strange double function” of standing before God on behalf of creation and before creation on behalf of God is, in summary, humans’ *priestly calling*.

In §4.4.3—pursuing the problem of “humanization” and “christianization” (§3.4)—I showed how Moltmann introduced a pneumatological paradigm which goes beyond the Christocentric paradigm in which all are free and equal as brothers and sisters. This “charismatic paradigm” is determined by the notions of “fellowship” and “charismata”. It views liberation as *embodiment* in the network of relations already given in nature, in the “eschatological Springtime of the whole creation.” “Kingdom of God” basically means that everything arrives at the life *it is intended to be*. This kingdom is “as brilliantly variegated as the creation which we know now,” so the consequence is not homogeneity but “unity in diversity and diversity in unity.” In a nutshell, Moltmann’s approach is characterized by the motto: “To everyone their own, and all hand in hand for the kingdom of God!” (*SL*: 194).

Thus Moltmann identified the kingdom of God with “life” (with a capital L, so to say). He equated this idea of “life” with the life-giving indwelling of the triune God. Accordingly, the mission on which God sends men and women *invites* “all human beings, the religious and the non-religious, to life, to the affirmation of life, to the protection of life, to shared life, and to eternal life.” Christian faith is thus not one religion among others but the window to “life.” Christian mission invites people to the “fulfilled life,” to “the shared life,” to “eternal life,” to “the fulness of life.” In this mission, it recognizes the “life-furthering” activities of others. Their efforts must be respected “in the light of this wider horizon:” they are also doing “Kingdom of God work.”

We have thus far looked at the evaluation of my analysis in the previous chapters. I will pursue the two questions just raised a little further. Christian anthropology is liberating because it sets human beings in the broader horizon of God’s kingdom. But how and where can we experience God’s presence in our immanent reality? How can we participate in the “round-dance of the triune God?” And what does this then say about the destination and calling of human beings? We saw how Moltmann placed these questions within the liturgical and sacramental framework of the Sabbath-Sunday. With regard to the human and ecological crises we are facing, according to Moltmann himself, one could ask whether such a “liturgical reform” will suffice. French writes: “Liturgical reform is nice, but alone it is not an adequate response to a crisis as serious as the one Moltmann believes we face” (French 1988: 84). Indeed, Moltmann “offers very little concrete guidance to the church and society.” His publications do not offer concrete strategies (besides a few occasional remarks about spending the Saturday “without exhaust fumes and lawnmowers and so on;” 1989: 86).

Should we expect such strategies? Moltmann’s sacramental approach certainly may have consequences for the way humans see themselves and their own role and responsibility in this world. His solutions may not offer concrete proposals on how the social organization of our world could or ought to be reformed (although Moltmann himself not seldom gives the impression that he nonetheless aspires to do so). They do, however, give valuable perspectives about human beings who are stumbling on in this world, about what kind of persons they need to be in order to live in a more harmonious and humane world. Without trivializing the importance of reflecting upon social arrangements theologically, theologians should maybe, as Volf suggests, primarily concentrate on “fostering the kind of social agents capable of envisioning and creating just, truthful, and peaceful societies, and on shaping a cultural climate in which such agents will thrive” (Volf 1996:

21, cf. §5.2.1). In the next section I will consider which leads Moltmann's anthropology offers in this respect.

Now I will focus on the second issue, namely the problem of "humanization" and "christianization" (§3.4), and, related to this, that of universality and particularity. As indicated, Moltmann's theology started among the ruins of the *corpus christianum*. He wanted to think beyond the old notions of church and mission and to develop a missionary theology for a secularized world, i.e. a world after the "Christian era." This dialogue with the secular world was largely based on commonly shared ideas about humanity, human rights and human values. This was so for obvious reasons. The secular world he encountered in the 1960s and 1970s was still largely rooted in common Christian-humanist values. Consequently, he could associate the "relevance" of the Christian faith with the modern project of the "humanization" of the world (including, for instance, the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*). As he has often emphasized, the mission of Christians is not to extend the influence of the church or the Christian world but to *humanize* this world.

The debate with the Latin American theologians in the 1970s undermined the very assumption that it is self-evident what such a humanization is. Moltmann's response, a new "ecumenical thinking," was that everyone should recognize the limitations of his own position and the relativity of his own particular environment (no one can say any longer what is valid for everyone at all times and in all places and no one can cover the whole of theology), but within the universal horizon of the kingdom of God.

The confrontation with the liberation theologians, however, took place within a Christian context and within the limits of a typically modern theological paradigm.<sup>152</sup> In the following decades, processes of globalization and mass migration seriously challenged this modern paradigm.<sup>153</sup> The

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<sup>152</sup> This modern paradigm of theology was clearly described by Metz: "The world no longer appeared as a comprehensive "finished" whole, but as the *milieu* of human activity that can be worked on and transformed, as the "material" of the continual, historical free self-fulfilment of man before God" (1969: 54).

<sup>153</sup> I will not further go into the manifest decline of the modern paradigm of twentieth century (ecumenical) kingdom-of-God theology. See for instance Witvliet's book *Gebroken Traditie*, which is a critical assessment of ecumenical theology today. Witvliet maintains that in face of the radical *alterity* of others, ecumenical thinking can no longer relate the unity of the churches socio-ethically to the unity of humanity as a whole, thus swallowing up the other by a "limitless solidarity" (Witvliet 1999: 40ff.).

plurality of worldviews and religions today seems much more radical than was often presumed.<sup>154</sup> Moltmann seemingly acknowledges this, but refuses “to fall into the modern trap of pluralism, where it is supposed to be reduced to its particular sphere” (for him, postmodernism means relativism, “reconciled difference” and ethical indifference). The seriousness of the worldwide threats to life forbids “the post-modernist free-for-all” (Moltmann 1999a: 242).<sup>155</sup> Moreover, he believes that whoever surrenders “the unity of history” surrenders the unity of the eschatological freedom for all. Therefore, over against sheer ecclesiocentrism on the one hand and post-modern pluralism on the other, he aims to uphold the modern ecumenical ideals of unity and solidarity, of peace, justice, and integrity of creation, and seeks to do justice to plurality within this paradigm.

As we saw, he offers a “charismatic paradigm” and presents it as a “theology of life.” But what is “life?” Is it a general vitality behind the manifest plurality of singular lives? But how is this to be understood? Is it a theological, an anthropological one or a biological term? Or is it a term which includes all these perspectives? At any rate, it is evident that Moltmann implies that there is a more or less commonly shared conception of “life.” At the same time he assumes that the Christian message of life is actually not a particular religious view but the articulation of that for which every living being strives and the answer to the perennial human quest for the fulfilment of life. Thus he can claim that “mission” is not a matter of spreading the Christian religion but one of fostering true life. True life is that life which lies ahead of us but at the same time that which we, each in our own particular way, are intended to be.

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<sup>154</sup> It could, of course, be asked whether Western societies are really as pluralistic as often imagined. Gordon Graham for instance questions whether the differences with respect to mainly moral issues are as extensive and deep as presumed by popular theses on pluralism. Does not basically everyone condemn torture, theft, fraud, child abuse, murder, rape, lying, and cheating? He therefore believes it is difficult—even for religious people—to persist in claiming that there is much that is distinctive about one’s lifestyle in comparison to others. In his view a widespread *rhetorical pluralism* is blanketing evident sameness (Graham 2001: 4ff.).

<sup>155</sup> In an overview of more recent literature on political theology (focussing mainly on Metz), Erik Borgman observes a “massively confessed rejection” of what is called “postmodern caprice” (Borgman 2002: 81). Plurality, a change in the dynamics as central in postmodern theologies is seen as a surrender of the logic of a culture that attends only to the sensation of that which is always new. With that, it is held, the memory of those who remain behind is betrayed.

But what are we intended to be? If we are talking about an orchid, then I have a clear idea of what the orchid is to be and can understand how it comes to itself in being able to grow and blossom. The same is true with respect to a pig. I would say that it comes to itself when it can have a good roll in the mud and does not remain cooped up in a small pen on a pig farm. However, what I am saying here is already no longer based on a commonly accepted view. Obviously, it becomes all the more problematic when we ask: What about human beings? When do they arrive at “life?”

We saw Moltmann’s answer in §4.4. Humans are priests and priestesses; it is their task to give everything its due, to foster true life, including that of individual human beings in their variety. If “being a man” is a charisma, he must have the opportunity to become a “true” man. But how does he arrive at true “manliness?” Certainly not by raping women, as some perverted minds may think. And if it is argued that humans must respond to their “calling,” the holy mission to get on a bus with dynamite strapped around one’s waist is certainly not included. These are extreme examples which could possibly be countered by more or less generally accepted ideas of “life” and of “life-furthering” action. However, we run into trouble when we consider, in a more detailed way, the different ways in which people give concrete meaning to “life.” As long as the different views are compatible, variety can be cherished and enjoyed in the way Moltmann intends. A Japanese Zen Buddhist can foster “life” by meditation in his temple and a German professor can do so by supporting local environmental groups. But what if the concepts of “life” contradict each other and if the concrete implementation of these concepts leads to serious conflicts? The Hindu idea of becoming what one is intended to be is defined as living in accordance with one’s *karma*. For many this still involves the acceptance the class differences of the caste system, which predetermines whom is to sweep the streets and whom is to become a doctor or a politician. Others (Marxists but also humanists and Christians for instance) regard any class difference as a form of oppression that needs to be removed in order to arrive at “life.” Another example: a liberal humanist sees “self-development” as a central “life-furthering” notion, while a Christian, following Moltmann for instance, may stress the idea of life as a gift that should be understood in categories of “being” and not of doing or having. Many Buddhists, for their part, even question the very idea of having or being a self, regarding this egocentrism as the root of all suffering, as attachment to oneself. Such differences do not simply display a diversity-in-unity but a fundamental and radical plurality.

Does Moltmann really acknowledge religious plurality by stating that we all strive for “life” (which he happens to call “life in the Spirit”), everyone in his or her or its own way? What, then, would be the significance of

his pneumatology? Identifying “life in the Spirit” with “life” would involve nothing but a reconfirmation of the situation of plurality. Moltmann certainly does not choose this road. “Life in the Spirit” has a great deal more content. That implies a judgement of other views. Apparently, the “charismata” of other people are recognized as “life-furthering” charismata only as far as they fit into Moltmann’s Christian view of “life.” Basically this leads us to a similar question as formulated with regard to his theology of human rights in the 1970 (§3.3): Is every “life-furthering action” a form of “christianization” (and thus all those who strive for a humane world are anonymous Christians) or is, conversely, every “christianization” a form of “life-furthering action” (and Christian faith thus just one perspective with respect to the higher ideal of “life”)?

The core of the problem seems that, just as in his earlier theology, Moltmann relates the universality of the Christian message of God’s kingdom in a socio-ethical way to the suggestion of a universal moral world order or at least on a broad consensus about what is “humane.” I can understand why Moltmann insists once more on overcoming the rather imperialistic universalism of the old ecclesiocentric view on mission. And to the extent that “post-modern pluralism” indeed means ethical indifference and reconciled difference, I can sympathize with his reasons for rejecting this. But why should a theologian give up his theological engagement with the whole suffering world and with the universal future of God’s kingdom if he acknowledges that his universal perspective is one *particular claim to universality*, not based upon any suggestion of a *factual commonality*?

In fact, I think, Moltmann’s approach eventually only obstructs the—indeed highly necessary—dialogue about world-threatening problems. The distinction he makes between “direct” and “indirect” dialogue (cf. §4.4.3) is misleading. It suggests that particular religious insights are merely accidental and that there is a common discourse, a “third factor,” in which we all find one another, namely the life-threatening crises today. However, as I tried to demonstrate, such a common discourse simply does not exist. Not everyone is concerned about these problems in the same way that Moltmann is (from a Christian point of view) and everybody looks at “life” from his own religious perspective. Acknowledging “true pluralism” (cf. Vroom 2003: 24) means acknowledging that every dialogue is a “direct” dialogue, that one can no longer subtly identify a “third factor” (“life”) with one’s own particular—be it universal—perspective (cf. Heim 2001: 91 ff.). Moltmann’s Christian theology of the “fullness of life” would be more forceful if it is not presented in a camouflaged way (as “inviting” others to “life”), thus subtly incorporating the other into a implied commonality that does not exist, but as an explicitly Christian perspective on the value of life on this

planet and on the common dangers that threaten us all. By earnestly seeking dialogue with others, such an approach leaves behind the imperialistic “churchification” Moltmann rejected and, by claiming that one’s perspective is universal and that some fundamental insights cannot be relativized (for instance the conviction that this earth must be protected because it is God’s creation and the dwelling place of his creatures), it also goes beyond the ethical indifference of the “post-modern pluralism” Moltmann despises.

