

# ON BEING HUMAN: MOLTSMANN'S ANTHROPOLOGY OF HOPE

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Over the years Moltmann's vision of human selfhood has unfolded in the context of his overall theology. Accordingly there are shifts of emphasis, depending upon the decade of his work. It seems best to summarize his thought on the two sides of a watershed which occurred, he states, in the late 1970s. This was the time in which he began sketching his *Systematic Contributions* series and in which he experienced a "theological turning point"<sup>1</sup> resulting from a 1978 conference in Mexico City with liberation theologians. That date may serve as a rough marker for accentuating a shift already underway, a relaxing of his earlier political theology utilizing some Marxist categories and instead a new celebration of trinitarian thought. The same shift is also discernable in his emerging doctrine of what it means to be human.

## I

The writings of the early Moltmann, that is, those prior to 1978, reflect the exhilaration and intellectual context of his ground-breaking *Theology of Hope*. At that time his views of humankind and society were affected by many influences, including dialectical theology, the biblical theology of von Rad and Käsemann, the "warm stream" of revisionist Marxism (especially Ernst Bloch), the 1960s Christian-Marxist dialogues, and the critical theory of the Frankfurt School of ideology critique. Looking back on this period, he wrote, "I myself came from the Critical Theory to the justice-and-theodicy question as common for theology and socialist philosophy and from there to the burning Auschwitz-question."<sup>2</sup> The latent Jewish messianism of Bloch and other Euro-Marxists increasingly attracted him to other Jewish writers (e.g., Franz Rosenzweig) and to Christian-Jewish dialogues. Interest in these and other inter-group dialogues during these exciting years no doubt helped to prompt an early focus on theological anthropology.<sup>3</sup> Hope must set the context, he insists, for the irreducible

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ambiguity of human selfhood. For this theme of ambiguity he is partly indebted to a number of European philosophical anthropologists, such as Helmut Plessner and Arnold Gehlen. For instance he often cites Plessner, who described humanity as the "ex-centric" being, an ellipse with two foci, a self-transcendence that both has and is a body.<sup>4</sup>

Theological anthropology may begin by asking how humans come to a knowledge of themselves. Here Moltmann manifests the influence of Calvin and Barth: there is a reciprocal relationship between the knowledge of humankind and the knowledge of God. To themselves, humans are an incessant question-mark, but in God we see "the worth (*Würde*) of the question-able (*frag-würdig*) being which we all are."<sup>5</sup> Moses at the burning bush asked "Who am I...?" and received no direct reply at all, but instead the promise "I will be with you" (Exod. 3:11-12) and ultimately the self-giving of Immanuel, "God with us."<sup>6</sup> From here, and continuing through the coming of the Son of Man, we see the Bible has no set anthropology, and ascribes no fixed attributes or prerogatives to human beings as such, but instead speaks of men and women only in the restless, unfolding history of their relationship to God.<sup>7</sup>

As a historical and thereby unfinished being, the human being is really not definable at all. "The essence of mankind is hidden and has not yet appeared. 'Mankind'—the realized generic concept—is becoming, is still in process, has not yet acquired a fixed 'nature'."<sup>8</sup> It is not simply that God is hidden (*Deus absconditus*), but that God is the key to humanity's own self-mystery (*Homo absconditus*).<sup>9</sup> The Old Testament prohibition of images implies a warning against attempts to anticipate a clarity that can be possible only at the eschaton; to venture definitions of humanity's essence here and now would only betray persons into fixated norms and manipulation.<sup>10</sup> The history of Marxism, for instance, would be an illustration of the dangers entailed by a uniform model of "true humanity" which is then imposed upon hapless individuals and societies.

Far easier to define, however, is our present *inhumanity*! "What true humanity is can be comprehended in a positive affirmation only with extreme difficulty. On the other hand, what inhumanity is—from Nero to Hitler and from the hell of Auschwitz to the hells of our own day—can be designated with moderate precision from our experience."<sup>11</sup> Here is a clear example of Moltmann's fondness for a category borrowed from the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, the negation of the negative. Here it means that what we humans hold in common is not our positive attributes, our alleged virtue or capacities. Rather, the Gospel addresses us solely on the presupposition of our common inhumanity—whether Jew or Greek, slave or free. "Throughout all periods of history there is a solidarity of afflicted men in their common lack of freedom and glory ... the partnership of deprivation," which can also be called the "history of the world's suffering."<sup>12</sup>

This universal inhumanity is the reason why, since his *The Crucified God*, Moltmann has insisted that the knowledge of God is bound to the cross. We are a fallen race, no longer *Mensch* ("human being") but *Unmensch* ("Inhuman being"), unable to know God directly, naturally. Instead, we persistently *misuse* the available knowledge of God for our own self-deification. So any theologies of glory must be countered, as Luther said, by a "theology of the cross." Only the cross takes seriously the "Inhuman being's" perverted interest and misuse of the knowledge of God. The cross not only disclosed God in the unexpected form of

despised and brutalized humanity, but it continues to be a crucifying knowledge—one that smashes all the means of human self-exaltation, and liberates the *homo incurvatus in se* into a new openness to God and neighbor. It is in this seeming contradiction, God in the broken form of the crucified Jesus, that there is the opened possibility for us inhuman beings again to become truly human, beside God.

From the beginning, Moltmann has emphasized that so-called "human nature" must be posited within the wider vista of an unfolding historical process. He thereby renounced the traditional individualism of all forms of "substance" or existentialist thinking. "The world is not yet finished, but is understood as engaged in a history. It is therefore the world of possibilities, . . . an age which stands within the horizon of a new future."<sup>13</sup> We too are unfinished women and men, poised to become what we are. Our restless self-questioning is not derived from some innate human property, an inherent *cor inquietum* or an immanent "openness to the world" within us, but instead arises from the charge and commission of God, the *promissio inquieta*, the eschatological "openness to the world ahead of us" which then beckons and disturbs the human consciousness.<sup>14</sup> Quoting Ortega y Gasset, "Man has no nature; he has only history," Moltmann goes on to add, "Human nature,' or that which makes men men, is not given at the beginning of their history and does not exist as idea behind the multiplicity of man's appearances. If it exists at all, it stands at the goal and end of history and its conflicts."<sup>15</sup> Humans are unfinished, non-established creatures, living in an "ex-centric" position. As Bloch and Plessner pointed out, we are simultaneously within history and yet above it, like swimmers whose heads strain to rise from the water to take our bearings. Hope, therefore, provides the orientation needed. Any attempt to define "the human" must be done through hope.

