

CURRENT THEOLOGY

A CHURCH FOR THE POOR AND THE WORLD: AT ISSUE WITH MOLTSMANN'S ECCLESIOLOGY

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No matter what Jürgen Moltmann publishes, he will always be remembered foremost for his *Theology of Hope*. With the publication of that work in 1964, he attracted the attention of the world of theology by insisting that the Christian revelation must be understood from beginning to end as eschatological. From then on, M.'s project has been to reformulate all theology systematically in terms of that eschatological perspective derived from the promise of the future contained in the resurrected Christ. The focus of his work shifted from the resurrection of Christ to "the cross of the risen Christ" in *The Crucified God* in 1972. What had largely remained undeveloped, however, was a systematic treatment of the effect of eschatology upon the life of the Church. That need was finally fulfilled in 1975 with the publication of a fully-developed eschatological ecclesiology, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*.¹

The major contribution of Moltmann's ecclesiology may well lie in its fundamental repositioning of the Church within God's Trinitarian salvific relationship toward mankind and the world. In this bulletin, however, I want to discuss four areas of his ecclesiology which touch upon more pressing and somewhat controversial ecclesiological questions for today: (1) the nature of the Church (here I shall be in partial agreement with M.); (2) in what sense the Church may and may not validly be said to be "on the side of the poor" (I suggest a corrective to M.'s position here); (3) how Church-state separation may and may not validly be understood (I agree with M.); (4) whether the Church exists for the world (as M. proposes) or the world is oriented toward the Church (as I dare to suggest).

THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

Moltmann understands the Church to be "the fellowship of believers who follow the one Lord and have been laid hold of by the one Spirit" (106). The Church "becomes visible through the fellowship in the Word and the fellowship of the Lord's Supper" (107). Since the gospel makes the coming rule of God already present in and through his Word, the

¹ Tr. Margaret Kohl; New York: Harper & Row, 1977. All page references to Moltmann's ecclesiology are to this edition and noted within the body of the article.

Church of Christ is also "the exodus Church," the new "people of the kingdom" emigrating from exile in enslavement to sin to freedom in the coming glory of God (83). In this sense the Church is already "the community of the liberated, the community of those who hope" (85). But since it is on the cross that this freedom is won for us, the Church must also be seen as a community "born out of the cross." The Church lives "under the cross . . . wherever Christians take their cross on themselves . . . in common resistance to idolatry and inhumanity." The Church lives also "in the shadow of the cross" in brotherhood with "the poor, the handicapped, the people society has rejected, the prisoners and the persecuted" (97). All of this represents the eschatological imprint of M.'s theology of hope upon his definition of *what* the Church is.

But, Moltmann argues, one must not only discern what the Church is, but also *where* it is to be found. The Church must be present, he states, wherever Christ promised to be present. Since Christ is the one whom the Church follows and who leads it to the truth, a true understanding of the Church, he feels, must include the presence of the Church wherever Christ promised to be present. He summarizes this notion in a phrase based on the thought of Ignatius of Antioch (*Smyrn.* 8, 2): "Where Christ is, there is the Church."

Moltmann finds two general areas in the Scriptures where Christ promised to be present: (1) in the believing community and (2) outside it in "the least brethren" (121-30). He easily justifies the first area by arguing that Christ promised to be present (*a*) in the believing community in its apostolic activity (cf. Lk 10:16: "He who hears you, hears me"); (*b*) in the sacraments of the Eucharist and baptism (cf. 1 Cor 11:23 ff. and Rom 6²); (*c*) in the fellowship of believers (Mt 18:20).

