JÜRGEN MOLTMANN’S ECOLOGICAL THEOLOGY IN PROCESS PERSPECTIVE

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Process thinkers in the United States long thought that German theology, even when it affirmed itself as nonphilosophical, was too deeply under the sway of Kant to take the world of nature seriously. This seemed true of the Neo-orthodox theologians, and the shift to an emphasis on the future and on political liberation did not seem to change matters much in this regard. Theologians who turned to Hegel for inspiration were partly freed from the anthropocentrism so strongly established by Kant, but only partly. Even Thomists, who had in their heritage the possibility of overcoming Kant, have tended instead to reinterpret Thomas to fit the Kantian, anthropocentric mold.

The most striking exception has been Jürgen Moltmann. For many years he has taken the ecological problem seriously. For a long time, almost alone among political and liberation theologians, he included “peace with nature” as an essential part of the goal. Gradually others have followed. But it is only just to recognize his pioneering work and his continuing leadership in an area that appears to process theologians to be of utmost importance.

When I wrote my critical evaluations of several German political theologians in Process Theology as Political Theology I recognized and affirmed this distinctive contribution of Moltmann. I nevertheless presented process theology as an ecological theology to be, in general, compared with the societal focus of political theology. Despite impressive statements about the importance of ecological issues, Moltmann had not, at that time, written extensively or thematically on the topic. Sometimes what he did write seemed to instruct us more about practical attitudes that are needed than about the actual condition of nature, humanity, and God.

When I was asked to write again about Moltmann’s political theology for this volume, I requested permission to focus my remarks on his Gifford lectures of 1984-85, God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation. I had not previously had the...
chance to respond to this book. Because it is such an important statement on a topic of such central interest to me, I appreciate the permission given me to write about it.

What is most striking to a process theologian is the wide range of agreement in the understanding of the ecological problem and of how theology is, and should be, related to it. Secondly, there is wide agreement on how Christians should understand the natural world and the place of humanity within it. Thirdly, there is wide agreement as to the relation of God to humanity and to the natural world. Fourthly, whereas we process theologians have done little more than claim that our views are congenial to the Bible, Moltmann has developed very similar ideas quite directly out of his study of the Bible. For all of this, process theologians can only be grateful and stand in admiration of Moltmann’s creativity, scholarship, and wisdom.

There is, nevertheless, a parting of the ways. Moltmann distinguishes three phases or periods in God’s relation to the world. There is, first, the phase before the creation of the world culminating in calling the world into being out of nothing. There is, second, the phase in which we live and which exhausts our empirical knowledge: namely, that in which God pervades the creation and guides it. There is, third, the phase of consummation, that to which we look forward in hope.

The close correspondence between Moltmann and process theology is in what he says about the second phase. Process theologians claim no knowledge of either the first or the third phase in so far as those phases differ fundamentally from the present one. Moltmann, on the other hand, speculates freely on these phases, drawing, of course, on biblical and traditional images but going far beyond them.

Process theologians are not averse to speculation. We understand our philosophical method to be speculative. However, we see speculation as an intermediate stage to be followed by empirical testing—understanding “empirical” here very broadly and loosely. That is, speculation is the framing of hypotheses which are to be tentatively adopted to the extent that they illuminate the available data or guide in the discovery of new data. Moltmann’s speculations are not subject to this kind of test.

Moltmann’s speculations are not, however, casual or idle. They are in the service of rendering certain traditional Christian doctrines consistent with what we now know of the world through the natural sciences. Hence they can be tested in two directions: the natural sciences and traditional doctrines. With regard to the former it is required that they not be in contradiction. With regard to the latter it is required that they be confirmatory.

Process theologians seek a stronger relation to the former and demand less in relation to the latter. For us the Bible and Christian tradition are sources of hypotheses about the way things are and should be, hypotheses which seem to us of utmost importance. Indeed, we know that our own perceptions and convictions are deeply formed by them. But we think it necessary to differentiate between those convictions that most deeply shape our lives now and beliefs that were plausible and convincing in earlier times but are less so today. This leads us to limit ourselves to hypotheses about how God and the world are now related and to push to the extreme periphery speculations about possible phases of God’s life before and after the time we now experience.