Man, who is encountered by God's revelation in promise, is identified and finds himself; at the same time, however, he is differentiated and goes searching for his true life which is concealed in Christ (Col. 3:3). He finds himself, but only in hope, for he is not yet excluded from death, he is not yet risen . . . He comes into harmony with himself—in *spe* but not in *re*.<sup>16</sup>

"He is still future to 'himself' and is promised to himself. His future depends utterly and entirely on the outcome of the risen Lord's course."<sup>17</sup> Believers can only confess that they are riddles to themselves, examples of a *homo absconditus*, standing "ahead" of themselves in hope. Indeed, history itself is propelled by the disharmony between hope and experience. So believers risk their present provisional identity by sacrifice, expending themselves for the new possibilities opened up ahead. But they venture this risk, even change the world, because of their memory of the resurrection of the Crucified and Rejected One, who represents "the 'impossible possibility' of hope in this world."<sup>18</sup>

Consequently, for Moltmann's early writings, all the strands of human characteristics are drawn to a Christological focus. This is especially so since *The Crucified God*. The cross confronts our happy idolatries, and the resurrection sets in motion our potential transformation. Jesus is described as the Son of Man (the early Moltmann's favorite Christological title), the truly human person set amidst our inhumanity.

The crucified Lord embodies the new humanity which responds to God in the circumstances of inhumanity which oppose God. He incorporates home in the circumstances of alienation, and freedom in the midst of the chains of slavery. But it is just through this that men are empowered to alter these relationships, to make the world more homelike, and to abolish internal and external slavery.<sup>19</sup>

Here the vision in Daniel 7 is recalled, in which the Son of Man figure represents and is the vanguard of our vocation to rule the world in a humane manner, in contrast to the "bestial" empires of oppression. Arriving from heaven rather than emerging from the sea, the Son of Man enters history as something truly new. And surrounding himself with the guilty, the exiles, the sick, and lowly, "the Son of Man is he who identifies with those who are below the mean of humanness, in order to call them human."<sup>20</sup>

Here then is disclosed the key to the human self. It is the resurrection power of the exalted Son of Man that replaces what most anthropologies seek to uncover as the quintessence, the basic continuity for human nature. Only the faithfulness of God constitutes, ever anew, what we term human identity. A person's "essence," and that means his identity and continuity, is determined by the call of God, by his being called to a partnership in the covenant, by the event of justification.<sup>21</sup> Because of this creative faithfulness of God, a human being cannot be analyzed into a mere conglomerate of reactions and functions, but he/she takes courage and is held open and receptive amidst the flowing relativities of history. "In the hidden faithfulness of the Spirit, man is directed ahead of himself; he acquires future—not an automatic future but rather a historical future.... He acquires continuity in the midst of changing conditions in as far as he acquires future."<sup>22</sup> Put differently, although one's humanness (*hominitas*) be a *gift* which is already a fact, one's humanity (*humanitas*) remains a *task* laid before each of us.<sup>23</sup> Such is humankind's continuity, both present and future, which is received from God.

But what contents may we readers assign to this *humanitas*, this vision which is to be attained? The picture is unclear because, over the years, Moltmann consistently has mistrusted definitions, the verbal act of "setting limits." "Definitions are acts of domination,"<sup>24</sup> he insists, which prejudice and fossilize what is new, vital, and spontaneous. Such objectification he considers philosophically a lapse into essentialism, and politically an invitation to despotism. While pedants and tyrants make use of definitions to restrict what is permitted, by contrast God's new creation—struggling even now to be born—will participate in God's limitless glory. In principle, therefore, Moltmann scorns traditional logic and empirical precision. So he resists venturing any detailed portrait of the new humanity. Nevertheless, readers may discern some elements of his vision of *humanitas*.

One of these components reflects goals familiar since the eighteenth-century Enlightenment: material abundance, human dignity, self-determination, and purposefulness in life.<sup>25</sup> Another ingredient is the biblical hope for universalism, a unity that surmounts all economic, social, or racial distinctions.<sup>26</sup> Such unity, although necessarily preceded by the apparent partisanship of God who sides with the oppressed in struggling for justice, is prefigured by a love of enemies. That love already begins to burst asunder our factional rigidities (e.g., Martin Luther King, Jr.). Even now, the church, by its compassionate gathering together of the diverse and the unlike (rather than the "birds of a feather"

typical of other organizations), must become the Church of the "Others," acting as the representative and messianic vanguard of this new humanity.<sup>27</sup>

A final component of the future vision is humanity's glorification to become "like God," and "participate in God's infinite creativity."<sup>28</sup> What such glorification may mean, of course, is eschatologically undefinable (see 1 John 3:2). But it will not be some apotheosis that dissolves human creaturehood into the Godhead, or mimics Marxism's "total man." On the other hand we can say something about the future: it will include a gathering of individuals by the general resurrection, a transformation that goes beyond mere restoration of primal creaturehood, and both a freedom from death and a freedom for participation in God's infinity.<sup>29</sup> In Moltmann's later writings, as we shall see, he develops such suggestions further.

