

ECCLESIOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN MOLTMANN'S THEOLOGY OF HOPE

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JÜRGEN MOLTMANN has become a figure of international prominence in the world of theology as a result of the major statement of his thought, the *Theology of Hope*, which first appeared in 1964. Since then, Moltmann himself, as well as many others, have not ceased to marvel at the impact the work has made, not only in the United States and Europe, but in Oriental countries as well. Opinions will obviously differ as to the basis of the impact, but my own opinion is that it can be found in the fact that the *Theology of Hope* made the truths of the Christian revelation intelligible within the context of modern man's framework of thought. At the same time, Moltmann was able to do this, not by distorting the unique contents of the Christian message, but actually by returning to what he considered to be the truest elements of that message, basing his thought upon the conclusions of modern scriptural exegetes. The *Theology of Hope* is, then, a work of hermeneutics that is appearing to succeed because of the success with which Moltmann interprets the essentials of the Christian good news in the light of the spiritual and intellectual currents of today.

Moltmann concluded the *Theology of Hope* with a chapter entitled "Exodus Community," which sought to formulate certain conceptions of the Church which would follow from the application of certain principles of the theology of hope. The chapter was mainly devoted to political and sociological consequences of hope theology, it being one of Moltmann's major convictions that the absolute separation of the political world and the Christian community is not compatible with the Christian message. Apart from this chapter, Moltmann has published only a monograph and a smattering of essays and sections of other works, as teasers to what a real ecclesiology based on the theology of hope might be.¹ And yet, if the theology of hope actually does ex-

¹These publications would include *Die Gemeinde im Horizont der Herrschaft Christi: Neue Perspektiven in der protestantischen Theologie* (Neukirchen Kreis Moers: Neukirchener Verlag, 1959); "Die 'Rose im Kreuz der Gegenwart': Zum Verständnis der Kirche in der modernen Gesellschaft," *Monatsschrift für Pastoraltheologie* 50 (1961) 272-89 (ET in J. Moltmann, *Hope and Planning*, tr. Margaret Clarkson [London: SCM, 1971] pp. 130-54); "Was erwarten Kirche und Gesellschaft voneinander?" *Der Mensch in der Wirtschaft* 12 (1963) 3-17; "Die Kirche als Faktor einer kommenden Weltgemeinschaft." *Kirche in der Zeit* 21 (1966) 307-10; "Theologische Kritik der poli-

press the Christian message in a meaningful way to the modern world, it is essential to determine the concrete ramifications of this theology upon ecclesiology. For if the test of the worth of any theology is to be found in the effect of that theology upon the continuation of the process of renewal of the Church in the spirit of her founder, then this is especially to be affirmed regarding Moltmann's theology, with its emphasis upon the active role of Christianity in the creation and transformation of history.

Few are aware that Moltmann has drawn up a doctrine of the Church. He presented his first series of lectures on "Die Kirche" to his theology students at the University of Tübingen in the summer semester of 1968. He repeated, modified, developed, and brought to an end his first complete statement on the Church in his fall and winter lectures of 1971-72. I attended that second series of lectures, studied Moltmann's lecture notes from the first series, and spent a total of three years in Tübingen, mainly trying to determine what positive significance Moltmann's theology of hope might have regarding our understanding of the Church. This article is a brief (and, I hope, accurate) statement of some of the major elements of Moltmann's ecclesiology, while we wait for its publication, probably late 1973.

Since the appreciation of the ecclesiological dimensions of Moltmann's thought can really only follow upon the general appreciation of the corpus of his theology, this article will be divided into two major parts: (1) a general résumé of Moltmann's theology as a whole and (2) the ecclesiological ramifications of that theology. This will then be concluded by an attempt to single out certain major values, as well as problems, that might be noted in Moltmann's perspective on the Church.

MOLTMANN'S THEOLOGY AS A WHOLE

Moltmann's theology is based on the Old Testament and New Testament experience of the revelation of God "in the form of promise and in the history that is marked with promise."

tischen Religion," in *Kirche im Prozess der Aufklärung: Aspekte einer neuen "politischen Theologie"* (coauth.: J. B. Metz and Willi Oelmüller), "Gesellschaft und Theologie" 1 (Munich: Kaiser, 1970) pp. 11-51, esp. 45-49: "Politische Kreuzestheologie und die Kirche der 'anderen'" (ET "Political Theology" [abridged and slightly altered], *Theology Today* 28 [1971] 6-23, esp. 20-23); and *Die ersten Freigelassenen der Schöpfung: Versuche über die Freude an der Freiheit und das Wohlgefallen am Spiel*, Traktate 2 (Munich: Kaiser, 1971) esp. pp. 64-76: "Die befreiende Kirche—Experimentierfeld des Reiches Gottes" (ET *Theology of Play*, tr. Reinhard Ulrich [New York: Harper & Row, 1972] esp. pp. 58-72: "The Liberating Church—A Testing Ground of the Kingdom of God").

