

Talk-back Session with Jürgen Moltmann

Question: Professor Moltmann, when you were speaking of the Holy Spirit in terms of the female image, to what extent might that have been influenced by the thinking of Zinzendorf and the Herrnhutter movement of the eighteenth century, which had some influence on Wesley also. Second, the understanding of the restoration of all things (*Wiederbringung*) is prominent in Württemberg Pietism, but was also often opposed by Protestant orthodoxy. Were there political as well as theological reasons why mainline confessional churches tended to oppose that insight?

Moltmann: Well, I think I can answer the first question but perhaps not the second one. Count Zinzendorf proclaimed—in 1741, I believe, in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania—the motherhood of the Holy Spirit as the doctrine of the community, saying that God is, through Christ, our Father and the Holy Spirit, through Christ, our Mother, and Christ is our Brother. So this was a Trinity in the image of a family and it was the reason why he proclaimed the Motherhood of the Holy Spirit. There are also the homilies of Macarius Simeon, a very old Syriac church father of the second century, which were translated in Zinzendorf's time by Gottfried Arnold. So there is a very old tradition from the Syrian church fathers who called the Spirit Mother—*ruach* in the Syriac language is female anyway. They had two arguments for it: One is, when the Paraclete comes, as spoken of in the Gospel of John, he will console you as a mother consoles her children. There is another reference which speaks of the work of the Spirit and how the mother deals with the children. The other argument is one I brought up that the one who is reborn out of the Spirit has the Spirit as his or her mother, otherwise the metaphor would not work. So the rebirth out of the Spirit claims that the spirit is the mother of the reborn people. I think it's good to

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find female images in God, but to complement the fatherhood of God with the motherhood of God is certainly not enough. The relationship between human beings and God should be put in different images. One is a relationship to God as an authority figure or Lord (the human being is servant), and another is the relationship to father or mother (the human being is child). But there is one step more and I think this is from the mystical tradition but also in our hymn books. It is a friendship with God. God is respected and loved as a friend and this friendship of God is an expression for prayer, because you pray to God as a friend. You say what you want and respect his freedom to do what he wants. So, as in a friendship you have a kind of mutuality which you do not have in the relationship of the children to parents or of servants to the Lord. I think this would be more on the line of answering the justified questions of feminist theology rather than an attempt to integrate Motherhood into the Godhead.

The second question concerns the idea of the restoration of all things, which has a long Pietistic tradition. I think it arose first of all from the Anabaptists during the Reformation. Then there was a rediscovery of eschatology with Spener and from the tradition of Bengel and Oetinger. At the same time when theologians and Christians discovered the real future hope of Christian eschatology, they embarked on a mission to the peoples of the world and entered into a new relationship with the Jews. So Protestant evangelism and the rediscovery of eschatology were combined from the beginning. The reaction of Protestant orthodoxy was against this type of eschatological future hope and against evangelism, saying that the time to evangelize the people was the time of the apostles and this was already 1,000 years ago. Now we have to keep what we have and not go out to the nations anymore. I think it was in the time of Protestant Orthodoxy that there developed an understanding of one's own presence in eschatological terms after the millennium, that is, in the struggle with Gog and Megog, before the end of the world. However, the early Pietists (Spener and others) discovered that we do not live after the millennium but before the millennium. Therefore, we expect from the millennium a new spring of mission and a conversion of people and also a conversion of Israel and the Jews not to the church but to the coming Christ. I think this was the logic behind it.

Martin Luther also thought that he lived not before the millennium but after the millennium. He said that the millennium occurred from Constantine to the year 1000. In political terms, this was 1000 years from the installation of the Roman structure of the church. Thus we are at the end of that. I was afraid when President Ronald Reagan spoke of a nuclear Armageddon in our generation that he also had the impression that he already is living after the millennium rather than before it. After the millennium there is only the last battle, and then the final judgment.

