

## **Moltmannian perspective on the resurrection and hope**

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The resurrection and hope has been a conjoint theological theme that has dominated the studies of eschatology since the mid twentieth centuries. Considered as “one of the most influential of contemporary German protestant theologians, in the non-Western as well as the Western world, and in wider church circles as well as in academic theology” <sup>1</sup> the father of the theology of hope, Jürgen Moltmann got public attention when the New York Times featured his theology of hope on the front page with the caption “‘God Is Dead’ Doctrine Losing Ground to ‘Theology of Hope’”. From then onwards, a new paradigm of theological understanding and interpretation of Christology was emerging from the Moltmannian perspective.

The mid twentieth century may be characterized as a period of impregnated hope. A recovery from the crumbles of World War II, Sub Saharan African states emancipating from colonialism, the Black Civil rights movements in the United States of America, and many other movements of hope were emerging all over the world. On the other hand, there was also fear of worldwide cataclysm, Cold War and the fear of nuclear doom as well. It was within these mixed sentiments of hope and fear that the theology of hope of Moltmann burst into the scene. There is however no doubt that events during and after the World War influenced his theological thinking. Richard Bauckham, probably the best lens into Moltmannian theology, has noted that “Moltmann himself finds the initial source of his theology in his first experience of the reality of God when he was a prisoner of war in the period 1945–8. This was an experience both of God as the power of hope and of God’s presence in suffering.” <sup>2</sup> Within this retrospective background is very important to direct our attitude to take into consideration about current scholarship on hope the discourse of Moltmann.

Just to begin with Bauckham, a contemporary New Testament scholar of Moltmann, and a very important theologian to the studies of Moltmannian theology. In one of his sermons which is captioned “Advent Hope 1” or “The future of creation”, in the first paragraph, Bauckham made confessional claims that “...hope for the future that the coming of Christ at Christmas has given us, the hope for his second advent, when, as the Creed puts it, ‘he will come again in glory.’ *It is,*

*of course, a more difficult thing to think about, because it hasn't happened yet and we may have trouble supposing that it can happen,* [3](#) *but it is vital we think about it."* [4](#)

Yes, "we may have trouble supposing that it can happen" is one of the problems Moltmann deals with in the Theology of Hope. Moltmann raised three consecutive interrogatory questions about the future hope of the Christian: "But how can anyone speak of the future, which is not yet here, and of coming events in which he has not as yet had any part? Are these not dreams, speculations, longings and fears, which must all remain vague and indefinite because no one can verify them? ...But how, then, can Christian eschatology give expression to the future?" [5](#) From these eschatological problems Moltmann attempted to secure a proper grounds for the future hope of Christianity. But where does everything begin from?

Everything starts from "definite reality in history" [6](#) says Moltmann. Christian eschatology is realized in the proclamation (kerysso) of a risen Lord. Taking a distance from arguments relating to the historical Jesus, Moltmann focuses on the future of Jesus based on "hope's statements of promise" [7](#). In Moltmann's theology of hope, it is not necessarily about a risen Lord who identifies his absolute omnipresence in the eschatological milieu of history, rather, it is the risen Lord who communicates his future in promises of future realities to humanity. This reality transcends beyond the present. It is only a "historic character" as long as the present and existing reality leads it to these future realities.

This postulation of the future hope in the Theology of Hope sets the Christian hope apart from utopia (fancy imaginary of a state of perfection) and however explains why hope has a future.

Is hope just alone to make sense? Moltmann answers no. Making reference to Kierkegaard, Moltmann accepts the passionate force in hope. That is the raising of the crucified one expands faith into hope. He categorically establishes the primacy of hope whilst being careful to give faith the priority. He writes, "Thus in the Christian life faith has the priority, but hope the primacy" [8](#). That means that the two are both "inseparable companion".

The key instrument that underlies Moltmann's theological innovation in his Theology of Hope is the "dialectic of cross and resurrection" [9](#) in which is found the substance of the nature of reality as a whole. He writes "Christianity stands or falls with the reality of the raising of Jesus from the

dead by God.” <sup>10</sup> Hence, the reality of the resurrection gives meaning to the eschatological future as reality. By introducing a realistic interpretation of the resurrection event in a theological orientation, Moltmann helped to shape the theology of hope into undoubtedly futuristic theology (dynamic process of history) and also giving theological enterprise a new approach in its interpretation of the cross and resurrection of Christ in the future of Christ.

### Endnotes

1. Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995, p. 1. ▲
2. Richard Bauckham, “Jürgen Moltmann,” in Ford David (Ed) and Rachel Muers, *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology Since 1918*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2005, p. 147. ▲
3. The italics are mine ▲
4. Richard Bauckham, *The Future of Creation*, Sermon.  
<http://www.richardbauckham.co.uk/uploads/Sermons/Advent%20Hope%201.pdf> ▲
5. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, pp. 16-17. ▲
6. Ibid, 17. ▲
7. Ibid, pp.17, 18 ▲
8. Ibid, p. 20. ▲
9. Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, p. 4 ▲
10. *Theology of Hope*, p. 165. ▲