It has been my intention to formulate this difference descriptively rather than normatively. As one who believes that Christian wisdom should go on the offensive against the
limitations of the dominant modern and postmodern minds, I am deeply impressed with Moltmann’s achievement. He preserves and makes somewhat plausible numerous themes and subthemes of the Bible and tradition that I have viewed as expressing a worldview that can no longer be taken with full seriousness. He shakes my own skepticism. I am grateful.

Furthermore, his presentation of all of these doctrines is keenly sensitive to the danger that they can be used in negative ways. As in all his writings, the practical implication of doctrines is as important to Moltmann as their theoretical justification. For example, process theologians have been concerned that the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo is so associated with views of God’s unilateral exercise of coercive power as to adversely affect our concern for the self-determination of creatures. We have also thought that it presents a view of power over the powerless that has distorted Christian understanding and exercise of power. Moltmann shows that the doctrine can be maintained without any such negative consequences. Thus he disarms much of the criticism process theologians have directed toward the traditional doctrine he affirms.

Despite these remarkable achievements, I remain doubtful that this is the best way to go. In a time when the appeal to traditional authority arouses so much suspicion, I wonder whether gaining a hearing for Christian wisdom may not be handicapped by the extent of this appeal in Moltmann. There are times when he presents Christian views as carrying forward current secular thinking and solving problems inherent in it. If we limit ourselves to putting forward Christian insights in this way, they may gain greater credibility than when we call for acceptance of particular speculations as the only way to save otherwise incredible traditional Christian doctrines.

In the remainder of this essay I will discuss these very general comments in some detail. Section 1 will consider Moltmann’s account of the ecological crisis and how that informs his theology. Section 2 will discuss his eschatology as formulated in this volume. Section 3 will interact with his doctrine of creation out of nothing. Section 4 will return to the agreement between process theologians and Moltmann in the understanding of our present world and the task of theology within it. Section 5 will conclude with appreciative comments on Moltmann’s fresh and original discussion of the Sabbath.

I. THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS IN MOLTMANN’S THEOLOGY

In the Preface Moltmann writes:

What we call the environmental crisis is not merely a crisis in the natural environment of human beings. It is nothing less than a crisis in human beings themselves. It is a crisis of life on this planet, a crisis so comprehensive and so irreversible that it can not unjustly be described as apocalyptic. It is not a temporary crisis. As far as we can judge, it is the beginning of a life and death struggle for creation on the earth. (p. xi)

Moltmann appreciates how profoundly contemporary institutions and practices must change.

The processes which intervene destructively in the natural environment originate in the economic and social processes. So if the destruction of nature is to be halted,
the economic and social conditions of human society must be changed. Societies which are primarily out to develop production, and increase the efficiency of human labor, and make further strides in already existing technologies, can neither restrict nor overcome the progressive destruction of the environment which they are causing. (pp. 23-24)

Since there are few signs that the socio-economic system described by Moltmann is losing its hold on global affairs and many signs that it is growing ever more totalitarian in its control, Moltmann's accurate statements are deeply disturbing. Like others of us who share his judgments, however, Moltmann is not able to keep this understanding fully in view as he writes his book. Precisely because he deals so thoroughly and insightfully with traditional ideas and debates that were formulated when this crisis did not exist, at least as a planetary one, the reader can lose sight of the crisis in large sections of the book. Furthermore, Moltmann does not think it is part of the theologian's task directly to challenge the contemporary economism at whose altar the world now worships or to propose alternatives. Nevertheless, awareness of the crisis deeply informs Moltmann's thinking.

In this regard the major systematic theological question left unclear in the book is how to relate the Christian promise of a new creation to the degradation of the earth. Recognizing that we are in "a life and death struggle for creation on this earth" and that the creation in question includes us, one would anticipate that the Christian hope for a new creation would be explained in relation to the apparent threat of planetary death. Regrettably this does not happen. The promise of a glorious future formulated when no such life and death struggle was going on is renewed by Moltmann without reference to this struggle.