It is Moltmann's determination of the second area where Christ promised to be present that presents problems: outside the believing community in "the least of the brethren." He draws exclusively upon Mt 25:31-46, where he understands Jesus as Son of Man and eschatological Judge to be offering the kingdom of the Father to those from all the nations of the world who responded to the needs of the least brethren, and pronouncing judgment or condemnation on those who did not. The important verses are 40 and 45, because Jesus identifies himself there with "the least of his brethren" or "these least ones." M. concludes from his exegesis that Jesus is "already hidden in the world now in the present—in the least of his brethren—the hungry, the thirsty, the strangers, the naked, the sick and the imprisoned" (126). He notes the remarkable balance

² Though Christ does not, of course, personally promise his presence in baptism in Rom 6, M. apparently feels it permissible to derive that conclusion from Paul's statement of our unity with Christ through likeness to his death and resurrection, an experience entered into through baptism into Christ's death.

between this formulation of Jesus' presence in "the least brethren" who await assistance and the formulation of his presence in the believing community in the apostolate: "He who hears you, hears me" (Lk 10:16). He concludes that the latter formulation identifies Jesus with the "active mission," while the former identifies him "with the suffering *expectation*" (127). Traditional theology, he argues, has ignored the ecclesiological significance of the Matthean text by identifying the Church of Christ exclusively with the promises of Christ's presence in the believing and mission community. M. argues that if *ubi Christus, ibi ecclesia* is valid, the Church of Christ must be present not only in the "brotherhood of believers" as always understood, but also in the "latent brotherhood" of "the poor" or the "brotherhood of the least of his brethren with Christ." The Church must "represent this double brotherhood of Christ in itself, and be present with word and Spirit, sacrament, fellowship and all creative powers among the poor, the hungry and the captives" (129) as well as in the believing community.

But is that the case? Moltmann's ecclesiological conclusions here are drawn entirely from his exegesis of Mt 25:31-46, which is full of difficulties. Since he has used this text to formulate a wholly new understanding of the Church that is surely controversial, one must closely investigate the validity of his exegesis.

1) Three groups of people are denoted in the passage: those who are saved because they responded to the needs of "the least brethren"; those who are condemned for not doing so; and "the least brethren" (v. 40) or "these least ones" (v. 45). The heart of the problem is: Who precisely are "the least brethren"? M. argues that they are the poor "wherever and whoever they are." They cannot only be "poor and persecuted Christians," he states, because the Son of Man as the world's Judge "calls all men to their account," judging them on the basis of what they have done for him "in his hidden presence in the poor." But that is precisely the question at issue, and the fact that the world's Judge is judging all mankind does not resolve the matter. M. argues further that restricting the meaning of the term to Christians "would also be contradicted by the people's ignorance about what they were doing" (126). But if this is in fact a universal judgment scene, there is no reason to expect that the people would have any knowledge of the significance of their actions *even if* they were directed toward Christians. The identification of "the least brethren" is hardly resolved by either of these arguments.

2) One must therefore begin by attending more clearly to the primary question at issue here: Should "the least brethren" properly be understood as referring to the "poor" of the world (in which case M., using the principle *ubi Christus, ibi ecclesia*, might rightly conclude to the presence of the Church among the poor of the world) or to Christians alone? If the

latter, the argument in this passage would be that all mankind is saved insofar as it responds to the needs of followers of Christ. The Church would then remain essentially identified with the community of believers, and M.'s use of the term "least brethren" to denote a universal second brotherhood of the expectant poor with which Christ identified himself would be invalid. The meaning of "the least brethren" is therefore of profound ecclesiological significance.

That the exegesis of the text supports Moltmann's position is far from clear for several reasons:

a) Whom is Jesus addressing in this text? According to Matthew, Jesus is speaking to his disciples alone both now and immediately after this passage (24:1; 26:1). Presumably, therefore, the teaching contained in 25:31-46 is intended for Jesus' disciples and for their understanding of his gospel calling. If that is the case, it is difficult to see what the point of the text would be if the significance of the teaching were suddenly directed toward those who never knew him. The text would educate about the necessity for mankind in general to care for the poor and jar with the contents of all passages around it. Of course, the redaction and location of the passage is Matthew's. But if that is so, it is surely more likely that Matthew is fitting the text into a context appropriate to it, in which case the more likely conclusion must be that the text is illuminating some aspect of discipleship of Christ. I would argue that Jesus' major concern is not ignorance of his identification with "the least brethren." Rather, he is stressing that he *is* identified with his disciples in their mission activity, so that they might find strength in this fact and may know that they are a source of salvation for anyone who is actually serving Jesus by satisfying their needs. The disciples are thus made to know that they represent the continuing presence of Jesus in the Gentile world and the possibility of salvation for anyone who would respond to them in their need. But were the disciples ignorant of Jesus' identification with them? It is quite possible that Jesus' teaching on this matter (or Matthew's or the Church's understanding of it) needed clarification here just as much as other elements of his teaching throughout the Gospel. The disciples are presented as ignorant of Jesus' teaching throughout nearly all the Gospel; there is no reason why the situation should be different here.

