The modern consciousness of history is a consciousness of crisis, and all modern philosophy of history is in the last analysis a philosophy of crisis. To a remarkable degree, all of Jürgen Moltmann's theological writings can be seen as a response to this impasse in modern times between a perceived crisis of the social order and attempts to end the crisis by understanding it. In this chapter, I wish to cover four points briefly: (1) Moltmann's own survey of various attempts to philosophize about history, in which he also asks pointed questions about what drives such attempts, (2) his critique of those attempts, (3) Moltmann's way of articulating the relationship between history and the Christian faith, and (4) how this understanding responds to the conversation on the theology of history in the twentieth century.

MOLTmann AND THE CRises OF HIsTOrY

There was never a time in the history of the church or of Christendom that cataclysmic events affecting society on a large scale did not call forth reflection on the meaning of history. Thus the series of blows delivered against Rome, after the era of Christian ascendancy, was the occasion for Augustine's City of God, which was not truly a philosophy of history, in the modern sense, but was an interpretation of Christianity based in history. The modern period is different in this regard. Moltmann points out. Whereas, up until the beginning of the nineteenth century, the crises of history were in the background of all great reflection on history, since the French Revolution, "history has been understood entirely in terms of crisis." Thus, in various ways, history came to be understood in terms of crisis and the resolution of crisis. From Hegel to Ranke and Burckhardt, the task of a philosophy of history was to find some general explanation of history's flux, its singular events—its spontaneity that threatened always to overthrow a sense of order. The philosophy

A.J. Conyers is professor of theology at George W. Truett Theological Seminary in Waco, Texas.
of history hoped thus to capture history in some comprehensive vision, and in effect to master it. That is why explanations of history became "of a total and totalitarian kind."

The "crisis of history" meant, of course, that the prospects of the future were taken to threaten disruption. With the Enlightenment, Europeans began to look toward the future rather than the past for a way of interpreting the human experience. This turn toward the future, along with the unsettling revolutions and rumors of revolution, caused European thinkers to begin in earnest seeking a way to accommodate this new orientation, while coping with the social and political upheavals, and at the same time not utterly losing a sense of order. Interpreters of history, those who would discover or impose a meaning upon history—whether they be conservative such as Jacob Burckhardt or revolutionary such as Auguste Comte—attempted to give answer to the crisis of the present. If they feared the overthrow or collapse of traditional ways and institutions, the future might be seen as the hammer of judgment upon the sins of the present, those sins being viewed largely as deviations from the covenants of the past, betrayals of former generations and their accumulated wisdom. If they welcomed the future and its "total critique" of the present, then the background of such revolutionary thinking "is always bound up with the utopian outlook which examines the possibilities and tendencies of things to come, anticipates them, and incorporates them in the present decision." In this way the disasters of the present become the necessary prelude to the more perfect future; and if necessary, then desired; and if desired, then actively to be pursued, even if by the most violent means. Thus "German idealism is the theory of the French revolution." This is also what Camus meant when he said that "Europe no longer philosophizes by striking a hammer, but by shooting a cannon."

In either case, whether conservative or revolutionary, whether motivated by prudential calculations, by fear, or by utopian anticipation, Moltmann saw these philosophies of history as attempts, however subtle and indirect, to bring history to an end. The aim, for Saint-Simon and Comte, was to bring an end to the revolution. For Burckhardt it was to mine the wisdom of the past as a means of fortifying against the abysmal dangers of the future. For Hegel, the aim was the discovery and articulation of a reliable essence within the unreliable particulars of history. Hegelian philosophy could comfort with the thought that history only appeared to be random, for its gratuitous appearance only masked an inner, and essential, "cunning." In fact, the cunning that lay beneath each of these modern philosophies of history was the attempt to bring an end to crisis.

Saint-Simon and Comte, for instance, imagined a social science that would propel the human understanding above the circumstances of history. "Scientific knowledge of the world and of history will supplant the now useless epoch of metaphysics and the still older epoch of theology." When the world and its events could then be placed within this calculus, the crisis would be ended. For Jacob Burckhardt, the crisis is forestalled or ameliorated by historical continuity and the consciousness of tradition; history became then a resource for order.