The danger, from my point of view, is that this kind of promise can distract attention from the life and death struggle. It can tell Christians that, serious as planetary dangers appear, they should not be allowed to weaken our sure confidence. I am not saying that Moltmann in fact communicates that kind of otherworldly message. But he does leave us in a tension between genuine concern about the fate of the planet and the confidence that all will be well regardless of what we do or fail to do.

On the one hand, he tells us, rightly: "Unless there is a radical reversal in the fundamental orientation of our human societies, and unless we succeed in finding an alternative way of living and dealing with other living things and with nature, this crisis is going to end in a wholesale catastrophe" (p. 20). On the other hand, he assures us:

Participation in the divine nature and conformity to God, flowering into perfect resemblance, are the marks of the promised glorification of human beings. The God-likeness that belongs to creation in the beginning becomes God-sonship and daughterhood in the messianic fellowship with the Son, and out of the two springs the transfiguration of human beings in the glory of the new creation. (p. 229)

One is left wondering whether this new creation is to arise out of the wholesale catastrophe, or whether Christian believers can be confident that in fact no such catastrophe will occur. This problem could be avoided if we understood the new creation to be another world alongside this one. But that is far from the tenor of Moltmann's eschatolog-
ical thought either in this book or in earlier ones.

This problem that seems so central to me is not the one that occupies Moltmann’s attention. His concern is to rethink the Christian doctrine of creation in such a way that it removes any possible support for those features of Western culture that have led to irresponsible degradation of the natural world. This is surely an extremely important undertaking.

Moltmann sees the problem in terms of Western affirmation and practice of human domination. Although the practice of domination belongs to modern technological societies, Moltmann recognizes that the way the Christian doctrine of creation was understood in the West provided a favorable context. This is especially true of the way in which the command to “subdue the earth” was read. Moltmann’s project is to reclaim the biblical and traditional teaching of creation from these modern distortions and, instead, to present it as supportive of the new relation of human beings to nature that is so urgently needed.

Despite his recognition that Christian tradition could be used in support of modern domination of nature, it is important to Moltmann to minimize its role. He does not here simply point to science, technology, and new social structures as bearing the chief responsibility. Instead he points to the emergence of the nominalist philosophy. According to this, Moltmann points out,

God is almighty, and *potentia absoluta* is the pre-eminent attribute of his divinity. Consequently God’s image on earth, the human being (which in actual practice meant the man) had to strive for power and domination so that he might acquire his divinity. Power became the foremost predicate of the deity, not goodness and truth. (pp. 26-27)

Reading this as a process theologian, I am deeply appreciative. We have been critiquing the idea that God is to be understood in terms of totally controlling power for a long time. We prefer to understand God’s power as persuasive and empowering. We, too, have seen nominalism as having given the starkest expression to the objectionable view of divine omnipotence.

Nevertheless, there is some difference. In reading Moltmann one might come to the conclusion that this feature of nominalism was a minor and temporary deviation from an otherwise favorable Christian tradition. Thus one could remain comfortable with the tradition as a whole and simply reject this minor aberration. One might even suppose that nominalism was not really a part of the Christian tradition at all. Moltmann says nothing about the large role of nominalist thinking in the Reformers, especially, but not only, in Calvin, and among their followers as well.

From the process perspective it is better to be fully open about the importance of the notion of absolute divine power from an early point in the tradition and its special prominence in the Reformation. We agree that it is a misreading of scripture, and we deeply appreciate Moltmann’s support in exposing this erroneous reading. We agree that the Bible in fact supports an appropriate relation of human beings to the other creatures, one beautifully and brilliantly articulated by Moltmann. But we believe that the Christian tradition bears a larger responsibility for modern domination of nature than Moltmann’s formulations suggest and that many of its contemporary formulations continue to support
destructive human domination.

We think that as Christians today we need to repent of the errors that we have inherited from our tradition rather than minimizing or concealing them. We believe that these errors still influence the way we worship and the way we think and act, that they are not simply incidental errors in the past. As a result, we often polemicize against such elements in the tradition. But in our own understanding, our repentance is itself a fuller following of the deeper tradition.