b) Light could presumably be shed on this issue by an investigation of the identity of "the least" or "the least ones" in other passages in Matthew³ (there are no other passages where Matthew uses the expression "the least brethren"):

2:6: "And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means *least* among the princes of Judah. . . ." This text is not useful because it is borrowed

³ I am limiting my investigation to Matthew since there are no Gospel parallels to 25:31-46 and to avoid needlessly prolonging this presentation.

from the OT, although here "the least" refers to Bethlehem in its lowliness and insignificance among the townships of Judea and not of the world.

5:19: "That is why whoever breaks the least significant of these commands and teaches others to do so shall be called *least* in the kingdom of God." The "least" refers here to those attaining the lowest position of honor in the kingdom of heaven. Although the passage does not specify who these people are, Jesus indicates that they have failed to observe the commands of the law and the prophets. Since the setting is strictly Jewish, with reference to Jesus' disciples and their observance of the law and the prophets, the "least" cannot directly refer to mankind as a whole. A similar passage is found in 11:11.

c) Of greater importance are the texts in Matthew where Jesus refers to "these little ones":

10:42: ". . . whoever gives a cup of cold water to one of *these little ones* because he is a disciple will not want for his reward." This reference is extremely valuable, because the action designated strikingly parallels the satisfying of the needs of others in 25:31-46. But here "these little ones" receiving the benevolent action are clearly disciples of Jesus in mission activity, and so they must correspond to M.'s believing community in apostolic activity. In addition, since they are being commissioned to mission only to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (10:6), those providing the cup of water must be essentially Jewish.

18:6: "On the other hand, it would be better for anyone who leads astray one of *these little ones* who believe in me, to be drowned . . ." Here "these little ones" are clearly denoted as those believing in Jesus. While in vv. 10 and 14 "these little ones" is not further specified, the term presumably continues to refer to those among Jesus' believers.

Matthean texts regarding the "brethren" are too numerous to list, but in every case the term refers either to natural-born kin (of no interest to us here) or to disciples in Christ.⁴ In 12:46-50, Jesus insists that the term "brethren" means his disciples; cf. 5:47, 23:8, 28:10.

My conclusion, then, is: if one interprets Matthew's use of the terms "least brethren" or "least ones" in 25:40, 45 on the basis of his use of such terms throughout his Gospel, one must agree that, rather than making exceptional use of these terms here as referring to the needy among all mankind, he is using the terms to refer to his own disciples, probably in mission activity, or simply as members of his community of followers. If this is the case, M.'s use of 25:31-46 as a basis (and the only basis) for drawing up a second brotherhood of the Church outside the community of believers is not substantiated. The more justifiable conclusion is that

⁴ W. D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (London: Cambridge Univ., 1966) 98.

"the least brethren" mentioned in Matthew are disciples of Jesus and that anyone from among the nations of the world who takes care of their needs as they carry out their discipleship is serving Jesus and thereby performing service to God. The text would therefore not be relevant to the discussion of the entirely different matter of Christian service to the needs of the poor in general. Though one might, of course, legitimately argue from Christian moral principles that responding to the needs of mankind in general is part of good Christian living, our point is that this text does not in itself speak to that issue and may not therefore be used in drawing up a second brotherhood in the Church that includes the poor "wherever and whoever they are."⁵

⁵ Lamar Cope emphatically supports my conclusion: "Finally, perhaps the most important result of the exegesis relates to its use in ethics and homiletics. Matthew XXV 31-46 cannot provide a legitimate basis for Christian concern for the poor and needy of the world. Such an interpretation violates the text by eisegesis. 'The least of these my brethren' are the disciples; the ethic is a churchly, sectarian one; it does not represent a significant advance in ethical thinking over the ethics of the Judaism of its day. For a wider concern and richer ethic interpreters must turn to other places in the New Testament" ("Matthew XXV:31-46—"The Sheep and the Goats' Reinterpreted," *Novum Testamentum* 11 [1969] 44). Scholarly opinion on the meaning of "the least brethren" has varied considerably. The two general categories of meaning have been: (1) all the poor or suffering or needy of the world or (2) Christians, though exegetes have often seen only a part of the community intended by the term: either disciples or missionaries or apostles or Jewish-Christians or poor Christians.