According to Moltmann, the revelation of Yahweh to Israel in the Old Testament pointed "away from the appearances in which [the promise] is uttered, into the as yet unrealized future which [the promise] announces." When Israel entered the Promised Land, she recognized that passage and her new life in Canaan as "fulfilment of the promise," as "realization of the pledge given [to the bands of Israel] in the wilderness by the God of promise who had caused their fathers to journey into it."² After Israel had settled in the Promised Land, she continued to live, in spite of continual temptations to do otherwise, in terms of the God of the Exodus, a God of covenant and of hope, a God who was guiding His chosen people into a future that He had promised to them. Even the experience of judgment upon Israel at the time of the collapse of the two kingdoms and the annihilation of the assurances of her previous history and covenant with God was not recognized by the prophets as the annihilation of Yahweh's faithfulness to His people. Instead, Yahweh's judgment served to strengthen the prophets' conviction that out of the future would come an unheard-of new salvation, a new covenant which would bring salvation not only to Israel but to all nations involved in the history of Yahweh's relationship with Israel.

In the New Testament it was again recognized, at least by some, that the same God of promise was at work, though in a "new" way, regarding both His actions and their meaning: for it was "Yahweh, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob" who "raised Jesus from the dead," and who thereby guaranteed not only the fulfilment of His history of election of His chosen people, but also the salvation of all those who responded to His call in terms of faith and service.

Moltmann understands the resurrection of Jesus to be the event in which the New Testament witnesses saw the certainty of the *future* fulfilment of the promises of God. The resurrection did not in itself, therefore, bring the fullest realization of the promises, but rather guaranteed their realization in the future intended by God for His creation. The hope in Yahweh's future salvation of His people, which had already reached "eschatological" proportions by the end of the Old Testament period, became a Christian eschatology of hope in the future made known in the death and resurrection of Christ. That is, the content of the promises of the future of Yahweh reached such proportions in the Christ event that they were seen to become destined for the universal community of mankind and to involve the annihilation of all the limiting and negative aspects of life, namely, sin, death, and the law.

²J. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, tr. James W. Leitch (New York: Harper & Row, 1967) pp. 100-101. Hereafter TH.

The use of the concept "future" to describe the nature of Christian eschatology is important to the understanding of Moltmann's thought. When he states that the Christian revelation is essentially an eschatological one, he means that the Christian faith is grounded in the occurrence of a definite historic event, the raising of Jesus, and lives from the promise of the *future* of that event, namely, the future realization of the righteousness of God, of a life as a result of resurrection from the dead, and of the kingdom of God in a new heaven and a new earth, a *nova creatio ex nihilo*, where all things will be brought "to right, to life, to peace, to freedom, and to truth" because God will be all in all.³ This future, which will be realized in the parousia of Christ, is understood by Moltmann as a *real* one, i.e., not one that is merely to be unveiled, but one that has not yet been realized. It will be accomplished when Jesus has finally "put all enemies under His feet."⁴ It will be, therefore, a new creation not only noetically but also ontically. This future-oriented, end-time (and therefore eschatological) understanding of the nature of the fulfilment of the promises contained in the resurrection of Christ is important to the understanding of Moltmann's theology, because it constitutes the basic perspective that governs all of his theological statements:

1) Regarding the concept of *hope*. Hope is that power that is aroused in man in the light of his faith in God's promise of a definite future existence for man. The promise of this future already opens man in hope to the presence of the promised future in his own life, though only in anticipation of the future. Hope therefore mediates the future to the present, thereby releasing man from the chains of the present and making it possible for him already to begin to share in the life of freedom of the future kingdom.