### 5.2. *A Theological Anthropology in Eight Perspectives*

There have been many images that have been drawn to typify the “postmodern” human being. A striking one is the metaphor used by the Belgian sociologist Walter Weyns, namely the wandering shadows in Giambattista Piranesi’s dungeon drawings (Weyns 2002: 104ff.). The *carceri* sketches of this eighteenth-century Italian architect show a dimly lit space with many rooms, corridors, stairs, foot planks, bridges, gears, and winches, portraying an enclosed world that coincides completely with objects of human manufacture. There is no sign of the presence of anything that transcends this—even animals and plants are absent. People, reduced to vague penstrokes, are swanning around, aimlessly going upstairs and down. The room is full of energy, but the slightly bent figures display resignation and apathy. To all appearances, they have given up the age-old titanic struggle with the gods and fate; they are bowed down by the manifest meaninglessness of their actions. What we see is a *finished world* which, as Weyns remarks, provokes anxiety, or more precisely, “a mixture of claustrophobia and agoraphobia.”

Piranesi’s dungeons are plainly too limited to feel free and too limitless to feel at home. Behind each door new rooms are to be expected—but each is virtually identical with the previous one. It is this strange paradox that also characterizes postmodern existence, so it seems. On the one hand, people seem “agoraphobic.” Processes of modernity have liberated them from age-old social and cosmic contexts. The “master narratives” of rationalization and emancipation that were offered instead have crumbled as well. The postmodern individual is absolutely autonomous; there is no higher god or institution that tells him how to behave. Many scholars are led to believe that, although some people celebrate our times of flexibility, speed and “style-surfing,” an increasing majority fails to live this postmodern life of fluidity, non-durability and commitment-avoidance. The modern credo of unrestricted freedom has turned into an overriding obligation (Barry

Schwartz speaks of a “self-defeating tyranny”<sup>156</sup>). Paralyzed by the multitude of images of the good and even better life, of lifestyles, norms and values that are used side by side, in a jumble, and against one another the post-modern individual is struggling to find a sense of continuity and coherence, of purpose and security, and, maybe most of all, of limits and embeddedness.

On the other hand, postmodern individuals are “claustrophobic.” They are knocking on heaven’s door, but they know that all that remains is what they have made and lacks any transcendent meaning and, apparently, any higher aim. The walls of their self-made world is closing in on them. As Moltmann would say, they are not able to find the “boundary of transcendence” in their self-enclosed, man-made world.

It has been suggested that Piranesi’s drawings reflect the shadow side of modernity, symbolizing modern factories, prisons and even concentration camps (Weyns 2002: 111). But, as Weyns remarks, the glory days of modernity were dominated by a restless will to discover what lies beyond the horizon and a sacrosanct belief in unlimited progress. The *carceri* show a completed world in which this fight has been waged—and won: a world in which *time* has largely been reduced to endless repetition of the present moment and *space* to homogenous expanse of identical places. In short, as Weyns suggests, it reflects today’s world which is a “self-made and preserved technological incubator in which [the human being] is doomed to eternal passivity” (transl. mine).

The intention of Moltmann’s anthropology was the liberation of isolated, alienated, “self-immunized” individuals. The sacramental, liturgical frame of the Sabbath-Sunday re-embeds them in time and space. The development of Moltmann’s theology can be regarded as a cumulative rehabilitation of history as a history of salvation and of the cosmos as the dwelling place of God and all creatures. The Barthian *Trümmertheologie* presented to him after the war was liberating because it was “timeless” and “spaceless.” Coming from the utopia of a Third Reich, of “*Deutschland heiliges Vaterland*”, and of blood-and-soil ideology, it was a relief to hear that the only certainty of life is the relation between God and the individual hu-

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<sup>156</sup> Schwartz observes that the number of people with depression is growing explosively (Schwartz 2000: 81). He puts this down to the excessive emphasis on self-determination, which has contributed to unrealistic expectations (life has to be perfect), to the fact that people—who must produce this perfection themselves—blame themselves when they fail, and to the tragedy that the “crucial vaccine,” deep commitment and belonging to social groups, is increasingly undermined by the emphasis on individual control.

man being and that historical, geographical, and social conditions are virtually irrelevant to that. His theology of hope was a rehabilitation of historical categories such as hope, future, anticipation and promise. Later, he spoke of the “counter-history” of the triune God in which humans are invited to participate. His theology of the 1980s and 1990s aimed to integrate this historical paradigm with an ecological paradigm in which notions such as rest and inhabitation could be explored. Can this theology offer ways to liberate the agoraphobic and claustrophobic individual? One way to investigate this is to reevaluate the eight theological perspectives on human life we gathered in the course of this book. That is what I aim to do now, be it in a rather impressionistic way.

### 5.2.1. The Human Being and the *Deus Absconditus*

A startling and thought-provoking aspect of Moltmann’s theological anthropology (and public theology as such) is the suggestion that the current situation—agoraphobia and claustrophobia, so to say—proves that “God has hidden his face from us.” In his retrospectives on Norton Camp (cf. §2.2.2), it becomes clear that the God he “encountered” in his “Jabbok” experiences was not the fairytale God of nineteenth-century culture Protestantism. God has “darker” sides and is not available on demand.

From his earliest writings on, Moltmann has looked at modern processes of secularization and pluralization from this perspective. The claim that human beings are “hidden” to themselves is a statement on the confusion of modern humans who cannot cope with the pluralism and antagonism of images (they live in a “hall of a thousand mirrors and masks”). In the early 1960s he stated with Bloch: “Only with respect to the *Deus absconditus* is the problem of what the *mysterium homo absconditus* is all about dealt with” (Moltmann 1961a: 25) (cf. §2.4.2a). He sought to interpret this situation theologically by exploring Nietzsche’s saying about the “death of God” and interpreting it in a Hegelian way: it is God himself who abandoned himself. This idea is pursued in his theology of the cross in the 1970s. Humans are caught in “vicious circles of death” and these circles can only be broken through if we go beyond analyses open to psychology and sociology and reveal the underlying vicious circle of meaninglessness and god-forsakenness. In his later theology he also interprets the total socio-ecological crisis we are facing today as a “loss of God” (“We have lost God, and God has left us, so we are bothered neither by the suffering of others we have caused, nor by the debts which we are leaving behind us for coming generations;” cf. §4.5). Moltmann speaks of “an objective alienation from God.”

The analysis of Moltmann's development makes clear that over the years he has become more and more critical of modernity, without ending up in an anti-modern or postmodern view (cf. Volf 1999: 236). He has never sought to legitimize modernity theologically, but his public theology initially assumed at least a close alliance with the emancipatory strand of modernity. Already under the influence of the Frankfurt School, he began to emphasize more clearly the ambiguities of modernity. In his later publications (in the 1980s and 1990s), the flaws of modernity become central to his theology. As I suggested in §4.1, in his early theology there was an alliance with modernity in order to save the Christian story of liberation, while now, conversely, the origins of Christian faith are to be unveiled to rescue modernity.

In order to point out how today's crises and catastrophes are the result of the inner dynamics of modernity itself, the historical analysis of modernity becomes important, or better, the theological-historical analysis. He claims that the whole modern project is based on a messianic religion which portrays God as absolute ruler and, accordingly, human beings as little lords who have to pursue his kingdom on earth by domination and conquest (cf. §4.2.1). This lords can look at reality only in an anthropocentric way. The key word is domination which for Moltmann characterizes the way modernity defines freedom. It reduces "persons" to "individuals," disconnected from community with fellow humans, their own bodies, nature and, ultimately, God. Moltmann sees direct links between this concept of God and humankind and today's nihilistic attitude towards nature and the "surplus people" in Third World countries. The religion of modernity and the basic values and the way of life stemming from that have thus led to the loss of community and the self-immunization of the modern individual. In his self-enclosed world God is no longer present. Therefore, the first step we must take if we follow Moltmann is to interpret the situation of the agoraphobic and claustrophobic individual as a "God crisis," as the startling absence of God.

There are at least two major advantages to Moltmann's view. First, it evokes the challenging question of whether present-day theology is not too much concerned with anthropological approaches when it seeks to come to terms with the problems of plurality and identity in a threatened world. God's "hiddenness" as the fundamental perspective on our situation is, as stated, both startling and thought-provoking.

Secondly, it offers clues for detecting the religious dimensions of modern society. It could be asked whether Moltmann not too exclusively—and too apocalyptically—traces current problems back to this modern messianism. The consequences of centuries of Western exploitation, plundering

and slavery are certainly still obvious, but the suggestion that the advent of modern times (and especially its “religion”) bears itself the whole burden of leading to a world order in which Western countries “live in the light” while the Third World lives “in darkness” (1999a: 12) seems too simplistic. It dismisses, for instance, all kinds of cultural aspects which determine “development” and many environmental factors. Overpopulation, for instance, can hardly be attributed to an aggressive Western mentality. At any rate, however, Moltmann’s analysis may challenge theologians to enter the public domain and to evaluate the religious elements of the dominant liberal paradigm. Moltmann’s suggestion that the supposedly neutral notion of individual freedom as proclaimed by liberal politicians today is only a particular definition of “freedom” based on a certain anthropology and an “implicit religion” and thus on certain “basic values” (“domination” notably) seems to be a starting point for a debate on our society’s norms and values (although I doubt whether liberals would subscribe to Moltmann’s analysis).

What are the drawbacks of Moltmann’s? The implications he draws for a public theology today—basically, to reinvent modernity—seem, firstly, far too ambitious in view of the position of church and theology in Western societies. But here is a more fundamental objection. Is it the task of theology to replace the supposedly rotten foundation of society (cf. §5.1)? It must certainly unveil its religious elements. Although Moltmann would probably deny that he claims that he as a theologian can grasp the totality of our society and even the whole world intellectually, his approach suggests that he understands modernity better than it does itself and that it needs Christian theology to move into the right direction again.

This suspicion increases when we look at Moltmann’s proposals to replace “the” anthropocentrism and anthropotheism of modernity by a genuinely, i.e. trinitarian, Christian view of God, humans and the world. He does not only entertain a rather one-sided view of culture by assuming a homogenous entity whose strong elements can be cherished and which can be purified of rotten elements but also too easily clears the street of the Christian tradition, suggesting that the crisis today is the result of the modern distortion of Christian faith. It is, for instance, remarkable that in his publications on ecology he does not explicitly enter the famous debate with Lynn White, who pointed to the “Judeo-Christian” image of human beings and nature as the root of today’s technological exploitation of nature (White 1967).<sup>157</sup> In White’s opinion, this “Judeo-Christian tradition” is primarily re-

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<sup>157</sup> In *GiC* White is mentioned in only one footnote (324 n.11) as is also the case in Moltmann 1999a (269 n.6.).

sponsible for a desecration of nature and secondly decrees that humans should subdue the earth (the much discussed *dominium terrae*, Gen. 1:28: “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it”). Bypassing (exegetical) debates on White’s claim (for instance, on so-called biblical anthropocentrism<sup>158</sup>), Moltmann follows “nature-friendly” interpretations of the Bible and tradition (as Hendrik-Joost van Soest shows, the change to “soft” translations and interpretations of the Hebrew verb *radah* (“subdue”) is related to the first expressions of concern about the environment in the 1970s; Van Soest 1996: 187<sup>159</sup>). Of course, I do not deny that the rise of modernity with its scientific-technological perception of reality has led to a different and often devastating attitude to nature. Nor do I deny that biblical texts can offer a more respectful human dealing with nature (cf. e.g. Hiebert 1996<sup>160</sup>). However, we must go beyond a simplistic distinction between (anthropocentric) modernity and (the “theocentric” and nature-friendly) Christian faith and view both as multilayered, complex and open traditions which, moreover, have influenced each other. The ecological problems we are facing today could not have been envisaged by modernity nor by the Bible and the Christian tradition.

### 5.2.2. The Human Being and the Revelation of the Wholly Other

“It is simple but true,” Moltmann writes, “theology has only one problem: *God*. We are theologians *for God’s sake*. God is our dignity. God is our suffering. God is our hope” (1999: 5). The fundamental question that runs through Moltmann’s entire theological project is accordingly: *How can we know God?* And: what does this knowledge involve for our daily life in the conflicts of our age? Where is the “boundary” of his transcendent kingdom in our immanent reality? How does the infinite touch the finite? His concern was to go beyond the dichotomies of God and the world and between divine history and human history without falling back into pre-Barthian identifi-

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<sup>158</sup> For exegetical debates on the *dominium terrae* and biblical anthropocentrism see e.g. Westermann 1974, Houtman 1982, Rütterswörden 1993, Van Soest 1996 and Hiebert 1996.

