

The Role of Suffering in Jürgen Moltmann's Theology of Hope

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by

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Preface

My motivation for studying Jürgen Moltmann's theology of hope stems from my years of volunteering at The Listening Post, a sacred place in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. There, we welcome people from the area, most of whom live on the margins of society, who are broken and suffering. We spend one-on-one time listening to them, being with them, journeying with them.

Through this experience, I have gradually developed a profound sense of hope. I picked up Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* to try to understand this hope and how it might be related to the suffering I encountered. It is an insightful and inspiring book. I was delighted to read in the introduction the phrase *spes quaerens intellectum* (hope seeking understanding), a variation of Anselm's classic definition of theology: faith seeking understanding. Hope seeking understanding is a perfect description of my quest.

Moltmann uses the story of Jacob wrestling with an angel as a model for the study of theology, especially theology that challenges the *status quo* and takes a risk. Jacob wrestles all night with the angel and ends up with a lame hip, but also with a blessing. That nicely sums up my experience, not just with this paper on Moltmann's theology of hope, but also with the program at St Mark's College. I feel a little lame, but very blessed.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the faculty, staff and students of the College who were a constant source of inspiration and occasional wrestling partners. In particular, I would like to thank each of my professors, from whom I learned not only

theology, but also what it means to be a person of faith. In the order in which I took their courses: Dr Elaine Park, Dr. John McLaughlin, Dr. Gertie Jocksch, Fr. Walter Vogels, Loren Houldson, Sr. Nancy Brown, Fr. Martin Moser, Dr. David Pitt, Dr. Les McKeown, and Dr. Colin Ruloff. I would also like to extend a word of gratitude to Sr. Lorraine Lamarre, co-founder of The Listening Post, my practicum supervisor and an inspirational listener.

And finally, my wife Jan and our children Scott and Kristen deserve special thanks. Jan is my constant supporter and the sunshine of my life. Our children are an ongoing source of inspiration; they remind me about what's important in life and I see them carrying the message of hope into the next generation.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Central Claim

When Jürgen Moltmann wrote his first book, *Theology of Hope*,¹ in the 1960s, hope was in the air. The 1960s was a decade of great hope. It was a time of great hope for the Catholic Church, with Vatican II. Hope was in the air for oppressed people, with the civil rights movement and the women's liberation movement. And it was a time of great explorations that launched people into space and left footprints on the moon. Moltmann's book resonated with the times. Its publication vaulted him from an obscure professor to the forefront of theology. The book shook up established principles of theology, including the meaning of eschatology -- that it wasn't just about the end times or last things, but that it was about now.

Yet, this time of great hope occurred just a few short years after a period of great suffering and despair -- World War II -- when millions lost their lives in battle or as innocent, collateral victims of war, or in the targeted murder of Jews that was the Holocaust.

My claim that it is not a coincidence that hope follows suffering. Indeed, my claim is that hope emerges from suffering. This is true for the development of Moltmann's theology of hope², i.e., it emerged from the suffering he experienced as a

¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope - On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. James Leitch (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1967).

² Note that I use *Theology of Hope* to refer to Moltmann's book and theology of hope (unitalicized, no capitalization) to refer to his theology.

youth in Hitler's military in WWII. And, more importantly, this is true for Christian hope. God has consistently responded to the suffering human condition with hope.

1.2 Literature Review

This research paper is based on works by Moltmann, as well as secondary sources relating to Moltmann's theology. Jürgen Moltmann is one of the top theologians of the twentieth century,³ his writing is insightful, it fits with the times and he is a prolific writer. Therefore, there is a wealth of books, papers and research by and about Moltmann. A recent research bibliography by James Wakefield⁴ cites 1,217 works by Moltmann and 1,043 publications dealing with his theology, including 192 dissertations.⁵

But Moltmann's first book, *Theology of Hope*, is the book for which he is best known. *Theology of Hope*, published in the early 1960s thrust him into the spotlight and it is this work that has kept him there. Within two years, it had been reprinted six times and translated into five languages.⁶ The theology in his first book forms the basis for my paper, and I restricted my research to topics in that book.

Moltmann's approach to theology is to encourage dialog, so his books are open ended, rather than presented as a *fait accompli*. This is especially true of his *Theology of*

³ Stephen Brown, "Moltmann wins theology world cup," *Christian Century* 123, no. 16 (Aug. 2008): 14. This article describes a somewhat lighthearted, but telling contest to select the greatest theologian of the 20th century in the Systematic Theology World Cup. The contest was run on the internet, in parallel with soccer's World Cup.

⁴ James L Wakefield, *Jürgen Moltmann: A Research Bibliography* (Lanham, Md: Scarecrow Press, 2002).

⁵ Ton van Prooijen, *Jürgen Moltmann's Search for a Liberating Anthropology* (New York: Rodopi, 2004), 7.

⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *A Broad Place - An Autobiography*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008), 98.

Hope, as it turned out to be the first of a three book series on the trinity (*Crucified God*⁷ and *Church in the Power and Spirit*⁸ being the other two). The scope of his theological writings is broad and includes eschatology, ecclesiology, Christology, pneumatology and more.

In my research of Moltmann and secondary resources, I have noticed that few authors have focused on the role of suffering in Moltmann's theology of hope and this is the perspective from which I have undertaken my research. The theme of suffering underlies this paper on hope.

While *Theology of Hope* was a huge success and made a big impact, this theology is not unique to Moltmann, but rather it was built on existing work that he graciously acknowledges. My research includes many of Moltmann's sources.

As indicated in the opening paragraph, Moltmann's book was published in a time when hope was in the air, so it had a ready audience thirsting for some clarification for their feelings. Moltmann's call to action resonated with the times and the people. As Moltmann puts it in his autobiography, it was a book that met its *kairos*.⁹

Perhaps the most significant theological impact of Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* was that it transformed the concept of eschatology. The predominant thinking prior to his book was that eschatology was about the end times and, consequently, it had little to do with today. Moltmann changed that with his claim that eschatology was not just about

⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. R.A. Wilson and John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1974).

⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: a Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

⁹ Moltmann, *A Broad Place*, 99.

the future, but it was also about today. In so doing, he made eschatology the underlying, pervasive principle of Christianity.

Moltmann's primary interpreter is Richard Bauckham, who has written three books on Moltmann's theology¹⁰ and published several prefaces and papers. In the most recent edition of *Theology of Hope*, published in 2002,¹¹ Bauckham wrote the preface, where he summarizes the underlying concepts of Moltmann's theology of hope. These are:

- “the notion of divine promise;
- the understanding of the resurrection of Jesus as promise;
- and the understanding of history as mission.”¹²

These three topics structure this paper and are summarized below.

1.3 Divine Promise

Divine promise refers to the promises made by the God of Israel to the people of the Old Testament. In those days there were two cultures. First, there was the sedentary agrarian people whose livelihood depended on favourable weather and the perennial pattern of seasons. Second, there was the nomadic people who tended their livestock and moved from place to place. The agrarian people worshipped many deities to stave off bad

¹⁰ Richard Bauckham, *Moltmann: Messianic Theology in the Making* (Marshall Morgan and Scott, 1987); Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995); Richard Bauckham, ed., *God Will be All in All: The Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001).

¹¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope - On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. James W. Leitch (Viborg: SCM Press, 2002).