Moltmann's analysis of sin derives from this grand hope; indeed, until we catch this vision we are unable even to recognize fully our fallen condition. His references to sin are scattered among the early writings; however, in every case sin is linked to hopelessness. Although derived from anxiety, hopelessness emerges in one of two overt forms: either *praesumptio*, pride, which might be called "the premature, self-willed anticipation of the fulfillment of what we hope for from God," or *desperatio*, despair and inertia, "the premature, arbitrary anticipation of the non-fulfillment of what we hope for from God."<sup>30</sup> The contrast could be symbolized by the figures of Prometheus (especially popular in the nineteenth century) and Sisyphus (more typical of twentieth-century ennui).

*Praesumptio* is expressed in several ways. An obvious manifestation is the self-deification of humans (*Vergottung*) that corresponds often with the modern "un-deification" (*Entgötterung*) of heaven—as pursued by secular idealism or by the moral earnestness of protest-atheism.<sup>31</sup> Many current ideologies have this effect, from Marxism's "total man" to romantic conservatism's nostalgia for organic communities, from the liberal's individualistic idealism to the militant's praise of brute force and exertion of will.<sup>32</sup> By demanding a level of performance impossible to attain, however, they all result in the grim joylessness so typical of modern times. Another manifestation is the "works-righteousness" of the Western work ethic. Here Moltmann has been particularly critical of Marxism which, despite its reproach of the West as a society of "having" instead of "being," ended up with a more extreme form of that same malady.<sup>33</sup> Framed differently, Moltmann also describes *praesumptio* as idolatry, a perversion of our vocation of God's image. That is, the inhuman being

inverts the dialectic of trust and control. In trusting things or his own works, although they are not trustworthy but only controllable, he mistrusts God whom he cannot control but only trust. . . . The creation which he is to use and rule becomes the object of his trust. God becomes the object of his mistrust and his exercise of control.<sup>34</sup>

The second major category of hopelessness is *desperatio*, a resignation, timidity, and weariness that prompt humans to forsake in a more passive manner what God expects of us. Apathy is the result; it is a pervasive sickness of our era, the fear of the pain and risk which love necessarily entails. In vain women and men try to flee what is actually an irreducible dialectic of human existence: "we live (*leben*) because and in so far as we love (*lieben*)—and we suffer (*leiden*) and die because and in so far as we love. In this way we experience life and death in love."<sup>35</sup> The price of shrinking from this sensitivity, however,

is to lose the ability to love, to fall prey to a range of psychosomatic illnesses, and to experience in fact a preliminary form of spiritual death. Hope, then, is the remedy for both pride and resignation.

Leaving the topic of sin, let us return to the theme of the inevitable ambiguities of our earthly human selfhood. We have noted that the human being is a being in historical process, the presently fallen *Unmensch* who is on the way to becoming *Mensch*, who struggles to turn the gift of *hominitas* into the promised *humanitas*. But Moltmann early posed an additional polarity, one which is less temporal: we are both creature and image of God.

First, the human is a creation of God, one among the many other fellow-creatures. Like them we were called into existence out of nothing and chaos, and like them we face annihilation again.<sup>36</sup> This solidarity with the contingent natural world has a critical function, for it shows that neither humans nor nature are divine, nor should either be demonized as evil. Of course, important ecological consequences must follow from an awareness of solidarity with our fellow creatures (*Mitgeschöpfe*). And on the personal level, it can begin to reverse the problem of alienation from the physical body—a problem to which the later Moltmann will return. For in Western society categories of “possessing” have become so dominant that we both despoil the natural world around us and speak of “having” a body instead of “being” a body.<sup>37</sup> Hope, however, should bring us mortals a sense of oneness with all that has been created.

The other side, however, of humanity’s eccentric position in creation is our specified placement and calling as the image of God. That which differentiates us from other creatures is not some essence or single attribute, but our total personhood. It is precisely in our web of relationships that we have the vocation to represent God in and for God’s creation. That commission also has its critical function, for it must refute the ancient mystique of all nature as potential imagery for God. Such a mediary function, as early Israel insisted, belongs only to human beings—and furthermore, that function is not restricted to royalty, but resides (democratically!) in humanity as such. So every human being is God’s viceroy, representative in and to the world, and also humans must develop a far more responsible use of power over the world—these are the positive corollaries of the Second Commandment.<sup>38</sup>

As creature yet as *imago Dei*, again the human being occupies a dialectical eccentric position. We “are” a body in addition to “having” a body; we are identified with our empirical environment, yet we transcend it.<sup>39</sup> Prior to the eschaton the human cannot yet be self-identical, as are the animals which have their being in a species. “What its species is for the animal, history, the open uncompletable history of the humanization, democratization, and socialization of man . . . is for man.”<sup>40</sup> To ignore this eccentric position, this bipolar status of humanity, would be to risk apathy or else the totalitarian homogeneity of the “new man” in various modern ideologies.

The human being is thus bipolar. But in a world of utilitarian values and interlocking technology, it is especially important to emphasize not just our finitude, but our preliminary freedom. This transcendent dimension of the human creature is promise and foretaste of our eschatological identity. In contrast to all ideological reductionisms, the human already has a share in the endless freedom of the Creator over against all finite objects and circumstances. This measure of participation in divine freedom is safeguarded by the Second Commandment and by the offense of the cross. So humanity combines earnest-

ness and mirth, a painful longing for the consummation of creation blended with a playful celebration of God's good pleasure here and now. In this continuing dialectic, we humans suffer and yet prefigure with joy our eschatological destiny.<sup>41</sup>

## II

Since 1980 Moltmann has been publishing a new series of major theological works, subtitled "Systematic Contributions to Theology." This series marks the most discernable shift in his thinking. It consolidates the newer trends of his thinking, a "messianic theology," while bringing to maturity many of the older ones. In this later phrase theological anthropology is now seldom singled out for the sustained attention it once had—with some exceptions, such as sections of *God in Creation* (1985) and his essays on human rights. Indirectly, however, anthropology continues to be addressed. Indeed, the later Moltmann has become a champion of human experience as a genuine source of knowledge of God—albeit in a dialectical way, of course, that avoids the reductionist pitfalls of Protestant liberalism.