<sup>159</sup> For a discussion about the “violent” connotations of *radah* see also Rütterswörden 1993: 98ff.

<sup>160</sup> Hiebert suggests rehabilitating the Yahwist tradition according to which the idea of redemption is very much grounded in the world of creation, specifically in the agricultural landscape to which human beings are thought to be intrinsically related from the very beginning of this world (1993: 152).

cations of the transcendent and the immanent. That was the key issue in the 1950s and so it has been over the decades that followed.

In §5.1 I evaluated the development of Moltmann's thinking. In his later theology, the God who reveals himself is the triune God who dwells in creation and who will be "all in all" in the eternal Sabbath towards which the whole creation is moving. Human beings are created like God's image. They are *imago Trinitatis* (cf. §4.3.4). In Moltmann's later theology, the Trinity is presented as a "non-hierarchical community of equals," who are "wide rooms for each other." This mutual indwelling is not restricted to the Trinity only; referring to John 17:21, Moltmann argues that the unity of the triune God is an open, inviting unity, the spiritual space of life (*Lebensraum*) in which church, humanity and creation exist. God is not only "Wholly Other" but also the "broad space in which there is no cramping" (2003b: 122). From this follows a new thinking about human relationships and about the church in particular. As a "perichoretic" community, i.e. a nonhierarchical democratic community in which both the diversity of persons and their unity are respected, humans *reflect* the trinitarian relationships. As shown, Moltmann's notion of *imago Trinitatis* has a mystical dimension: human beings participate in the "round-dance" of the triune God. Humans (the self-immunized Western individual in particular) find true humanity only in community with God, fellow humans and nature. The second step is thus the confession that humans beings find God, themselves and their fellow creatures in this "round-dance" of the triune God.

Moltmann's ideas about "humanization" are thus fundamentally *relational*. The "proud and unhappy god," Narcissus, the *homo incurvatus in se* (or, as we could add, the bowed figure in Piranesi's dungeon) becomes a "true human being" in *perichoretic* relationships with others and nature and, related to this, in the mystical *perichoretic* relationship with the triune God. "Humanization" can thus not be perceived in categories of "having" and "achievement." Moltmann insists that "true humanity"—being *imago dei* or *gloria dei* on earth (cf. §4.3.4)—is a *gift* that can only be perceived in categories of *being* and "acceptance." It is experienced when God graciously accepts the human being and invites him into his "broad space." This anthropology is a sharp critique of the liberal glorification of individual autonomy and is a fruitful basis for Christian reflection on the modern pressure to achieve and the urge for "self-fulfilment" as well as on political and socio-economic issues like social services and health care (cf. §4.4.2). The question is how this implementation is supposed to take place. Is the notion of *perichoretic* community linked explicitly to the mystical experience of the triune God or must it be fostered as "model" for a humane society as such? I will come back to that question in §5.2.8.

### 5.2.3. The Human Being in Christological Perspective

Moltmann's theology has had a Christocentric outlook from its very beginning in Norton Camp. As recorded, in the godforsaken Jesus he recognized his "divine brother in distress, the one who takes the prisoners with him on his way to resurrection." He writes: "This early fellowship with Jesus, the brother in suffering and the redeemer from guilt, has never left me since" (§2.2.2). Only through Christ were forgiveness and reconciliation possible and only through Christ did he find a way to live with the history of his nation, to live "in the shadow of Auschwitz." The focus on Jesus Christ as *the brother in suffering* and *redeemer from guilt* enabled him to relate two realities that seemed divided forever: the godforsaken daily reality and God's reality. In the crucified but risen Christ both realities come together in a paradoxical, dialectical way. The promises of the God encountered in the godforsaken but resurrected Jesus are trustworthy because the one who promises is the one who knows what it is to suffer from forsakenness.

In his theological reflection from the late 1950s on Moltmann has sought to relate this dialectic of the cross and resurrection to the world and history. Beyond Barth and Bultmann, he aimed to express that "cross" has to do with the conflicts of our age, with the concrete suffering of people due to inhumane structures, and "resurrection" with hope for the world, with transformation of unjust structures (cf. §2.4.2). The "identity-involvement dilemma" he observes is "solved" within this Christocentric dialectic. He regards the tension between identity and relevance as the inevitable tension of the Christian faith (cf. §3.2.6). Both the crisis of identity and that of relevance can be reduced to the common denominator of the cross. If Christian theology is a genuine theology of the cross and thus worked out among the "crucified" people today, then Christian identity is rooted in its relevance and *vice versa*.

Within this framework it becomes clear that Christian anthropology is an anthropology of the crucified and risen Christ. This is the third step. "The fact that in between the mirrors and masks in which men encounter themselves, the hard reality of the crucified Lord is represented is the specific element in the Christian doctrine of man" (1974b: 21). In his entire theology this messianic anthropology is expressed in two ways. On the one hand, one gains oneself (in line with Luke 17:33) by abandoning oneself in self-emptying service to one's neighbour. The human thus does not identify himself by disregarding the negativity of life but by opening himself up to pain, patience and the dreadful power of the negative. On the other hand, the human comes to himself through hope in the fulfilment of God's promise centred in the Christ event. The promissory event of resurrection identifies

the human being. Only against the horizon of the resurrection of Christ can the question of what it is to be truly human emerge. Identification with the Crucified means solidarity with the broken, imperfect, longing, suffering world. In his later Christology, a “christology after Chernobyl” (cf. §4.3.2), this is explicitly broadened to include the entire creation. At the same time, identification with the Resurrected means hope in the future resurrection from the dead into God’s glory, i.e. the resurrection of all things that are broken in a future where God will be “all in all.”

Both sides of Moltmann’s messianic anthropology can only be brought together in a dialectical way. One can hope because Christian hope is based on the Resurrection of the Crucified and one can suffer in solidarity because “self-emptying love” is the love of the Resurrected who was crucified. One could argue that this dialectical, paradoxical language is a shortcoming in Moltmann’s theology. Is the paradox eventually not a sacrifice of the intellect or, as Mister Settembrini says in Thomas Mann’s *The Magic Mountain*, the poison of quietism and the radiance of a mind that has become lazy (Mann 1996: 221f.)? I can sympathize with Moltmann’s way of formulating his messianic anthropology. Theologically speaking, it is rooted in an event that is itself fundamentally paradoxical. If one tries to resolve this paradox one either downsizes hope or trivializes the suffering. From this Christocentric perspective Christian theology can offer serious critique of Western society, which is apparently not able to cope with suffering, pain, imperfection and death (the only way seems to suppress it). If Moltmann is to be believed, the consequence is that Western people are accordingly not able to experience real joy and wonder (cf. §4.3.1). At least in the Christian experience of God (Christ is the “gateway to the Trinity”), suffering and joy are intrinsically—i.e. messianically—related. Moltmann’s christocentric perspective on human life offers valuable clues for going beyond a superficial “pursuit of happiness.”

#### 5.2.4. The Human Being in Pneumatological Perspective

In our age, we seemingly have no choice but to place plurality and radical otherness at the centre of theological anthropology. The pneumatological dimension of Moltmann’s theology seems promising on this point. In his later theology pneumatological elaborations lead to a broadening and “spatialization” of his doctrine of the Trinity and, accordingly, to a deepening in his view of human relationships (as discussed above in §5.2.2). Moltmann includes the whole creation. It is through his Spirit that the Creator dwells in creation as a whole *and in every individual created being* and by virtue of his Spirit he holds them together and keeps them in life in a “viable symbiosis.” The multifariousness of life is interpreted as the “many-faced gifts

of the Spirit.” The fellowship of the Spirit is the “free space” in which the different *charismata* can be awakened and grow. “Everyone according to his abilities, everyone according to his needs” (cf. §4.4.3). Diversity is thus valuable in itself. Every attempt to reduce “the many” to bland homogeneity should be rejected. *Freedom* must be guaranteed to allow all *charismata* to flourish. For Moltmann this does not lead to heterogenous indifference or to the present-day urge to use all available hypes, trends, lifestyles and possibilities for “realizing” oneself. All creatures are, after all, believed to be united by the power of the one Spirit who offered the multifarious gifts. This is not the unity of the one God, the one pope, the one faith, but a unity through *love*. Unity and diversity are thus thought together by *love* (“the power of unity”) and *freedom* (“the power of diversity”).<sup>161</sup>

This “charismatic paradigm” involves a critique of the modern notion of liberation as emancipation, progress and development. Within this paradigm, true human identity basically means emancipation from structures, institutions and traditions that keep people immature and oppressed. As in Moltmann’s earlier theological reflection, the messianic lifestyle is thus one-sidedly associated with standing up, with resistance to oppressive powers, with exodus, with movement, with hope and future destiny. But what is it from which the postmodern seeker of identity must be liberated (cf. Brinkman 2003: 25)? Is this idea of the messianic lifestyle liberating for the agoraphobic and claustrophobic individual who seems paralyzed by freedom?

As pointed out, Moltmann thinks that true freedom can only be found in fellowship with the triune God. Christ is the gateway to the Trinity, but pneumatological perspectives are crucially important for expressing the “opening” of the self-immunized to community (or the re-embedding of the disembedded). The process of liberation to true freedom in community is apparently not a matter of adopting yet another lifestyle. It is a process of *rebirth*. This is the fourth step.

It is striking how dominant pneumatological perspectives are in Moltmann’s reinterpretation of the classical theological-anthropological themes of justification and sanctification (especially, of course, in *SoL*). In Moltmann’s doctrine of *sanctification* the Spirit played a large role since Moltmann began to read Calvin and Calvinist theologies in the 1950s. In his

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<sup>161</sup> I will not discuss here the question of whether it is exegetically sound to interpret the New Testament notion of “charisma” in such a way that it expresses that what every creature, in its own way, potentially is. It is attractive but—as shown in §5.1.3—also problematic.

theology of pilgrimage, of perseverance, of hope it is the Spirit who leads believers to a growth in faith on the way towards the future kingdom (cf. §2.3.3). In his doctrine of *justification*, pneumatological elements become clearly visible—not to say dominant—only in the course of his “messianic project” in the 1980s and 1990s. In *SoL* he even states that without the Holy Spirit there is no justification (*SoL*: 148). The “forensic” element remains (the operation of Christ, so to say); justification is given only out of grace (e.g. *WJC*: 186). However, he now also understands justification as *regeneration* and speaks of a “subjective” aspect of justification (not to be confused with sanctification, which refers to the new life in the righteousness of God after the act of justification). This “subjective aspect” must be ascribed to the work of the Spirit. “Justifying faith is itself the experience that the love of God has been poured out into our hearts ‘through the Holy Spirit.’” Admittedly, the idea of “acceptance of acceptance” is not new (see, for instance, §3.2.3). However, he now relates it explicitly to the experience of the Spirit.

Justification puts me in a new relationship to God, but regeneration or rebirth changes my inner substance, provides a new nucleus for my existence, puts a new self in me, and renews me myself, with my attitude to life and my conduct. Justification says what God does for human beings; regeneration says what then happens within them.

This regeneration is not about coming to terms with the past (the forgiveness of sins); it has to do with the future of life. It *opens* the enclosed human being to the future.

“Rebirth” therefore mainly involves the flourishing of that which one potentially is (that which one is intended to be by the Creator) in view of future fulfilment. It demands the freedom to explore one’s gifts. As stated above, this is not an unconstrained freedom for self-fulfilment as modern society proclaims but a freedom that is essentially embedded in a community in which these gifts are needed and appreciated and in which one is enriched through the gifts of others. The pneumatological understanding of fellowship is important; it is a unity-in-diversity and a diversity-in-unity. The Spirit unites what is different in his movement towards future consummation—but only by inspiring all creatures to let their own *charismata* flourish.

### 5.2.5. The Human Being in Eschatological Perspective

One of the most fundamental insights expressed in Moltmann’s theology is that the “home of identity” of human beings lies in the future. The question of “what makes man human” (*TH*: 196) is answered by opening up a way,

a promise, a future, in which “truth” comes to human beings. Humans do not have any “essence” but are set in a history through *call*, *election* and *promise* of God. This history is “open,” an openness grounded and kept alive by that “openness of the revelation of God which is announced in the event of the resurrection of Christ and in which this event points beyond itself to an *eschaton* of the fulness of all things.” This theological rehabilitation of history is very promising in an age in which, as Moltmann writes himself, time has been “abolished” (cf. §4.2.1).