Question: Your comments on hell seem to imply that you are looking to a possibility of repentance for those in hell beyond the grave. I'm wondering, first of all, is that your view? If so, how do you reconcile that view with punishment being described as eternal or everlasting in the New Testament documents?

Moltmann: If you were in my class in Tübingen, I would say take a sheet of paper and on one side of the sheet write down all the texts that speak of a double end—salvation and condemnation and eternal condemnation, and on the other side write down all the universalist statements, as in the latter part of Philippians 2, Romans 11, and Revelation 21. There is also Colossians 1, where Christ reconciles everything on heaven and earth. Then you must see whether you can integrate the particularistic statements into the universalistic statements, or the other way. You cannot extinguish one side, but I think it is possible to integrate, the particularistic statements into the universalistic statements, saying that the final judgement is preliminary to the new creation. God's last word is, "Behold, I make everything new." Therefore, condemnation to hell is not eternal as God is eternal, but *aionios*, as it is said in the New Testament. That is a long time, but the negative cannot be as eternal as a positive. There is always an over-value of grace over against the wrath of God, I believe. Then you come to theological arguments and perhaps to what my conclusion is—to a universalism of hope which is not a doctrine or a certainty but is a presupposition. Whenever I would preach about these texts of condemnation, I would preach it with a view toward the condemnation and destruction sermon of the prophet Jonah. That is, I would preach particularism as self-destroying prophecy and would not be disappointed. But it is a very delicate question, and I think we should not end up with easy answers, because there must be open questions, which only God can answer. Otherwise, our eschatology would be prejudice to God but not an openness for God, and this is one of these questions where we have ideas. We should not say it is this way or that way, because you cannot pin down God.

Question: While we are on the subject of hell, one of the growing popular interpretations of hell is expressed in British evangelicalism and has a growing impact even on American evangelical thinking. That is the position of John R. W. Stott and John Wenham, who advocate a doctrine of annihilation. What is your response to this alternative?

Moltmann: There was a tradition from Johann Gerhard to Hollaz and Quenstedt for more than 100 years in Lutheran orthodox theology, that spoke of the *annihilatio Mundi*. At the end the whole world will be burned to nothingness, and only the faithful will survive with the rest of the angels and God. I think this was a kind of gnosticism taken from the early gnostics while the reformed orthodox tradition never spoke of the *annihilatio Mundi*, but always of the *transformatio Mundi*. I think there is better evidence for the latter in the biblical tradition, than for the Lutheran position. The Orthodox Church speaks always about a *glorificatio Mundi*. This affirms that the end is when time will change into the *aion*, to eternity, and space will be changed into the omnipresence of God. Thus, at the end we have a glorification, and not an annihilation nor only a transformation. I think annihilation is unthinkable. If you believe in annihilation, you must then speak of an act like an act *ex nihilo*, only the other

way around. Otherwise you cannot annihilate anything. What is cannot become nothing again, as in our throw-away society. To throw things away is to annihilate things, but they are somewhere and sometimes they return. We would be very happy if we could annihilate nuclear bombs and whatever junk we have made here, but it is impossible. So, the idea of annihilation is, I think, an impossible idea. You may believe in annihilation but you can never combine this with faith in God the Creator. That God the Creator will, at the end, annihilate everything that he created and annihilate things for which his own Son died? I think it is impossible. That at the end there is a big "No"? That contradicts my whole faith. If I would believe that, I would become an annihilist myself and would blow up the world if I could. Why not? It would bring me to a complete cynicism and this would contradict my Christian faith. Therefore, I am very strongly against it. You could give me some books, because I must work on my eschatology and must deal with handling all these negative questions, too.

Question: Dr. Moltmann, I'm very grateful that you are here. I really enjoyed your book, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*. The question I have relates more to your book on the Trinity. Yesterday, in your discussion of the suffering God, you placed the Heavenly Father in Christ on the cross. In the book, I believe, patripassionism was labeled as a heresy of the third century. Help me to understand the Trinity in that scenario, especially when it comes to the statement, "Did we crucify the Father."

