

As one considers the highly significant improbabilities of the neo-Darwinian concept of evolution, one is constrained to consider other possible solutions, including solutions beyond the generally accepted but limited confines of formal science. Once one permits possibilities beyond these confines, the challenges posed in this volume can become strong support for an alternate concept, that of creation, and, in the words of Doctor Eden, "what looks like teleology" might very well be interpreted, under a broader system of possibilities, as teleology.

A New Role for Eschatology

HEROLD WEISS

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THEOLOGY OF HOPE

By Jürgen Moltmann; translated by James W. Leitch
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The reviewer received the doctor of philosophy degree (1964) in Biblical studies from Duke University and is currently assistant professor of New Testament at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

When the history of twentieth-century theology is written from the vantage point that only time can give, it will probably characterize this period as the time when eschatology came into its own.

Rationalism and romanticism had all but given the death blow to eschatology, especially in its apocalyptic form. This situation, however, was altered by the radical studies of Johannes Weiss, who gave to the concept of the kingdom of God its proper eschatological meaning. Then Albert Schweitzer conducted a postmortem examination of the vast theological effort (called "the quest of the historical Jesus") that had overlooked the basic eschatological thrust of Jesus' life and message because it failed to take His apocalyptic background seriously. Since Weiss and Schweitzer, eschatology has taken a predominant position in Biblical studies.

Opinion has polarized between those who understand the eschatological message of the New Testament to refer to a future consummation of history and those who deny the legitimacy of any transcendental expectations for the future. Among the latter there are those who view eschatology as a *summum bonum* actualized in the Incarnation (e.g., C. H. Dodd) and those who consider that eschatology has no chronological reference at all but transcends time and partakes of eternity (e.g., Rudolf Bultmann). The existentialists assign only relative theological value to history, whereas those who see eschatology as having to do fundamentally with the future (e.g., Oscar Cullmann, W. Kümmel) tie theology closely to history.

Jürgen Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* represents an attempt to take seriously the basic polarities of futuristic and existentialistic eschatology and yet find a third position beyond them. He defines the polar alternatives as, on the one hand, "the reflective philosophy of transcendental subjectivity for which history is reduced to the 'mechanism' of a closed system of causes and effects," and, on the other hand, "a theology of

saving history, for which . . . 'sacred history' has not yet been subjected to critical historical thinking." These positions are judged as claiming, respectively, too little and too much for the theological values of history. Moltmann wishes, therefore, to make these set estimates of history malleable once more in order to be able to reconcile them and to point to them as the way to the future.

By marrying modern historiography, theology has become not only dependent on the value assigned to history. It has become also aware of the anguish caused by the attempt to talk about God in a language that claims to be subject to the scientific principle of empirical verification. Therefore it is necessary for anyone breaking new theological ground first to clear away the linguistic debris left by those who harvested the field before.

Unlike Tillich, Moltmann does not attempt to make a completely new set of tools with which to work; rather, like Barth, he settles for the traditional vocabulary of theology but gives to the traditional words new meanings. The perspective from which Moltmann derives these new meanings is his understanding that according to the Biblical view of reality the basic theological principle is God's *promise*. Therefore, eschatology, which is the verbalizing of how the promise is to be fulfilled, should not be the last chapter (usually short and vague) of theological work; it should be the basis upon which all theology stands. Eschatology must inform all other doctrines. It is not the case, then, that on the basis of a doctrine of revelation one is able to talk about eschatology; on the contrary, it is on the basis of eschatology that one may formulate a doctrine of revelation and in turn all other doctrines.

God is to be understood, Moltmann tells us, as the One who has promised, whose essence is "not his absoluteness as such, but the faithfulness with which he reveals and identifies himself in the history of his promise as 'the same'" (p. 143). The trouble with much recent theological discussion is that it has operated in terms of a debate between "revelation theology" and "natural theology" that sets up the God of revelation in opposition to the gods of nature.

Once the alternatives are drawn on these lines, the whole problem of theology becomes the problem of the knowledge of God. But by making eschatology, rather than revelation, the basis of theology, Moltmann sets up "the God of promise" in opposition to "the gods of the epiphanies." That is, the God of the Bible does not confront man in order to reveal *Himself*, but in order to give man a promise — to give him hope for the future. If in the word of promise God reveals something about Himself, it is that He exists in the future. The Holy Spirit, the agent of God to accomplish His work in man, is identified as "the power of futurity." God is understood primarily as neither intraworldly nor extraworldly, neither in us nor over us, but *in front of us* as the God of hope.