The idea of historical research in the modern period tended increasingly to be imitative of the natural sciences. The investigation of history gave rise to a methodology that would allow for an empirical system of investigation. The feeling for history as the remembrance of something that was once uncertain and dangerous and that met with unexpected cir-
circumstances gave way to a more or less calculating view of history as a product of knowable forces and made up of verifiable events. History thus conceived was reduced to what can be reconstructed and understood. Its quality of surprise, of unrepeatable events, of people and circumstances that are accessible only to lively, interpretive memories is lost. For this reason, Moltmann came increasingly to emphasize that history can only be understood well if it is considered in light of its sense of the future; in other words, the historical past had a horizon in view that made all the difference in how it was experienced.¹

The fact that modern people turned from a living tradition to inform them of their past and consequently their present as well, to the ‘science’ of history, meant ironically that they found themselves all the more alienated from their past. “The positivist, materialist reduction of history to the level of past fact and times that have gone suppresses the future in the past. This kind of historicism was in its trend and effect anti-historical. Rather than the experience of history, it meant a farewell to history,”¹⁰ Tradition at least makes a claim upon human beings and informs them of those gifts, as well as those debts, that have been passed on to the present generation. It makes the past present. Historical criticism works instead to emancipate men and women from their past. As in the natural sciences, said by Descartes to make us ‘maîtres et possesseurs de la nature’, so now in history, criticism gives human beings a lease over the hegemony of the past.¹¹ “The historicizing of history frees man from history.”¹²

MOLTMANN’S CRITICAL RECEPTION OF ‘HISTORY IN THE MODERN SENSE

A principal insight of Moltmann’s Theology of Hope (one affecting the whole of his theological contributions) is that modern ‘totalitarian’ explanations of history—efforts to reduce historical experience to a method, or to ‘master’ the crisis of history—had lost an essential element of human experience. To explain history, to ‘solve its riddle’ and to master it as one would a technical problem is to expel unpredictability and thus to eliminate that which makes experience historical. Without the uncertainty of the future, and the multiplicity of possibilities in the present, as well as the as-yet-unresolved significance of the past, one cannot speak of history as it is truly experienced. A comprehended history is a self-contradictory notion. It is an attempt to master and then to end history, but it is not, and can never be, an understanding of history. “The result of the historicizing and rationalizing of history is then to abolish history and leave human social life bereft of all historic character.”¹³

The criticism of ideas that tend to have “domination” as their object is a familiar and central theme in Moltmann’s theological works. In an autobiographically revealing comment on the early development of his theology, he said, “I grew up during the German dictatorship and as a young man spent five years in barracks and prison camps (1943-48). I have therefore experienced authority and power as not especially healing—in fact, the reverse.”¹⁴ Thus philosophies of history can represent themselves as a solution to the crisis of history, but in fact represent a kind of domination, one that takes place on the level of comprehending and thus controlling history. Moltmann recognized that this “cure” for the dangers of historical crisis also steals from history the very feature that makes it history—that allows human experience to be an experience of history—namely, its unpredictability and its freedom from domination.
The problem of understanding history as human experience that is free yet not wholly indeterminate, as having a capacity for hope without being fatalistic, is a part of the species of theological problems that commonly fall under the heading of providence and free will. Early in his theological career, he found that the Federalist Theology (Federaltheologie, also referred to as Covenant Theology) that had had a number of exponents since the seventeenth century, yielded insights into the possibilities of freedom within a covenant of the human being with God. These insights offered the possibility of a theological approach that would avoid the pitfalls of determinism and domination. A system that had found adherents among a wide variety of Protestants, from German mystics to English and American Puritans, its understanding of God's relationship to humanity as one of a covenant that bound both parties, held the possibility of preserving both the sovereignty of God and the freedom of the human being without compromising either. His early interest in this contribution to theological understanding is especially apparent in his first book, Prophesie und Pfandverrat, published in 1961. From this point in Moltmann's thinking, it is possible to see how the federalist theology allowed him to see the authority of God as something clearly distinguishable from the notion of tyranny and oppression.