2) Regarding the concept of *history*. History is the concrete mode of life that is created between the revelation of the promise of God and its fulfilment. History is the movement of man, and through him of all creation, toward the realization of the *eschaton*, as promised by God and brought about by Him in Christ. There is therefore only one true history, eschatological history, which encompasses all other types of history (e.g., calendrical, positivistic, experiential). Eschatological history is strictly linear: it is irreversible movement toward that which has never been but will be. It is "open," and therefore true history, because the limiting and binding factors of sin, death, and the law have been "broken through" in the death and resurrection of Christ. But it is also "open" because of the fact that the outcome of this movement is "unfinished": history is a movement that is really

³ *TH*, p. 224. ⁴ *TH*, pp. 162-63.

going somewhere, toward something that has never been before, that exists at the present time only in the form of promise and hope. Now, it is the concrete actions of the man of hope that form the "stages" of this movement of eschatological history toward the *eschaton*. Hope's actions in history take the form of "creative transformation of reality," in a process of constantly "leaving behind the old" and moving in the direction of realizing the possibilities of the new.⁵ Because Moltmann's eschatology is thus historically and temporally oriented, it never involves a type of union with God by a process of abstraction of oneself from history, but only by a process of involvement in the movement of history toward the *eschaton*. History becomes, then, finally, the process of the coming of all things to what they truly will be in the *eschaton*, the final moment of truth.

3) Regarding the concept of *truth*. Truth, for Moltmann, is primarily a designation of that state where the promise contained in the resurrection of Christ finds or creates a reality that completely corresponds to it. In other words, truth is a designation of the state of things in the *eschaton*, where God will be all in all, and all things will have attained their final state of being. Since the *eschaton* has not yet come to be, it follows that, for Moltmann, history is in a process moving toward the realization of its true existence, or essential being. Truth is, therefore, primarily something that is becoming realized in history and that will be realized in the future, and is not something that is essentially eternal or already determined, or definitively revealed in the past and merely handed down, in its preserved form, to posterity.

This conception of truth does not mean to deny, of course, that there is truth content to be handed down from the past. The supreme example of such a content is that of the death and resurrection of Christ. For Moltmann, however, that death and resurrection of Christ is known as an "event," by which he means an occurrence whose truth content is essentially ahead of it. Thus the Christ event is not a "fact" that can be scientifically circumscribed within history, but is an occurrence that opened up history to a definite future, and retains its enduring significance in history by the future that it promises as coming toward history. The Christ-event is, then, essentially a revelation in time and history of the future to which history is destined. In this way the Christ-event becomes an event that has its time ahead of it; and because, through this event, all history essentially has its time ahead of it, the "past" becomes the already anticipated revelation of the future, the "present" becomes present anticipation of

⁵ *TH*, pp. 34-35.

future reality, and the "future" is the oncoming disclosure of the truth of the history of the promise of God that will finally be immediately disclosed in its most realized form in the *eschaton*. The truth content of present statements of truth is not destroyed by understanding them as anticipations of the future, but is made temporary and provisional. Present truth is not lost in the quandary of "relativism" (and therefore not really truth), because truth content is not "relativized" in this perspective, but is "anticipational," a foreshadowing of the absolute truth.

It is obvious here that Moltmann is attempting to reverse the entire perspective of Christian thought regarding the character of truth—seeing truth not as residing at the beginning of creation but at the end. If that is the case, then history becomes for Moltmann what he calls a "judicial process" of truth, the process of the struggle of history to come to its truth. The immediate and important consequence of this conception of truth seems obvious, namely, that all conceptualizations of truth remain faithful to the drive of history toward the realization of the truth only by being open to a process of increasingly adequate anticipation of the truth of the *eschaton*. Truth does not have to be *conserved* in this perspective nearly as much as it has to be *liberated*.

ECCLESIOLOGICAL RAMIFICATIONS OF MOLTSMANN'S THEOLOGY

Much more could be said concerning the basic theology of Moltmann, but we must now turn to the consequences of this theology in regard to Moltmann's understanding of the Church.

Moltmann understands the Church to be the gathering together of those who witness to the world, in community life as well as in individual vocations in the world, the above-mentioned facets of the Christian message. The Church, in this sense, holds last place in Moltmann's theology, at the same time as she is that without which all the rest of his theology would find no place in the world.

The major characteristic of the Church, which our study of Moltmann's ecclesiology has revealed to us, is her eschatological character. The Church is the community of witness to eschatological salvation. It is for this reason that we can even say that the community is eschatology. The equation of the concrete term "community" with the abstract term "eschatology," while normally not grammatically permissible, is deliberately chosen here, to stress the fact that the community, according to Moltmann, is so closely associated with the role of witness to the eschatological movement of history that she may actually be identified with that history and personify it.