¹² Richard Bauckham, "Preface," in *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (London: SCM Press, 2002), xiii.

weather and to protect their crops. God chose to reveal himself to the nomadic people and make promises to them. He promised them land, blessings and many descendants. With these promises came hope.

The fact that the God of Israel chose to reveal himself to the people and respond to the needs of the people indicates that God acted in history and changed history. This was counter to the prevailing theology of Moltmann's day (notably the theology of Karl Barth), a theology that was rooted in the philosophy of the unchanging eternal being established by the ancient Greeks.

1.4 Resurrection of Jesus as Promise

God's promises were nearly all fulfilled in the Old Testament: Abraham had many descendants, God stayed with them during their forty year wandering in the desert and they entered the promised land. The exception was the promised Messiah, which is fulfilled by Jesus Christ. The story of Jesus is also one of divine revelation and divine promise, of working in history and responding to the needs of the people, in a manner similar to the God of Israel. In particular, the resurrection of Jesus is central to Moltmann's theology of hope. The resurrection transforms the divine promise of God that was exclusive to the chosen people and opens it up to a universal saving message applicable to all. It also serves to transform the world by announcing a new kingdom of God and calling all of us to work towards the kingdom.

Christ's resurrection was more than the fulfillment of the promises of the God of Israel; it was a rebirth of a new promise – the universal kingdom of God.

1.5 History as Mission

Finally, what does this all mean for us today, as Christians? The resurrection of Jesus is the birth of a new promise of the kingdom of God and it comes with a call for all of us to work towards that kingdom. Just as God acted in history in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, now we are called to act in history to bring about new life. We, as individuals and as church, are given a mission to respond to the call of God and to set out on a journey to the new promised land. We are to follow God as Abraham followed him, as countless others followed him, through a string of unbroken promises throughout history.

In modern society, the role of religion and faith is on the decline. They are no longer integral parts of society, but have become more and more private matters. Modern society is largely about commerce – production and consumption of goods -- and largely lacking in faith, tradition and values. As a result, there are increasingly more people on the margins and more people suffering. Christian hope is a response to this suffering.

Of course, hope exists in the secular world and help is offered to those who suffer, but in what is it rooted? And where is it leading? And how sustainable and effective is it?

For Christians, our mission is to act both as individuals and as a community to restore authentic hope to the world, to restore faith and tradition and values to our society and to restore love and hope through our individual interactions with fellow human beings. We are called to replace the hollow hope of the secular world with the hallowed hope of Christ.

1.6 Summary

The three principles summarized above (divine promise, resurrection as promise, and history as mission) will be fleshed out in the body of this paper. But before exploring these principles in detail, it's important to first understand some background about Moltmann and his day, to determine the context and motivations for the development of his theology of hope. This not only helps understand the theology, but it also establishes context for the application of his theology today.

Chapter 2: Horizons of Hope

2.1 *Kairos* of Moltmann's Day

Perhaps every human being feels he or she is living in a special time and a special place. Theologians use a biblical word for the times: *kairos*. In this chapter, we'll review the *kairos* in which Moltmann lived and developed his theology, beginning with his childhood in Germany, his youth as part of the German military machine of World War II and his post-war years as a pastor, theologian and author of his *Theology of Hope*, published in the 1960s. During this period, the world fell into the depths of despair and suffering that was the Second World War and the Holocaust and rebounded from that to a world bursting with hope that includes the civil rights movement, the liberation of women and Vatican II.

The central claim of this chapter is that, throughout these times, hope was a close companion to suffering. Indeed, the claim is that Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* emerged from the suffering of his times.

This period was also a special time for theology and, following the war, Moltmann immersed himself in the theologies of the day, notably from German theologians, including Karl Rahner, Karl Barth, Johann Baptist Metz, Joseph Ratzinger, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Hans Küng. Theology would be forever changed by Moltmann -- a change felt not just in Germany, but also felt around the world.

2.2 From a Horizon of Hope to a Horizon of Despair

To examine this era, we'll use the framework of horizons. We begin with Moltmann as a child living in the flatlands of Northern Germany, gazing out of the window of his home towards the distant horizon.¹³ He was drawn to that endless horizon that "invites one to go on beyond."¹⁴ He was filled with hope and dreams of studies in the fields of mathematics and physics.¹⁵ In a few short years, he would be recruited into the German army, he would witness the slaughter of countless innocents and he would be imprisoned in a Prison of War camp -- most of this while still a teenager.

In his hometown of Hamburg, he witnessed the destruction of endless Allied bombing raids, including the "biblically named" Operation Gomorrah, which killed 40,000 of his fellow citizens.¹⁶ As part of the German war machine, he was called up to the Russian front, where he was armed with a shovel and revolver, and then he was sent back to Belgium and the Netherlands. The shovel saw more service than the revolver, as he spent months in dugouts, was infected with lice, was ill fed and was afflicted with boils -- the scars of which he still bears today.¹⁷

Finally, he was captured and sent to a Prisoner of War camp in Scotland, where he saw, for the first time, photos of Nazi war crimes, including the Holocaust.¹⁸ Like

¹³ Jürgen Moltmann, "Foreword," in *Origins of the Theology of Hope* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), x.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, x.

¹⁵ Moltmann, *Broad Place*, 26.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁸ Geiko Muller-Fahrenholz, *The Kingdom and Power: The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 17.

most German soldiers, Moltmann had no involvement with the Holocaust, but he shared the nation's profound shame and guilt for the crimes.

In prison, the hopeful horizon of his youth was replaced with the truncated horizon of the barbed wire enclosed POW camp.¹⁹ His dreams of studying lay shattered and his hope was supplanted by despair.

Fortunately, his Scottish captors were kind. What especially impressed Moltmann was that they forgave him and this affected him profoundly. They also brought him a book as a gift and this gift would change his life. It was a book "full to the brim with hope,"²⁰ the Bible. Moltmann had been raised in a non-religious home and this was his first exposure to the Bible. Through their kindness and their book, Moltmann found "a deeper, liberating hope which works through love."²¹

He abandoned his dreams of studying math and physics to study -- and earn a PhD in -- theology.²² Coming to theology late in life, with a fresh view, would strongly influence his approach to theology. He questioned everything, including the well-accepted teachings of the church and the theological thought of his day.

We are grateful for those kind Scottish Christians and for their book, as they not only changed one young soldier's life, but impacted the lives of countless others who have learned and grown from Moltmann's work.

¹⁹ Moltmann, *Broad Place*, 26.

²⁰ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 15.

²¹ Moltmann, "Foreword," *Origins*, xi.

²² In a forward looking spirit, the Allies arranged an educational camp to train pastors and theologians to seed and heal the German nation.

2.3 Post War – from Despair to Hope

After the war, Moltmann threw himself into his theological studies, became a pastor and, finally, joined on as a professor at the University of Tübingen, where he'd write his first of many books, the *Theology of Hope*. His studies included the huge legacy of theology of his era that he built upon and transformed. Richard Bauckham describes it as the “tradition of (mainly German Protestant) theology to which he is indebted and from which he significantly departs in his understanding of eschatology.”²³

Clearly his thoughts and his work -- in particular his *Theology of Hope* -- were groundbreaking and long lasting, but the ideas were not uniquely his. He acknowledges his sources in his works. M. Douglas Meeks, in his *Origins of the Theology of Hope*,²⁴ lists the key theologians upon whom Moltmann builds his arguments, among them Wolfhart Pannenberg and Gerhard Sauter.²⁵ Moltmann himself references Karl Barth, his Old Testament professor Gerhard von Rad and his New Testament professor Ernst Käsemann.²⁶

There were also others developing theologies of hope during this period, notably Pannenberg, Johann Baptist Metz (the Catholic theologian and student of Rahner) and

²³ Bauckham, *Theology of Moltmann*, xii.