Some of the changes in Moltmann's more recent work are largely a matter of emphasis. Progressive Marxist categories and thinkers, for instance, have receded in his analyses. There is far less attention to the *Unmensch* or to an analysis of sin than he gave thirty years ago. Instead there is a celebration of human potential and bodily existence, sometimes in hyperbolic language. Does this mean that "hope," in the later Moltmann, has become tainted with secular humanism and the self-help movements of today's pop culture? Not really. While recognizing the risks, he nevertheless cautions pious critics against denouncing "self-actualization" as irreligious egotism. They should ask instead which "self" is meant! If it refers to one's essence, then self-actualization is no secular egotism but is intrinsic to the biblical command, "Love your neighbor as yourself."<sup>42</sup> Genuine love bestows self-actualization in both directions. Moltmann also demonstrates that his grounding in biblical theology is unchanged, for he insists that the fullness of life conferred by God's Spirit is not done for moral or egotistical grounds, "for the sake of a personal fulfillment," but is granted for the sake of God's righteousness.<sup>43</sup>

Several newer motifs are also discernable. The flowering of Moltmann's trinitarian thought, certainly, has deeply affected his portrayal of men and women. Another influence has been his work with the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches which, overshadowing his earlier dialogues with non-Christian partners, gives a more ecumenical, intra-Christian context for his "systematic contributions." Concern for eco-justice and harmony with the earth,<sup>44</sup> rather than the early political theology, has come to shape his analyses of human selfhood. In general, however, there is no major shift in direction of Moltmann's vision of being human, and most of those motifs noted in his earlier anthropology continue.

For instance, the familiar polarity of the human being as creature and as *imago Dei* now receives important elaboration in the Gifford Lectures of 1984-85. While modernity is fond of emphasizing how people "differ" from the animals, Moltmann instead chooses to begin with how humans are bonded to other creatures: "the human being as 'a creature in the fellowship of creation,'" as a microcosm of the creation, an *imago mundi*.<sup>45</sup> In the temporal sequence of the Old Testament narrative, humans are God's last creation before the sabbath, and they stand before God as representatives of the macrocosm, interceding

on its behalf. But in the history of redemption the sequence is reversed: humans are created first, after Christ, and it is the new heavens and earth that come at the end, the ultimate sabbath. In their double role as creatures, then, humans are "priestly by nature, and stand before God on behalf of the earth and before the earth on behalf of God."<sup>46</sup>

The other half of this initial polarity, humanity as *imago Dei*, however, Moltmann has revised in a successive, trinitarian fashion. He now explains that, while humans were originally designated as *imago Dei*, their messianic calling is to be *imago Christi* and their eschatological glorification will be *gloria Dei*.<sup>47</sup> For the first of these three stages, the curious grammatical mixture of singular and plural in Genesis 1:26f. ("Let us make human beings in our image...") suggests that God is no undifferentiated monad, but finds correspondence in human community and its sexual differentiation. So we humans are preeminently social beings, not just individuals who later join together. The much-debated "likeness to God" of the first man and woman is not a fixed "characteristic" setting us apart from the animals (such as soul or upright posture), but is our entire existence in its relationship to God. In short, it is the complexity of our relationships, both horizontal and vertical, so to speak, that constitutes our humanness.<sup>48</sup>

The Genesis story then continues (1:28f.) with the commonly misunderstood commission to 1) rule over animals, and 2) "subdue the earth." The mandate, however, is not to be understood as a restatement of the *imago*, but as an addition which must presuppose that right relationship with God. Only once we become God's "image" are we authorized to "rule," and even then only as (vegetarian!) tenants, stewards of God's garden.

But this is only the beginning. Moltmann remains true to his early mistrust of definitions. Definitions, he says, belong only to the future (and he goes on to quote Gregory of Nyssa: "Concepts create idols. Only wonder understands"<sup>49</sup>). Meanwhile our present likeness to God is undefinable, being both indicative and imperative, both gift and task. That is, we are still in the process of becoming human. "The true likeness to God is to be found, not at the beginning of God's history with mankind, but at its end; and as goal it is present in that beginning and during every moment of that history."<sup>50</sup> In the New Testament the phrase "likeness to God" is applied not to humans, but instead to Jesus, as God's true image, and we in turn are called to be *imago Christi* (Rom. 8:29f.). The command in Genesis to "rule," then, can only be fulfilled by "ruling with Christ," and not by technological or governmental coercions. "Under the conditions of history and in the circumstances of sin and death, the sovereignty of the crucified and risen Messiah Jesus is the only true *dominium terrae*. It is to 'the Lamb' that rule over the world belongs."<sup>51</sup>

The final of the three stages will be our eschatological glorification as *gloria Dei*. In the Great Sabbath of the end-time humanity will see God face to face. Then truly we will conform (that is, be "like in form") to the triune splendor. Accepting the label "panentheism" for his vision, Moltmann says that somehow we will participate in and with God's nature. The oneness of Jesus with the Father (John 10:30) will be replicated in the oneness of the disciples in their fellowship with one another and with God (John 17:21). "It is a fellowship with God and, beyond that, a fellowship in God. But that presupposes that the trinity is open ... [for] the whole creation.... So the unity of the Trinity is not merely a theological term; at heart it is a soteriological one as well."<sup>52</sup>

Meanwhile, however, in the present time we live as fallen creatures. Does that sinful



condition call into question our status (dialectical though it be) as God's image? Here Moltmann rejects traditional answers, the patristic distinction between the sinner's *imago Dei* and *similitudo Dei* that safeguards the former at the cost of the latter. Indeed, as we have seen, he renounces any categories of "substance." Instead, humans are constituted by their standing given by God's history. "The presence of God makes the human being undeprivedly and inescapably God's image. ... The dignity of human beings is unforfeitable, ... thanks to the abiding presence of God"<sup>53</sup> It is only *our* relationship to God, not the reverse, which sin can pervert. In this way (echoing Luther's famous phrase), the human being can be entirely a sinner and yet entirely God's image.