Traditional interpretation held, as M. does, that the term included all the poor of the world. But more recently, according to J. Lambrecht and W. G. Thompson (in their excellent discussions of this matter listed below), Matthean scholars have begun to opt for some form of the second position.

Among those holding the traditional position are: George A. Buttrick, Exposition of "Matthew," *The Interpreter's Bible* 7 (New York: Abingdon, 1951) 566; Howard Clark Kee, "The Gospel according to Matthew," *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible* (New York: Abingdon, 1971) 640; Josef Schmid, "Das Evangelium nach Matthäus," *Regensburger Neues Testament* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1965) 355; Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News according to Matthew* (London: SPCK, 1976) 477; Pierre Bonnard, *L'Évangile selon saint Matthieu* (Neuchâtel: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1963) 366, who also cites Théo Preiss as agreeing; Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Scribner, 1963) 207; Paul Gaechter, S.J., *Das Matthäus Evangelium: Ein Kommentar* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 1963) 820; John L. McKenzie, "The Gospel according to Matthew," *Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968) 43:177.

Some are open to either position: e.g., Adolf Schlatter, *Der Evangelist Matthäus: Seine Sprache, sein Ziel, seine Selbstständigkeit* (6th ed.; Stuttgart: Calwer, 1963) 725-27; J. C. Fenton, *Saint Matthew* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1963) 402.

Many have opted for some form of the second position: e.g., (a) Christians in general: Walter E. Bundy, *Jesus and the First Three Gospels: An Introduction to the Synoptic Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ., 1955) 475-76; Henry Wansbrough, O.S.B., "St Matthew," *A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture* (London: Nelson, 1969) 948; W. D. Davies (n. 4 above) 98; W. G. Thompson, S.J., "An Historical Perspective in the Gospel of Matthew," *JBL* 93 (1974) 258, n. 31. (b) Christians in need: K. Stendahl,

IS THE CHURCH ON THE SIDE OF THE POOR?

We have noted that Moltmann identifies "the least brethren" as "the poor wherever and whoever they are." That Jesus was interested in the poor "wherever and whoever they are" is a matter clear from his general teaching and actions. That he was interested in the poor among his disciples is clear from Matt 25:31-46. But what types of persons are meant by "the poor" in Jesus' teaching? The question is important, because the popular argument today is that Jesus, though proclaiming his gospel to all, was on the side of the poor and proclaimed a gospel partisan to the poor. M. argues that both Matthew and Luke "sum up the people who are primarily affected" by the gospel and for whom it was primarily intended as "the poor," and that if we Christians wish to continue to proclaim the gospel of Christ properly, we may only do so "in fellowship with the poor" and in social solidarity with them (79).

Before one can answer if Jesus was on the side of the poor, one must ask: Who are "the poor" for Jesus? Are they the hungry and the materially deprived, as the term is so often used today? According to Moltmann (79), the poverty intended by the Scriptures

extends from economic, social and physical poverty to psychological, moral and religious poverty. The poor are all those who have to endure acts of violence and injustice without being able to defend themselves. The poor are all who have to exist physically and spiritually on the fringe of death, who have nothing to live for and to whom life has nothing to offer Poverty therefore means both dependency and openness "Riches" are equally multi-dimensional and extend from economic exploitation, by way of social supremacy, to the complacency of the people who look after themselves in every sector of life What is meant is an attitude, and the thing it depends on. What is meant are possessions and the violence through which they are acquired and maintained. . . . [The rich] are neither dependent on others nor open for others.