²⁴ Christopher Morse, *The Logic of Promise in Moltmann's Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁶ Moltmann, "Foreword," *Origins*, xi.

Sauter.²⁷ In addition, Moltmann's work is strongly influenced by the Jewish tradition, including Martin Buber,²⁸ Franz Rosenzweig and Abraham Heschel.²⁹

2.4 The 1960s – a Decade of Hope ... and Despair

The 1960s was a decade that Moltmann described as “an outburst of hope.”³⁰ Hope sprung up in areas as diverse as the civil rights movement, Vatican II and human space travel. During the Sixties, Moltmann would encounter a book by fellow German Ernst Bloch -- Jewish, atheist,³¹ Marxist philosopher.³² Bloch's three-volume *Philosophy of Hope*³³ had a significant, but controversial, influence on Moltmann.³⁴ Essentially, Moltmann found Bloch's concepts of hope to be intriguing, but they were lacking the grounding element of God. In his autobiography, Moltmann says: “I took up critically Ernst Bloch's hopes for a ‘world without God’ so as to link them with ‘the God of hope’ (Rom 15.13) of Jewish and Christian traditions.”³⁵

Shortly after Moltmann published his *Theology of Hope*, Martin Luther King was assassinated; communists marched into Czechoslovakia and the decade of hope -- and

²⁷ Bauckham, *Theology of Moltmann*, xi.

²⁸ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 96.

²⁹ Bauckham, *Moltmann: Messianic Theology*, 2.

³⁰ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, xi.

³¹ Moltmann, *Broad Place*, 79. Moltmann quotes Bloch as saying: “I am an atheist for God's sake”.

³² *Ibid.*, 79.

³³ Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice and Paul Knight (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986).

³⁴ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 9.

³⁵ Moltmann, *Broad Place*, 101.

Moltmann's theology – turned towards suffering. Moltmann's next work would be *The Crucified God*, which sought to locate God in the midst of suffering. Moltmann made bold and controversial statements about the impassibility of God, especially the suffering of Jesus. But Moltmann's theme of hope re-emerged from the suffering of Jesus, with the resurrection of Jesus.

2.5 A Broad (Biblical) Place

The source for much of this chapter is Moltmann's *A Broad Place: An Autobiography*. Twice in his autobiography, he cites a scriptural reference for "a broad place." The first is from Job: "You too he allured out of distress into a broad place where there is no more cramping." [Jb 36:16]³⁶ The second is from Psalms: "Thou hast set my feet in a broad place." [Ps 31:8]³⁷ For Moltmann, broad places are reminiscent of his childhood view, with the wide horizon, the wide horizon of hope.

Through God's grace, we are invited to journey from the confines of despair to the broad place of hope. Even when life seems most discouraging, even when life feels most filled with despair, God is there to offer a broad hand.

2.6 Summary

To summarize, the central claim of this chapter is that hope is available to those who suffer. And hope can emerge from suffering. Simple gestures by individuals, such

³⁶ Moltmann, *Broad Place*, 64. Moltmann uses the Revised Standard Version.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 361. RSV

as the kind visitor to the POW camp, who brought forgiveness and a book full of hope to the young broken soldier, can make a difference.

Hope can be found in the most desperate situations, even Auschwitz. When Moltmann once rhetorically posed the question: “How can you speak about God after Auschwitz?” He replied: “How can you not?”³⁸ With that, we turn to his writings, his reply to Auschwitz, his *Theology of Hope*.

³⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, "Afterword: An Autobiographical Note," in *God, Hope, and History: Jürgen Moltmann and the Christian Concept of History* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988), 203-204.

Chapter 3: Promise as Hope

3.1 Overview

Moltmann summarizes his approach to theology as “biblically founded, eschatologically oriented and politically responsible.”³⁹ In the case of his theology of hope, the biblical foundation stretches back to the days of the Hebrew Bible. There, we find the first seeds of hope planted by God in some of his earliest revelations to humanity. In Moltmann’s *Experiences of God*, he quotes Jewish theologian Martin Buber, who said “Christians and Jews have two things in common: a book and a hope.”⁴⁰

These first seeds of hope took the form of promises God made to his chosen people – the nomadic tribes people – and these promises formed the basis of a new religion based on promise and hope. This religion was in sharp contrast to the religion of the predominant agrarian culture, who worshipped multiple deities to ensure the ongoing pattern of fair weather needed for successful crops. The God of Israel was the God of promise, who acted in history and changed history.

3.2 Biblical Foundations

The biblical foundation of Moltmann’s work is evident from the start of his *Theology of Hope*. Within the first two pages, Moltmann references his first scriptural

³⁹ Moltmann, "Afterward" in *God, Hope*, 222.

⁴⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences of God*, trans. M. Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 25-26.

passage, the “God of hope,”⁴¹ a quote from the New Testament (Paul’s letter to the Romans 15:13). The core of Moltmann’s theology of hope is the resurrection of Jesus; but, as Bauckham says in *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, “to understand the resurrection, one must remember that the God who raised Christ from the dead was the God of Israel.”⁴² As Paul writes in that same chapter of Romans: “For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.” [Rom 15:4]⁴³

In others words, the “God of Hope” is the “God of Israel” and it is to these ‘former days’ -- the days of the Old Testament -- that Moltmann first turns to find where “we might have hope.”

Accordingly, we will begin our journey of the study of the God of hope by opening up our book of Sacred Scriptures, scriptures “full to the brim with future hope,”⁴⁴ to begin appropriately where God first starts journeying with us, in the first book of the Old Testament: Genesis.

3.3 God of Promise

Moltmann’s professor of the Old Testament was Gerhard von Rad, to whom he owes much in his development of promise as hope. Moltmann says in his autobiography: “following Gerhard von Rad, I read the Old Testament as the tradition history of God’s

⁴¹ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 16. Moltmann cites Rom 15:13.

⁴² Bauckham, *Theology Moltmann*, 33.

⁴³ NRSV.

⁴⁴ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 15.

inexhaustible promise to Israel for the future of the whole world.”⁴⁵ Moltmann extracts three key themes from the Old Testament that underpin his theology of hope: revelation, history and promise.⁴⁶ Revelation refers to God’s revealing of himself to his people. Divine revelation takes the form of promises: these promises break into history. They act in history and they transform history to bring about a new future.

3.4 Agrarian People vs. Nomadic People

Moltmann begins his discussion of God’s ‘inexhaustible promises’ with Abraham. To understand the significance of this divine promise, it’s important to understand the people of the day. In those days, there were two main types of people living in the area known as the fertile crescent:⁴⁷ agrarians (Canaanites) and nomadic tribes (pre-Israelites). Agrarians were “locally bound,” sedentary people who farmed the land.⁴⁸ Their livelihood was based on the success of their crops, which depended on the annual cycle of seasons and weather.

In contrast to the agrarian people, the nomadic people raised livestock (sheep and goats), so were less bound to a specific place, tended to be on the move, and less dependent on weather.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Moltmann, *Broad Place*, 101.

⁴⁶ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 122.

⁴⁷ Lawrence Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 32.

⁴⁸ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 97-98.