Humanity's likeness to God, says Moltmann, should be construed in social terms (paralleling Eastern Orthodoxy's doctrine of Trinity), rather than in psychological terms (the Western trinitarian tradition, since Augustine). This would avoid the time-honored pitfalls of defining the *imago Dei* as the intellectual, sexless soul which dominates the body in the same way that God is pictured as dominating the created world.<sup>54</sup> For centuries the Western church has been all too fond of reducing key theological concepts to a "doctrine of sovereignty," emulating the dualism of some cosmic autocrat coercing his property into line. Visualizing such monarchical theism in the heavens, however, can only lead to social hierarchies, class oppression, and ecological plundering on earth. Such practical consequences in society seem to have been one of Moltmann's initial motivations in turning to a careful construction of a more social doctrine of Trinity. Such a reformulation of God-language must accordingly have an impact on our conceptualization of God's image in humanity. Moltmann is indebted to Eastern Orthodox theologians, who

started from the essential fellowship of the Trinity (perichoresis) and found the *imago Dei* in the primal human community. We have taken up these ideas as a basis for a pronouncedly social doctrine of human likeness to God in a theology of the open Trinity. Instead of starting from a closed and self-contained Trinity which manifests itself outwardly without differentiation, we have taken as our premise an open Trinity which manifests itself outwardly in differentiated form.<sup>55</sup>

Since the triune God is thrown open to us and all the world, seeking not domination but fellowship with the beloved creation, then it is in our very multiplicity of relationships, our communities, that we humans best manifest our likeness to God. Reflecting not just God's outward rule but God's inward nature, we are *imago Trinitatis*. After all, God created us with bodies and as sexually differentiated persons who produce children. So

the anthropological triangle determines the existence of every human being: every one is a man *or* a woman, *and* the child of his or her parents. The relation between man and wife signifies the inextinguishable sociality of human beings, while the relation between parents and children denotes the equally unalterable generativity of human beings. The first is the simultaneous community of the sexes in space; the second the community of the generations in time. If the whole human being is designated the image of God, then true human community—the community of the sexes and the community of the generations—has the same designation.<sup>56</sup>

Readers will note that Moltmann's former emphasis on a Christological redefinition of humanity has now been replaced by social trinitarianism, a perichoretic effulgence. Yet within this new development Moltmann retains a certain Christocentrism. In contrast to the Western tradition since Augustine, he states that humans are fashioned not by the entire Trinity but by just one of the *personae*. The Son alone became human and embodied God's image on earth, and it is through the Son that we obtain access to the Father. "This is to say that [it is] through the Son the divine Trinity throws itself open for human beings."<sup>57</sup>

There remain several sub-topics within theological anthropology to which Moltmann in more recent years has devoted particular attention, and we will now consider them. These sub-topics include human rights, human freedom, and the relationship of body and soul.

Human rights, as a theme, has come to be one of the most practical extensions of Moltmann's formulations of the divine likeness in humanity. Beginning in the early 1970s, this concern grew in part from his world travels, his participation in World Council of Churches' discussions of human rights, and his leadership in the World Alliance of Reformed Churches on that subject. Indeed, the theme of human rights seems a metamorphosis of his earlier passion for political theology, which likewise was grounded in an anthropology of hope. In criticizing totalitarian political theory he states,

(T)he Leviathan conception of the state presupposes a negative anthropology, in order to legitimate a positive theology of power, of authority and sovereignty. . . . By contrast, the covenantal conception of the state presupposes a positive anthropology, in order to legitimate a critical theology of power and the control of power by democratic institutions.<sup>58</sup>

Because constitutional theory holds the state is not just a consequence of human sin and alienation, but is rooted in human nature as such, therefore human rights must be safeguarded. That means a desacralization of political power, so that it may be held accountable to the citizenry it represents.

The foundation of human rights, however, is found neither in the state nor in some particular human attribute. The foundation is in human dignity. So all rights finally are rooted in God's right, the divine claim over the creation that precedes any human claims. This right has emerged in the course of God's redemptive history with Israel and Christianity, awakening among us unfinished mortals the pain as well as the impassioned commitment necessary for human liberation. Therefore it is from this quite particular origin, the biblical traditions, that the more universal ground of human rights arose.<sup>59</sup> "In the designation of the human being to be the image of God, the right of God to all human beings is expressed. The human rights to life, freedom, community, and self-determination mirror God's right to the human being because the human being is destined to be God's image in all conditions and relationships of life."<sup>60</sup>

It is in the future, then, that human rights are grounded, because in the future our God-given identity will be completed and our deadly inhumanity overcome. "Human rights mirror the claim of the coming God and of his future upon human beings."<sup>61</sup> These

rights derive from the full range of our multiple relationships as God's image, and so they include not only a right to rule over the earth but the right and duty to be in community with the non-human creation. And those rights do involve responsibilities as well; in overcoming "an egoism of the generations" we must keep faith with nature and with future generations. Because various societies develop human rights in a one-sided, partisan direction (the West exalting individual political rights, for instance, and the East favoring collective economic rights), Christianity should defend the indivisibility, the intrinsic interrelatedness of all such rights. A "just balance of concerns" can be maintained, even while advancing the overall level of rights, and thereby "the unity of human rights should act as a pointer to the future of a universal established community of all people and nations."<sup>62</sup>

Human freedom is another theme discussed worldwide, but to which Christian theology should contribute. The secular concept of freedom had its primordial beginnings in power over nature and early humanity's first steps in transcending the realm of compulsion and necessity. Such negative notions developed, under Western liberalism, into political definitions of freedom as sovereignty over "the other." Another secular view of freedom was striving for community, for actualizing the Good, which has become partly reflected in how socialist societies defined freedom. Christianity embraces both earlier modes of viewing freedom, but also presses beyond them in (unsurprisingly) a trinitarian comprehensiveness. That is, freedom must also include creative initiative, a messianic dream of the new, of unprecedented possibilities. "Freedom as the lordship of man over objects and subject is a function of property. Freedom as community between people is a social function. Freedom as a passion for the future is a creative function. We might sum it up by saying that the first means having, the second being, and the third becoming."<sup>63</sup>