The Church is primarily present in history, according to Moltmann, as a witness to the world of the fact that history is on the way toward a union with God in the universal human community, in a process that transcends all the purposes, goals, and aspirations of any other movement in history because it involves the annihilation of all the limitations and negations of history in a way no other movement can. Moltmann's hope, in seeing the community as the witness to this unique transcendence in the midst of history, is that her presence there as this witness will serve to overthrow all lesser movements that lead men astray by their limited and enticing but illusory promises of utopian goals. The Church can accomplish this task, according to Moltmann, if she is a true witness of eschatology, because, as anticipation of the life of the *eschaton*, she is an expression of the power of the Spirit of the *eschaton* within history, and in that expression, the proof of the truth of the eschatological dimension of history.

In this sense the Church is radically called to account before God and the world for the success or failure of the "Christian experiment" that was set in motion in history by God in the death and resurrection of Christ, and will be successfully brought to a conclusion only in the end-time lordship of God. One might say, in the light of Moltmann's theology, that a Church that ceased to bear witness to the truth of the historic-temporal-eschatological orientation of the whole of history toward the final revelation of God in history—that is, a Church that ceased to be eschatology—would cease to be the Church that bore witness to Christ, and thus would cease to be Church.

Once we have radically identified the Church with eschatology within history, much of the other specifications of the content of her witness to that history falls into place. In regard to the above-mentioned notions of hope, history, and truth, we may indicate the following:

- 1) The Church is seen by Moltmann as the community of *hope* in the world. Consequently, she is the community whose role it is to keep before the eyes of the world what Moltmann likes to refer to as the "inadaequatio rei et intellectus." This means that the Church must act as a critical force in the world, by keeping alive the fact that the present reality (*res*) must be left behind, because it does not yet adequately correspond to the hope of the Christian faith which comes to us from the future. In this sense, the Church is the "revolutionary" force par excellence in history. All other "revolutionary" movements that wish to be true to the true meaning of "revolution" in history must share, in one way or another, in the overthrow of present inadequate constructs, in the hope of more excellent expressions of the truth of the future that is found in the future of Christ for the world.

2) The Church is, as we have stated, the community that personifies eschatological *history*. She may even be said to create that history, however, insofar as her historical acts are attempts to realize, as much as possible within history, that which corresponds to the destiny of history. She is, therefore, that force within history which constantly leads it toward its goal, and in that sense she makes history.

3) The Church is the community whose course in history is a process of constant struggle against her own false witnesses and the powers of the world, for the *truth* of the Christian gospel. Since the truth of the Christian gospel is ultimately eschatological truth, it follows that the role of the Church, as witness to eschatological truth in history, does not consist in preserving a body of doctrine that was always somehow so from the beginning, nor that has actually been "completed" in the event of Christ. What the event of Christ has done, rather, is to make known within history the genuine knowledge of its open character, as destined for transcendent fulfilment in God at the time of the Parousia. Truth, therefore, always lies ahead of us, and is always to be won by the Church, in the historical process of her coming to greater realization of the content of that truth.

Let us look now more concretely into the *life* of the Church in history. According to Moltmann, the Church works toward her goal—to be the valid witness to the truth of the eschatological movement of history—in two fundamental ways: (1) in her attempts to create genuine Christian community, and (2) in her attempts to share with the non-Christian community in the work of transforming the present into anticipations of the future kingdom of God. Let us briefly specify these two basic aspects of Church life.

1) The Church derives her meaning and purpose in history from her relationship to Christ and His messianic purpose in history. Now Moltmann understands Christ's messianic role in history to have been to announce the gospel of the kingdom, and to anticipate the future of the kingdom in His life, death, and resurrection for all men. It is, therefore, the role of the Church to proclaim that same gospel and that same future as present and guaranteed in that same Jesus, and, more specifically, in the dialectic of His cross and resurrection. The gospel is proclaimed to the world by the Church in order to prepare the way for the coming of that future, in acts of repentance, conversion, and transformation of the world in the light of that future.

Now, when the future kingdom of God is realized in the new creation of God at the end of history, it will be made up of the universal human community of those who have been liberated in Christ. The Church is the valid anticipation of that kingdom, therefore, insofar as

she creates in this world genuine anticipation of that end-time community. In doing so, the Church becomes the world that is already turned toward the future of God for the world. She anticipates in word and faith, in sacrament and the brotherhood of men, the kingdom of freedom of the new creation. She does so, however, always under the limiting conditions of the present, which for Moltmann is marked with the pervasive shadow of the cross of Christ. The Church becomes, therefore, the community of men distinguished already in this life by the freedom of the children of the resurrection, but only in the life of the cross, the life of self-offering in love that has as its model the life of the crucified Lord. In this way the Christian community shares in this world in the enduring historical dialectic of Christ's cross and resurrection, the dialectic that leads, in the promise of God revealed in Christ's resurrection, to entrance into the future kingdom of God.