⁴⁹ Boadt, *Old Testament*, 135.

3.5 Epiphany Religion vs. Religion of Promise

The religions of the two people were as different as their lifestyles.

Agrarian People's Epiphany Religion

The agrarians had “a rich set of religious beliefs based on nature”⁵⁰ and “ would celebrate sacred festivals at specified times of the year.”⁵¹ They worshipped and made sacrifices to their gods, who they believed controlled the forces of nature, in an attempt to stave off the chaos of extreme weather (floods, draughts, crop-damaging storms).

The agrarian people identified special places (“stones, waters, trees, groves, mountains etc.”)⁵² where their gods would make their presence known. These “hierophanies” were considered gateways through which gods come to hallow the land.⁵³ Agrarian people chose to live as close as possible to their gods.

Moltmann refers to the religion of the agrarian people as “epiphany religions,” and references Victor Maag as the originator of this concept.⁵⁴ With epiphany religions, people have occasional encounters, or glimpses, of the divine. “Its experience with the divine corresponds to the ever-recurring cycle of the seasons: the gods ‘appear’ in the seasonal festivities and guarantee ‘the eternal return.’”⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Boadt, *Old Testament*, 216.

⁵¹ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 99.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 98.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁵⁵ Bauckham, *Theology of Moltmann*, 216.

Nomadic People's Religion of Promise

The nomadic people were not as tied to the weather or seasons and, as a result, they were not dependent on deities nor tied to particular sacred places. These early nomadic tribes lived on the margins of the surrounding agrarian culture. They were homeless, in a sense: on a journey but without a specific destination. God would change that.

God initiated encounters with the nomadic people, the “chosen people.” In these encounters, God made them a series of promises, including that they will have blessings, that they will have many descendants and that they will inhabit a land “flowing with milk and honey.” [Ex 3:8]⁵⁶ God also promised to be with them.

Thereafter, these nomadic tribes would not journey alone, but would be accompanied by God who “journeys along with them, is himself on the move.”⁵⁷ “God leads men [sic]⁵⁸ to a future which is not mere repetition and confirmation of the present, but is the goal of the events that are now taking place. The goal gives meaning to the journey and its distresses; and today’s decision to trust in the call of God is a decision pregnant with future.”⁵⁹

⁵⁶ *New American Bible: St. Joseph* (New York: Catholic Book Publishing, 1986). All quotes from this version of the Bible, unless otherwise noted.

⁵⁷ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 97.

⁵⁸ Note the German word *mensch* is gender neutral, so it is unclear whether the author intended to mean only men, or more likely both men and women.

⁵⁹ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 97.

Gradually, the people came to understand that the significance of their encounter with “otherness”⁶⁰ didn’t rest with the time and place but with the promise: the ‘word of God.’⁶¹ “Word” here is used in both senses: promise and *logos*.

The people God chose in the Old Testament were a people of suffering: nomads who had no land. Abraham and his wife Sara were old and childless when God asked them to move to a better land. Later, when the early Israelites were living under oppressive conditions in Egypt, they wandered in the desert for forty years. God kept his promise to be with them throughout this period.⁶²

These early nomadic tribes had encountered the God of Promise, the God of their future, and the “God of hope”.

3.6 God of History

The other factor that differentiates the epiphany religion of the agrarians from the promised religion of the nomads is that of history. In Moltmann’s definition, history is not just what was: history is what will be and what is now. Moltmann contrasts the God of promise -- the God of history, who makes history, who remembers the past and who creates a future -- with the unchanging, perennial deities of the agrarian people.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 16.

⁶¹ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 99.

⁶² God somehow chose these nomadic people -- and this is pure speculation -- perhaps because they were on a journey, they were not tied to fixed places, so less tied to fixed ideas and therefore more amenable to change and new ideas, including a new future. And perhaps God chose that particular period in time to counter the threat of the multiplicity of (real or imagined) deities that formed the religion of the agrarian people. Or perhaps God blessed all people with his word and promises, but it was only the nomadic people who listened.

Promise brings with it future; promise breaks into the present time and creates a new future -- a future of hope. Future is temporal, with a past, present and future. Future is historical; future is history. "In contrast to all epiphany religion, God's self-revelation here does not abstract from history, but actually makes history."⁶³

As Moltmann says, "Yahweh's revelation manifestly does not serve to bring the ever-threatened present into congruence with his eternity. On the contrary, its effect is that the hearers of the promise become incongruous with the reality around them, as they strike out in hope towards the promised new future."⁶⁴

This distinction between epiphany religion and promise religion as history is a critical foundational element for Moltmann's further development of his theology of hope. As will be shown in the next chapter, Moltmann goes on to claim that the resurrection of Christ also makes and changes history, again through promises.

This view of history -- namely, that God interacts in history and therefore changes history -- was contrary to the dominant theology of his day: that of Karl Barth. A more recent critic of Moltmann's promise religion is Christopher Morse, whose book, *The Logic of Promise*,⁶⁵ is almost entirely, but respectfully, critical of Moltmann's concept of promise.⁶⁶ Morse says that the same God is present in both religion of epiphany and religion of promise, so it's not a debate on fundamentals.⁶⁷

⁶³ Bauckham, *Moltmann: Messianic*, 31.

⁶⁴ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 100.

⁶⁵ Morse, *Logic of Promise*, 9.

⁶⁶ Bauckham, *Moltmann: Messianic*, 29.

⁶⁷ Morse, *Logic of Promise*, 31.

The effect of the God of history on the nomadic people was profound. Abram and Sarai (Abraham and Sarah) set out from their home to a new land and had many descendents, as was promised to them. The people journeyed to Egypt, where they suffered under oppression, then left Egypt in the great Exodus and followed their God into the desert, where they wandered for forty years, sustained throughout by their God of hope. Finally, they crossed the Jordan River and entered their promised land.

3.7 Summary

In summary, Christian hope has its roots in the God of Israel, as chronicled in the Old Testament. Often, the Old Testament is viewed simply as a prelude to the New Testament, but it is filled with theology and teachings that stand on their own and are still very relevant to this day. Thus, incorporating their lessons in modern theology is vital. As Bauckham puts it, the “recovery of the Jewish roots of Christian theology [is] something very characteristic of Moltmann’s theology.”⁶⁸

The God of the people of Israel revealed himself to them in the form of promises. The nomadic people trusted in God and left for the promised land, that they would eventually occupy many generations later. Throughout, God journeyed with them.

However, even in the promised land, the Jews still yearned for more -- the promised Messiah. That’s where Moltmann takes us next.

⁶⁸ Bauckham, *Theology of Moltmann*, 9.

Chapter 4: Resurrection as Hope

4.1 Promise of a Messiah

In this chapter, we turn from the Old Testament to the New and break open the core of Moltmann's theology of hope and the core of Christianity: the resurrection of Jesus. In the previous chapter we demonstrated the importance of promise, divine revelation and history, and in this chapter we learn that these same principles apply to Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

We build on the knowledge of how the God of Hope works in the history of the nomadic people, through divine revelation, through a series of promises and through journeying with them to the promised land. In the New Testament, Jesus likewise enters history as the incarnated God, who not only fulfills the promises of the Hebrew Bible, but also creates new promises and a new future. The dialectic of Jesus on the cross and the resurrection provides a universal message of hope that extends beyond the chosen people to all humankind. With the resurrection, the promises of the God of Israel are not simply fulfilled: they are reborn and offered anew to all. Christ's resurrection is not the "end of the promise," but "its rebirth, its liberation and validation."⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 145.