Moltmann's preference for an approach such as this 'federalist' construction of theology can be seen all the more clearly in his survey of attempts at historical heuristics and philosophies of history that he undertakes in the *Theology of Hope*. Wherever there occurs the attempt to speak comprehensively of the bare facts of history there necessarily arises the problem of attaching abstract meaning to things and events that do not speak for themselves. These attempts have taken various forms, some at the level of heuristics, others striving for a 'philosophy of history':

1. There is the attempt to distill a 'law' within history, or laws that govern the succession and movement of events. Such evoking of 'laws of history' call to mind the efforts of Auguste Comte, followed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Laws of history, in this sense, are imitative of the idea of natural laws which focus on efficient and material causes as adequate explanation of events. The difficulty here, says Moltmann, is that while we 'can certainly argue from effects to causes' we can hardly ever argue in reverse. 'Hence the really historic factor lies in the concept of possibility rather than in that of necessity...'

2. Less stringent is the idea of historical 'tendencies' taken up by such esoteric Marxists as Georg Lukács and Ernst Bloch. Rather than argue from cause to effects, one who softened the idea of 'laws' in favor of 'tendencies' would argue from 'possibility to reality.' Still, Moltmann reminds us, the intention here is to ascribe an end or goal to history and thus to limit possibilities.

3. Others attempt to grasp history in the sense of its 'style,' an aesthetic concept that imposes yet again a certain *logos* upon the otherwise unpredictable nature of historic experience. This approach seeks to avoid placing heavy weight upon the 'facts' of history by comprehending the way in which these facts, whatever they may be, arrange themselves and are comprehended as a whole.

4. The idea of 'structure' in history attempts to account for the influence of social institutions, especially as they appear to embody the historical sense of a given moment. Form-critical historiography attempts to view historical statements, for instance, in light of the institutional requirements of an epoch in history, reflecting the comprehensive influ-
ence of laws, manners, customs, art, and the overall articulation of values in social arrangements. Thus history is seen as the history of ‘forms’ or ideas that have had comprehensive effect on history.\(^5\)

(5) Finally, history might be understood on the basis of human existence as a dialectic of “situation” and “decision,” of problem and response. Following the existentialist method of Martin Heidegger, the “historian is then not so much interested in the events themselves and their causal or tendentious connections with other events, but rather in the historic character of the several existences that have been, and in the possibilities of human existence.”\(^2\)

All of these heuristic models present possibilities for a comprehensive understanding of history—if, that is, such possibility exists at all. They become the basis of philosophies of history that endeavor to do precisely that. The heuristic possibilities range from the quite objective discovery of ‘laws’ in the spirit of Newtonian natural sciences to the subjective appropriation of history through an existentialist approach to knowledge. They are methods that range from being grounded in facts to being grounded in human, even individual, experience.

Over against these heuristic devices and their tendency to raise the possibility of a comprehending and mastering idea of history, Moltmann’s critique is single, simple, and powerful. History is about change; and change is the opposite of ‘essence’. Therefore, historiography is a self-contradictory term: to say there is a logos within history is to say that the experience of change that we call history is unreal, that it is—in one way or another—the varying manifestation of an unchanging reality.

Either we must deal with history or we must not. Moltmann insists that one cannot merely pretend to be dealing with the human experience of history while in fact attempting to locate a central core that renders the notion of crisis and change meaningless. “Philosophy of history as a philosophy of crisis,” he writes, “has the aim of annihilating history.”\(^2\)

**Moltmann’s Positive Reception of the Experience of History**

The question naturally arises, then, in the face of all these efforts, conscious and inadvertent, to “annihilate history,” whether there is something about history that one would wish to keep. The founder of the “theology of hope” is unequivocal in saying “Yes.” It is a matter of instructive contrast that the classical Greek world thought little of history and the Hebrew world of the prophets saw history as the medium of divine revelation. For Hellenistic culture history could only be seen as a repetitive presentation of the cosmic order. Events may differ, and the players upon a sacred stage may vary, but the drama always speaks of an eternal and unchanging order. The divine order is therefore indifferent to the form and pathos of the drama and its players. This is what Moltmann refers to as the “spell of the Aristotelian doctrine of God” which insists that God is incapable of suffering (apatheia); if he is incapable of suffering, Moltmann says, he is also incapable of loving.\(^2\)

But for Hebrew experience and for the prophetic response to Israel’s crisis, history is open to something utterly new and unforeseen. This is to say that God discloses himself in events that encounter the present circumstances as advent. Historical crisis appears in dual aspect: it endangers the present (which philosophers of history had seen) but it also opens the way to new possibilities. The crisis carries with it both the prospect of fear and of hope. Christian faith arises out of the memory of the crucified and condemned one who was
raised from the dead to a new life. It thus transforms the habit of fear to a spirit of hope.