By repentance I mean here turning or changing direction. This should be accompanied by some pain and regret over the past, but wallowing in guilt is certainly not helpful. Hence the difference from Moltmann is not great. He offers us a way of turning and changing direction, one which I admire and largely appropriate. That is of primary importance. Perhaps Christians can follow him the more easily because he is so little critical of our shared tradition. But from our point of view, there is a danger that when we fail to bring out clearly our collective responsibility for what is destructive in the modern relation to nature, we may not uproot from ourselves the deep-seated habits of thought that are involved.

Moltmann is certainly correct that the primary bearers of domination today are science, technology, and economics. Hence correcting Christian teaching will not suddenly change public attitudes and policies. But as theologians, helping the church to repent is our central responsibility. Clarifying the different sort of science, technology, and economics that are called for by a repentant Christianity will be another important step.

This book by Moltmann is focused on the doctrine of creation. In the first chapter Moltmann provides us with "some guiding ideas for an ecological doctrine of creation." The congeniality of his thought with that of process theology is nowhere more evident than in these guiding ideas.

Alfred North Whitehead, whose work is so influential in process theology, commented that the Alexandrian theologians in their reflection on the relations among the members of the Trinity made the one great metaphysical advance since Plato. This was in their doctrine of the mutual immanence of the persons of the Trinity. Whitehead understood his thought as carrying out that program philosophically. He believed that what is needed in Christian theology also is the extension of this insight to the relation of God and the creatures and of the creatures to one another.

In Moltmann Whitehead's hopes for theology are fulfilled. Moltmann writes:

Our starting point here is that all relationships which are analogous to God reflect the primal, reciprocal indwelling and mutual interpenetration of the trinitarian personhood: God in the world and world in God; heaven and earth in the kingdom of God, pervaded by his glory; soul and body united in the life-giving Spirit to a human whole; woman and man in the kingdom of unconditioned and conditioned love, freed to be true and complete human beings. There is no such thing as solitary life. Contrary to Leibniz's view, every monad has many windows. In actual fact it consists only of windows. All living things—each in its own specific way—live in one another and with one another, from one another and for one another. (p. 17)

This is not a minor part of Moltmann's thought. On the contrary, it shapes his doctrine
of how God is related to the world and the world to God. He rightly employs "panentheism" to name this relationship, for although it initially names only the way creation is in God it has come to imply the immanence of God in the world as well. The difference between panentheism and pantheism is emphasized, rightly, again and again. In all this the agreement of process theologians is virtually complete.

2. ESCHATOLOGY

Moltmann argues that for a doctrine of creation to be Christian it must be messianic.

A Christian doctrine of creation is a view of the world in the light of Jesus the Messiah; and it will be determined by the points of view of the messianic time which has begun with him and which he defines. It is directed towards the liberation of men and women, peace with nature, and the redemption of the community of human beings and nature from negative powers, and from the forces of death. (pp. 4-5)

The understanding of the present and the future are thus intimately bound together.

Human beings already experience the indwellings of God in the Spirit here in history, even if as yet only partially and provisionally. This is why they hope that in the kingdom of glory God will dwell entirely and wholly and for ever in his creation, and will allow all the beings he has created to participate in the fullness of his eternal life. (p. 5)

Although a process theologian can read this passage with appreciation and without disagreement, it also raises questions. First, what is intended by God's dwelling entirely and wholly in "his" creation? It might mean that the creation will lose its creaturely character, that it will become simply part of God. In that case process theologians could not agree. But Moltmann's explanations elsewhere rule out this interpretation.

On the other hand, it might mean simply that the divine indwelling, while having the basic character it now has in creatures, will be more fully expressed in what the creatures, in their freedom and contingency, become. In that case process theologians will devoutly share the hope. But for Moltmann this increased effectiveness of God's indwelling seems not to suffice.

Process theologians can read this passage in terms of our own eschatological thinking. While hoping for a world in which God's presence is much more effective than the present one, we also find assurance in the conviction that in God all creatures live on forever. Much that Moltmann says about his hope fits quite well with this one. Nevertheless, for him it seems to be important that the glorification of which he writes occur at a temporally future point on this planet.