4.2 Christ as Hope

In the sections of *Theology of Hope* dealing with the resurrection, Moltmann enters the realm of Christology by entering into “the mystery of Jesus.”⁷⁰ For while the Jewish roots of Moltmann’s theology are foundational to his theology of hope, it is Christology -- especially Christ’s resurrection -- that is at its heart and soul. The resurrection is central to Moltmann’s theology of hope. As Bauckham says in his book *Moltmann: Messianic Theology in the Making*, “it might equally have been called a theology of the resurrection.”⁷¹ The resurrection of Christ is the essence of hope.⁷²

4.3 Resurrection as Promise

The resurrection of Jesus is a promise, “God’s ultimate promise for the new creation of all things,”⁷³ is “a promise of a radical new future for whole world.”⁷⁴ This promise is the kingdom of God. It is somehow both already here and not yet here. And the message to all believers is that now is the time to work towards the end times. God journeys with us to make promises happen.

⁷⁰ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 141.

⁷¹ Bauckham, *Moltmann: Messianic*, 3. Ryan A. Neal, *Theology as Hope: On the Ground and the Implication of Jürgen Moltmann's Doctrine of Hope* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2008), 7. Note that after I wrote this, I found almost the exact sentence with the same reference to Bauckham in O’Neal’s book, so I added him as reference.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 19.

⁷³ Richard Bauckham, "Preface," in *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (London: SCM Press, 2002), xiv.

⁷⁴ Bauckham, *Theology Moltmann*, 35.

Promise builds on the Jewish roots of Christian theology,⁷⁵ which is now answered. Moltmann quotes Paul: “For all the promises of God find their Yes in him” [2 Cor 1.20]. Later Moltmann adds: “In the gospel the Old Testament history of promise finds more than a fulfillment which does away with it; it finds its future.”⁷⁶ “It is not that the Old Testament religion of promise finds in the New Testament a fulfillment in which it comes to an end.”⁷⁷

This is where Moltmann’s theology challenges and reforms the prevailing notion (championed by Karl Barth) that eschatology is about the end of time, i.e., it is all future.⁷⁸ For Moltmann, eschatology is also about future but, more importantly, it’s about now too. Christ’s resurrection and death did more than just introduce a new future: it introduces a new present. Moltmann summarizes his view of eschatology this way: ‘from first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope.’⁷⁹

4.4 Dialectic of the Cross and Resurrection

Moltmann’s Christology centres on the “dialectic of cross and resurrection,”⁸⁰ that attempts to reconcile the Jesus who suffered and died on the cross with the Jesus who was resurrected in full glory. As Bauckham describes it the “total contradiction ... of the cross and the resurrection of Jesus represent total opposites: death and life, the absence of

⁷⁵ Bauckham, "Preface," *Theology of Hope*, 33.

⁷⁶ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 147.

⁷⁷ Bauckham, *Moltmann: Messianic*, 32.

⁷⁸ Bauckham, *Theology of Moltmann*, 38.

⁷⁹ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 16.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 200.

God and the nearness of God, god-forsakenness and the glory of God.”⁸¹ And yet, “it is the *same* Jesus who was crucified and is now raised.”⁸²

When Jesus cries out “My God, my God why have you forsaken me?” [Mk 15:34], Moltmann interprets this cry as one of complete abandonment by God, that Jesus truly has experienced the state of god-forsakenness on the cross. This abandonment by God allies Jesus with all humans who feel abandoned by God or who have no concept or understanding of God. Bauckham summarizes that Jesus is identified “with the present reality of the world in all its negativity: its subjection to sin, suffering and death, or what Moltmann calls its godlessness, god-forsakenness and transitoriness.”⁸³

Jesus has identified himself with all humanity through his suffering and, since this is the same Jesus who was resurrected, this means that the hope associated with the resurrection applies to all humanity. Just as Christ’s suffering is universal, Christ’s hope is universal. God’s promise of hope for the chosen people has been extended to the horizons of all humanity through the suffering and death of his son, Jesus Christ. God’s hope is now universal. Bauckham comments: “his resurrection constitutes God’s promise of new creation for the whole of the reality which the crucified Jesus represents.”

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⁸¹ Bauckham, *Theology Moltmann*, 33.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 33.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

4.5 Universal Suffering

Therefore, the key to the universal message of hope is the common bond forged between Jesus and all humanity, the bond of suffering. But what is suffering? To find some answers, we turn to Pope John Paul II's 1984 encyclical on suffering, *Salvifici Doloris*. In his encyclical, John Paul refers us to the Bible, observing that "sacred scripture is a great book about suffering."⁸⁵

According to the Bible, suffering has been part of human life since the earliest days, since the Fall of Adam and Eve. Because of their disobedience, God declared that Adam and Eve would suffer physically: women would experience "pain" in childbirth and men would have to "toil" and "sweat" for food. [Gn 3:16-18] God also expelled them from the Garden of Eden, causing them to suffer mentally and spiritually because of the separation from their homeland and from God. In the next chapter, suffering associated with family and community is introduced. After Cain kills his brother Abel, God bans Cain from his homeland, causing him to suffer the emotional pain of isolation from homeland and also from family. God causes Cain to become a "restless wanderer." [Gn 4:12]⁸⁶

Cain was the first of countless generations of restless wanderers, including Abraham and his fellow tribes people. In Abraham's day, suffering had evolved from individual suffering to communal suffering, experienced by the communities of tribes people who lived on the margins of the agrarian society. These tribes people shared the common bond of suffering. John Paul describes communal suffering this way: "The world of

⁸⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, Vatican, Feb 11, 1984, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_11021984_salvifici-doloris_en.html, para 6.

⁸⁶ Likely this marks the beginnings of the nomadic tribes people.

suffering possesses as it were its own solidarity. People who suffer become similar to one another through the analogy of their situation.”⁸⁷

The Psalms give voice to both types of suffering, especially the psalms of lament, which include Psalms of individual lament and psalms of communal lament. Psalms of lament also include thanksgiving to God for his response to suffering.⁸⁸

The Book of Job gives another voice to suffering in the form of story. Job continues to serve as a primary reference point for understanding suffering today and has been called “probably the greatest, fullest, most profound discussion of ... suffering ... ever written.”⁸⁹ It “deals with the profound theological problem of the meaning of suffering in the life of a just man.”⁹⁰

Next, we’ll examine the life of another just man – Jesus – and the meaning of his suffering. In the Old Testament we have seen that suffering has been a constant element in the long history of humanity. Suffering takes the form of physical and mental suffering and can be experienced individually and communally.

The theme of suffering continues in the New Testament. Here, though, the emphasis is not on giving a voice to suffering, but on Jesus’ response to suffering. Jesus cures the ill, casts out demons, and preaches to and comforts the gathered crowds. Jesus himself also suffers, for us, culminating with his suffering and death on the cross, identifying him with all humanity and preparing the way for the ushering in of a new era of universal hope with his resurrection.

⁸⁷ Pope John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, para 8.

⁸⁸ John S. Kselmann, S.S. and Michael L. Barre, S.S., "Psalms," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Roland E. Murphy (New York: Geoffrey Chapman, 1990), 34:9.

⁸⁹ Harold S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Avon, 1981), 36.