How is the Christian community composed? Moltmann specifies that, first of all, the call of the gospel goes out to all men, not on the basis of their virtues, by which men are divided, but on the basis of their common godlessness, their sinfulness, their lack of humanity before God. In this way no one is excluded from the call of the gospel to become a follower of Christ. Once true community is formed, however, it involves the bringing together of men, but, once again, not on the basis of their common qualities or virtues (which are causes of division among men), but in their state of "otherness," or dissimilarity to one another. In this way no one is excluded from qualifying for membership in the community. True community is, then, composed of "Jews and Greeks, educated and noneducated, lords and slaves, blacks and whites," and, as Moltmann suggests, even of Communists and non-Communists.⁶ Only in forming this kind of community does the Church foreshadow the universal human community of the *eschaton*. Moltmann states that the Church falls into "heresy" and becomes a source of scandal to the human community when she fails to form community in this way.

The most controversial section of Moltmann's ecclesiology is his specification of the composition of Church community by his use of the principle *ubi Christus, ibi ecclesia*—that the Church is present wherever Christ has *promised* His presence in the world. Moltmann takes this principle and applies it to scriptural statements which, directly or indirectly, indicate Christ's promises of His presence in the world. The consequences of the strict application of this process

⁶ Cf. J. Moltmann, *Religion, Revolution and the Future*, tr. M. Douglas Meeks (New York: Scribner's, 1969) p. 141. All quotations in this section on Moltmann's ecclesiology, unless otherwise noted, are from Moltmann's private notes, used with permission.

of reasoning are, according to Moltmann, that the Church must be understood as present not only where the Church has always been understood to be present, namely, in the brotherhood of the just who are gathered together in Christ's name (Mt 18:20), and in the proclamation of the word (Lk 10:16) and in the sacraments, i.e., baptism (Rom 6:3-4) and the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:23 ff.), but also in the brotherhood of the poor, the "least brethren" of Mt 25:31 ff. The enduring dialectic of the cross and resurrection in history, according to Moltmann, is manifested in the identification of the risen Christ with the community of the justified, and of the crucified Christ with the community of all the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed. Therefore the Church, that stands at the side of Christ, must be present in this same dynamic interrelationship between the "poor" who have been justified (the baptized) and those who literally stand in poverty and oppression before God. The latter are thereby seen no longer simply as objects of Christian charity and good will, but as those having ecclesiological significance in and because of their present state of deprivation and hardship before God.

2) We said that the Church worked, secondly, toward her goal as valid witness of the eschatological orientation of history in her attempts to share with the non-Christian community in the work of creating historical correspondence to the future kingdom of God. By non-Christian community Moltmann is referring to the other orders or "zones" or institutions in the world, namely, "the family, work, law, society, politics, and culture." He recognizes in these zones areas which must also be opened to the movement of history toward the coming of the future kingdom of God. By her active role in these areas, the Church makes present to the world the fact that the various spheres of life in the world "stand under the command of the promise of God." The Church, in and through the vocations of her members to concrete Christian witness in the world, makes specific contributions to the reorientation of the processes of history toward the eschatological future of history.

At the same time, the Church is made aware of her own role as "partner" in the work of the kingdom in history. In her contemporaneity with these non-Christian zones, the Church, according to Moltmann, takes part in a process of history that is greater than she is: the movement of the whole of history toward the kingdom of God, the concrete history in which all men share, for it leads to the "open future of all mankind." If the kingdom is the future of all creation and not simply of the Church, then the Church must recognize other "processes of orders and movements of freedom" in history as other

“agents of the kingdom,” and thus take her place “alongside them,” as “critical coworker in the tasks and goals of the political community.” The future of God is thereby understood to be not only at work through the Church upon the world, but also through the world upon the Church.

Moltmann specifies that these movements of freedom have already expressed themselves in past political as well as Church history, and must continue to express themselves in the efforts of present and future political and Church history, in “tendencies” toward the “desacralization of authority” and the “democratization of government.” Both tendencies are to be found already in the Scriptures and are essentially present in the meaning of the cross of Christ, which not only brought the law and the sacral character of the state to an end, but also grounded in history the “royal priesthood of all believers” and created the movement of history toward the universal community of liberated mankind. Both tendencies are therefore movements of political theology where the efforts of the Church and the Spirit in the world overlap.