Once he had decided to resist tendencies to de-historicize history, and to explore instead the fully historical elements of the biblical understanding of reality as history, as a history founded on promise and that expects a future fulfillment, we can see how this resolve carries over into his critique of twentieth century trends in theology. In beautifully compact form, this insight into the unhistorical nature of twentieth-century theologies is presented in *The Way of Jesus Christ* in relation to the historical nature of the resurrection.

The problems of the resurrection for modern historians are seen in light of Troeltsch's 1898 axioms for the critical historical method. An event gains historical credibility in that it can be said to be probable (similar events occur), in that it corresponds to a world of cause and effect, or that it appears to stand in analogical relationship to other events. One can readily see that an event such as the resurrection, which (1) cannot be said to be probable, (2) corresponds in no discoverable way to the "cohesion of cause and effect," and (3) is singular and an event that contradicts experience, and thus one that defies analogy, cannot be included among those events defined historical. Therefore, theologians "who allowed themselves to be drawn into this position looked for different categories as a way of proving that the Christian faith was well founded and meaningful." Thus, in a major way, theologians attempted to speak of Christian faith in a manner that does not rely on history. In other words, they ventured to create out of a resolutely historical faith a theology that might get along as well without history.

For Karl Barth, then, matters of history were overwhelmed by a sense that what was of ultimate and supreme importance was the reality of God "whose eternity confronts all the times of history simultaneously." The Word of God penetrates the vagaries of history and discloses itself in history, but it is supremely the same word, not a new word or a different word. Thus, that which is unchanging, a sort of "Divine History," discloses itself in the horizontal this and that of history: the eternal is not changed in any way by what is disclosed. So, even for the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Barth would say that it is "nothing other than a paraphrase for the word 'God.'" In this way, Barth's understanding of the raising of Christ from the dead is not at all affected by Troeltsch's axioms about historicity. And Moltmann accordingly observes that "This reduction of Christ's resurrection to God's sovereignty does not merely demythologize the resurrection; it de-historicizes it as well." Over against the attempt to avoid the historical criticism of biblical history, there is also...
the possibility of seeing the relationship of history and faith in a new way. "It is one thing," he says, "to see Christ's resurrection in the perspective of history, where we are faced with the inescapable question: is the resurrection an event, or an interpretation of faith? It is another thing to see history in the perspective of Christ's resurrection." In this way, he raises to a conscious level the recognition that history ought really to be more than the antiseptic discovery of facts in the now dead past, but the discovery of a living history that took place in the foreground of the experienced hopes and expectations of a people. History, in other words, is not simply about the past, it is about a past that had a future. Furthermore, the past's meaning is progressively discovered not by unearthing, layer by dusty layer, the facts of the past, but by discovering through the progression of time how that past anticipated its future, and how its anticipated future colored the foreground of each experienced present.

At this point, we see that Moltmann is joined by Wolfhart Pannenberg in a similar insight about the incompleteness of history, an incompleteness that can only be completed in light of the last things. Thus history, for Pannenberg, is proleptically illumined by the resurrection of Jesus, an event at the end of history that takes place in the 'midst of history'. This makes possible what Pannenberg calls 'anticipatory reason' raising the possibility of the category of 'universal history'. It is true, as Moltmann readily attests, that this approach resists the temptation to simply de-historicize a historical faith, as he found in Barth and Bultmann. It takes seriously the historical character of the faith of Israel and the Apostles. However, he says, "it can easily become the confirmation of what takes place in history and human reason anyway." In that case, the raising of Christ 'could then become the historical and symbolic endorsement of the proleptic structures of being, and would then offer nothing new.' If 'nothing new', then would that not mean 'no transformation', 'no salvation', and in effect 'no gospel'? At this point, therefore, we must note carefully the distinction of Moltmann's appropriation of this insistence upon rescuing the historical dimension of Christian theology and resisting the wish to simply dispel it by unhistorical theologizing such as he found in Barth and Bultmann.