In the 1950s the eschatological-historical dimension was expressed by categories of covenant and hope, promise and anticipation, God’s faithfulness and the “perseverance of the saints” (cf. §2.3.3). These categories were taken up in Moltmann’s theology of hope in which the future became a new model of transcendence (cf. §2.4.2). In the 1970s, the notion of the *Shekinah* was introduced, which resulted in a theology of “God’s trinitarian history with this world” (cf. §3.2.6). In the 1980s this Christian “*Shekinah* theology” was broadened to include the whole creation. The trinitarian community, dwelling in creation, moves towards final consummation (cf. §4.3.3). This indwelling takes place in a *creatio mutabilis*, a creation fundamentally open to and longing for the messianic future. In this world, humans are thus historical beings, “contemporaries of God.” Under the conditions of our broken reality, all their charismata can flourish in anticipation of future fulfilment by participation in the dwelling of God in creation.

Moltmann’s eschatology has been an alternative for both “Eternal Now” theologies and modern technological chiliasm (cf. §4.2.1). In this light the relevance of certain lines in his eschatology for present-day culture becomes pregnant. It is a protest against present-day (political) chiliasm but also against the “abolishment of time” in “our present electronic culture.” This culture, Moltmann asserts, makes “every effort to end the *anamnetic culture* of history, and to abolish the culture which lives in remembrance and hope, absorbing it into a *postmodern culture* of “the present.” The future is now! As he maintains, the crisis of modern messianism has led to a culture in which the *now* “holds all the past within itself, and no longer has any future ahead, other than itself.”<sup>162</sup> Modern messianism lifted people out

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<sup>162</sup> As sociologist David Lyon writes, the postmodern period should not be considered so much as a time of crisis but as a *crisis of time*, i.e. of the modern concept of time (Lyon 2000: 122). In our world of high technology, consumerism, globalized relations and cyberspace, *time itself has become flexible*. Lyon observes that past, present and future no longer appear as a line but as a *mélange* (Lyon 2000: 125). “Time is telescoped into today.” Or, as Zygmunt Bauman maintains, we live in a “continuous present” in which time is abolished

of traditional modes of time but the messianic concept of time it offered instead has largely become untenable.

Moltmann's theological attempt to prevent the "shutting down of history" (the transporting of past and future into present possibilities) is the fifth step on Moltmann's way to a liberating anthropology. Christian faith proclaims a future that transcends human history and is thus a future for the whole of history. But it is a transcendence that in Christ has interrupted the history of the world and thus created a new beginning that, although not latent in human history itself, is already present. This dialectic between past and future, between remembrance and hope, between cross and resurrection offers a meaningful framework in which our "little hopes" do not fall victim to resignation and cynicism (2003a: 28). It is important to stress that Moltmann's concept of time is not *chronical* but *kairotic*. The future is not a far horizon but the birth of new life *here and now*. He assumes, so to say, a *perichoresis* of times. Present and future, eternity and time, are not stages on a time line but "dwell" in each other (2002b: 114f.; strictly speaking, the usual distinction between "already" and "not yet" is even invalid since it assumes a chronical concept of time). The already "established" future is not a *futurum* but an *adventus* dawning every moment anew in our present history. The mystical experience of the "fulfilled moment" expresses a certain intensity of life, an experience in which one is "present" completely. One experiences "present eternity" (*gegenwärtige Ewigkeit*). Such experiences of "present eternity" arouse a longing for "eternal presence." The "fulfilled life" that is experienced in the mystical moment makes us hungry and thirsty for the eternal "fulness of life." Moltmann expresses this "dialectical mystery of Christian eschatology" with the words of T.S. Eliot: "In my beginning is my end, in my end is my beginning" (Moltmann 2002b: 90). The Resurrection event makes Christians "*eternal beginners*."

By placing human beings within this dialectical tension between eternity and time or future and present, Christian theology can provide the "culture of remembrance" for which many people are seeking. On the one hand it leaves the chronical concept of time in which future lies ahead of us and humans must "realize" themselves in view of this future (in a certain way, in his recent writings Moltmann approaches the Bultmannian theology of the fulfilled moment of faith from which he explicitly dissociated himself in his theology of hope). Thus it offers an alternative for the way of life proclaimed by modern achievement society and, I think, for the modern

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and has become an arbitrary sequence of present moments (Bauman 1996: 24). Past and future converge in the present, which is the moment to consume.

grand narrative of twentieth-century ecumenical theology in which the future was a design to be fulfilled (albeit not solely by human beings). On the other hand, it may be an alternative to today's "eternal present" culture. It acknowledges the present difficulties with and irrelevance of the modern linear view on history but without ending in an abolishment of history. The "eternal present" lies in the future, when God will be "all in all." Now we can experience "present eternity."

#### 5.2.6. The Human Being in Ecological Perspective

In Moltmann's opinion, the *kairotic concept of time* ("everything has its time") must be parallel to an *ecological concept of space*. Theology must not only prevent the shutting down of history, but also *the "emptying" of space* by developing an *ecological* (i.e. a "homely," cf. §4.3.3) concept of space which stresses that spaces are determined by what happens in them ("There is no such thing as empty time without happening, and in the same way there is no empty space without objects that rest or move in it," cf. §4.2.1). According to his observation, the "endlessness" of time, which "becomes a poor infinity," is matched by a limitless, homogenous conception of space. *Omnipresence* and *simultaneity* are two sides of the same coin.<sup>163</sup>

What is Moltmann's alternative to this "spatialization of the world" in which space has largely become homogenous and "empty"? In his theology "space" involves predominantly the natural environment (and even more abstractly, the "eco-system"). As said, Moltmann's theological development is characterized by a turn from eschatology to ecology, from the concept of time in the progress of human history to the concept of space in the life-giving organism of the earth. Of course, "space" was not absent in this theology. With Bonhoeffer he pleaded for the true worldliness of faith and with Van Ruler for a theology of the apostolate that includes the whole world. "World" was, however, predominantly the human world. This changed when during the 1970s and 1980s he became aware of the fact that human history takes place within the *ecological* conditions of the earth. Ecological problems forced him to offer a *theological rehabilitation of space*. With this a new field of language entered his theology: space, rest, indwell-

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<sup>163</sup> Cf. Giddens, who sees the "*separation of time and space*" as the major cause of the "disembedding" of modern individuals. He describes this "disembedding" as "the "lifting out" of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space" (Giddens 1990: 16ff., 21).

ing, inhabitation, etc. Liberation was no longer primarily expressed in terms of emancipation but in terms of participation and inhabitation.

This notion of indwelling has far-reaching consequences for his view of the relation between human beings and nature. From an evolutionary point of view, the “human being” has only recently appeared. As Moltmann writes, he still did not find his place and role on this planet. He is not “at home” in nature. This homelessness was the central theme of existentialist anthropology and, as Moltmann holds, modern philosophical anthropology has made a virtue of necessity by arguing that this *Weltoffenheit* is necessary for human self-transcendence and culture (2003b: 125). Moltmann agrees, but, as he now admits, theologically speaking he and others (he mentions Pannenberg) adopted this anthropology of the homeless human being in the 1960s and 1970s too quickly. The fact that humans are not self-evidently “at home” in nature does not imply that nature is not or should not be their home. Here we arrive at the sixth step of Moltmann’s anthropology. His theological elaborations on creation as “shared house of all earthly created beings” at least compel theologians to reconsider Christian tradition on this point.

Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz did so during a conference at the occasion of Moltmann’s seventy-fifth birthday (Müller-Fahrenholz 2002). He elaborates powerfully on the different lines in Moltmann’s ecological theology and speaks of the “*paroikal misunderstanding*” of Western Christianity (humans are *paroikoi*, strangers on this earth). He acknowledges that against the background of the growing awareness of ecological problems the Christian tradition has been rightly criticized for its anthropocentrism. Its dominant doctrine of humanity and of sin in particular involved a condemnation of nature, of the flesh, of the senses, of women, of the earth itself. Müller-Fahrenholz shows that this view still holds good, even as pastoral suggestion for dealing with suffering and misery. He quotes a recent German hymn: “That it will not be forgotten, what we so readily forget, that this poor earth is not our home”<sup>164</sup> (2002: 84). The earth is not our home—it is the place of sin, of temptation, of death, the desert we have to cross to reach the promised land. To quote the letter to the Hebrews: “For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come” (Heb. 13.14). Müller-Fahrenholz holds that this could be understood as a protest by a Christian minority against the conditions of life in the Roman empire. However, things went wrong when theologians started to transform this con-

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<sup>164</sup> “Daß nicht vergessen werde, was man so gern vergisst, daß diese arme Erde nicht unsere Heimat ist.”

crete protest in a fundamental negation of the here and now in the perspective of a future paradise. He has in view here not only the consequences for Christian soteriology: Do we really come “home” if we keep on conceiving ourselves as apart from nature, i.e. both the organic life outside ourselves and the body we are ourselves? It also functioned as a legitimation for the domination and exploitation of “demonic” nature. Throughout the history of Christianity, the anthropological *Leitbild* has been the lord who subjects “nature” and in fact can do with it as he pleases (not only the devastated earth bears witness to this but also oppressed women and the enslaved “savages”). If only because of these ecological and ethical reasons a revision of the dominant theological anthropology is needed. It requires a theology that does not only entertain the image of the human being as a *sojourner* for whom home is always elsewhere and some time away but also that of a *dweller* who seeks habitation in nature.

#### 5.2.7. The Human Being in a Eucharistic Perspective

We now come to the seventh step of Moltmann’s way towards a liberating anthropology. This step is crucial because it integrates the different aspects elaborated on so far. In §4.2 I pointed out how Moltmann was faced with the problem of how to relate two fundamental anthropological insights and, accordingly, two fundamentally different “public theologies,” a historical and a cosmological. The rehabilitation of time and the rehabilitation of space seem to lead to two different, apparently even contrasting paradigms. A public theology that seeks its relevance in ecological issues is at odds with a public theology that focusses on the “problems of history” and seeks its identity in eschatological hope and anticipation. A theology that seeks its “home in existence” by exploring “historical” categories seems to exclude a theology that probes spatial categories. To all appearances a re-embedding of postmodern people, disembedded from time and space, becomes stuck in a conflict of *faith in history* implied in the first and *ecological equilibrium* deriving from the second.

As we saw in §4.3, Moltmann solves this problem in his doctrine of God by tying together Joachim’s doctrine of the “three kingdoms” and the Eastern Orthodox concept of *perichoresis*. The latter is “dynamized” by the first, while the first is “broadened” by the latter. The notion of *Sabbath* is very important, because it relates the historical and the spatial by incorporating the time and space of creation into the history of the unfolding of God. It shows that all times and spaces are open. They point beyond themselves, to the final consummation which will be the home and dwelling place of God’s glory.

Moltmann translates this into a “sacramental worldview” by combining the sabbath and Sunday. This is one of his most encouraging theological ideas. The Sabbath-Sunday offers a perspective on life in which both rest and action, contemplation and hope, looking back and looking forward have a place. On the one hand, the role of human beings on earth resembles that of the priestly emperor in traditional Chinese culture. He represents the “archaic but ecological rule” of “*effective non-intervention*.” On the other hand, he looks forward, as a historical being, as a contemporary of God. “*All’s well that ends well*” and “*all’s well that begins well*” (cf. §4.4.1). Accordingly, Moltmann describes the role of humans as “priests and priestesses.” It is a double role: as “*gloria dei* on earth” they represent both God and the world.

How can we picture this alternative “sacramental view of the world” (2003a: 34) concretely? In searching for an image to express this priestly function of human beings I was reminded of the diary of American diplomat and historian Washington Irving, who in the spring of 1828 made a journey through Spain which ended in Granada where he stayed in the famous *Alhambra*. He describes what he experienced when he was sitting in the hills around Granada one day:

The evening was approaching; the setting sun just gilded the loftiest heights. Here and there a solitary shepherd might be descried driving his flock down the declivities, to be folded for the night; or a muleteer and his lagging animals, threading some mountain path to arrive at the city gates before nightfall.

Presently the deep tones of the cathedral bell came swelling up the defiles, proclaiming the hour of *oration* or prayer. The note was responded to from the belfry of every church, and from the sweet bells of the convents among the mountains. The shepherd paused on the fold of the hill, the muleteer in the midst of the road; each took off his hat and remained motionless for a time, murmuring his evening prayer. There is always something pleasingly solemn in this custom, by which, at a melodious signal, every human throughout the land unites at the same moment in a tribute of thanks to God for the mercies of the day. It spreads a transient sanctity over the land, and the sight of the sun sinking in all his glory adds not a little to the solemnity of the scene (Irving 1986: 263ff.).