In Moltmann's fuller expositions it seems that at a future time, creatures, while remaining creatures, will become immortal. The nature of time itself will change. The situation for which he hopes is a metaphysically different one from what we now know. Here a process theologian cannot follow. We do not preclude great changes in the cosmos, changes which may be favorable to creaturely life. But we do not consider the cosmic images employed by biblical writers a safe guide to predicting the future destiny of the cosmos today.
We assume that the biblical passages in which images of the hoped-for future are found express the ideas that were available and possible to Jews living and thinking in the context of a radically different worldview from ours. We take them seriously, but not literally. We do not believe they authorize us, in our very different context, to construct anticipations of metaphysical changes in the nature of process and time.

The second key question is about "hope." This is a very important notion for process theologians. We live by hope. But for us it is important to distinguish between our hopes and our assurance. We share with Moltmann hope for radical reversal in the character of our present global society. But this by no means makes us confident that the needed change will occur soon enough to avoid catastrophe for humankind. Our assurance is that whatever happens in the course of events on this planet, God will not be finally defeated, and that God will redeem and preserve forever all that we have been. Some of us also believe that the cosmos we now inhabit has dimensions that radically transcend those to which our sense organs relate us, and that in such dimensions we may live on after death in a changed relation to God. Moltmann's discussion of heaven and comments about angels may mean that he is open to something of this sort as well.

If "hope" had for Moltmann this openness to lack of fulfillment, this recognition that it may be thwarted by human sinfulness, then the fact that his formulations differ somewhat from ours would be a minor point. Hope is most important with regard to how it shapes the efforts and expectations of those who hope and their interpretation of their present. Process thinkers find many apocalyptic formulations disturbing at this point. These picture a future so disconnected from the present as to weaken concern to realize what possibilities the present holds. But Moltmann's sensitivity to such dangers is superior to ours. He has done more than anyone else to formulate Christian hope in a way that draws forth Christian concern for the poor, the oppressed, and the exploited earth. We have learned from him, and we hope to continue learning.

Nevertheless, in our reading of Moltmann, "hope" seems to carry a weight of assurance that is lacking for us. What he finds promised in the Bible, he seems to say, Christians can be assured will come to pass. Thus faith seems to be bound up for him with the confidence that in fact the temporal future will have the metaphysically transformed character that he describes. To us this appears too heavy a burden to place on faith, too tight a connection between faith and a particular metaphysical speculation, one for which our present experience of reality, including our present experience of God and our historical knowledge, provide no support.

The speculative side of Moltmann's work in this book is not a minor one. He devotes entire chapters respectively to "the time of creation" and "the space of creation." These speculations are informed by contemporary science as well as by scripture and tradition. They are original and imaginative. I do not disparage them. Indeed, I commend his daring and his genius. If they are intended only to show that we should not exclude the possibility of radical changes in the nature of time and space, my response would be detailed engagement with his proposals. It is because I read them as claiming more than this—much more—that I distance myself from them.
3. CREATIO EX Nihilo

Metaphysical changes in the future are discussed by Moltmann in connection with metaphysical changes in the past, and it is here that he engages process theology most directly. He rightly accuses process theologians of opposing the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo.* It is our belief that the theological strengths of this doctrine can be retained without raising the mysterious and fruitless questions about what God was doing before creating the world.

The traditional doctrine rightly affirms that nothing other than God now exists or ever existed apart from God's creative work. It rightly affirms, therefore, that there is no matter existing apart from God. It also rightly affirms that the world did not emanate from God, that is, that it is not of divine substance. And, finally, it rightly makes impossible any form of pantheism or any identification of the world with God.

But with all its strengths, it also has weaknesses from the point of view of process theologians. (1) It requires a beginning of time, or at least of what we know as time, thereby raising questions about "before time" that are unintelligible to our creaturely minds. (2) It implies that the way God worked in the beginning is discontinuous with the way God works now. (3) It encourages a doctrine of radical transcendence that is at odds with Christian teaching of incarnation and the indwelling Spirit. (4) It supports thinking of God in terms of unilateral actions upon the world from without and expectations that God will intervene in such ways to save us from our predicaments or to prevent such horrors as the Holocaust. (5) And because of the attempt of human beings, especially of men, to model themselves upon their understanding of God, it encourages a quest for control and domination on the part of men.