Moreover, these functions of freedom have evolved cumulatively, in a three-fold pattern reflecting Joachim of Fiore's medieval doctrine of the successive kingdom of God on earth, first as Father, then as Son, and finally as Holy Spirit. The millennialism implied in Joachim's schema provides Moltmann's own trinitarian eschatology with a welcome historical precedent. The resulting "strata in the concept of freedom"<sup>64</sup> point us toward the promise of the future. In the kingdom of the Father we are the Creator's property and servants, in the kingdom of the Son we are made children of the Father, and in the kingdom of the Spirit we advance to become God's friends, addressing God boldly in prayer. These distinctions demonstrate that, like the concept of human rights, "freedom itself is indivisible and all-comprehensive. That is why every partial freedom presses forward to total freedom and to the freedom of the whole creation."<sup>65</sup> Again, capping this analysis, the culminating glory is anticipated. "When God is known face to face, the freedom of God's servants, his children and his friends finally finds its fulfillment in God himself. Then freedom means the unhindered participation in the eternal life of the triune God himself, and in his inexhaustible fullness and glory."<sup>66</sup>

Moltmann's later writings on being human are also more concerned with wholistic reformulations of body and soul. At one level, this turn seems prompted by social concerns: his discussions with feminist theology<sup>67</sup> and concern for our planet's ecology. Since humanity can neither retreat from modernity nor allow it to continue its present reckless course, we must try instead to "reinvent modernity." And this means, among other things, "a new *non-androcentric* and *non-anthropocentric* anthropology [which] will set free the bod-

illness and sensuousness of human existence . . .<sup>68</sup> But at a deeper, more theological level Moltmann's wholistic thought grows out of the flowering of his pneumatology, the vitality and integrity of the Spirit of Life which so infuses his recent work.

We will note here especially the latest two volumes of his *Systematic Contributions*, dealing with the Spirit and (in a return to his original theme) eschatology. These volumes are notable for displaying the theme of bodiliness as well as his new methodological reliance on human experience. "By experience of the Spirit," he says, "I mean an awareness of God in, with, and beneath the experience of life, which gives us assurance of God's fellowship, friendship, and love."<sup>69</sup> So bodily life and death are not just biological facts, but are to be analyzed as fundamental experiences.<sup>70</sup> And no analysis of death and eschatology should detract from the present moment, but should ever enrich and deepen the living of life here and now.

Increasingly, then, we find Moltmann's focus to be on human wholeness—a wholeness which is embraced by the Spirit of Life (his preferred phrase for the Holy Spirit)<sup>71</sup> and the hope of the resurrection. Before God we stand in our comprehensiveness—in all the temporal stages of our life, in our individuality as well as our sociality, in the living interplay of erotic love, in open friendship with people who are diverse, in the bonds of past and successive generations, and in our relatedness to the natural world we also transcend.<sup>72</sup> Sexual differentiation, for example, is intrinsic to our divine likeness, for God created not just one individual but a triadic family: Adam, Eve, and Seth.

[T]he anthropological triangle determines the existence of every human being: everyone is a man *or* a woman, *and* the child of his or her parents. The relation between man and wife signifies the inextinguishable sociality of human beings, while the relation between parents and children denotes the equally unalterable generativity of human beings. The first is the simultaneous community of the sexes in space; the second the community of the generations in time. If the whole human being is designated the image of God, then true human community—the community of the sexes and the community of the generations—has the same designation.<sup>73</sup>

It is these manifold dimensions which, as we have seen, attest our trinitarian likeness to God, a mutual perichoresis that awaits future completion. And most broadly, Moltmann's hope has come to be undergirded by "a panentheistic vision of the world in God, and God in the world."<sup>74</sup>

The relationship of body and soul, therefore, must be redefined accordingly. An unbiblical dualism has long separated the two. As we noted, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas identified the *imago Dei* with the intellect, a sexless soul, ruling as "sovereign" over the body just as a monarchical God must govern a passive world. So the future life was pictured as an immortality of the soul. Apart from bodily life, however, the soul begins implicitly to displace the function of God, acquiring the divine quality of impervious self-unity. Plato, Descartes, Fichte, Barth—each in his own way contributed to a false spiritualization that reduced the human body (and thereby women as well as the world of nature) to mere instrumental status.<sup>75</sup> Another consequence of this dualism is the ancient (and now revived) doctrine of transmigration of souls. Ideas of reincarnation, to be sure,

have the advantage of promoting empathy with sequential generations, but they also subvert any sense of personal identity amid a bewildering succession of life-forms. Moreover, the accompanying doctrine of Karma, with its iron chain of deeds-and-results, mandates a pitiless retribution that is quite incompatible with a principle of grace.<sup>75</sup>

The wholeness of body and soul, then, is important. And it is best defended by a doctrine of the Spirit as well as of Resurrection. Broadly defined, spirit means "the forms of organization and communication of all open systems of matter and life"<sup>77</sup>; as such, spirit is not at all antithetical to the body. Since persons are the high example of a living open system, a person's spirit is "the anticipatory structure of his whole physical, mental, and spiritual existence"<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, spirit is the communication between persons that enriches life, and is the loving affirmation that risks pain because of its passionate embrace of life.<sup>79</sup> So there is no need for a distinguishable "soul" enduring timelessly, but rather there is the undying Spirit of life as an entirety, the undying relationship which God has with humanity and humanity has with God.<sup>80</sup> That vitality surges throughout the creation and infuses us with the love of life. And we experience God in quite sensual ways, such as the laying on of hands, embracing, the holy kiss, and the shared meal.<sup>81</sup> So the body has its own dignity; it is no preliminary encasement of human identity, but constitutes the temple of the Spirit (1 Cor. 6:13ff.). Indeed "embodiment is the end of all God's works,"<sup>82</sup> the convergence of spirit and flesh which will be transfigured in the cosmic redemption.