When Moltmann wants to consider the 'sphere of historical experience', he wants to do so in light of the 'horizon of historical expectation'. We must remember, at this point however that Moltmann insists that one does not really do justice to the historical experience by taking from it the risks and the uncertainties that make it what it is. In this sense, his difference with Pannenberg is as striking as his critique of Barth and Bultmann. The shorthand way of expressing Moltmann's approach is to say that history without time is not the experience of history. "Reality is only experienced as history as long as there is a perception of time." And furthermore, "Time is only perceived as long as the difference between past and future exists." Therefore, "Remembrance and hope are the conditions for possible experiences of history." The space between remembrance and hope open the possibility for praxis, for acting upon the conditions of the present in light of the remembered hope for human beings and for nature. So, to move back to the historicity of the resurrection: what is historically important is not the simple fact of the resurrection, or a defense of the event as a datum to support the dogma of the church on the resurrection of the dead, but it is the reality of its raising the historical hope that suffering and god-forsakeness, poverty and oppression, can be experienced in the horizon of God's remem-
bered promise for the future. It means that suffering and hope take place in a manner that gives substance to the practice of attending to those who suffer and working in behalf of those who have almost lost hope. "The resurrection of Christ," therefore, "is historically understood in the full sense only in the unity of knowing, hoping, and doing."10

With remarkable consistency Moltmann keeps time, with change as its essence, at the heart of the historical faith of Israel and the Church, critically exposing the claims of each new effort to divest the Christian faith of its intimate connection with historical experience, that is, experience that takes place between a past and a future. This is at the heart of Christian understanding, he says:

For God's promise is like a horizon which moves with us and into which we move. Promise has fulfillment ahead of it. That is why the hoping person begins to seek for the fulfillment of his hope, finding rest only in the reality of fulfilled promise. What was imagined in individual terms with Abraham was Israel's collective experience in the exodus from Egypt, an experience which was told from generation to generation. Exodus means leaving an old reality which was endured as an imprisonment and seeking the land of promise. If we transfer this to the experience of time, exodus means leaving what is behind and reaching out to what lies ahead (Phil. 3:13). Past and future become distinguishable in the transition of the present. The three Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—are religions of history, aligned towards the future. This is made plain in every encounter with the Asiatic religions of external and internal equilibriu—equilibrium in nature, as in Taoism, equilibrium in society, as in Confucianism, and equilibrium in one's soul, as in Buddhism.31

In this way, Moltmann offers a third alternative of reading the modern experience of history. He intended that his readers should see that one need not resent the modern experience of continual and radical change, attempting instead to rescue the remnants of tradition and return to the past. Nor should one attempt to evade history as if it is finally irrelevant to the religious consciousness, as in the theology of Rudolf Bultmann. Instead, the thoughtful Christian should recognize in the modern experience of history the very character of history that gives rise to hope. In fact, the eschatological orientation of the gospel calls radically into question the stable institutions and traditions of the present, and gives relief to those who anxiously observe the shaking of every so-called foundation. The modern experience of history does not, in other words, lead us away from the Christian gospel, but in fact leads us to the very heart of the gospel and into the presence of the Crucified One.

Thus, in contrast to the eternal, though varied, presentation of a logos, an "eschatology of history" which incorporates and "revolves around the new and the future, of mission and the front line of the present" has the strength to "take history as history, to remember and expect it as history, and thus not to annihilate history but to keep it open."32

HISTORY AS ANTICIPATION AND HOPE

The next step in Moltmann's consideration of history is best understood in light of a certain analysis of history that he has made in recent times. In answer to the question, "What can we know about God's future, and how can we talk about it?" he pointed out...
that one might use either of two ways of talking about the future. One is the method of extrapolation. The other is viewed as anticipation.