⁹⁰ R. A. F. MacKenzie, S.J. and Roland E. Murphy, O. Carm., "Job," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Roland E. Murphy (New York: Geoffrey Chapman, 1990)..30:2.

But Jesus' suffering also has meaning in that it teaches us about suffering. It teaches us that suffering is part of being human and that all humans suffer, even the just. Suffering is not punishment. Jesus' suffering and death also removes the barrier that has existed between humanity and God since the Fall. This prepares the way for complete reunion with God in his kingdom.

The suffering of Jesus is a controversial topic of Moltmann's that is introduced in his *Theology of Hope* and is much more thoroughly developed in his second book, *The Crucified God*. In Moltmann's *The Crucified God*, he makes the further claim that God actually suffers. Moltmann's argument is against the static eternalness of the epiphany religions and in favour of a God who acts in history, relates to humanity and reacts to human events. This is the subject of much debate and is outside the scope of this paper; but, essentially, Moltmann challenges the principle of the impassibility of God, i.e., that God does not change. Some agree with Moltmann, saying it shows God's compassion and complete identification with the suffering of humans (e.g. Sobrino, Boff). Others say God cannot suffer (e.g. Rahner). The consensus view is that it is the human side of Jesus that suffers. Jesus is fully divine and *fully* human and hence subject to the full range of human emotions and feelings.

4.6 Christ's Universal Message of Hope

Moltmann's claim, that the power of Christ's message is universal, is essential to his theology. We presented his argument from the perspective of the suffering of Jesus who identifies with all humanity.

Moltmann adds further evidence to his universal claim by examining two standard ways of approaching theology (in particular, Christology) and contrasting them to his approach. The first way is from the perspective of perfection (the Hellenistic approach) and the second way is from the more modern approach of viewing Jesus “as being a man in history.”⁹¹ Both approaches start from the general (perfection or human, respectively) and move to the specific of who Jesus is, viewed from these starting points.⁹²

Moltmann takes an approach that is opposite to the above. He approaches theology from the specific and moves from there to the general. To support his claim of the universality of Christ’s message, he identifies two specifics or “propositions.” First, “Yahweh . . . raised Jesus from the dead.” Second, “Jesus was a Jew.”⁹³ “The first proposition would mean that the God who reveals himself in Jesus must be thought of as the God of the Old Testament, as the God of the exodus and the promise, as the God with ‘future as his essential nature.’”⁹⁴ This means that the God of promise cannot be the same as the eternal, unchanging Greek view of God.

To the second point, the fact that Jesus is a Jew, he claims that Jesus must be considered as representative of the people of the Old Testament, the recipients of the original promises of God. “It is through the event of the cross and resurrection, which is understandable only in the context of the conflict between law and promise, that he becomes the salvation of all men, both Jew and Gentile.”⁹⁵

⁹¹ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 140.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 141.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 142.

Moltmann summarizes this approach to theology as follows: “theology moves from the unique events of the biblical revelation, which culminate in the history of Jesus, to the universal significance of this revelation for all people and all reality.”⁹⁶ Based on the above pair of arguments, Moltmann concludes that Jesus’ message of hope is universal.

4.7 Centrality of the Resurrection

Bauckham comments that “it is essential that the one whom God raised was the crucified Jesus. Because Jesus in his death was identified with the whole of this world’s reality and because it was this Jesus who was raised, his resurrection is not a promise of another world but the promise of the transformation of this world into its glorified eschatological future in the presence of God.”⁹⁷

The centrality of the resurrection is one of the elements of commonality amongst the diverse Christian denominations. The Catholic Catechism asserts the centrality of the Resurrection, saying that “The Resurrection above all constitutes the confirmation of all Christ’s works and teachings.”⁹⁸ And further, the Catechism quotes from 1 Corinthians: “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.”⁹⁹ [1 Cor 15:14].

⁹⁶ Bauckham, *Moltmann: Messianic*, 25.

⁹⁷ Bauckham, "Preface," *Theology of Hope*, xiv.

⁹⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1992), para 651, 145.

⁹⁹ Scripture quotations in the Catechism are from the Revised Standard Version and occasionally from the New Revised Standard Version, 1989.

4.8 Universal but Distinct from Greek Mystery Religions

In Moltmann's *Theology of Hope*, he questions how followers of Christ's message of hope were able to safeguard themselves against the competing beliefs of the dominating cultures and the beliefs of Rome and, especially, Greece. He refers back to the Old Testament, where the Hebrew people successfully formed a distinct religion, despite pressures of the agrarian cultures and beliefs. It was the promises of God and the fulfillment of these promises by God that kept the Hebrew people cohesive and distinct for the other culture.

But, in the New Testament, Christ brings a universal message. The Jewish people can no longer say they are different than everyone else, because Christ's message also embraces the Gentiles, including Greeks and Romans.¹⁰⁰ In the end, the approach and answer is the same as in the Old Testament: promise and fulfillment of promise. The God of hope's promise in the New Testament forms a powerful bond between God and his people, while at the same time breaking down barriers between people. Furthermore, the universal nature of Christ's hopeful and saving message helped transform these societies into Christian societies.

4.9 Summary

In summary, Moltmann's theology of hope builds a bridge from the Old Testament to the New Testament. The promise of the Old Testament is not simply fulfilled in Jesus Christ, but, in Christ, promise is reborn. The resurrection of Christ is central to Moltmann's theology of hope, as he says: "without the coming kingdom of

¹⁰⁰ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 154-155.

God ... God's raising of Jesus has no significance, but without his raising, the hope of Christians has no Christian foundation either."¹⁰¹

The dialectic of Jesus of the cross and Jesus of the resurrection being the same person, opens up the message of promised established by the God of Israel to a universal message for all.

But what specifically is this universal message for all? And what does it mean for us today? That is covered in the next chapter.

¹⁰¹ Moltmann, *Broad Place*, 102.

Chapter 5: Hope as *Praxis*

5.1 History as Mission

So far, in this paper, we've covered two of the three key theological concepts in Moltmann's *Theology of Hope*. We've covered 'the notion of divine promise' and 'the understanding of the resurrection of Jesus as promise.' In this chapter, we address the final concept: "the understanding of history as mission."¹⁰²

It may be appropriate to highlight the Trinitarian theme uniting these three concepts. In exploring the first concept – 'divine promise' – we have seen that God (the Father) has been journeying with humans since the early promises to the Patriarchs. God led them to the promised land. Then, sometime later, God sent his son, who not only fulfilled the promises of the Old Testament, but through his resurrection, restated them to make them universal and to bring a new world order into existence. This was the 'understanding of the resurrection of Jesus as promise.'

This chapter covers 'history as mission, in essence, the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit, in individuals and in the Church. In Moltmann's *Theology of Hope*, his pneumatology and ecclesiology is not yet fully developed, but still contains powerful and relevant messages. His more developed concepts appear in his book *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: a Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Bauckham, *Moltmann: Messianic*, xv, xiii.

¹⁰³ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: a Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

5.2 Praxis of Hope

In Carl Braaten's "Toward a Theology of Hope," he quotes from Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, where Kant stated: "The whole interest of reason ... is centered in the three following questions: (1) What can I know? (2) What ought I to do? (3) What may I hope?"¹⁰⁴ Moltmann would likely reverse the order of points 2 and 3, because for Moltmann, what we ought to do is driven by what we hope.