I might summarize Moltmann's opposition between "the rich" and "the poor" as that between those who are complacent and secure in relation-

"Matthew," *Peake's Commentary on the Bible* (London: Nelson, 1967) 794; William Neil, *Harper's Bible Commentary* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962) 346-47. (c) disciples or missionaries: Lamar Cope (cf. above) 39; J. Lambrecht, "The Parousia Discourse: Composition and Content in *Mt.*, XXIV-XXV," *L'Évangile selon Matthieu: Rédaction et théologie*, ed. M. Didier (Gembloux: Duculot, 1972) 329-42, esp. 336-37 (Lambrecht feels that this interpretation, though not traditional, in fact goes back to the early Church); Eugene A. LaVerdiere, S.S.S., and William G. Thompson, S.J., "New Testament Communities in Transition: A Study of Matthew and Luke," *TS* 37 (1976) 580-82. This last work and Lambrecht's article provide excellent studies of the more recent developments. My own position corresponds most closely to theirs. Cf. Lambrecht also for a more extensive listing of exegetes supporting his position.

ship to the world and through what it has to offer them (money, power, reputation) and those who are open to the power of God in their lives and find meaning and security in their lives totally from their dependence on God.

But if that is the case, "rich" and "poor" are more terms of relationship between human beings and toward God than terms merely denoting quantity of possessions or food. To be sure, the starting point is the concrete situation in which the given individual has a plentiful or negligible use of money and food for the creation of personal well-being and security in the world; Jesus, in making use of these terms, seems always to have had this situation in mind (Lk 6:20-21, 24-25). Yet, at a deeper level, one finds it is primarily (though not exclusively) the "spiritual" dimension that is at issue (Mt 5:1-12), in which case one who is materially poor could in effect share in the obstacles to entrance into the kingdom of heaven which beset "the rich" and thereby not be considered by Jesus as one of "the poor," whereas one who is materially "rich" could be open to the possibility of inheriting the life of the kingdom and thus be numbered among those who are spiritually "poor." While quantity of money and possessions is never totally to be ignored in this discussion, the more fundamental question is *how one makes use of them*. Thus, if one who has an abundance of money and possessions is nevertheless totally oriented to God for meaning and security in his life and uses his wealth in the service of God and mankind, he does not in effect fall under the category of "the rich" as described in the Synoptic Gospels. In turn, if one who has negligible money and possessions is nevertheless totally absorbed in himself and finds meaning and security in his life only in terms of what he can make and build up for himself in the world, he does not fall under the category of "the poor" to whom the kingdom of heaven belongs.

But if that is so, if we are any longer to speak of Jesus and his gospel as on the side of the poor, poverty must be understood not only as a term applicable to the materially poor but also to those poor in spirit even when they are not materially poor. It is this latter group that Moltmann and so many contemporary theologians seem to be ignoring in their interpretation of poverty in the Scriptures. M. is fearful that the Church may easily identify poverty as "an attitude of humility limited to the inner and spiritual life" (356). Surely this is to be avoided. But to compensate for this, one should avoid moving to the opposite extreme. It does little good to define poverty, as he rightly does, as having religious, moral, and psychological dimensions as well as economic and physical ones, and then to say that Jesus is on the side of the poor and apply the notion only to those who are materially and physically deprived, as he

and many theologians tend to do today. If the scriptural use of the term "poor" has both material and spiritual dimensions, one must not fail to consider the spiritual, psychological, and even social forms of poverty and alienation possible in the world today even where there is literally no material or physical deprivation. Then it is possible even to consider some of the materially rich as among "the poor" whom the gospel of Jesus favored. The "rich" are not simply to be identified with the powerful, the exploitative, or the complacent, as those influenced by Latin American liberation theology and its too narrow conception of poverty would have us believe. The fact is that Jesus' mission was to proclaim the good news of salvation in the kingdom of God *to all*.⁶ All those who accepted his call and renounced the world to re-establish their lives on the basis of the values of the kingdom of God were considered by him to be "poor," because they accepted his gospel and lived solely from its power. It is not because the rich man has possessions as such that he is not acceptable to Jesus, but because those possessions tend to make him find meaning and security in his life in something other than his relationship to God and his kingdom. But once he accepts that relationship as the sole basis of meaning and power in his life and lives a life of service of the kingdom, he is one of the "poor" with whom Jesus sides.