I grant that this picture is highly romanticized and it is obviously not my intention to reduce Moltmann’s sacramental theology to sheer romanticism. However, I think it catches the “eucharistic” view on life Moltmann advo-

cates wonderfully: the cathedral bell proclaims a moment of silence, prayer and “rest” in which the human beings, working in the field, are united with the whole creation in thanksgiving to God. This “transient sanctity” is, I guess, what Moltmann has in view. For a moment, earthly existence becomes “transparent.” We must add immediately that in his theology this sanctity has an eschatological dimension. It is the “fulfilled moment” which anticipates the future “fulness of life.”

The main aspect of Moltmann’s “priestly” anthropology is that humans are called to give everything its due in the “broad space” of the triune God and in expectation of future confutation. The central Christian anthropological notion of *imago dei* does not express some (natural) quality humans possess but a promised future to be experienced in both *anticipation and participation* here and now. It can be discussed only from a *holistic* perspective: humans are the image of God—but in community with creation, in love, participation, integration, and mutual indwelling. Moreover, only as *complete* human beings, i.e. as soul and body, will humans arrive at their *telos* as the *gloria dei*. The liberation of humans is thus expressed in categories of embodiment and the meaning of their life is grasped in terms of receptivity and participation. This anthropology seems first of all a critique of the modern achievement society and the way it exploits nature. A question that could be asked is whether the “perceptive” dimension, emphasized in reaction to modern anthropology and epistemology (cf. §4.3.1) does not trivialize the “activist” responsibility of human beings (the *active intervention*) in such a way that it counterproductively obstructs a “life-furthering” attitude to nature and eventually, the arrival of claustrophobic and agoraphobic humans in their natural “home.” I will elaborate on this question.

As stated above, Moltmann holds that the concept of a “triumphant God” and of the little lord as his image is a *modern* invention. The heart of his argument is that the God of the Bible has nothing to do with this triumphant lord. With good reason he rejects the modern “objectification” of nature by the human “subject” as unbiblical (cf. §5.2.6). But is it fruitful to entertain the scheme of anthropocentrism - ecocentrism - theocentrism (cf. §4.2.3)? Moltmann cannot escape this, since he has reduced the current socio-ecological crisis exclusively to the anthropocentrism of modern humans. Rejecting any anthropocentrism, he claims that as “priests and priestesses” humans must think and act “theocentrically.” But can human beings think non-anthropocentrically and even theocentrically? Should they do so? Is it anthropocentric to think that the malaria mosquito (also a creature that should become what it is intended to be?) should be banned from the house of all created beings? Besides, is thinking “theocentrically” not simply too much for human beings? Should they really be priests on

behalf of the whole creation? Both modern anthropocentrism and modern ecocentrism presume that humans have a relation to the entire cosmos, either as its “masters and owners” or as its fellow creatures and its “justices of peace.” The biblical way of speaking about nature seems, however, much more differentiated and more cut to a human size (so *e.g.* Boersema 1997: 208, 234ff.). The Bible speaks of “wild” nature (the thorns and briars, the panthers and bears) and “domesticated” nature (the land, the cattle). The relation to wild nature is a rather marginal theme compared to the relation with domesticated nature, which is couched in crystal clear rules and prescriptions. Domesticated nature is included in the circle of religious ethics. Human beings have a moral bond with it, which determines their responsibility for it. Moltmann does not make this distinction and that seems the reason why he appears to become stuck in an impossible opposition: humans must either have control of everything and dominate it or else keep their hands off of everything and form a community with the whole creation. It is either/or. Thus it becomes hard to define human responsibility for, for instance, the veal calf (cf. §4.2.3) or the explosively growing elephant population in Africa.

We must, of course, add immediately that our relation to nature today is significantly different from the situation in the Bible. In fact, we have a relation with the whole of nature since we are apparently capable of destroying it completely. This only underscores that the place of human beings on earth is not an obvious one. It cannot trivialize the fact that human culture still has to be defended over against the threat of nature. Outside the Western world people know by experience that this is still the case (ask a fisherman in Bangladesh or a farmer in Sudan) and in spite of high-tech machines and chemical fertilizers, farmers inside the Western world would also affirm that things still do not occur automatically. Of course, Moltmann knows that the human being must create a home in nature himself, since he is an “unfinished being who is not adjusted to the environment at all” (*GiC*: 96). However, given the alarming fact that not only is human culture threatened by nature, but, conversely, modern technological-scientific civilization threatens nature, he lays—possibly too strongly—emphasis on the liberating “let it be.” Theologically and anthropologically speaking, active human intervention is not evaluated positively—it seems largely a necessary evil.

The problem this evokes is brilliantly illustrated in Etienne van Heerden’s novel *Leap Year*. It sketches late twentieth-century life in a small (fictional) city in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. This part of the world (called *De Kei*) is a “primeval world” characterized by “dust and rock and aloes and wind” (Van Heerden 1997: 55). The local farmers have to “play

the game according to the rules of wind and weather, of survival and death, of hunter and prey” (79). One of them remarks:

In this part of the world one may never forget the impassive remoteness, the inscrutability of nature, the indifference in its giving and its taking. It is as though the God who conceived it all moves through the landscape like a majestic kudu bull, guileless, fattened and content after good rains, proudly carrying his magnificent horns. (1996: 2)

At the same time, however, signs of the human exploitation of nature become visible in an almost apocalyptical way.

The winter months had given the district ample warning that nature was in an extraordinary mood. The June days had been unexpectedly warm. A meteor with a long yellow tail had passed over south-east of the Kei region. (1996: 6)

“One morning, a silvery shoal of fish had swum up through the river mouse [and] hurled themselves against the sand banks.” “... a calf with two heads had survived its own birth.” “This is raging suicide,” the people whisper. Is it the result of the way humans are disturbing the “delicate ecological balance”?

The book describes the clash between the farmers and the strong Green movement (whom the farmers call a “bunch of middle-aged hippies” who do not understand their “struggle against nature,” 1996: 83). At a certain moment, we witness a jackal hunt which gets completely out of hand. The animal runs into the town and slips inside the church. At that time a priest emerges who starts a conversation with Seamus Butler, the Master of Hunt:

“It is a necessary ritual, Father,” Seamus tries to explain. “The farming community needs the hunt to defend its flock and herds against the wild beasts of the field and the birds of the air. Today is the annual jackal hunt; it is a symbolic day for us—symbolic of the charge laid upon man in Genesis to subdue the earth and have dominion over all creeping things ...”

“And yet, my son, is it not man that has disturbed the balance of nature?” ... “To the extent that that little animal no longer has any naturel prey left?”

Seamus sighs. The hunter has now become prey. How unexpectedly labels can be switched! New times, new demands. But we, we still have to fight the good fight, for we have no defence against wind and weather, against sun and earth. (1996: 83)

The priest is, so to say, confronted with two different ideas about how humans can be *at home* in nature. The farmers with their Old Testament beards and image of humankind and the world claim that as the crown on creation and according to their divine calling humans have to act firmly and create themselves a home in the chaotic and unruly nature, while in view of the ecological crises the Greens plea for a viable symbiosis with nature. In short, the issue is one of activity over against receptivity. What should the priest do? He could invite both parties for a common sabbath-Sunday celebration, but most probably they would immediately cross swords with each other again afterwards. The Greens would plea for a continuation of the practised let-it-be attitude to be at home in nature, while the farmers would argue that in order to feel at home the chaotic powers (the jackal included) have to be actively combatted during the week.

Eventually, Moltmann's approach does not seem of much help for the pitiable priest, because it ignores too much the "double ambivalence" of "being at home" in nature. Humans do not only threaten nature but are also threatened by it. Undoubtedly, Moltmann's plea for habitation in nature is liberating for the self-immunized Western individual who has alienated himself from nature. But his suggestions of how to do so mirror only the indecisive attitude the priest adopts: distinguishing himself from the archaic "anthropocentrism" of the farmers and displaying a vague partiality for the Greens. Is Moltmann's theocentric approach in the harsh daily reality of the ongoing human struggle against nature and the threat of nature by human beings more than just a soft and Christianized ecocentrism? I think it definitely is. However, within his sacramental, eucharistic, "sabbatical" anthropology, concrete human responsibility in a broken and imperfect world should be discussed much more. Moltmann's schematizing of the problem (anthropocentrism - ecocentrism - theocentrism) seems to paralyze human responsibility in concrete situations—or better, it obstructs any attempt to ground it theologically. Perhaps "priest" is too strong a metaphor. It suggests that humans have a relationship with the whole of nature and it emphasizes predominantly the common messianic longing for future consummation. In fact, the relationship with nature is thus reduced to something as abstract as the eco-system and bypasses the complicated dilemmas of people struggling with nature as well as responsibility for the "concrete" nature with which humans are living (the veal calf would probably welcome a more concrete theology of nature).

#### 5.2.8. The Human Being in the Perspective of the Apostolate

This leads us finally to the eighth step, the human being in the perspective of Christian mission. "The proclamation of the gospel, the community of

faith, and the diakonia or service of love all have to do with *the world in the kingdom of God and the kingdom of God in the world.*” Thus Moltmann claims in *God for a Secular Society* and he continues:

The future of God which is symbolized by the term “kingdom of God” includes the future of the world: the future of the nations, the future of humanity, the future of all living things and the future of the earth, on which and from which everything that is here lives. In the biblical writings “the kingdom of God” is the broadest, most comprehensive horizon of hope for the *general well-being* of the world. (1999a: 251f.)

He thus follows up on what he learned from Van Ruler: Theology is apostolate theology and the church is an apostolate church. The church is not a means to an end but a “function” of the kingdom of God. Apostolate theology belongs within all the different sectors of a society’s life: political, cultural, economic and ecological.

Moltmann fully acknowledges that within almost half a century our society has changed fundamentally and with this the task of apostolate theology. The church has become a minority church. For Moltmann, this is in a certain way a blessing (2003b: 116). The end of the Christian world offers new perspectives for the church and even the possibility of a “rebirth.” Since it no longer needs to be the religion of society it can become what it was always intended to be, a “vehicle of God’s reign” or the “avant garde of a redeemed humanity.”

With the same persuasion as in the 1950s he thus rejects any “churchification” of the world. With Moltmann, I see the dangers of a new “churchification” today. In a pluralist context it is tempting to wall oneself in, to seek security on an island of like-minded. As he has claimed for at least thirty years, true “community” is not based on “like seeks after like” but upon the acknowledgement of what is “other” (*CG*: 26, Moltmann 1990). Moreover, it is the common future of life in the kingdom of God that is at stake, not the position and power of the Church. In §5.1 I argued that today theology can no longer assume a broad consensus about what “life” is. Churches proclaim and practise the universal Christian perspective on life. Their mission should, indeed, be “the invitation to life” (1999a: 238)—not the extension of Christian (or Western) civilization but an invitation to the “fulness of life” as they view it. This is not a surrender to a pluralist mindset, as Moltmann suspects, but full acknowledgement of the radical plurality of existing universal claims. New apostolate theology cannot, as Moltmann

provocatively remarks, be “post-dialogical.”<sup>165</sup> Of course, he has particularly in view the “conservative” “reconciled difference” at all kinds of well-intentioned interreligious meetings. But, as stated, we cannot move beyond “direct” dialogue as such by assuming a “third factor” on which we are supposed to find one another (cf. §5.1).

As emphasized above, the Christian perspective on true life is for Moltmann a life in community with God, fellow humans, one’s own body and nature. We have seen how he, exploring the theological notions of *perichoresis* and *Shekinah*, develops a way of thinking about the relationship between the three divine Persons in which the Trinity is presented as a “non-hierarchical community of equals.” The notion of space has become important: the trinitarian Persons are not only Persons but also Spaces, i.e. “wide rooms for each other.” From this follows a new thinking about human relationships, about the church in particular. First, as a *perichoretic* community—i.e. a nonhierarchical democratic community in which both the diversity of persons and their unity are respected—humans reflect the trinitarian relationships. As such a community they are the *imago trinitatis*. Secondly, they participate in the “round-dance” of the trinitarian Persons. By God’s grace they are invited into the community of the Trinity. This is the mystical dimension of Moltmann’s renewed doctrine of the Trinity. The Johannine texts to which he refers (particularly John 17:21) characterize the life of the Christian community within the direct experience of God’s love first of all. Moltmann, however, emphasizes that these texts are not just meant for the sustaining of Christian congregations. In the fellowship of the Spirit, he writes, the gathering of Christians in the church and the mission or sending out of the church to Christians in the world are “rhythmically related” to one another (cf. §4.4.3). These belong together “like breathing in and breathing out.” But how?