But the body has its limits. What then of death? Is it a natural part of the creation, or is it primordially unnatural, a punishment injected only after human sin?<sup>83</sup> Certainly Moltmann rejects the latter alternative. Reversing the claim that death is "the wages of sin" (Rom. 6:23), he sees sin instead as "the wages" that result from death—that is, the anxious arrogance, the violence prompted first by a consciousness that we are mortal. Death is not a punishment—either for Adam's sin or our own. Instead we die a "natural death." But neither does Moltmann accept the former alternative, death as a natural part of creation, for he defines "nature" as "no longer what is primal and not yet what is final"<sup>84</sup> It is that time of creation comparable to winter—temporarily real but awaiting the fruitful splendor of springtime. So death is "natural" only as an aspect of the present stage of the unfulfilled creation, and our deaths mark our solidarity with its groaning as the creation awaits glorification (Rom. 8:19ff.). Once again, our creatureliness binds us humans to all forms of life on our planet, as we wait together in hope.

Meanwhile, we live bodily lives, whether healthy or not. The concept of health should be redefined, says Moltmann, for the modern world coddles an impossible ideal: health as complete physical, social, and mental wellbeing. So defined, the ideal becomes an idol, a morbid preoccupation that isolates the sick from industrialized society, marginalizes the handicapped, and threatens to bring a crisis of basic confidence in life every time we fall ill. It is far better instead to define health as an attitude, quite independent of our fluctuating bodily conditions. "Health is not the absence of malfunctions. Health is the strength to live with them."<sup>85</sup> It is "the strength to be human," throughout our living and our dying.

Will death then ultimately be destroyed (1 Cor. 15:26; Rev. 20:14; 19:20)? The later Moltmann has become less fond of biblical apocalyptic language and so he hesitates at this point. Rather than resting content with a flat negation of the negative, he prefers now to underline "a new position of being" that has been opened up and prefigured by the

transfiguration of Jesus' crucified body. So it is better to say that death will then no longer be able to exist because with the resurrection of the dead, the creaturely world will receive imperishable life from the divine life. Then will begin our great metamorphosis, our enduring presence in God's presence.<sup>86</sup>

This is Moltmann's legacy in theological anthropology thus far. It is a vision of being human, as images of the Trinity who await their fulfillment, but who meanwhile exercise human rights and freedom in their bodily life. It is a constructive and timely legacy, which now will be best served by further discussion.

#### NOTES

1. Jürgen Moltmann, "Reflections," reply to M. Douglas Meeks, "Jürgen Moltmann's *Systematic Contributions to Theology*," *Religious Studies Review*, 22:2 (April 1996), p. 102.
2. Moltmann, personal letter to the author, June 29, 1980.
3. See G. Clarke Chapman, "Moltmann's Vision of Man," *Anglican Theological Review* LVI:3 (July 1974), pp. 310-30.
4. For example, Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), pp. 213, 337; Jürgen Moltmann, *Hope and Planning* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 47, 70. Citations of Plessner continue in Moltmann's recent work as well.
5. Jürgen Moltmann, *Man: Christian Anthropology in the Conflicts of the Present* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), p. x; see the original in *Mensch* (Stuttgart: Kreuz, 1971), p. 8.
6. Moltmann, *Man*, pp. 16-17; Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, p. 285.
7. Moltmann, "Man and the Son of Man," in *No Man Is Alien*, J.R. Nelson, ed. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971), p. 210.
8. Moltmann, *Hope and Planning*, p. 80. See Moltmann, *Der verborgene Mensch* (Wuppertal-Barmen: Jugenddienst, 1961), pp. 26-31.
9. Jürgen Moltmann, *Religion, Revolution and the Future* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), p. 154.
10. Jürgen Moltmann, *Die Sprache der Befreiung: Predigten und Besinnungen* (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1972), p. 155; Moltmann, *Hope and Planning*, p. 81; Moltmann, *Der verborgene Mensch*, pp. 27-28.
11. Moltmann, *Religion*, p. 30. The original German essay referred specifically to "the hell in Vietnam," but the English version softens this! Compare Jürgen Moltmann, *Umkkehr zur Zukunft* (Munich: Siebenstern, 1970), p. 121.
12. Moltmann, *Religion*, p. 103; Moltmann, "Man and the Son of Man," p. 216.
13. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, p. 338.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 196, 285.
15. Moltmann, "Man and the Son of Man," p. 208. See also Jürgen Moltmann, *Perspektiven der Theologie* (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1968), p. 203; Moltmann, *Religion*, pp. 76, 151; Moltmann, *Hope and Planning*, p. 108.
16. Moltmann, *Hope and Planning*, p. 24.
17. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, p. 91. See pp. 286, 337, and Moltmann, *Religion*, p. 154.
18. Moltmann, *Man*, p. 117.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
21. Moltmann, *Hope and Planning*, p. 105.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 108. See Moltmann, *Perspektiven*, p. 210, and Jürgen Moltmann, "Antwort auf die Kritik der Theologie der Hoffnung," *Diskussion über die 'Theologie der Hoffnung' von Jürgen Moltmann*, ed. W.D. Marsch (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1967), p. 237.