The tax collectors (and perhaps prostitutes) of the Jewish world are extremely valuable in clarifying how we must understand Jesus on the side of the poor. Certainly the tax collectors in Jesus' time were not materially poor and yet Jesus ate and drank with them. Since Jesus was always about the work of calling to the kingdom of God, he has to have been actively in pursuit of the tax collectors too. In Jesus' time, however, it was possible to be materially well-to-do and yet an outcast of society. That fact alone must make us cautious about making a too easy identification of "the poor" to whom Jesus was partisan with the economically and materially deprived. The same hesitation is necessary today. In fact, to say that Jesus was on the side of the poor must be qualified so much to avoid popular misunderstanding that it seems better to search for more acceptable terms. Jesus was not so much partisan to the poor as to the alienated, the lonely, the disoriented, and the dispossessed, meaning by that not simply those who might be materially deprived but all those who are in any way unfulfilled, disjointed, uprooted, or outcasts in relation to the world and its standards of value. This, then, includes not

⁶ It is for that reason that Vincent J. Genovesi, S.J., strongly argues that "the gospel is not for the poor alone. The rich also need its life-offering. . . . [Christ's] desire was that everyone—poor and rich—would hear his good news, do penance and believe" ("Christian Poverty: Sign of Faith and Redemptive Force," *The Way*, Supplement 32 [autumn 1977] 80-81).

only the economically alienated but also those who may be religiously, philosophically, socially, psychologically, morally, or politically alienated even though not economically alienated.⁷

Jesus was not really partisan to the poor in the way society tends to use that term today. He was partisan to anyone who would respond to his call to the kingdom: "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers? . . . There are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is brother and sister and mother to me" (Mt 12:48-50). Jesus sought all those who would enter into an interpersonal relationship with God, recognize that it is God and His kingdom that provide meaning in life, and respond with a life of discipleship in service. And so, if one would use M.'s principle *ubi Christus, ibi ecclesia*, one must conclude that the Church's role is to be at the side of anyone who is in need of and open to God's love and mercy.

The ecclesiological significance of this broader perception of "poverty" is of enormous importance, for it allows us to overcome an overly confined perception of where the efforts of the Church need to be directed today. I am not saying that Jesus was not on the side of the poor. I am saying he was also on the side of those among the materially rich who were nevertheless numbered among those who were "poor in spirit" and that the efforts of the Church must be directed toward those as well.

That this conception of the role of the Church would broaden the horizon of its activity and provide a much stronger base for enrichment of its life is obvious. That it would also supply greater possibility for reformation of the political and social structures of society today is clear. It would surely become possible for the Church to establish a political theology of influence at the higher levels of our society, rather than simply to work against those in the upper levels of society on behalf of those materially deprived.

POLITICAL THEOLOGY

One of the most significant offshoots of the theology-of-hope movement has been political theology with its attendant theologies of revolution and liberation. The specific point of connection for Moltmann between the last three theologies and his theology of hope has been his theology of the cross. The cross of Christ represents the historical front line to the process of history that culminates in the eschatological event of resurrection. The cross of Christ means for M. not only the destruction of the law

⁷ Walter Kasper insists upon this broad conception of "the poor" in Scripture: "Poor is taken in a very broad sense: it includes the helpless, those without resources, the oppressed, those in despair, the despised, the ill-tempered, the abused. . . . Jesus' glorification of the poor is not related to any social stratum and implies no social programme" (*Jesus the Christ* [New York: Paulist, 1976] 84-85).

and its claims to provide righteousness and liberation, but also the overthrow of political-religious forms claiming power, meaning, and value in our lives and in our world.

Because the political-social world with its illusions of grandeur is so heavily burdened with tendencies to idolatry, Moltmann considers the theology of the cross to have dethroned that world most of all. But if the cross of Christ desacralizes the idols of the political-social world, it necessarily tends also toward a "democratizing" form of government leading to individual personal responsibility for political decisions. Political theology goes even further. In order to rectify the alienation created by puffed-up political systems of the past and to do away with systems of alienation in the future, political theology champions the causes of all those rejected by powerful political systems today: the poor, the lowly, the alienated, the outcast, the oppressed, the enslaved.