Moltmann: Well, the early and rightly-condemned patripassionism was a kind of modalism, saying that there is only one Person, or one divine person who has two faces, so to speak; the face of the Son and the face of the Father. Therefore, this one person died and was raised up from the dead again. Therefore, the Father suffered where the Son suffered, because there was only one person. This is not my explanation of it. I said the Son suffers, dying in this strange abandonment from the Father, and according to the story of Gethsemane there are two persons in two different wills. Otherwise the prayer—"not my will but thy will be done"—would be impossible nonsense. I said you can take an analogy from your own life. I will suffer my own process of dying but I will not suffer my own death because I will not survive, in human terms, my own death. When I had to bury my own child, I did not suffer the process of dying directly but I suffered from the death of my child because I had to survive my child and then have this mourning. So it is a two-fold and different pain. The pain of dying and the pain of suffering death. I took this analogy to say that Jesus suffered dying, and His Father in Heaven suffered the death of his Son. So there are two sufferings coming together, differently but joined in the cross. Therefore, I would not accept that I am a patripassianist, though I am speaking of the suffering of the Father in his way on the cross of Christ.

Question: I appreciated your remarks today that focused on evangelism. I teach some in that field here at the Seminary. Basically I raise two questions. One has to do with the nature of the church and the other has to do with how the gift of faith is, in fact, discovered by most people. I heard you saying that we must not transport chauvinistic denominationalism everywhere and I profoundly sympathize with that. I would only add that the church always exists in the form of incurable grass-roots communities and they always form into networks with other churches, and, in time, they take on a name, and presto you've got denominations, whether it's always of the chauvinistic type or not. So I want to probe a bit there. The second question is the more important to me. You said that inevitably, in any kind of mission context, the people who respond to the word will form into communities and basically we ought to leave it up to them as to the kind of church they become. I identify with that except at one point. Most people do not first find faith merely from the witness in the word. They usually experience it in the church, and many of them are technical members of the church before they become alive to God. I'm referring here to the old adage, that the Christian faith is more caught than taught. Furthermore, it's more likely sustained in the church than simply individualistically.

Moltmann: Well, thank you, you have certainly more experience about that than I have. In the ecumenical movement from the West we are always embarrassed to meet the past of our own denominations in meeting Christians from Africa or Asia. If you come to Nairobi you can go to a St. Patrick's Church or to a St. Andrew's Church, but these were not the saints of Africa but of Scotland and of Ireland, even though the Africans have a lot of martyrs in their own tradition now. Why do they not name their churches after their own martyrs? I think it is coming. The first generation normally takes over what the missionary brings to them. The second generation tries to live in separation from their own culture and from the other religions around them. The third generation then rediscovers its own heritage, and so we have an indigenization. I think this is very good for us, at least, because then we receive something back from their understanding of the Gospels. Their expression of their faith is in music and in dances, etc. We know all the hymns from Wesley and Martin Luther but they offer new hymns which they would like to sing. There are churches—the Roman Catholic Church for example—who says the church in Rome is a mother and the rest are the daughters, and therefore these daughters must always be under the tutelage of the mother church in Rome. Kirk, a Reformist in South Africa, calls their missionary churches "daughter churches," as if they would never come of age. I think that's not good. Sometimes the Holy Spirit does not flow through the channels of Apostolic Succession. Sometimes he jumps and then forms Pentecostal churches, no longer in traditional churches. In Central America there was a strange form of pentecostalism and fundamentalism of the people, not by American missionaries, but a people who discovered the Bible and then formed new congregations from below in their own way, as also in Africa. Normally we call this syncretism, but I think we are wrong.

Question: Professor, in your lecture yesterday, you eluded to or spoke of the commandments and the commission to heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out demons. When you spoke of those, you gave them a figurative interpretation, for instance, raising the dead meaning something like we're raising the dead when we bring those who are outside of Christ to Christ. Are you limiting those commandments to that type of interpretation?