Moltmann is keenly sensitive to the third, fourth, and fifth of these dangers. Although I am not sure that his sensitivity can prevent some tendency in these directions being supported by his doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo,* I have nothing but admiration for the way in which he deals with those features of the doctrine that have been, for me, most troubling. Hence, what divides us is the insistence that time as we know it must have had a beginning and that God's mode of being and action prior to that time differed from God's subsequent behavior.

I do not wish to dispute the abstract possibility that this is so. Some people see the current astrophysics of the Big Bang as supporting such a view. I, on the other hand, find Kant convincing on the point that we can neither think beginninglessness nor a beginning; so my mind boggles at these questions. I do not pretend to understand my own preferred doctrine of the beginninglessness of time. I have thought it sufficiently difficult to understand the temporality and spatiality in which we are now immersed, and I have seen no theological need to speculate about another one. Indeed, I have seen it as theologically dangerous and damaging.

It is certainly correct that *creatio ex nihilo* has been a part of the Christian theological tradition. If this fact alone makes it necessary for the contemporary theologian to affirm it, then I understand Moltmann's commitment. My own judgment is that this fact does not make it necessary for the contemporary theologian to understand the theologically important concerns that the doctrine expresses. I have given my list of such concerns above. To be persuaded that more is gained than lost by taking on this burden to credulity as a
requirement of faith, I will need to hear some concrete gains to contemporary faith that cannot be attained in another way, namely, the way I have adopted.

I find two such arguments at least implicit in this book of Moltmann. First, he claims that the Bible supports the doctrine of creaatio ex nihilo. He is a far better biblical scholar than I, and I do not doubt that his conclusions are possible, even plausible. On the other hand, it is unlikely that a beginning of time was an issue among the ancient Hebrews or among the Jews of Jesus' day. The overwhelming likelihood, I believe, is that there was no clearly articulated consensus. Contemporary scholars differ in their interpretation of the first verse of Genesis, and Jews have never been as committed to creaatio ex nihilo as Christians.

Even if we suppose that most biblical writers if asked the question would have opted for a beginning of time, that is not in itself of much importance. We would have to ask what that meant to them in terms of their understanding of themselves, of the world, of God, and of the future. If these meanings are central to biblical faith, do they require a beginning of time in order to flourish? If not, then we are no more bound to this than to the biblical cosmology generally.

Moltmann himself, when relating biblical teaching to evolutionary theory, provides for the kind of freedom that process theologians assume also with regard to creaatio ex nihilo.

Like the other writings of the Old and New Testament, the biblical creation narratives originated in different historical eras. Each of them itself represents a successful synthesis between belief in creation and knowledge of nature. It is a biblicist misunderstanding of the biblical testimonies to think that they are laying down once for all particular findings about nature, and render all further research superfluous. The history of the biblical traditions themselves shows that the stories of creation belong within a hermeneutical process of revision and innovation, as the result of new experiences. Since they are testimonies to the history of God with the world, they themselves actually direct their readers to new experiences of the world in this divine history. This means that they offer themselves for productive new interpretation and further development. So it is not merely possible to relate the biblical testimonies about creation and God's history with his creation, to new insights about nature, and new theories about the interpretation of these insights; it is actually necessary to make this connection, and to reformulate the biblical testimonies in the light of these things. The openness for ever-new syntheses is rooted in the openness for the future which we find in the biblical testimonies themselves. But it is of course also true that this openness for the future turns every synthesis into a provisional draft, and permits no dogmatism. (pp. 192-193)

Given this understanding of biblical authority, it is clear that Moltmann's commitment to a beginning of time as we know it does not arise from the slight and indirect support that a few biblical texts provide for this speculation. The process treatment of this doctrine conforms fully to the implications of this excellent passage. Hence Moltmann's criticism of process theology on this point must rest on something deeper than its possible nonconformity to biblical teaching.
This deeper ground is the second argument which I find implicit in this book. The plausibility of a metaphysical change in the cosmic situation in the future is bound up with the idea that there has been an analogous change in the past. Only if time as we know it had a beginning are we likely to believe that time as we know it will have an end. Since the way God acts in our time is not of the sort that would bring about a metaphysical change, we must believe that God is capable of a mode of action not taking place in our time. The strongest way to demonstrate that ability is to argue for *creatio ex nihilo*.