Such political theology inevitably gives the Church a political dimension. Separation of Church and state based upon a demarcation of areas of interest and influence is unacceptable to Moltmann. The role of the Church is to stand at the side of Jesus Christ and to continue the mission of Christ to combat all contradictions to the freedom and brotherhood of mankind (176-77). As the community which seeks correspondence to the kingdom of God in history, the Church must "encourage the forms of government which best serve human fellowship and human rights and dignity, and it must resist those forms which hinder or suppress these things" (178). In this way the Church must take an active part in the formation of a political order which overcomes the power of death and ministers to the new life of the kingdom of freedom.

Moltmann is far from calling for the restoration of Christianity as a state religion in his political theology. That citizens should be free to follow their own religious convictions is taken for granted. A Christian state religion is diametrically opposed to his conception of the Church as the community that stands at the side of the crucified Christ. At the same time, his political theology advances far beyond equally antiquated notions that set up boundaries between Church and state by making the Church a politically uninvolved institution and the state a religiously neutral one.

In discarding this completely unacceptable concept of separation (and one impossible to fulfil), Moltmann's political theology justly constitutes an attack on exaggerated Church-state separation thinking so widespread in American ecclesial and political thought and so often championed in recent Supreme Court decisions. Americans are reluctant to have the Church take positions on political and social questions, because they fear the power and undue influence of a particular religious viewpoint upon a pluralistic society. Perhaps in matters of little moral consequence such

reluctance is justified. But if the cross of Christ represents the historical contradiction and downfall of all dehumanizing cosmic forces, the Church which stands at the side of the crucified Christ must continue to contradict and seek to overthrow dehumanizing forces wherever they may be. There is, in fact, no neutral ground; history has substantiated that truth all too well. A Church that fails to contradict dehumanizing forces in the state does not merely stand idly by; it comes down politically on the side of those who sanction such dehumanizing forces. Far too often it has been taken for granted in our society that the Church in remaining quiet sanctions certain capitalistic economic principles with their inherent tendencies toward domination and economic imbalance. How ironic that the Body of Christ should be seen to champion a system based upon the validity of aggressive self-development! "God helps those who help themselves" is a cry heard from many a Christian today, unaware of the fact that Christ really did insist that the "poor in spirit," the "lowly" and the "merciful," are the ones blessed by God. The Church that does not contradict injustice becomes the Church that accommodates itself to injustice and allows its members to do the same. When that happens, the Church that finally takes a stand against an evil force in society seriously risks speaking to a community that no longer cares to listen.

Moltmann's criticism of an apolitical Church and his insistence that the Church become the Church of the alienated and dispossessed becomes one of his strongest criticisms of the Church of the modern world and one of the most potent elements of his ecclesiology. But a caution should be directed to his political theology as well as to that of all others working in this area. The Church that takes the side of the alienated and dispossessed does not necessarily espouse any particular political or social formula for doing this. It is naive to conclude from a political theology in favor of the dispossessed that the rich must totally dispossess themselves of their goods, or that the Church must stand at the side of the alienated right or wrong. Ultimately, to be on the side of the alienated means to be working for the amelioration of the structures of society as a whole, so that no one might be either indigent or excessively well-possessed. That this should be done is demanded by M.'s political theology; how specifically it should be accomplished is another matter. It is to this matter that the Church must educate its politicians and economists, that they will use their political know-how and technical skill in the service of the gospel of Christ. It is foolhardy for political theologians to pretend to replace them.

A CHURCH FOR THE WORLD OR A WORLD FOR THE CHURCH?

It is Moltmann's firm conviction that history is now inevitably oriented toward union with God in His kingdom. That destiny is assured in the

death and resurrection of Christ. The role of the Church is to serve this purpose. The Church, therefore, presently seeks to create within history as much as possible the life of the kingdom that will only be completely realized beyond history. This service of the kingdom the Church carries on by seeking to create already now communities living in peace and justice based on equality and love. The Church is essentially seen as a relational reality involved in two different but interrelated relationships: in the service of the kingdom of God and in the service of the world because of the kingdom of God.