In order to talk meaningfully about the God of hope who reveals Himself from the future, Moltmann recognizes, one needs first to criticize Kant's metaphysics of transcendence and his concept of reality. Accordingly reality is understood not as that which stands in an eternal present and shines forth in special moments of disclosure, but rather as a process of discovery. In a theology of hope, theological concepts do not function as "judgments which nail reality down to what is, but anticipations which show reality its prospects and its future possibilities" (pp. 35-36). Thus "the condi-

tions of possible experience which were understood by Kant in a transcendental sense must be understood instead as historically flowing conditions. 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" (p. 50). In other words, it is not a transcendental concept of time that gives us the measure of history; rather, the futurity of God is what makes us historical beings and thus allows us to understand time.

Basing the possibility of human experience on the flowing conditions of history rather than on transcendental reality would seem to place Moltmann within the tradition of "progressive revelation" or "salvation history." But while he gives this approach credit for its "underlying polemic against an abstract materialism and an unhistoric historicism" (p. 72), he maintains that it identifies revelation too closely with history and so fails to unmask the godless world and all its history before the cross. For it makes moments in history the epiphanies of God, rather than setting up God as standing over against history. "The theology of saving history does indeed perceive the process of promises and events, but not the contradiction in which the promise stands to reality" (p. 226).

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Stated in terms of alternatives, "the decisive question is, whether 'revelation' is the illuminating interpretation of an existing, obscure life process in history, or whether revelation itself originates, drives, and directs the process of history" (p. 75). Choosing the second alternative, Moltmann declares that "revelation . . . does not acquire its character of progressiveness from a reality foreign to it, . . . but itself creates the progress in its process of contradiction to the godless reality of sin and death. It does not become progressive by 'entering into' human history; but by dint of promise, hope, and criticism it makes the reality of man historic and progressive" (p. 226). In other words, the waiting God is the One who by means of His promise pushes man forward toward Himself and thus creates history.

Now the concrete word of promise that gives to man his future and thus his reality is the resurrection of Jesus. The revelation of the God who promises consists in the appearances of the risen Lord. This means that "the 'vital point' for a Christian view of revelation . . . lies . . . in the fact that in all the qualitative difference of cross and resurrection Jesus is the same. . . . It is that that is the ground of hope which carries faith through the trials of the godforsaken world and of death." Thus, the concept of revelation is primarily an eschatological rather than an epistemological one. Revelation is "the ground of the promise of the still outstanding future of Jesus Christ." It is not "the illumination of the existing reality of man and the world, but has here constitutively and basically the character of promise" (p. 85).

To establish theology on the concept of promise, and to make the resurrection and subsequent appearances of Jesus the ground of promise, is not only to express a fundamental theme of the Old Testament and the very heart of the New Testament. It is also Moltmann's way of questioning the whole modern conception of reality, which is derived from the philosophy of Kant.

The word of promise that is present in the death and resurrection of Jesus effectively calls all reality into question and suggests alternatives to the modern, post-Kantian concept of science, to the critical concept of reason, and to the monopoly of

history as the only valid method of treating reality. Moltmann considers that modern theology was driven to its present impasse, best epitomized in "the death of God," by its own adoption of Kant's critical method. He insists, therefore, that what is to be looked at critically is not God, or ourselves, who are a portion of reality. Rather, talk about God must call the whole of reality into question, which is precisely what the death and the resurrection of Jesus accomplish.

In order to make clear that he is indeed questioning the modern understanding of reality as a whole, Moltmann speaks of "the eschatological future of the truth." By this he means to indicate that truth really exists only within an eschatological context — that is, from the perspective of the future that is expected on the basis of past promises.

The task of theology, therefore, is "to expose the profound irrationality of the rational cosmos of the modern, technico-scientific world" (p. 179), which has been "factualized and institutionalized" in such a way that it excludes the element of contingency (p. 93). This has left modern man bereft of a sense of "the historic," a sense that is crucial for theology, because the eschatologically new can be understood only in a world in which there is room for contingency. This does not mean that the task of theology is to reintroduce "chance" into the modern consciousness; the need is "to give this world itself a place in the process that begins with the promise and is kept going by hope" (p. 94). And this requires the formulation of a new understanding of reality.