In the Old Testament, Abraham obediently followed the God of promise who asked him to leave his land and journey to a new promised land. In the New Testament, what has Jesus asked us to do -- what specifically are we asked to do as individuals and as a community of faith?

In this chapter we attempt to answer these questions by looking at the practical aspects of Moltmann's theology of hope, the *praxis* of hope. Moltmann suggests we first look at history as mission. By history, he means both what is in our past and what history is being made today. The mission he refers to is both a responsibility of the community of Christians and a responsibility of individual Christians.

We learn that our mission is to bring about the kingdom of God -- here and now -- on the earth. Just as Jesus identified with the suffering and needy on this earth, by suffering and dying on the cross, we too are called to identify with those on the margins - - the oppressed, poor and hungry -- and be there for them. And act for them.

In this chapter, we'll also examine the changes in society as a whole, from one that had religion at its core, complete with values and traditions, to one that is godless, more concerned with production and consumption of goods than good. Parallels with the

¹⁰⁴ Carl A. Braaten, "Toward a Theology of Hope," *Theology Today* 24, no. 2 (July 1967): 208-226.

agrarian society of the Old Testament, also concerned with production and consumption, will be drawn. Moltmann refers to this as the “Exodus Church.”¹⁰⁵ In Western society, Christianity has had a longstanding tradition of being the soul and conscience of society. Now, it is largely a private affair, limited to influencing the soul and conscience of individuals.

As part of mission, we are called to help restore religion to its rightful place as an integral part of society. For while there are good things being done in the secular world, they alone will not lead us to the new promised land.

5.3 Modern Society

The concluding chapter of Moltmann’s *Theology of Hope* is entitled the “Exodus Church: Observations on the Eschatological Understanding of Christianity in Modern Society.” There’s a footnote added by the translator that says: “Christianity means whole body of believers,” meaning not just the Church, not just congregations, but the union of all believers.

Moltmann begins his examination of the Exodus Church with an assessment of modern society, which he defines to be a “society that has established itself with the rise of the modern industrial system,” and “not the state nor the family, but that sphere of public life which is governed by the conduct of business, by production, consumption and commerce.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 304. The title of the last chapter of his book is “The Exodus Church: Observations on the Eschatological Understanding of Christianity in Modern Society”.

¹⁰⁶ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 305.

He notes that society these days is at best “neutral towards matters of religion,” a departure from hundreds of years of tradition, where religion had a key and valued role in society. Now, society is mostly about the production and consumption of goods, with culture, religion and traditions largely excluded.¹⁰⁷ Hope has “emigrated ... from the Church and turned in one distorted form or another against the Church.”¹⁰⁸

Culture, religion and traditions are now generally a private concern, yet society expects these to exist and help define what it means to be human, but not as an integral part of society, rather on the margins of society.¹⁰⁹

Thus, religion and the church have become an “exodus church,” which means that Christianity is the ‘pilgrim people of God’ as described in the Epistle to the Hebrews: ‘Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come.’ (Heb. 13.13f.)¹¹⁰

5.4 Ecumenical Signs of Hope

On a positive note, in a later book by Moltmann, he informs us of the 1968 assembly of World Council of Churches, in Uppsala. He “welcomed the declarations ... as an ecumenical fulfillment of what I had in mind with the *Theology of Hope*.”¹¹¹ The assembly’s words were:

¹⁰⁷ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 308.

¹⁰⁸ Bauckham, "Preface," *Theology of Hope*, xii.

¹⁰⁹ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 311.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 304.

¹¹¹ Moltmann, *Broad Place*, 105.

We hear the cries of those who long for peace. The hungry and the exploited cry out for justice. The despised and the disadvantaged demand their human dignity. Millions are seeking for the meaning of their lives. We ask you, trusting in God's renewing power, to join in this anticipation of God's kingdom, and already to allow today something to appear of the new creation which Christ will complete on his day.¹¹²

5.5 Christian Call to Action

As Christians, we are called to work towards the new promise of the new kingdom of God proclaimed in the New Testament by Jesus. The motivation for action for this work is, according to Moltmann, fueled by tension: tension between the present reality and the promised future. God's promises were not just part of history, but they also created history. Promise "shows that present reality is not yet what it can and will be." A tension is developed between what is now and what will be, and this tension provides the motivation and energy for people to work towards the future of the kingdom of God. Thus, promise creates the motivation that continues to create history. In other words, "Promise creates history." Therefore, the mission Moltmann refers to in his statement: 'human history as *the mission of the kingdom of God*'¹¹³ is for believers to take concrete actions to make history and realize the kingdom of God. This changes the world today. God's promise does not lead to complacency; God's promise leads us to action. Unlike the fabled utopias, Moltmann's theology of hope hinges on the expectation, "not of *another* world, but for the new creation of *this* world."¹¹⁴

¹¹² Moltmann, *A Broad Place*, 105.

¹¹³ The italics are mine.

¹¹⁴ Bauckham, *Moltmann: Messianic*, 35.

Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* contains few specific suggestions for the application of his theology. In essence, he is calling for both the church as a whole and individuals to act, to help improve our society and to help alleviate suffering of the individual, especially those on the margins of society -- the poor and broken.

5.6 Responses to Claims of Being too Similar to Marxism

The call to action motivated by a theology of hope has been misinterpreted as the *same* call to action motivated by non-theological-based philosophies or ideologies of hope, such as Marxism (Ernst Bloch, for example). Certainly, Moltmann was influenced by Ernst Bloch, after reading Bloch's *Philosophy of Hope*. But Moltmann's theological message is much different than Bloch's philosophical message.

Many of Moltmann's critics point to the similarity of his thoughts with Marxism, including Karl Barth. In his autobiography, Moltmann writes of a personal letter he received from Barth that included this sentence: "To put it somewhat brutally: isn't your *Theology of Hope* just a baptized version of Herr Bloch's *Principle of Hope*?"¹¹⁵

Others noted the obvious similarity between Moltmann's form of call to action compared to Marx's call to action. Marx's call to action is worded this way: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways, the point, however is to *change it*."¹¹⁶ Compare this to Moltmann's statement from his *Theology of Hope*: "The theologian is not concerned merely to supply a different *interpretation* of the world, of

¹¹⁵ Moltmann, *Broad Place*, 109.

¹¹⁶ Bauckham, *Moltmann: Messianic*, 14.

history and of human nature, but to *transform* them in the expectation of a divine transformation.”¹¹⁷

But all this is misguided. While Moltmann was influenced by Bloch (Müller-Fahrenholz calls Bloch a “catalyst” for Moltmann),¹¹⁸ Moltmann’s hope is solidly grounded in Scriptures and God and there is no room for either in Marxism.

One main distinguishing factor is Jesus, his resurrection from the dead and the promise that all will be resurrected in the end times. Bloch and the Marxists cannot argue on this level. This is “precisely the point which Bloch’s principle of hope cannot reach – the resurrection of the dead – is the foundation of Christian eschatology.”¹¹⁹

Also, for Moltmann, “hope is the inseparable companion of faith.”¹²⁰ In the introduction to Moltmann’s *Theology of Hope*, he uses the phrase “believing hope,”¹²¹ and goes on to say that “faith is the foundation upon which hope rests, hope nourishes and sustains faith.”¹²²

5.7 Responses to Marxist Criticisms of Christian Hope

Having responded to claims that he is too close to Marxist views, Moltmann also has to respond to criticisms from Marxists that Christian hope is lacking in two key areas. First, they claim that the Christian concept of afterlife robs Christians of the joy of the

¹¹⁷ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 84.