Indeed, in other contexts Moltmann draws further ecclesiological significance from the fact of this overlapping. In a way that is perhaps not entirely consonant with his conception of the Church as a “partner” of other zones in the movement of history toward the *eschaton*, he calls for an uprooting of our traditional spatial understanding of the world and the Church, and sets out to elucidate a historical-temporal understanding. Seen in this light, the Church is considered “the world that is already turned toward the future of God” because it has the life of the Spirit of the future of Christ present within it.

According to Moltmann, the Spirit of Christ, which has been present in the (spatial) Church from her foundations, has, to some extent, wandered out of the Church in the course of history, because the Church has not always lived up to the demands that the Spirit of Christ makes upon her. Moltmann understands “secular” movements toward human freedom (movements, therefore, that exist outside the movement toward freedom that is present within traditional Church structures) to be, in fact, “spirit which is of the Spirit of Christ” and, therefore, spirit which is of the Spirit of the Church. Following this line of reasoning, he can argue that the spirit of freedom which operates outside the (spatial) Church, because it is spirit of the Spirit of the Church, remains Church spirit. The Church, therefore, may be said to be present in these movements, even though their operations are no longer historically identified with the movements of the (spatial) Church.

A historical-temporal understanding of the "Church" and the "world," accordingly, corresponds in Moltmann's eyes more fundamentally and more accurately to the true realities of the Church and the world than our spatial images of the same. He will therefore equate the "world" and the "Church" with the "old" and the "new" respectively, or with the spirit of sin, law, and death, and the Spirit of freedom from them, respectively:

"World" [is, then,] to be understood as time that is enclosed within the visible and the disposable, the old era of the law, of power, of fear and being bound, in guilt, with the past and the transitory. . . . "World"—that is the passing time. "New creation" or the "kingdom of freedom"—that is the coming time. And in the present, where both times are in conflict with each other, we stand in the battle between the "power of the past" and the "powers of the future freedom," between the "movements [*Atem*] of death" and the "movements [*Atem*] of the Spirit." If we find the Church of God and His Christ in the movements of the Spirit and His first effects, such as liberation from sin and enmity, from self-affirmation and hatred of one's neighbor, then we find "world" everywhere where the movements of death, law, repression, and inner and outer slavery are in force and rule.

These two currents are in movement, according to Moltmann, within both the areas we specify spatially as world and as Church, making the question of the true circumference of the Church really an impossible one to define.

The conclusion that would seem to follow is that Moltmann would be in agreement with the principle that, wherever the Spirit of God (and Christ) is present, the "Church" is present, and that "Church" must therefore be understood to be present outside the confines of traditional Church structures—indeed, wherever the movements of the Spirit can be found.⁷

REFLECTIONS ON MOLTMAN'S ECCLESIOLOGY

We shall, finally, indicate certain major values that may be noted in Moltmann's ecclesiology.

1) First, by seeing the Church as the community destined for tran-

⁷ Indeed, similar thinking can be found in the statements of Vatican II. There it is clear that the Catholic Church holds to varying degrees of communion with herself outside of visible incorporation in her numbers, and that this is obtained in the Holy Spirit or in the movements of God's grace. Cf *Lumen gentium*, nos. 14-16; *Unitatis redintegratio*, no. 3. Note also in no. 3 that the Church, in a certain sense, exists outside of herself because of the fact that the various "elements or endowments which together go to build up and give life to the Church herself," and which "by right" belong to her, are present outside of her "visible boundaries" (W. A. Abbott, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* [New York: Guild, 1966] pp. 345-46).

scendent eschatological freedom, and already sharing by anticipation in the life of that freedom, Moltmann makes the Church "the first free people of the new creation." He thereby relativizes all human constructs, not only in their power, but also in their authority over the community. As a result, no temporal reality can any longer make any absolute claim upon the community. The new obedience of the Christian community can no longer be anything more than conformity to any created will insofar as that will is in conformity with the will of the Father. All created idolatries, all forms of subjection to created powers and works, are overthrown in the liberation obtained for all the children of God in the redeeming action of Christ's death and resurrection. At the same time, since this freedom is found only in the cross of Christ, it is granted to the Christian only in a life of "being-for-others," in a life of sharing in the sufferings of the present, in the hope of the realization of the promises of the future. Therefore, the freedom of the Christian is only known in dedication to the mission of Christ, of bringing to all men the good news and the hope of life in the kingdom. This means, therefore, that the Christian life is never escape from the world or from history, but is rather mission to all areas of the world in history—especially in the social and political worlds, where the work of transforming the present, in preparation for the future, is most pressing.