In Moltmann’s (recent) publications I find clues for two different ways to work out the implications of his image of *perichoretic* fellowship. First, starting from the Johannine texts about Christian fellowship and its participation in the divine love between the three Persons, one could develop a theological strategy for the concrete existence of the local Christian congregation in today’s pluralized society. Such a community lives in the direct experience of the triune God. At the same time it reflects the unity-in-diversity of the trinitarian fellowship. The main aim of public theology is then to develop strategies for local congregations, to give some clues of how

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<sup>165</sup> Moltmann suggested so in a lecture in Utrecht, The Netherlands, titled “Theologie der Hoffnung - 40 Jahre danach” (on February 18, 2004).

they—within our individualized society—could be living examples of what John portrays as true humanity, namely a community of human beings which respects the individuality and personality of each person but only in community and, as we may add, a community which respects the community of creation in which we live. Secondly, one can also start at the global level, suggesting that what John says about human community should actually be the way human society as such should be organized within the framework of nature. In that case the idea of reflecting the trinitarian fellowship is disconnected from the idea of direct participation in this trinitarian community, i.e. from the direct experience of faith. In this way a public theology analyzes and undermines hierarchical, “monarchical” structures of our society or, more broadly, of our globalized world as a whole and presents the idea of *perichoritic* community as an alternative model for the shape of society, concretely a model in which both personal freedom and sociality are related in such a way that ecological limits are respected.

The second strategy, aiming at a fundamental reformation of society, is directed immediately at the global problems threatening the common future of life. I tend to share Bauckhams doubts at this point (cf. §4.4.3). Can we uncouple the ideal of *perichoretic* community from the specific experience of faith, of the concrete experience of graciously being taken up into the broad space of the Trinity (cf. Jansen 1995: 143)? If we disconnect both aspects of Moltmann’s *imago trinitatis* idea, are we then not simply left with the modern secular ideals of democracy and interhuman relationships? One could even suspect that Moltmann starts with these contemporary, anti-hierarchical ideals and then pursues these in his theological thinking and ultimately in his doctrine of God.

The first strategy seems to me far more promising. With Moltmann, we can say that as “sacraments” of God’s trinitarian history with this world, the church must create a “messianic intermezzo” (cf. §3.2.6). “For a particular time, in a particular space through a particular community, the laws and compulsions of ‘this world’ become invalid .... An alternative emerges and is presented in festal forms” (*CPS*: 111). As a sacrament of God’s liberating history, the church is, so to say, a playing field where people find new “identity” and recognition and where they are given room to practice this new way of existence by trial and error.

However, the question is, of course, how one, starting at the local level, eventually arrives at the global level at which the world-threatening problems to which a public and apostolate theology aims to respond manifest themselves. There is every indication that the churches are facing a dilemma. How does one foster a more humane society? On the one hand, if

churches emphasize a reversal (or at least a significant change) of socio-economic structures, they may run the risk of biting off more than they can chew and of slipping back into abstract talk about macrostructures that does not at all affect the daily lives of people. On the other hand, if they try to “re-embed the disembedded” at the local level (for instance by encouraging and facilitating encounters), what could their relevance be for worldwide problems threatening the future of life?

The salutary discovery of apostolate theology in the 1950s was that the realization of the kingdom of God does not solely depend on God’s presence in the church. Moltmann worked out this idea with the help of Bonhoeffer’s theology of the mandates (cf. §2.3.2, §2.3.4). In recent articles he follows this idea in his elaborations on the task of a minority church in a secular society. In view of their gathering into a community, he writes, Christians see each other as brothers and sisters and “friends;” in view of their mission, they are “experts of their lives and their professions and work in society” (2003b: 123):

They will see to it that in society and politics, in economics and culture correspondences and anticipations of the Kingdom of God that they expect in the world arise and oppositions and obstacles are removed.

For Moltmann the separation of church and state does not mean that religion has to become a private affair and that the church turns into “a kind of club.”

Religious freedom doesn’t just mean the personal choice of a religion; it also means the freedom of the church’s institutions and of Christian organizations. Creches and nurseries, schools, universities, newspapers, television, further education, and the various forms of charitable service all carry into society the universal kingdom-of-God concerns of the churches which are now free of the state. (1999a: 254)

The mission of the kingdom of God does not depend on the church or the pope; “the ‘laity’ are the Christian specialists who have the whole say here” (1999a: 254).

The Bonhoefferian theology of mandates was Christocentric. Every particular sphere of life has its own mandate within the universal rule of Christ the *pantocrator*. The later pneumatological broadening of Moltmann’s theology enables him to recognize and acknowledge diversity. The acknowledgement that the Spirit of life goes its own way and is present in this world in many different ways means a more “relaxed” theology of the apostolate. This idea of energetic diversity within the unity of life in the

trine God (a particular Christian *claim* on universality) offers a perspective from which one can generously acknowledge the presence of God in what is “other”—not only in the “good work” others do but, possibly, also in their way of giving meaning and spirituality.

### 5.3. *Re-embedding the Disembedded? Concluding Remarks*

Moltmann intended to offer a liberation theology for Westerners (cf. §3.4.3). It was their isolation, their being “self-immunized,” their alienation from community with God, fellow humans, their own bodies and nature as a whole that appeared to be the problem. They suffer from a domination syndrome, so the diagnosis runs. Where do these agoraphobic and claustrophobic Westerners, living in their “self-made and preserved technological incubator,” find the “boundary” of transcendent reality?

For Moltmann it is first of all God himself who comes to them and invites them into the “round-dance” of the three divine Persons. To participate in this, Western individuals must, in “imitation” of Christ, face the suffering of this world in solidarity and “self-emptying love.” Accordingly, they will experience a “hope against hope” which goes beyond any superficial pursuit of happiness. Thus Christ is the “gateway” to the Trinity. What they will experience, so Moltmann believes, is the life-furthering Spirit who is present in all things and renews all things in view of future fulfilment. This experience of God, as I understand from Moltmann’s books, places the disembedded in both *time* and *space*. Moltmann’s *kairotic* understanding of time goes beyond the endless repetition of the present moment. It is a “fulfilled” time. People experience the fulness of life in the “fulfilled moment.” His *ecological* concept of space goes beyond the homogenous expanse of identical places. It sees the world as a shared house of all created beings in which every creature has its place. The *kairotic* and the *ecological* are liturgically related in the sabbath-Sunday celebration, which is a *eucharistic*, doxological way of anticipation and participation, of looking back and looking forward, of “rest” and of hope. Moltmann insists that this attitude to life is to be translated into a new apostolate theology, a theology of “life,” which encourages believers to “life-furthering action” in all spheres of life.

Moltmann’s theology has been a theology “on the way.” His intention is to place time and again the concrete historical challenges he sees in the perspective of biblical testimonies to God and his future. Following a “descriptive-analytical” method I have tried to depict his ongoing quest for a liberating anthropology. “Limping but blessed”—thus Moltmann characterized his “root experiences” in the post-war years. This Jabbok experience can be regarded as the *Leitmotief* of his theological search for liberating per-

spectives on human life, a search for true humanity in face of suffering and hope, vulnerability and the power of resurrection, cross experiences and the laughter of Easter. I attempted to show how fundamental anthropological perspectives, already articulated in the first stages of his theological journey, were continually revisited and readjusted in the face of new challenges. In this way Moltmann's theology shows a remarkable continuity. He has presented his theology as a fundamentally *open* theology—open to dialogue (with both contemporaries and predecessors) and open to the future. It is, so to say, designed as a theology *to be continued*. This final chapter was a very preliminary attempt to pursue his insights today.

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# Index

- Abraham . . . . . 38, 110, 155-56,  
242, 304
- actualism . . . 43, 45-46, 51, 107,  
315
- Adenauer, Konrad . . . . . 11
- Adorno, Theodor . . . . . 124, 138
- Ahn Byung-Mu . . . . . 211
- Allende, Salvador . . . . . 187
- Alves, Rubem . . . . . 116, 191-92,  
197, 202, 317
- Amesius, Wilhelm . . . . . 54-55
- Amyraut, Moyse . . . . . 38-39
- anthropocentrism . . . . . 213, 240,  
242, 321, 333-34, 343, 346-  
47, 349
- anthropology . . . 1-5, 7-9, 12, 15,  
26, 50-51, 63-64, 81-82, 88,  
95, 106, 108-09, 111-12,  
114-17, 119, 124, 127-28,  
131, 133, 138-40, 143-44,  
149, 155, 171, 184, 213, 215-  
16, 219, 244, 269-70, 272-74,  
276, 278-79, 289-91, 296,  
310-11, 313, 316-18, 322-25,  
329-31, 333, 335-37, 341,  
343-44, 346, 349, 354
- apathy . . . . . 12-13, 15, 24-25, 55,  
86-87, 106, 137, 155, 187,  
217, 232, 234-35, 308, 314-  
15, 329
- apostolate . . . . . 9, 31, 56, 60, 63,  
107, 112-13, 215, 300-01,  
310-11, 342, 349-50, 352-54
- Aristotle . . . . . 109, 143, 197
- Assmann, Hugo . . 188, 190, 202
- Augustine . . . . . 109, 205, 261, 289
- Baader, Franz . . . . . 288
- Bach, J.S. . . . . 146
- Bacon, Francis . . . . . 223
- baptism . . . . . 165, 251, 284
- Barth, Karl . . . 13, 23, 26-27, 29-  
33, 36, 42-43, 46, 48, 50, 54-  
56, 74, 81-83, 87, 91, 93-94,  
99, 102, 110, 178, 191, 210,  
314, 316, 336
- Bauckham, Richard . . . 22, 108,  
122, 238, 247, 260, 268, 277,  
307
- Bauman, Zygmunt . . . . . 340-41
- Ben-Chorim, Schalom . . . . . 57
- Bengel, J.A. . . . . 52
- Benz, E. . . . . 261
- Berkhof, H. . . . . 39-41, 114, 166
- Berkouwer, G.C. . . 39-43, 46, 50
- Binder, Wolfgang . . . . . 24
- Bloch, Ernst . . . . 6, 9, 15, 80, 86-  
94, 96-97, 105, 108, 116,  
120, 124, 138, 140-41, 148,  
269-70, 316, 331
- Blumhardt, C.F. . . . . 57, 59
- Boersema, Jan J. . . . . 347
- Boff, Leonardo . . . . . 189, 246
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich . . . . . 7, 23-  
24, 30-37, 57-59, 61, 63, 95,  
102, 107, 112, 167, 256, 315,  
342
- Borchert, Wolfgang . . . . . 11, 20
- Borgman, Erik . . . . . 326
- Boterman, Frits . . . . . 11
- Bouma-Prediger, Steven . . . . . 289,  
293
- Braaten, Carl. E. . . . . 14
- Brinkman, Martien E. . . . . 251, 338

- Brocardus, Johannes . . . . . 38  
 Brugsma, W.L. . . . . 220, 303  
 Buber, Martin . . . . . 304  
 Bucer, Martin . . . . . 47  
 Bultmann, Rudolph . . . 12-14, 43,  
     46, 81-83, 87, 94, 110, 163,  
     191, 210, 336  
 Burnham, Frederic B. . . . . 19  
 Calvin, John . . . . . 38-39, 47-50,  
     54, 92, 95, 107, 145, 309,  
     315, 338  
 Calvinist . . . . . 24, 38-43, 48, 50-  
     53, 55-56, 62-63, 80, 83, 87,  
     94, 96, 107, 127, 145, 150,  
     170-71, 179, 300, 315, 338  
 Cappadocians . . . . . 261, 289  
 certainty of life . . . . . 6, 10, 14, 32,  
     34, 42, 47-48, 55, 62, 64, 91,  
     107, 151, 315, 330  
 charismata . . . . . 296, 298-99, 310,  
     312, 323, 328, 338-40  
 church . . . . . 4-5, 10-12, 18, 28-29,  
     31, 35-38, 44, 46, 49, 55-61,  
     67, 76-77, 100, 102, 112-13,  
     119, 121, 127-33, 138, 142,  
     152, 155, 160-70, 172, 174-  
     75, 186, 189, 206, 210, 215-  
     16, 221-22, 246, 252, 284,  
     287, 294-98, 300-01, 303,  
     306-07, 315, 317, 319, 324-  
     25, 333, 335, 345, 348, 350-  
     53  
 Cocceius, Johannes . . . . . 38, 51,  
     53-55, 117, 179, 258, 272  
 Columbus, Christopher . . . . . 231  
 community . . . . . 9-10, 28, 32-33,  
     37, 66-67, 76-78, 95, 128,  
     134, 136-37, 149, 160-61,  
     163, 166-67, 175, 178, 180,  
     183-84, 191, 197, 201, 204-  
     05, 208-09, 231, 236, 238-41,  
     244, 253-54, 265-68, 270-71,  
     276-78, 281-82, 284, 286-87,  
     290-91, 293, 296-303, 307-  
     12, 323, 332, 335, 338-40,  
     346-54  
 Cone, James H. . . . . 135, 188-89,  
     202, 210  
 counter-history . . . . . 8, 63, 127,  
     154, 159, 162, 165, 195, 214,  
     260, 319, 321, 331  
 Cox, Harvey . . . . . 114, 117, 138,  
     188, 317  
 creation . . . . . 5, 35, 53-55, 60, 80,  
     89, 97, 101, 114, 120, 141,  
     145-48, 150, 153, 156, 165-  
     66, 173, 176-77, 179-81, 206,  
     221, 223, 228, 241-44, 248,  
     253, 255-64, 266-72, 274-87,  
     290-93, 296-300, 304, 306-  
     12, 321-23, 326, 329, 334-35,  
     337, 340, 343-44, 346-47,  
     349, 352  
 cross . . . . . 8, 13, 22, 25, 37, 48,  
     57, 59, 82-83, 96-97, 100-06,  
     109, 111-12, 116-17, 122-23,  
     126-27, 132, 141-42, 146-47,  
     151-52, 158-59, 163, 165-66,  
     187, 189, 192-93, 214, 216,  
     234, 248, 254-55, 257, 259,  
     301, 309, 314, 317-19, 331,  
     336, 341, 343, 349  
 De Kruijf, Gerrit G. . . . . 4  
 De Wit, J.H. . . . . 154  
 Descartes, René . . . . . 223-25,  
     237, 288  
 Deuser, Hermann . . . . . 1  
 dignity . . . . . 96, 113, 135-36, 172,  
     178, 180, 183, 185-86, 227,