The question arises: Does the Church exist for the world or does the world exist for the Church? The heart of Moltmann's eschatological ecclesiology is the subordination of the Church to the world as it moves toward the consummation of creation in the kingdom of God. The thesis held by M. and many others is that the subordination of the Church to the kingdom necessarily implies that of the Church to the world in its movement toward the kingdom. One hesitates today to suggest that that may not necessarily be the case, but that is what I propose to do.

It is first of all theoretically possible, if perhaps not demanded by revelation, that the subordination of the Church to the kingdom could include the subordination of history to the Church as the way leading to union with Christ in the kingdom of God. The objection that such thinking is preposterous since the world clearly has not yet been and shows little prospect of becoming unified with the Christian community is irrelevant; for that, even if it were true, would not deny that this orientation is theoretically possible.

But if this perspective is theoretically possible, one must still ask whether God's plan is in fact set in that direction. Unfortunately, one does not find the desired clarity on this matter in Scripture. Traditional ecclesiologists have subordinated the world to the Church, while more progressive theologians have chosen to reverse the subordination, and both justify their positions on the basis of revelation.

Even though the Scriptures are not decisive on the matter, they do not leave us at sea; for they provide us with enough evidence to conclude that, while the early Church was in mission to the world, this mission was not undertaken so that the world outside the community might be transformed within itself, but that the world might be brought to its transformation by its acceptance of Christ and discipleship of him *in* and *through* the Christian community. Mt 28:16-20 could not be clearer on the point. The fact that Matthew also ends his Gospel with this passage indicates that he felt there was nothing more to say to the Christian community. The community was now to do as Jesus commanded: to go out, baptize, and make disciples from all the nations of the world (cf. Acts 2:40-41; 6:7; 9:31).

It is only natural that the early Christians would have understood the world of their day as oriented toward fulfilment in the community and not vice versa. The simple fact was that life in the outside world was often rude, barbaric, and built upon oppressive class divisions, whereas life in the Church was essentially based upon principles of respect in mutual service, sharing in the freedom of new life in community with the risen Lord. Why would the early Christians want to subordinate this to the world, rather than bring the world to this? The fact that the early Church soon developed a prolonged catechumenate indicates (among other things, to be sure) that the early Christians were aware of the beauty of their common Christian existence and sought to preserve it in the midst of a world seeking too easy admission. The new life had to be protected lest it crumble before the onrush of those who wanted to share a good thing without the conviction and sacrifice necessary to maintain its strength.

It does not necessarily follow that because the early Church maintained this course, it is the only admissible one today. What it does mean is that if such was the perspective of the early Church, we must be cautious in overturning that perspective or in trying to dismiss it totally from our modern ecclesiologies. In the last analysis, it may be that the Church today could do far more in the service of eschatological history by seeking to create, build up, and witness to the glorious liberty of the children of God *in its inner community life* than by trying to transform the world outside. One cannot help but think that if the Church did, indeed, truly witness in its interior life to the new life of Christ, this would have a greater transforming effect upon the world than a Christianity so much absorbed in the business of transforming the world outside the community in necessarily dissipated and secularized efforts.

It might be argued that Vatican II, with its new perspective on the role of the Church in the modern world, intended to subordinate the Church to the world for the sake of the kingdom, and that if this perspective is not certainly to be found in the Scriptures, it has nevertheless been sanctioned by the Church today. A closer reading of Vatican II, however, will show that this is not the case. The Council is replete with conflicting theologies, which is a cause of anguish to many theologians. Richard McBrien, who argues strongly for Church subordination to the world, has criticized Vatican II for failing to disregard fully a Church-oriented ecclesiology. The fact is: as much as Vatican II argues to the Christian's involvement in the world, it never ceases to urge that this be done so that the name of God and recognition of Jesus Christ might be promoted in the world, so that the world might thereby come to accept Jesus Christ and respond to him by membership in his Church (cf. *LG* 2, 13-14).

Vatican II does not see the Church fulfilled through its subordination to the world, but the world fulfilled through its orientation to the Church. The Church remains essentially bound to a mission of proclamation and service to the world, but with the view that the world might recognize the dignity and nobility of life in the service of Christ and come to accept that life within the assembly of the Christian community.