Non-Christian zones, by sharing with the Church in the work of creating universal human community, also help to make the Church aware of the fact that she is continually called to reflect, in her own interior life, her historic role as the visible community of the liberated people of God.

2) Moltmann makes the entire *raison d'être* of the Church functional as well as relational. The Church is a functional reality, insofar as the Church is never an end in herself, but only a function of the kingdom. She exists to show man the way to the kingdom, and to mediate to man the life of the kingdom. As such, according to Moltmann, when the kingdom is fully realized, the existence of the Church will cease. This conception of the Church, as ordered toward the kingdom as a transcendent reality, frees the Church not only from the world but also from subjection to herself.

The Church is a relational reality, because the transcendent nature of the kingdom makes the Church a partner with other zones in the movement of the Spirit of that kingdom, drawing all creation toward the *eschaton*. The life of the Church and that of non-Christian zones thus become intimately interrelated and intertwined, in challenging and provocative ways.

In these two ways Moltmann intends to draw the total life of the Church out of herself and into her exterior relationships. Thus baptism, the Eucharist, ministry, divine worship are ultimately understood by Moltmann in terms of the larger mission of the Church toward creation of universal human community in the world, in the light of the transcendent destiny of the total human community in the kingdom of God. By seeing the Church as totally relational and functional, Moltmann emphasizes the importance of a renewed dedication of the Church to the service of the world, and to witness to eschatological history.

3) By opening the circumference of Christian community to include the community of the poor, Moltmann makes a further attempt to broaden the horizons of substantial Church life into the areas of total human community that will reflect the universal human community of the *eschaton*. The attempt is made also, to be sure, in the hope of returning the Church to the consciousness of her life as the community that takes sides with the poor rather than with the worldly esteemed. Moltmann wishes to emphasize the fact that Christianity represents the reversal of all worldly values, and that the Church must witness to that reversal in her own life by her presence at the side of her Saviour crucified, if she hopes to share in the life of her Saviour risen.

Certain questions arise, however, regarding Moltmann's conception of the poor:

a) Moltmann bases his entire argument for an ecclesiological conception of the poor upon Mt 25:31-46. He understands "the least brethren" in question in a universal sense, denoting the poor gathered from all the nations. The exact breadth of the term, however, is exegetically unclear, so that the position may legitimately be held that the "least brethren" should really be understood in a more limited sense, as referring only to those who follow Christ. Can ecclesiological significance as far-reaching as Moltmann's be drawn from such an unclear text?

b) If the term "the least brethren" may be employed in a universal sense, the question still arises: Is Christ (and therefore the Church?) to be found in them simply because of their impoverished state, or is a more subtle interpretation of the text demanded—for example, that Christ is present in them because of the qualities which their state normally exemplifies, as a lack of a spirit of self-righteousness? The danger apparent here, however, is that if the conception of the least brethren is made a more spiritual one, it can easily be said to include at least some men of all social and economic strata. Would all of these,

then, be members of the Church? In view of Moltmann's historical-temporal understanding of the "Church," it may be supposed that he would have to answer "yes."

c) Finally, it may be asked whether the Church has ever been so broadly understood, and, if not, whether it is legitimate to introduce such a radical conception regarding the nature of the Church that would not even reflect her earliest life.

Nevertheless, however one might look upon Moltmann's argumentation here, it constitutes a serious attempt on his part to open up the borders of the interior life of the Church beyond the confines of traditionally-understood Christian community. If it is eventually accepted, it will be bound to have far-reaching consequences upon the Church's present consciousness of her own image.

4) Moltmann's attempt to understand the Church in historical-temporal terms is a further radical departure from, and a sweeping undercutting of, traditional Christian, and especially Catholic, conceptions of the Church. Moltmann's perspective represents not only an attempt to broaden the dimensions of true Church life beyond that of including simply the community of the poor, but also restructures the constitution of the Church totally within the framework of history and its movement toward the *eschaton*. He thus goes significantly beyond the statements of Vatican II, which see "only Catholic Christians" as "fully incorporated in the Church."⁸ But he also takes the discussion of the true presence of the Church totally out of the context of institutional categories, such as allegiance to the "Supreme Pontiff and the bishops,"⁹ and places it in the realm of formation of community in anticipation of the universal eschatological community of liberated mankind. Thus Moltmann seems to incorporate non-Christians into the Church in a way that Vatican II chose not to do.