Moltmann: I think we can do these messianic works according to the strength that God gives us and according to the doors God opens to us; and if there is a time when we do not have the strength and the doors have closed, then we cannot do it, but this is not our mistake. I have no experience with raising the dead. I can witness to the fact that the gospel saves people from suicide and that people who felt like stiff corpses and like death before, became alive to a new life. They describe the situation before as *death* and the situation after as *life*, but I think the graves are not yet open. If I say this, I am not saying that this was nonsense, but I am saying that we are waiting for it and if it happens, we would be very happy. So, if something cannot be done at the moment, wait for it. As for demons, there were certainly in earlier times many demons in personal terms. In Korea you have the exorcists who drive out the demons—mostly dead people who cannot find rest. We have this in fairy tales in Germany, that dead people who didn't find justice cannot find rest and they return. In Korea, I was told of a demon who was a soldier from the Korean war and couldn't find rest and then came into a young girl and spoke with a very low voice and then was driven out and found rest somewhere. But there are other demons—demons in our market systems. We had demons in the political sphere during the Third Reich, under Hitler, who was certainly a political demon. People were obsessed by it, and so it is beyond reason to drive out and to deal with. These devils, these idols of death, are very dangerous. I think one should not limit it to one sphere, but look around where we are under the possession of idols and idol worshippers. John Sabrino normally speaks about these idols of death. If you touch the idols, you may be killed. There is the idol of national security and the idol of produce more, consume more. We have obsessions everywhere, including our personal lives. They are possibly found not so much in terms of spirits, but in obsessions of drugs, etc., and we suddenly discover that people lost their free will and they are obsessed. So there must come a stronger power to liberate them. Thus, I think this is very actual.

Question: Two questions. First, I would like to ask about your view of divine foreknowledge in relation to the idea that God never gives up on anyone. If it's true that God always hopes to save everybody and is always trying to save everybody, presumably that means He doesn't know that some people will forever persist in rejecting Him. So that means that He must not know their future response. This seems to imply a limited view of foreknowledge. A number of people advocate that view, I'm just asking if that's your picture. The other thing

I want to ask you is this: What is your view of the relationship between Christianity and other world religions, especially in view of the hope that if not everybody then at least many people from those religions will end up redeemed. How is the redemption of Christ applied to these persons? Do you accept something like an "anonymous Christian" view like that of Karl Rahner? Do you take the view that they will sometime acknowledge the truth claims of Christianity over against their religious beliefs? Would you accept some kind of inclusivistic view like John Hick, or what?

Moltmann: You offered a lot of possibilities. Well, to the first question, my argument would be that I experienced that God did not give me up when there was, well, there was all the right on His side to give up on me. He found me in that prison camp and since that time I cannot say that He would give up any other person. Kierkegaard made this argument once against universalism, saying all the other people may be saved, but with me there may be some problems. So, if really it has come to you, how can you say that God will give up anybody else? The foreseeing of God is, I think, a question which must be rethought. To say that God knows everything in the future and has no expectation and there can be no surprise to God is a bit abstract. I think God is waiting and God is making his experiences too, and perhaps also his disappointments with people. But that is a long question. I cannot give a short answer to that long question concerning providence. I think that is the term for *Voraussicht*, or the foreknowledge of everything.

The second question...how should I answer? First, I think there can be no anonymous Christians because Christians are called by name and they confess in name. Anonymous demons, yes. They have many names. Their name is legion. But there can be no anonymous Christians. There can only be confessing Christians. I don't think this was the best idea of Karl Rahner because I know people who left the church and became atheists and whatsoever, and they say, "I don't want to be swallowed up by Karl Rahner as an anonymous Christian. I'm not an anonymous Christian. I'm not a Christian"—and this should be respected in a way. If you talked to a Buddhist or a Muslim, you cannot say, "Well, I assume you are somewhat an anonymous Christian." You must take him seriously as a Muslim and then enter into the dialogue. You cannot come to a Buddhist and say, "Well, I do not know much about Buddha, but I may be an anonymous Buddhist. Please accept me as such." It is impossible.