23. Moltmann, "Man and the Son of Man," p. 210; Moltmann, *Man*, pp. 10-11, referring here to Plessner.
24. Moltmann, *Sprache der Befreiung*, p. 149; see Moltmann, *Hope and Planning*, pp. 15, 81; Moltmann, *Religion*, pp. 76-77; Moltmann, *Perspectives*, p. 205.
25. Moltmann, *Religion*, pp. 122-27. See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), pp. 332-35.
26. Moltmann, "Man and the Son of Man," pp. 219-20; Moltmann, *Religion*, pp. 37-41.
27. Moltmann, *Religion*, pp. 215-16; Moltmann, "Antwort," pp. 233-34; Moltmann, *Perspectives*, p. 195; Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, p. 28. See Moltmann, "The Cross and Civil Religion," *Religion and Political Society*, Jürgen Moltmann, et al. (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), pp. 41-45.
28. Moltmann, *Religion*, p. 33. The destiny to become "like God" was a favorite theme of Ernst Bloch, which has had some influence on Moltmann—although he remains critical of its extremes. See Moltmann, *Man*, pp. 47-59, and G. Clarke Chapman, "Jürgen Moltmann and the Christian Dialogue with Marxism," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 18:3 (Summer 1981), pp. 435-50.
29. Moltmann, *Theology of Play* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), pp. 42-43; interview with Moltmann, Sept. 13, 1972.
30. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, pp. 22-25.
31. Moltmann, *Man*, pp. 106-7, 114-15; Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, pp. 223, 251-52.
32. Moltmann, *Man*, pp. 46-104.
33. Moltmann, *Theology of Play*, pp. 45-56.
34. Moltmann, "Man and the Son of Man," p. 213.
35. Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, p. 253.
36. Moltmann, "Man and the Son of Man," p. 211; Moltmann, *Man*, pp. 108-9.
37. Moltmann, *Religion*, p. 56. See Moltmann, "Hoffnung und die biomedizinische Zukunft des Menschen," *Evangelische Theologie* 32 (July-August 1972): 321-22.
38. Moltmann, "Man and the Son of Man," pp. 211-12; Moltmann, *Man*, pp. 109-11.
39. Moltmann, *Religion*, p. 59; Moltmann, *Perspektiven*, p. 126.
40. Moltmann, *Man*, p. 57.
41. Moltmann, *Theology of Play*, p. 18; Moltmann, *Perspectives*, p. 194; Moltmann, *Man*, p. 109.
42. Jürgen Moltmann, *On Human Dignity: Political Theology and Ethics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), p. 10.
43. Jürgen Moltmann, *Das Kommen Gottes: Christliche Eschatologie* (Gütersloher: Chr. Kaiser, 1995), p. 140 (my translation).
44. John O'Donnell sees a pronounced shift from Moltmann's early, more hostile references to nature as an entity against which we struggle and which will be *aufgehoben* in history, to Moltmann's later, more empathetic view of nature; see his "Exploring the Human: Theology in Dialogue," *Gregorianum* 67:1 (1986), pp. 128-29.
45. Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), p. 185.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 228; see pp. 187-90.
47. *Ibid.*, pp. 215-29.
48. Moltmann, *On Human Dignity*, pp. 23-26.
49. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), p. 73.
50. Moltmann, *God in Creation*, p. 225.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 226.
52. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), p. 96.
53. Moltmann, *God in Creation*, p. 233.

54. *Ibid.*, pp. 237-39.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 242.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 241.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 243.
58. Moltmann, "Covenant oder Leviathan? Zur Politischen Theologie der Neuzeit," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 90:3 (August 1993), p. 311 (my translation).
59. Here some critics take serious issue with Moltmann as well as traditional Christianity, claiming that a quality that is universal (the claim to human rights) cannot be founded on a special (i.e., biblical) theology. See John A. Henley, "Theology and the Basis of Human Rights," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 39:3 (1986), pp. 361-78.
60. *On Human Dignity*, p. 17. This collection contains Moltmann's essays "Ecumenical Dialogue on Human Rights" and "Christian Faith and Human Rights."
61. *Ibid.*, p. 22; see p. 17.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 34; see pp. 23-35.
63. Moltmann, *The Trinity and The Kingdom*, p. 217; see pp. 213-18.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 221.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 222.
66. *Ibid.*
67. Generally Moltmann's thought has been welcomed by most feminist theologians, and he in turn has learned from and conversed with them—not least of all, his spouse, Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel. For an approving appropriation of his views on being human, see Mary L. Bringle, "Leaving the Cocoon: Moltmann's Anthropology and Feminist Theology," *Andover Newton Quarterly* 20 (Jan. 1980): 153-61, and also Rosemary Radford Ruether's remarks in "Christian Anthropology and Gender: A Tribute to Jürgen Moltmann," in *The Future of Theology: Essays in Honor of Jürgen Moltmann*, ed. Miroslav Volf, et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 241-52, especially p. 241.
68. Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology and the Future of the Modern World* "Plenary Address at the Annual Meeting of the AAR/SBL, Nov. 21, 1994" (Pittsburgh: The Association of Theological Schools, 1995), p. 7.
69. Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, p. 17.
70. Moltmann, *Das Kommen Gottes*, pp. 65-74.
71. Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, "Preface," pp. x-xiii.
72. *Ibid.*, pp. 251-63; Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, pp. 267-72.
73. Moltmann, *God in Creation*, p. 241.
74. Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, p. 211.
75. Moltmann, *God in Creation*, pp. 247-55; Moltmann, *Das Kommen Gottes*, pp. 74-82.
76. Moltmann, *Das Kommen Gottes*, pp. 132-37.
77. Moltmann, *God in Creation*, p. 263.
78. *Ibid.*, p. 265.
79. *Ibid.*, pp. 266-70.
80. Moltmann, *Das Kommen Gottes*, pp. 88-89.
81. Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, pp. 263-67.
82. Moltmann, *God in Creation*, pp. 239f, 244-46; the phrase is borrowed from F. Oetinger.
83. Moltmann, *Das Kommen Gottes*, pp. 96-115.
84. *Ibid.*, p. 110 (my translation); see pp. 108-12.
85. Moltmann, *God in Creation*, p. 273, quoting D. Rössler. See pp. 270-75, and an earlier statement in "The Humanity of Living and Dying," in *The Experiment Hope* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), pp. 147-57.
86. *Das Kommen Gottes*, pp. 102-3.