It remains for Moltmann, however, to bring together these two different currents of thought by which he is broadening his conception of the Church, but whose interrelationship is not so easily seen—namely, of the Church as world that reflects the Spirit of the *eschaton* (a more horizontal perspective of the Church), and of the Church that includes the community of the poor (a more vertical perspective). It remains for him also to define more clearly the relationship of the institutional Church to the historical-temporal Church, as well as the meaning of baptism within this entire context. The fact that it is still often not clear to which Church Moltmann is referring, when he speaks in a general context of the Church, shows

⁸ *Ibid.*, n. 48, p. 33, regarding *Lumen gentium*, no. 14.

⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 14, p. 33.

that the synthesis of the various strands of his understanding of the Church is the next step in his theology of the Church.

5) Moltmann's conception of the truth as historical anticipation of that which resides fundamentally and totally in the final realization of the *eschaton* constitutes a radical break-through in ecclesiological perspectives regarding the Church's philosophy of truth. However radically one might wish to interpret this perspective (does it include dogmatic statements of the Church, for example—a problem which Moltmann himself has not yet considered), it remains true that his conception of truth as anticipational would involve a fundamental transformation in the Church's conception of herself, from the role of preserver of past formulations of the truth to the role of liberator of the future of the truth.

Can the Church so radically restructure her institutional conception of herself as the bearer and preserver of tradition understood as the preservation of the past, to bearer and preserver of tradition understood as the liberation of the future of the truth? If dogma is understood as definitive formulation of past revelation of absolute truth, then there appears to be no way in which dogma is open to reformulation. If dogma, however, is understood as present anticipation of the future of truth that is not yet because it has not yet come to be (since the *eschaton* where God will be all in all is not yet), then dogma becomes present formulation of the absolute truth that lies ahead, and becomes open to revision, insofar as that truth becomes more perceptible within the process of history. When dogma codifies past truth that has been revealed once and for all, then it gives up the truth if it reforms itself. But when dogma is anticipation of what will be, then it has nothing to lose in reformulation, as long as the promise of the fulfillment of the future of truth remains. The Church, in the latter case, would not lose the truth upon which Christianity is based by her reformulating dogma, but should come more into her own as the witness to the truth of the future revelation of God in the *eschaton* (which is, after all, the role of the Church in history). Restatement of dogma would, then, mean greater anticipation of the truth, insofar as, in the Spirit of Christ, the Church is brought closer to the truth, i.e., closer to the transcendent goal of history.

If truth, then, is understood eschatologically rather than statically, the result is that the Church is forced to be radically open to the future of Christ if she wishes to preserve her true character, rather than being forced to hold on to past formulation of the truth in order to preserve her true character. Truth as eschatological thus frees the Church to become what she will be, rather than restraining her so that she might re-

main what she always was. If the Church ultimately was in need of a philosophy of truth that could allow her to open herself up to the possibility of "newness" within truth, then perhaps this conception of truth as eschatological provides that possibility. If the Church had been reluctant to reformulate her understanding of basic Christian truth for fear of losing the truth, she is challenged, by this conception of the truth, to hasten forward in the process of discovering the truth, lest the truth escape her. Most important of all, with this conception of truth the Church is free to think all things anew and still be faithful to Christ as His Church.

The nature of this mode of understanding truth as a function of the *eschaton* would, to be sure, bring about greater challenge in the life of the Church in history than her traditional understanding of truth; for it would demand of the Church a fidelity to her role as witness to the truth of Christ, as the basis for being granted ever more perceptive awareness of it. For it is only insofar as the Church moved closer to the truth, i.e., closer to the realization of the *eschaton*, in her own reconversion to the life that is proper to the *eschaton*, that she could hope to be enlightened as to the truth of the *eschaton*.

6) Finally, in making the activity of the Church in the world, at least insofar as the Church is present in the lives of her members, indigenous to the ecclesial character itself of the Church, Moltmann declares that the Church can never acquiesce to secular notions of the absolute separation of the zones of the Church and the state. For such a separation would serve to prohibit the eschatological presence of the Church within social and political history, whereas life in the Church, if it is the true Church of Christ, necessarily involves such a presence.