Whereas *creatio ex nihilo* is at best peripheral to biblical writings, hope for a radical transformation of the world is central, especially in the New Testament. Furthermore, in the New Testament the hope is also a profound confidence. The failure to share that confidence on the part of process theologians expresses a distance from the New Testament that is, understandably, unacceptable to Moltmann. This failure on our part is an expression of our expectation that God has acted in the past and will act in the future in much the way God acts in the present. We understand that way of acting and its purposes to be revealed in Jesus. We share the hope that these purposes will be fulfilled on earth as in heaven. But we do not envision even the ideal fulfilment of that hope as involving a metaphysical change. And we are by no means sure that God’s purposes will in fact ever by so fully realized as we pray may be the case.

How can we justify our distance from the expectation so important in major parts of the New Testament? First, we assume that in fact the expectation was not fulfilled as anticipated. The transformation was expected imminently. To suppose that in all respects except timing the expectation was accurate and grounds the assurance that at some time it will be fulfilled seems to us arbitrary.

The hope of Jesus, Paul, and others was conditioned by specific features of their time and place. It cannot be turned into absolute truth. On the other hand, this stance of hope, and specifically for God’s will to be done on earth, has proved to be of immense worth in that history in which it has operated. No one has displayed this so fully and insightfully as Moltmann. For Moltmann this means that our hope must be for at least as radical a change as any biblical author imagined. For process theologians the challenge is so to formulate hope as to continue many of the consequences effected by New Testament images of hope that are no longer convincing today. Still, we respect Moltmann’s theological program even where it does not speak to the need we feel within ourselves and see widely expressed in the old-line churches in the United States.

Moltmann’s program involves setting the whole of our cosmic epoch in a larger context of before and after. Our efforts are exhausted in seeking to find hope within our cosmic epoch. The difference, then, is great.

### 4. Congenialities with Process Theology

What is remarkable is that, when Moltmann attends to our cosmic epoch, he sees humanity, the world, and God in ways so very congenial to that of process theologians. I indicated above our agreement on the mutual indwelling of God and creatures as well as of creatures one with another. Quite strikingly, the agreement goes further, into more technical matters.

Although process theologians do not speculate about the beginning and the end of our
cosmic epoch and about what preceded it and what will follow, we do speculate about how God acts in our world. Those who follow Whitehead understand God to order potentials in such a way as to call us each moment into a new future, realizing what value is possible for us in such a way as to benefit others as well. Whitehead speaks of this ordering of potentials for the sake of creatures as the Primordial Nature of God. It is God's valuation of these potentials for us that enters into our becoming each moment, giving us direction and freedom. Without this participation of God in the creature, no creature comes into being.

Consider now a passage from Moltmann:

God the Creator is the source of creative potentialities, and for the potencies for the creation and completion of the processes we have described. By determining that he will be the Creator of his world, God decides out of the whole wealth of his potentialities in favor of the potentialities which are creative and against those that are destructive; he decides for the process of creation and against its omission, says the doctrine of decrees. But if the resolve is an essential resolve, and not an arbitrary decree, then the whole wealth of potentiality of the divine Being flows into the fount of creative potentialities. There is no 'dark side' to God—no side where he could also be conceived of as the destroyer of his creation and of his own being as Creator. If God is himself supreme goodness and truth, then the wealth of his potentialities is determined by his essential nature. 'All things are possible with God' does not mean his undetermined omnipotence; it means the determined power of his goodness. (p. 168)

Remarkable also are the similarities in the treatment of evolution. Process theologians have often felt ourselves in a lonely place. We reject the attempts of "creationists" to replace evolutionary theory with pseudo-scientific ideas determined by their understanding of biblical authority. But we also criticize the dominant form of evolutionary theory. We believe that this theory is hostile to central Christian affirmations and that the evidence does not support it. And we believe a proper role for the theologian is to challenge objectionable scientific theories on these sorts of grounds.

In the case of the dominant form of neo-Darwinism, what is most objectionable is its systematic effort to remove any role for purpose from the interpretation of evolution. The scientific orthodoxy here is deterministic and reductionistic. The implications for the meaning of human life and creation as a whole are diametrically opposed to Christian understanding of human freedom and responsibility and of the working of God in the world. We believe that the theological resistance to Darwinism was justified despite its numerous scientific mistakes.