Extrapolation looks toward the future as a continuation of the trends and movements of the present, "inferring the future from the data and trends of the past and present." Trend analysts assume that "the past and the future lie along one and the same straight, temporal line." Moltmann raises the question as to whether such a method is really dealing with the future at all. "They are simply prolonging into the future their own present." It is an "extrapolated and extended future" that they have in mind; and such approaches tend to suppress thinking about new possibilities that might break in unexpectedly, contradicting the present circumstances rather than carrying them forward in predictable ways. For this way of viewing history, the definition of history includes only "the eternal becoming-and-passing-away." Otherwise, however, one might think of history as anticipation. Anticipation allows for the possibility—even the probability—of that which is new. The new situation might be one of danger or opportunity, engendering fear or hope. Anticipation, however, is not simply a passive regarding of what is to come, it is rather an active imaginative engagement with the conditions of the future. In anticipation one stands ready, one is not deceived (Mark 13) by reassurances of continual ease or the opportunity of sin. Instead, one watches, awaiting the Advent of a new world, one that comes from God’s hand and is not merely the old one carried into the future.

The reason a follower of Christ can meet the future with both anticipation and hope is the resurrection of Christ. For the raising of Jesus from the dead is not merely a certain datum within history, but is the promise of the utter contradiction of the conditions of sin and death. Therefore, the resurrection means not "a possibility within the world and its history, but a new possibility altogether for the world, for existence and for history." The reason is found not in a new paradigm, but in the contradiction of paradigms which the resurrection of the dead presents to our imaginations. Here—in regard to the resurrection—we do not "derive general laws of world history," but we are presented instead "the hope for the future of all world history." For that reason, one's engagement with the resurrection of Christ is not then confined to a passive belief in a past event, but it is a belief in the ultimate future in which God "quickens into life ... makes the poor rich ... lifts up the humble and raises the dead." Believing that to be the future of the present and of the past, one is empowered to live in faith. And this faith "in the resurrection is itself a living force which raises people up and frees them from the deadly illusions of power and possession, because their eyes are now turned towards the future of life."

The task and the self-concept of the church can be said to flow from its understanding of history. That is to say, it flows from an understanding of its place in the human experience and how this place is founded upon the promise of God. For the church to remain the church means that the experience of history is constantly viewed in light of the horizon of history. "The glory of self-realization and the misery of self-estrangement alike," wrote Moltmann in the concluding words of the Theology of Hope, "arise from hopelessness in a world of lost horizons." From this condition we discern the nature and work of the church: "To disclose to it the horizon of the future of the crucified Christ is the task of the Christian Church."
Conyers

NOTES

2. Karl Löwith referred to the *City of God* as a "dialectical-historical interpretation of Christianity." *Meaning in History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), pp. 167-73. He distinguishes this Augustinian approach from the "philosophy of history" which he says is a term invented by Voltaire and a project taken up by other Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment figures such as Turgot, Condorcet, Comte, Hegel, Marx, and Burckhardt (see introduction, pp. 1-19).
4. Ibid., p. 233.
5. Ibid., p. 233; the term "total critique" is one used by Gerhart Niemeyer, *Between Nothingness and Paradise* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1971).
10. Ibid., p. 240.
16. Cf. Conyers, *Forward to God, Hope, and History*, p. vii. Here Moltmann notes that "My early studies of Reformation and post-Reformation theology (1952-1960) brought me to a third way...one other than political and theological hierarchy or anarchy, to the federalist way.... The federalist theology...found a political complement in the thought of Johannes Althusius who, following the model of the 'league' of Swiss farmers, declared the covenant to be the essence of the political life of the people. Humans are symbiotic creatures and organize their common life on various levels in tacit or explicit covenants. The covenant is the form of political power in which justice can be accomplished best. Those federalist ideas were promulgated by many Reformed theologians and politicians in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They became the foundation for the development of modern democracy in the struggle against absolutism during those centuries."
18. Ibid., specifically he writes "the intention in employing the heuristic medium of exploring tendencies is surely to discover a directional trend on the part of history which is teleological as a whole," p. 243.
19. Ibid., pp. 243-44.
20. Moltmann compares this to the approach that discerns a 'style', in that it is sociologically oriented, only in this case it is taken up in a form critical historiography. Ibid., p. 244.
21. Ibid., p. 244.
22. Ibid., p. 211.
27. Ibid., p. 227.
29. Ibid., p. 236.
30. Ibid., p. 237.
31. Ibid., p. 237.
34. Ibid., pp. 137-38.
35. Moltmann, Theology of Hope, p. 179.