- 238, 287, 299, 334  
 disembedded . . . . . 9, 105, 151,  
 226, 281, 313, 338, 344, 353-  
 54  
 diversity . . . . . 9, 167, 213, 219,  
 230, 254, 265, 293, 296-300,  
 310, 323, 327, 335, 338-39,  
 351, 353  
 domination . . . . . 32, 57, 69, 142,  
 224-25, 229, 236-37, 241,  
 247, 271, 289, 292, 308, 332-  
 33, 344, 354  
*dominium terrae* . . . . . 180, 259,  
 271, 334  
 Dostoevski, Fyodor . . . . . 19  
 Dussel, Enrique . . . . . 188  
 Dutschke, Rudi . . . . . 122  
 dwelling . . . . . 156, 213, 243, 264,  
 267-68, 279, 291, 302, 310,  
 329-30, 340, 344  
 D'Costa, Gavin . . . . . 246  
 Easter . . . . . 96-98, 103-04, 108,  
 146-47, 149, 166, 214, 257  
 ecocentrism . . . . . 240-42, 309, 321,  
 321, 346-47, 349  
 ecological crisis . . . . . 5, 220-21,  
 224, 229, 267, 277, 288-89,  
 305, 308, 331, 346  
 ecumenical theology . . . . . 203,  
 219, 325, 342  
 Eicher, Peter . . . . . 91  
 Einstein, Albert . . . . . 18  
 Elert, W. . . . . 46  
 Eliade, Mircea . . . . . 95  
 Eliot, T.S. . . . . 341  
 emancipation . . . . . 65-66, 77, 99,  
 133, 136, 220, 226, 228, 286,  
 296, 302, 329, 338, 343  
 Engels, Friedrich . . . . . 197  
 Enlightenment . . . . . 39, 91, 124,  
 168, 223, 233, 237  
 equilibrium . . . . . 44, 217, 223-25,  
 241, 244, 300, 310, 321, 344  
 eschatology . . . . . 13-14, 30-31,  
 39, 45, 87, 90-91, 94-95, 97,  
 114, 122, 126, 147-48, 167,  
 172, 194-95, 206, 229, 232,  
 340-42  
 eucharistic . . . . . 9, 215, 292, 311,  
 323, 344-45, 349, 354  
 existentialism . . . . . 14-15, 84, 123  
 exodus . . . . . 8, 86-87, 97, 104,  
 129-30, 152, 156, 178-79,  
 187, 203, 206, 219, 242, 244-  
 45, 268, 321, 338  
 faith . . . . . 8, 12-15, 19, 23, 25-27,  
 30-36, 38-51, 54-59, 61, 63,  
 71, 75-78, 81-83, 87, 92, 95,  
 97, 99-100, 102, 104-05, 107,  
 109, 115-16, 120, 125-26,  
 128, 131-32, 144, 150-51,  
 154, 161, 163, 168, 170, 172-  
 78, 182-83, 185-86, 193, 203,  
 209, 212, 216, 219, 221, 225,  
 227, 234, 242, 246-48, 250-  
 51, 256, 276, 294-95, 298,  
 302-06, 312, 314-15, 317,  
 319, 321, 324-25, 328, 332-  
 34, 336, 338-39, 341-42, 344,  
 350, 352  
 Falcke, Heino . . . . . 206  
 fellowship . . . . . 9, 21, 96, 147,  
 158-59, 162, 166, 178, 180,  
 207-08, 214, 239, 246, 251-  
 53, 255, 260, 269, 271-74,  
 283, 290-91, 293, 296-303,  
 307-08, 310-11, 323, 336,  
 338-39, 351-52

- Feuerbach, Ludwig . . . 101, 126, 139-40
- Frankfurt School . . . 6, 124-26, 317, 332
- freedom . . 6, 13-15, 27, 33, 46, 56, 60, 66-67, 69-70, 74, 78, 83-84, 86, 88, 90, 101, 105, 113, 116, 119-21, 124-28, 132, 140, 143, 146-47, 150-51, 154-55, 159-62, 164-67, 169, 172-74, 176, 179-80, 182-83, 186-87, 194-95, 201, 204-09, 213, 216, 231, 235-40, 244, 246, 252, 263, 267-68, 272, 283-84, 296, 298-300, 307-09, 317-18, 320-21, 326, 329, 332-33, 338-39, 352-53
- \*French, William C. . . 120, 171, 228, 324
- Freud, Sigmund . . . . . 88
- Furtwangler, Albert . . . . . 225
- future . . . . 6- 7, 12-13, 15, 21, 39-42, 44-45, 47-48, 50-52, 61-63, 72-73, 83-98, 100-05, 107-10, 112-14, 116-17, 120-23, 125-26, 129, 137-38, 145, 147, 149, 151-53, 156-57, 159-61, 164, 166-69, 172, 174-76, 178-82, 184, 192, 194-95, 200, 204, 206, 208-09, 213-15, 220, 226, 228-29, 232-34, 236, 239-41, 244-45, 250, 253, 256-57, 262, 267-69, 273-78, 280-84, 290-91, 293, 295, 299-300, 304, 306-07, 309-11, 316-17, 319-22, 328, 331, 337-42, 344, 346, 349-50, 352-54
- Garaudy, Roger . . . 76, 120, 239
- Gardavsky, Vitezslav . . . . . 119
- Geertsema, H.G. . . . . 91, 94
- Gehlen, Arnold . . 64-65, 74, 78, 131
- Giddens, Anthony . . . . . 342
- gloria dei* . . 8, 54-55, 117, 127, 145, 179, 244, 269, 274-75, 277, 290, 311, 322, 335, 345-46
- glorification . . 41, 48, 159, 258, 262-64, 274, 276, 335
- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang . . 18, 155
- grace . . . . . 40-41, 43, 48, 144, 147, 164, 178, 258, 262, 264, 275, 282, 307, 339, 351
- Graham, Gordon . . . . . 326
- Gunton, Colin . . . . . 246-47
- Gutiérrez, Gustavo . . . . 189-90, 202, 230, 250
- habitualism . . . . . 43, 45, 51, 53, 55, 315
- Hegel, G.W.F. . . 66-67, 70, 94, 99-102, 111, 214, 319
- Heidegger, Martin . . . . . 13, 64, 66, 315
- Hermann, R. . . . . 46
- heterogeneity . . . . . 79
- Hiebert, Theodore . . . . . 334
- Hillgruber, Andreas . . . . . 17
- history . . . . . 5-7, 13-15, 20, 22-25, 27, 29, 31, 34-35, 39, 41-44, 46, 50-58, 60-63, 72, 74-76, 82-92, 94-96, 98-105, 107-12, 117, 122, 124, 126-27, 141, 147-49, 151-52, 154-57, 159-69, 172-74, 177-78, 180, 182, 184-85, 191-95, 198, 200-01, 203, 206, 210,

- 213-16, 219-20, 225-40, 242,  
 244, 248-49, 251-55, 257,  
 260-63, 266-68, 270, 276,  
 278, 281-82, 284, 291-92,  
 305, 310, 314-16, 318-19,  
 321-22, 326, 330-31, 334,  
 336, 340-42, 344, 352
- Hitler, Adolf . . . . . 18, 28
- Hoekendijk, J.C. . . . . 31, 116, 301
- Holl, K. . . . . 46
- home . . . . . 2, 6-7, 9-13, 18, 20-  
 22, 31, 65, 69, 79, 86, 88-89,  
 94, 110, 114, 127, 181, 203,  
 220, 228-30, 234, 240, 244-  
 45, 258, 260, 263, 267-70,  
 275-77, 285, 289, 293, 310-  
 11, 316, 322-23, 329, 339,  
 343-44, 346-47, 349
- homelessness . . . . . 13, 25, 31, 64,  
 66, 126, 129, 343
- homo absconditus* . . . . . 64, 80-81,  
 106, 331
- homogeneity . . . . . 79, 219, 255,  
 265, 296, 298-99, 323, 338
- hope . . . . . 1, 3, 6, 9-10, 12, 14-  
 15, 18, 21-25, 27, 30, 38, 43,  
 45, 47-50, 54, 56, 59-60, 62-  
 64, 69, 80, 83, 85-97, 99,  
 102-05, 107-17, 120-22, 124-  
 26, 129, 151, 154, 156-57,  
 161, 163-65, 167-69, 173-74,  
 176, 178, 182, 187, 190-92,  
 195, 199, 209, 213-15, 219-  
 20, 227-28, 231, 233-34, 255,  
 257, 264, 268-69, 273-74,  
 277, 280, 283-85, 295-96,  
 304, 306, 309, 311, 313-17,  
 321-23, 331, 334, 336-41,  
 344-45, 350, 354
- Horkheimer, Max . . . . . 124, 138
- Houtman, C. . . . . 334
- human rights . . . . . 7, 127, 137,  
 170-86, 188, 202, 204, 213,  
 227, 238, 287, 294, 299, 319-  
 20, 325, 328
- humanization . . . . . 72, 84, 130-31,  
 161, 175, 182, 184-86, 317,  
 319-20, 322-23, 325, 335
- Hurthouse, Rosalind . . . . . 143
- identity . . . . . 5-7, 16, 29, 38, 46,  
 59, 61, 63, 71, 81, 88, 90, 94,  
 103, 105, 107-08, 110-12,  
 114-16, 126, 128, 131-36,  
 138, 143-45, 149-54, 160-70,  
 172, 175-77, 184-85, 191-94,  
 201-02, 207, 209, 213-16,  
 219-21, 226, 228-29, 240,  
 244-46, 255, 276-77, 286,  
 290-91, 302, 304, 307-08,  
 310, 313, 316-19, 321, 332,  
 336, 338-39, 344, 352
- imago dei* . . . . . 53, 269-75, 287,  
 289-93, 323, 335, 346
- imago mundi* . . . . . 269-70, 275,  
 291-93, 310, 323
- individual . . . . . 4, 14-16, 27, 33,  
 37, 44, 63-64, 66, 74, 78, 82-  
 83, 100, 130, 162, 172, 176,  
 179-83, 185-86, 234, 236-40,  
 242, 245, 247, 249, 268, 277,  
 286, 299, 301, 318, 327, 329-  
 33, 335, 337-38, 349
- inhabitation . . . . . 223, 266-68,  
 321, 331, 343
- Isaac . . . . . 156
- Iwand, Hans-Joachim . . . . . 25, 46,  
 94, 100
- Jacob . . . . . 5, 11, 20, 23, 156, 313