The non-Fundamentalist theological community in general, however, has resolved the issue by adopting a dualistic stance. Science, it is said, should be free in its own field. Theology is free to ignore scientific findings and to proceed in its quite different field. Often this is grounded in a neo-Kantian dualism of facts and values.

Moltmann's analysis of the situation is much the same as ours. He rejects creationism, but he writes as follows:
In German Protestant theology, Karl Beth, Adolf Titius, and Karl Heim tried to achieve a productive synthesis between evolutionary theory and the doctrine of creation. This attempt was of interest to both sides, but it ceased to be pursued once the ethical theology of liberalism, and also the new dialectical theology, accepted what Heinrich Ott calls 'the indifferentist solution', which meant the mutual 'non-interference' of theology and science. But this proposal brings no solution to the problems. It simply means excluding them from consideration. Consequently theology must start again from the early attempts at a synthesis, if it is to comprehend creation and God's activity in the world in a new way, in the framework of today's knowledge about nature and evolution, and if it is to make the world as creation—and its history as God's activity—comprehensible to scientific reason also. (p. 192)

In his brilliant proposals for moving toward a new synthesis Moltmann makes many points familiar and congenial to process theologians. He points out that natural events, like human ones, constitute "a unique irreversible and non-repeatable process with a particular direction" (p. 199). Natural laws are statistical generalizations rather than controlling principles. The whole deterministic mindset should be abandoned. "Open systems are determined by the time structure of the qualitative difference between future and past. They realize possibilities, and through this realization again acquire new ones" (p. 203). "God is the origin of the new possibilities" (p. 206).

5. THE SABBATH

Perhaps the most distinctive and original feature of Moltmann's distinctive and original doctrine of creation is his emphasis on the sabbath. He highlights the importance of the sabbath to the understanding of creation in the first chapter of Genesis, correctly noting that the seventh day has not been included in the doctrine of creation as commonly formulated. He argues that "the creation of the world points forward to the sabbath" (p. 5). The sabbath "is the prefiguration of the world to come" (p. 6). Thus the creation story itself points forward to eschatological redemption!

This means that the sabbath is not primarily established as a day of rest for human beings. Moltmann quotes H. Gese (Zur biblische Theologie, Munich 1977, p 79) "The main purpose is the non-intervention of human beings in the environment—the restitutio in integrum of creation.... In principle, what is at stake is the inviolability of creation, which at least on every seventh day is to be preserved from man, as a sign and symbol" (p. 321). The sabbath points beyond itself to the sabbatical year, in which the primordial conditions between human beings, and between human beings and nature are supposed to be restored, according to the righteousness of the covenant of Israel's God. And this sabbatical year, in its turn points in history beyond itself to the future of the messianic era. (p. 6)

These themes, introduced at the beginning of the book are repeated and enlarged in the concluding chapter. Moltmann shows how the neglect of the seventh day in the creation story has had profound and deleterious effects in Christian history and upon us today.
God is viewed as the one who in his essential being is solely 'the creative God', as Paul Tillich says; and it follows from this that men and women too can only see themselves as this God's image if they become 'creative human beings'. The God who 'rests' on the sabbath, the blessing and rejoicing God, the God who delights in his creation, and in his exultation sanctifies it, recedes behind this different concept. So for men and women too, the meaning of their lives is identified with work and busy activity; and rest, the feast, and their joy in existence are pushed away, relegated to insignificance because they are non-utilitarian. (pp. 276-77)

As a process theologian addicted to work I am reminded once more of the richness of the biblical literature and of the importance of encountering it again and again afresh, with as few preconceptions as possible. The connection between the sabbath and peace with nature is surely explicit in the texts, but without Moltmann's help, I would not have noticed it. Further, these texts do not provide simply additional arguments for changing our attitudes and practices toward the natural world, they also suggest different attitudes and practices—proposals that should be taken seriously even today. It is Moltmann's genius, again and again, to find in our common heritage fresh insights and perspectives which challenge and inspire us. I hope that my belaboring those points on which process theologians do not follow him has not obscured the great debt we owe him.

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