I think preaching the gospel to people of other religions does not mean to extinguish and annihilate the other religion. Do you really desire that all the people on earth become Methodists and that they are all alike—uniform Methodists? I don't think so. This is not my expectation, but I would like to have all the people on earth listening to the gospel and being infected by the hope in the future new creation of the world, and this infection with hope—this is a term of Hans Hupendyke—would bring the gospel into the other culture, and also into the other religion. Why should there not be a Buddhist

Christianity, or a Hindu Christianity, just as there was a German Christianity and a Jewish Christianity. As the Apostle Paul said, "*Beschnitten oder Unbeschnitten*," circumcised or not circumcised, where and how you are called, is your gift. And if being a Jew is a gift, then being not a Jew, a Gentile, is also a gift, and being a German or being a Jew is also a gift which can be brought into the work of the Kingdom of God. To uniformize the whole world according to the gospel or according to our Western understanding of the gospel means to serve the uniformity of the Western or the modern cultured world. In Korea, you have the beautiful old temples with the swinging roofs and then you can discover a Christian church immediately by its ugliness, because it is an import from the West. Only now they discover that they have Korean art which can be brought into the Christian buildings. This brings a little change in this. To uniformize the whole world cannot be the way of the Kingdom of God. So I would like to have the gospel preached to all people, but I would not like to have to destroy all the other religions, but to have them, so to speak, integrated into the work of the Kingdom of God. This may be not a good answer, but I cannot answer better.

Question: You have quoted, "When freedom is near, chains begin to hurt," and "as salvation approaches, danger also grows." Could you describe your perception of this current danger or hurt? And also, can you describe whether this evolutionary process of danger increasing or hurting has been historically progressive or cyclical? You also said that God suffered the forsakenness of His Son. To what extent could God suffer this forsakenness knowing that he could always bring his Son back to himself, if he wanted to?

Moltmann: In answer to the last part of your question, you must use some imagination. It may have been the option for God the Father to call his Son back and give up the world, or to send his Son and let him carry the sins of the world in order to redeem the world. If God is faithful to his own decision to create the world, to maintain the world, to love his own creatures, then the answer is clear. To call his own Son back and take him out of the world would mean to repent from having created the world in this way, and to let the world go to hell.

Your first question was about these dialectical forms of experiences. The first comment you cited is not a quotation, but a statement I made myself, remembering my experiences in prison camps whenever there was a transport of comrades for repatriation. They had to go home. The wind of freedom came into our camp and then we felt the barbed wire more than before, because there was always the effect of adjusting to the situation. The blacks in the south told me that they had a saying in the nineteenth century for this, "bend down so low 'til down don't bother you no more." But the moment you see a bird flying freely, then you suddenly feel it again. The moment the prison doors open for one or two of your comrades, then you all of a sudden feel it. Therefore, I said "When freedom comes near, the chains begin to hurt." Otherwise, you wouldn't feel it anymore.

Perhaps this is similar to the dialectical process of history that whenever salvation comes near, the danger also comes. Where faith comes, temptation comes and, therefore, you cannot say it is the way of history that all is bigger and better, and at the end we will enter into the Kingdom of God as the fulfillment of history. The other way is also not true, that history is a way where things become even worse, and at the end we all go to hell. I think it's a dialectical process; and if there is progress, one may say it's becoming more and more critical in history. There was no possibility before '45 to destroy the whole human world and some of the rest of the earthly creation. Only with the invention of the atomic bomb did it become a real possibility that this time could be the end time, and where the end of human life was laid into the hands of humans. So it became more critical. And now with the ecological developments, we are entering into a more and more critical state of affairs. Therefore, neither optimism nor pessimism is justified, but what is? *Wachet und betet!* Pray and watch, be alert and see, and live with open eyes.