Moltmann's proposed new understanding of reality based on the resurrection of Jesus depends on the fact that in his history and in his future Jesus is the same. This fact is the ground of history, because it is the ground of hope. "The stage for what can be experienced, remembered, and expected as 'history' is set and fitted, revealed and fashioned by promise" (p. 106). It is not what is experienced in history that makes faith and hope; it is faith and hope, sustained by promise, that make possible the experiencing of history as such.

In other words, history is informed from the future. According to this way of relating history and eschatology, history does not swallow up eschatology (as in Schweitzer's psychological explanation of the origin of eschatology), nor does eschatology swallow up history (as in Bultmann's existentialist interpretation). Instead, "the promise which announces the *eschaton*, and in which the *eschaton* announces itself, is the motive power, the mainspring, the driving force and the torture of history" (p. 165).

In the New Testament there is no faith that does not start with the resurrection of Jesus. Moltmann is correct, therefore, in pointing out that, when the resurrection is understood in historical, existentialist, or utopian terms, the idea of God is not finally necessary. Within any of these frameworks, God's participation in the resurrection may be optional. But when God is understood as the God of the resurrection of the dead, faith and hope on the basis of His promise become both possible and necessary "in an objectively real sense" (p. 168).

Thus the only framework in which the resurrection of Jesus may be truly understood is an eschatological one. The resurrection is "historic" not because it took place in history, but because it points to the future in which we can and must live. To affirm

the resurrection of the body is to call into question the value of history as a way of grasping reality. The resurrection cannot be classified among the events of the world. Time does not mark the day of resurrection; rather, it is the future of Christ, revealed in His own resurrection, that gives time existence.

History, "the reality instituted by the promise" (p. 224), is the framework wherein the disciples may carry out their mission to the world. The "historic" character of reality is now experienced in the contradiction between the unrealized future of the promise contained in the resurrection and the reality of a world in which "God is dead," or at least absent. In this world, Christian faith must be meaningful and relevant — meaningful in an eschatological context and relevant in a political context.

Therefore the mission of the church is not merely the propagation of faith and hope but also the "historic," that is to say promised, transformation of life (p. 330). To affirm the resurrection of Christ, for Moltmann, is not to involve men and their future in a cosmological, otherworldly utopia, but to affirm that in man's future the promised righteousness of the kingdom of God is to be fulfilled. This eschatological theology does not affirm that God is somewhere in the beyond, but that He is coming, and that as the Coming One He is now present. And the irrefutable argument for the reality of the Coming God is that men have the historic and eschatological possibilities for mission (p. 285).

Adventists who wish reassurance for their otherworldly eschatology will be disappointed by Moltmann's theology of hope. But to my knowledge no one has made a systematic attempt to take seriously the eschatology of the first Christians with greater discipline than has Moltmann. Almost everyone who has traveled this road has been either swallowed by the spirit of modernity or caught by the world view of the first century. Aware of these dangers, Moltmann has made a new attempt, and it is to his credit to have succeeded in establishing a new route. One may disagree with his judgments (for example, whether God establishes His covenant with men on the basis of their response to His promise or in order to give them the promise) (pp. 120-121). One may challenge his identification of the Biblical God with the God of the theology of hope. One may have doubts as to whether one wishes to go the way he proposes. But one cannot deny that Moltmann's way "to do" theology merits serious consideration.

This book is made valuable also by the facility with which Moltmann is able to traverse rather formidable theological terrain. He has read and understood well, and he can gratefully stand on other people's shoulders. Beyond this, he has attained additional insights through a remarkable ability to synthesize, not in a popularizing but in a systematic way. When he criticizes the work of others, he does so by opening up its essential character. But the book is much more than a "history of recent research" type of study (although it would be well worth its price and our time if it offered only its incisive account of what has been going on lately at the theological front); it reveals the exhilaration of a creative theological mind at work.

Here is a Christian in earnest about the Biblical message, struggling valiantly to make this message relevant to his contemporaries — one who in the face of modern currents within Christianity still wishes to affirm that in order to be a Christian one must stand on the Bible.