¹¹⁸ Müller-Fahrenholz, *Kingdom and Power*, 43.

¹¹⁹ Bauckham, *Moltmann: Messianic*, 18.

¹²⁰ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 20.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 20. This is a quote from Calvin.

present moment. Second, they claim that hope is too dependent on the afterlife, with very little emphasis on improving the lives of suffering and oppressed people here on earth today.¹²³

With respect to the claim that Christian hope robs people of happiness in this life, Moltmann refers to this as “humble acquiescence in the present” and says this is the “most serious objection to a theology of hope.”¹²⁴ His response is that God is wholly present with us today and everyday: “Christian faith ... means tuning into the nearness of God in which Jesus lived and worked, for living amid the simple, everyday things of today is of course living in the fullness of time and living in the nearness of God.”¹²⁵ What fuller joy can be imagined than living close to the God of hope each and every day of our lives?

In response to the claim that Christians depend too much on the afterlife and this leads to complacency about this life, Moltmann’s answer is, in essence, the subject of this chapter. The mission of Christianity today is to take action in *this* life to simultaneously improve conditions in *this* life and move the world ever closer to the kingdom of God.¹²⁶

5.8 Secular World Cannot Move Towards Kingdom of God

The other criticism of Moltmann from outside Christianity (not necessarily Marxism) is the claim that the secular world is getting better without the need for

¹²³ Bauckham, "Preface," *Theology of Hope*, xii.

¹²⁴ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 26.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

religion. When Moltmann wrote *Theology of Hope*, it was a time of general secular hope and many people were of the opinion that the world was incrementally improving towards a kind of utopia. Some of these same people had a superficial view of Moltmann's ideas and assumed he supported the notion that the world outside of religion was gradually improving the plight of humankind. But Moltmann rejects that notion strongly, saying the kingdom of God will never be achieved by "the result of any trends of world history."¹²⁷ We need God.

5.9 What is Church?

Moltmann's statement that history is mission is a call to action for the church. But what is church? For Moltmann, it's not just the "organized institution" or "congregations," but also "Christians at their worldly callings ... and in their social roles."¹²⁸ So this is a call to all individuals to act, not just in the context of their organized institutions, but to act in their roles outside the church, in their everyday lives.

5.10 Active Hope vs. Political Theology

To answer the question of what specifically we are asked to do, Moltmann describes it succinctly as "active hope,"¹²⁹ i.e., to turn hope into action (but not radical activism). The Catholic theologian Johann Baptist Metz (who was a student of Rahner)

¹²⁷ Ibid., 38.

¹²⁸ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 305.

¹²⁹ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 16.

discussed this balance under the guise of “Political Theology,”¹³⁰ defined by Bauckham to be a “politically critical theology aiming at radical change in the political and social *status quo*.”¹³¹ The political theology of Metz appealed to Moltmann. As Moltmann says in his autobiography, “Only Metz succeeded in finding a Catholic harmonization between the other-worldly and the forward-looking hope,” and “I willingly let myself be drawn on to this side, where I already felt at home.”¹³²

Metz, like Moltmann, was a German soldier who was deeply affected by the Holocaust. He was disappointed that the official church had little to say about the Holocaust, and his political theology was an attempt to get the church to be more actively involved in political criticism.¹³³

5.11 Summary

In this chapter we have learned our mission, as Church and as individuals. Our mission is to follow in the footsteps of the patriarchs, to put our trust in God and his promises and to follow in the footsteps of Jesus who identified with the poor and hungry. We are called to help usher in the kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed, to restore religion to its rightful place in society, and to restore Christian hope as individuals. This call can be answered by acting as individual persons to be there for those in need and

¹³⁰ Bauckham, *Theology of Moltmann*, 100.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹³² Moltmann, *Broad Place*, 108. Interestingly, Metz and Moltmann met at Bloch’s 80th birthday party.

¹³³ James C. Livingston, Francis Schussler Fiorenza, Sarah Coakley and James H. Evans, *Modern Christian Thought: The Twentieth Century*, Vol. 2, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: Fortress), 274-277.

journey with them, and thereby to offer to society and those on the margins of society the gift of God's hope.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Jürgen Moltmann's theology of hope emerged from a time of great suffering in the world (World War II, the Holocaust) and Moltmann's personal life. Moreover, the subject of his book, Christian hope, likewise emerged from suffering.

When the God of Israel first revealed himself in the days of Abraham, they were nomads, living on the margins of the agrarian culture, who had a rich religion consisting of rituals of worship and sacrifice to many gods who controlled the weather, seasons and storms. God made promises to the nomadic people, promising them many blessings, many descendants and a home: the promised land. God acted in history, creating a new future for the people, a future of hope. God journeyed with his people, accompanying them first to Egypt, then stayed with them after they fled the oppressions of Egypt and wandered in the wilderness for forty years and then, finally, into their promised land. God further promised them a Messiah who would save them and lead them to a new promised land.

When God sent the Messiah, his son, Jesus Christ, the chosen people were again living under the oppressions of a ruling people -- this time the Romans. Christ ministered to people, especially those who were most in need: the poor, the sick and the troubled. He proclaimed a new kingdom of God with a new promised land. And this time, his promises were for a kingdom of God for all people, a universal message of hope. Following his ministry, Christ suffered and died on the cross, was buried, and then was

resurrected. Christ's resurrection is central to Moltmann's theology of hope and central to Christianity.

Christ left behind the Holy Spirit to continue to journey with the people, now all humanity. The Holy Spirit provides the energy, motivation and guidance for individuals and for the entire Church. The Holy Spirit is guiding us to bring forward the kingdom of God, by our acting individually and as a community of believers.

Once again, the community of believers finds itself on the margins of society, this time ruled by ourselves, a society of producers and consumers devoid of faith, devoid of Christian hope. Faith and religion has been relegated to the private lives of individuals, and is no longer an integral part of our society. In parallel, hope is emigrating from the Church and gaining a foothold in other movements that are atheist or agnostic. While often well meaning, their work cannot lead to the kingdom of God.

So our mission, as a church and as individuals, is to take up the challenge of the God of Hope, of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit, and bring forward the kingdom of God. We are called to restore religion and faith to its rightful home in society and to restore hope in individuals who may have lost hope and may now live on the margins, broken and in despair.

In closing, Moltmann recounts a chilling story of one night of his life as a teenage soldier. He and another young soldier were together during one of the many nights of bombing raids on their hometown. A bomb fell nearby, killing his friend instantly and leaving Moltmann untouched. This was the first time Moltmann would cry out: "My God, where are you?" He kept wondering: "Why am I not dead too?" That night continues to haunt him. As a result of that night, he asks all of us the same questions that

he asked himself: “Why are you alive? What gives your life meaning?”¹³⁴ The answers changed his life.

Perhaps we can take a first simple step and sow some seeds of hope, for a society in need and for individual human beings in need. For society, we can stand up and be counted, and participate in active hope. For a broken individual, we can show kindness, be with them, journey with them, and offer them the gift of hope.

Let us not forget the impact of the small act of kindness of the Christians who visited the young POW in Scotland, far away from home, broken and filled with despair. Their simple gifts were that of forgiveness and the word of God -- the God of promise, the God of hope -- all inside a book, full to the brim with hope.

¹³⁴ Müller-Fahrenheit, *Kingdom and Power*, 16.

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