- Jansen, Henry . . . . . 2, 352
- Johns, Roger Dick . . . . . 123
- joy . . . . . 23, 31, 55-56, 60, 127-28, 145-49, 205, 244, 250-51, 277, 279, 283, 321, 337
- Jung, C.G. . . . . 88
- Jünger, Ernst . . . . . 72
- justification . . . . . 2, 25, 39-42, 49-51, 55, 60, 76, 81, 127-28, 135-36, 142, 144, 146, 149-51, 162-63, 165, 181-82, 184, 211-12, 244, 274-75, 282, 318-19, 321, 338-39
- Kafka, Franz . . . . . 69
- Kant, Immanuel . . . . . 124, 250
- Käsemann, Ernst . . . . . 28, 38, 52
- kenosis . . . . . 53, 102, 111, 158, 159
- Kierkegaard, Søren . . . . . 100
- King, Martin Luther . . . . . 121, 179, 236
- kingdom of God . . . . . 14-15, 37, 41, 52, 57, 60, 73, 86, 107, 113-14, 116, 151, 159, 164, 168-69, 172, 175-78, 180, 190, 195, 206, 213, 218-19, 222, 229, 234-35, 240, 262, 264, 283, 295, 296, 300-01, 303, 306-07, 310, 312, 317, 320, 323-25, 350, 353
- Köberle, A. . . . . 46
- Koopman, Nico . . . . . 4
- Krech, Shepard . . . . . 225
- Kuitert, H.M. . . . . 43
- Kuyper, Abraham . . . . . 38, 50
- Lapide, Pinchas . . . . . 158
- Leninism . . . . . 119
- Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim . . . . . 17
- liberation . . . . . 5, 6, 17, 21-22, 37, 66, 74, 106, 122, 124, 126-27, 132-36, 144, 150, 154, 156-57, 159, 169-71, 173-78, 182, 184-93, 196-206, 208-14, 217, 219-20, 227-28, 230, 237-38, 244-47, 250-51, 254, 256, 259-60, 263, 267, 273-75, 277-78, 283, 286, 290, 296, 301-02, 309, 320-23, 325, 330, 332, 338, 343, 346
- liberation theology . . . . . 17, 154, 171, 175-77, 184, 187, 189-90, 200, 202-04, 206, 208-12, 219, 230, 302, 354
- Lochman, Jan Milic . . . . . 119, 170-71, 177, 181, 184
- Lovelock, James . . . . . 222
- Luria, Isaac . . . . . 266
- Luther, Martin . . . . . 2, 6, 13, 25, 46-47, 81, 96, 121, 141-44, 146, 205, 210
- Lutheran . . . . . 25, 45, 50-51, 60, 147, 151, 163, 170, 178, 286
- Lyon, David . . . . . 340
- Machovec, Milan . . . . . 120
- Malcolm X . . . . . 135
- Mann, Thomas . . . . . 337
- Marcuse, Herbert . . . . . 124, 294
- Marsch, Wolf-Dieter . . . . . 9, 91
- Marx, Karl . . . . . 69, 86, 90, 120, 126, 191, 197-98
- Marxism . . . . . 15, 119-21, 129, 133, 149, 189, 196, 198, 294
- meaning . . . . . 5, 14, 16, 58, 64, 70, 77-78, 80, 86, 98-100, 102, 108, 120, 127, 130, 145, 147-49, 155, 166, 174-75, 190, 207, 210, 224, 229, 233-

- 34, 238, 241-42, 244, 249,  
 258, 266-67, 277-79, 282,  
 284-86, 290-92, 322-23, 327,  
 330, 346, 354  
 Meeks, M. Douglas . . . . 30, 100  
 Meijering, E.P. . . . . 14  
 Messianic . . . . 7, 11, 14-16, 36,  
 38, 52, 86, 88, 107-12, 124,  
 127, 129, 161, 163, 165-69,  
 173, 182, 186, 206, 219, 228-  
 33, 235, 241-42, 255-57,  
 259-60, 267, 269, 273-75,  
 277, 282-85, 293, 296, 300,  
 306-11, 315-16, 319, 321,  
 332, 336-41, 349, 352  
 Metz, Johann Baptist . . . 6, 119,  
 121, 123-26, 190, 197, 199,  
 235, 237, 295, 317, 325-26  
 Migliore, Daniel L. . . . . 114  
 Míguez Bonino, José . . . . 131,  
 152, 154, 188, 192-93, 196-  
 97, 202  
 modernity . . . . 8, 15, 65-67, 73,  
 86, 114, 124, 133, 137, 223,  
 225, 227-28, 230, 232-33,  
 237, 241, 247, 276, 295, 307,  
 321, 329, 330, 332-34  
 Moltmann-Wendel, Elisabeth . . .  
 9, 26, 121  
 Morse, Christopher . . . . . 19  
 Müller-Fahrenholz, Geiko . . . 9,  
 62, 157, 190, 203, 206, 217-  
 18, 268, 343,  
 Müntzer, Thomas . . . . . 86  
 Musil, Robert . . . . . 71  
  
 Nenning, Günter . . . . . 119, 121  
 Nietzsche, Friedrich . . . . 18, 44,  
 58, 72-73, 80, 101  
 Noordmans, O. . . . . 5  
  
 Nygren, Anders . . . . . 22  
  
 Oberman, Heiko . . . . . 47  
 Otto, Randall E. . . . . 30, 38, 80,  
 178  
  
 Pannenberg, Wolfhart . . . 87, 91,  
 94, 343  
 Parmenides . . . . . 92  
 pathos . . . . . 155-58, 248, 266  
 Paul . . . . 40, 93, 150, 160, 259,  
 274, 275  
 perichoresis . . . 240, 260, 264-67,  
 297, 322, 341, 344, 351  
 Peron, Juan Domingo . . . . . 187  
 perseverance . . . 6, 38-45, 48-51,  
 53, 55-56, 59, 62, 70, 96,  
 107, 153, 214, 315, 339, 340  
 Peters, Tiemo Rainer . . . . . 123  
 Pezel, Christoph . . . . . 38  
 Pixley, Jorge V. . . . . 188  
 Planck, Max . . . . . 18  
 Plessner, Helmut . . . . . 64-65  
 plurality . . . 7, 15, 64, 106, 108,  
 114, 168-69, 213, 216-17,  
 246, 294, 310, 326-28, 332,  
 337, 350  
 predestination . . . 43, 46-50, 53,  
 55-56, 95, 107, 315  
 priest . . . . . 348-49  
 progress . . . . 12, 40, 49, 64-65,  
 84-86, 105, 183, 220, 224-27,  
 230, 243-44, 267, 293, 300,  
 323, 330, 338, 342  
 Prometheus . . . . . 90, 109, 116  
 promise . . . . . 6, 23, 33, 35, 40,  
 47-51, 53, 56, 62-63, 83, 87,  
 91-99, 102-05, 107-10, 113-  
 14, 116, 122, 126, 163, 166,  
 168, 178, 191-92, 195, 213,

- 215, 219, 227, 256, 263, 282-83, 286, 316, 321, 331, 336, 340
- public theology . . . . . 4, 7, 122, 222, 227-29, 232, 234, 241-42, 254, 287, 293, 295-96, 298, 321, 331-33, 344, 351-52
- regeneration . . . . . 339
- reign of God . . . . . 13, 31, 48, 57, 62-63, 110, 116, 150, 154, 164, 182, 192, 194-95, 285, 319
- Reinders, J.S. . . . . 186, 290
- relevance . . . 5, 25, 78, 105, 112, 129-33, 162-63, 166-70, 172, 176-77, 184, 192-93, 216-17, 221, 228-29, 255, 278, 293, 295-96, 302, 306-07, 312, 314, 319, 323, 325, 336, 340, 344, 353
- renewal . . . . . 1, 39-41, 45, 181-2, 300, 319
- resurrection . . . 8, 14, 21, 37, 55, 59, 62, 82-83, 86, 97-104, 106, 108-12, 114, 116, 122, 147-48, 159-60, 165-66, 192, 216, 234, 251, 255-58, 275, 277, 284-85, 296, 301, 309, 314, 319, 336-37, 340-41
- Rilke, Rainer Maria . . . . . 44
- Robertson, E.H. . . . . 59
- Robertson, Roland . . . . . 59
- Rortorf, W. . . . . 284
- Rosenzweig, Franz . . . . . 157-59, 254, 278, 284
- Rothe, Richard . . . . . 57
- Rublev, Andrei . . . . . 265
- Rüterswörden, Udo . . . . . 334
- sabbath . . . . . 8-9, 137, 243-45, 260-61, 267-69, 275-87, 291, 293, 300, 308-09, 311, 321-24, 330, 335, 344-45, 349, 354
- sacramental theology . . . . . 7, 161-62, 214, 309, 345
- sanctification . . . . . 39-42, 50, 62, 127, 150, 154, 163, 165, 170, 181, 184, 274, 280, 283, 338, 339
- Sauter, Gerhard . . . . . 91
- Scheler, Max . . . . . 64
- Schelsky, Helmut . . . . . 11-12, 24
- Schleiermacher, Friedrich . . . . . 210, 247
- Schmitt, Carl . . . . . 74
- Scholem, Gershom . . . . . 266
- Schuurman, Douglas J. . . . . 264
- Schwartz, Barry . . . . . 330
- Seattle, Indian chief . . . . . 224-25
- Seyer, Hans-Georg . . . . . 91
- Shekinah . . . . . 156-58, 160, 215, 248, 254, 276, 309, 319, 322, 340, 351
- sin . . . . . 34, 41, 53, 146, 153, 166, 176, 178, 181-82, 184, 186, 205, 213, 262, 272, 273, 308, 319, 343
- Sisyphus . . . . . 116
- Sobrinho, Jon . . . . . 154, 189
- Sölle . . . . . 91, 94, 116
- Sperna-Weiland, J. . . . . 69
- Spirit . . . . . 6, 10, 13, 26, 44, 47, 49-51, 56, 59, 62, 81, 83, 85, 101-02, 107-08, 111, 121, 127, 148, 153, 159-61, 165, 169, 175, 181, 189, 214, 220,

- 231, 240, 248, 253-55, 261-65, 268-69, 271, 275-76, 286, 288-89, 298-304, 306, 309, 312, 315, 319, 322, 328, 337-39, 351, 353-54
- Stalinism . . . . . 119-20
- Stemmel, Michael . . . . . 150
- Tamayo, Juan José . . . . . 189, 191
- Teilhard de Chardin, Pierre . . . . . 258
- telos* . . . . . 51, 55, 61, 127, 145, 147, 150, 243-44, 261, 268, 286, 289-91, 300, 346
- Tersteegen, Gerhard . . . . . 286
- theocentrism . . . . . 242, 346, 349
- Thielicke, Helmut . . . . . 290, 292
- Thomas Aquinas . . . . . 256, 289, 337
- Tillich, Paul . . . . . 13, 137, 144, 149-50, 210
- Tödt, H.E. . . . . 178
- transcendence . . . . . 6, 15, 63-64, 73-79, 83-85, 88-91, 94, 97, 100-02, 104-06, 108-09, 111-12, 114, 117, 119-20, 125-26, 138, 140, 163-64, 214, 234, 247, 262, 264, 309, 315-16, 330, 340-41, 343
- trinity . . . . . 8, 13, 126, 159-60, 206, 219, 235-36, 245-48, 250-54, 260-66, 269, 271, 273-74, 276, 291, 296-97, 301-02, 306-09, 311, 322, 335, 337-38, 351-52, 354
- Undereyk, Theodorus . . . . . 38
- universality . . . . . 7, 38, 61, 169, 176, 184-85, 193, 208, 213, 216-18, 227, 235, 268, 295, 300, 303, 325, 328, 354
- Valle, Carlos A. . . . . 141
- Van der Kooi, C. . . . . 50, 54
- Van Egmond, A. . . . . 11, 153, 171
- Van Heerden, Etienne . . . . . 347
- Van Keulen, Dirk . . . . . 42
- Van Ruler, A.A. . . . . 30-31, 36, 38, 56, 60, 87, 112, 145, 165, 301, 342, 350
- Van Soest, Hendrik-Joost . . . . . 334
- Vanhoozer, Kevin J. . . . . 246
- Videla, Jorge Rafael . . . . . 187
- Volf, Miroslav . . . . . 10, 25, 85, 94, 122, 295, 324, 332
- Von der Dunk, H.W. . . . . 11
- Von Rad, Gerhard . . . . . 28, 38, 52
- Vroom, Hendrik M. . . . . 11, 123, 126, 328
- Wakefield, James L. . . . . 7
- Ward, Keith . . . . . 1
- Washington, Irving . . . . . 345
- Weber, Otto . . . . . 38, 51, 55, 178
- Weinrich, Michael . . . . . 313
- Wertheim, Margaret . . . . . 231
- Westermann, Claus . . . . . 334
- Weyns, Walter . . . . . 329-30
- Wheen, Francis . . . . . 90, 371
- White, Lynn . . . . . 134-36, 173, 175, 201-04, 209-10, 219, 301, 320, 333
- Williams, Bernhard . . . . . 93, 263
- Witvliet, Theo . . . . . 195, 325
- Wolf, Ernst . . . . . 60, 91
- zimzum* . . . . . 266

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