

## REVIEW

**Title:** Ethics of Hope

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*Ethics of Hope* is the long-awaited companion to Moltmann's monumental *Theology of Hope* (1967). This volume represents a lifetime of thought by one of the last century's most distinguished theologians. It is perhaps ambitious, if not presumptuous, for a young scholar to write a review on the work of a scholarly master. But I will attempt to give a helpful and informative review.

The work is divided into five parts. Part 1 addresses "Eschatology and Ethics". This comes as no surprise to anyone who has followed Moltmann's work. We have learned from him just how important Christian eschatology is in grounding the necessary hope for transformative action. The introduction provides well-crafted summary statements on the theology which grounds and guides Moltmann's eschatology and ethics. It also addresses important subjects such as "free action," based upon what we can genuinely hope for in this world, and "necessary action," based upon what we fear may or may not happen unless we act. Related to these topics, Moltmann also provides insightful and inspiring comments on the relationships between "praying and watching," and "waiting and hastening" in Christian action.

This introduction is followed by a survey of some prevailing eschatologies present in the Church. Moltmann explains and critiques three historic models ("Apocalyptic Eschatology" – Lutheran, "Christological Eschatology" – Calvinist/Karl Barth, and "Separatist Eschatology – Anabaptists/Hauerwas) and argues that each is insufficient to meet the call of scripture and the needs of the world. They fall short of being a Christian ethic of hope. Of particular interest in this section is Moltmann's critique of Hauerwas. Moltmann wonders at the "post-liberal separation between 'church' and 'world.'" He questions Hauerwas' preference for the Anabaptists' and J.H. Yoder's model over against that of Martin Luther King, Jr. Both models encourage, rightly, a peaceful, nonviolent Christian ethic. However, King's approach is preferable to Moltmann because it was actively resistant to the evils and injustices of the world, believing that non-violent engagement had the power to change things for the better. King's was an ethics of hope, whereas Hauerwas has embraced an ethics of separation. Hauerwas teaches about a *peaceable kingdom*, whereas Jesus calls for a *peacemaking Kingdom*.

This first section concludes with a commendation of "Transformative Eschatology." This is Moltmann's view. It has some affinities with the other views, but transcends them in theological breadth and depth. He reverses the terms associated with

Barth's view from *Christological eschatology to eschatological Christology*, where the key difference is that the future is not already settled, in Christ, but rather, the future is anticipated through Spirit-inspired action in the present. The future has begun with Christ's resurrection, but the work of implementation and transformation is not finished. He writes, "An ethics of hope sees the future in the light of Christ's resurrection... This points the way to transforming action so as to anticipate as far as possible, and as far as strength goes, the new creation of all things, which God has promised and which Christ has put into force" (41).

Part 2 addresses "an ethics of life" by addressing key aspects of culture and medical ethics. Moltmann argues for a "culture of life," in which true "human life is affirmed, accepted, interested, and fulfilled," and where all forces that seek to destroy life are resisted. He writes, "an ethics of life is intended to serve life" (74). A good operating principle in medical ethics is "*in dubio pro vita* – in case of doubt, decide for life" (75). This section contains important questions and mature insights into a broad range of subjects related to life such as birth, death, meaningful existence, true health, science, medicine and technology. The uniquely "Christian" shape of these arguments is rooted in the gospel of the kingdom of God, of eternal life, of justification, and of the "resurrection of life" (101).

Part 3, on Earth Ethics, is perhaps the most alarming. The section covers topics such as Creation and Evolution as well as the ecological crisis and the rights of nature. Moltmann paints a devastating picture of the ecological situation. He suggests that Christianity in the West has contributed to this crisis and that the earth cannot sustain present practices of consumption or natural resource exploitation. The tone of the section leaves one feeling that all humans - especially those in the West, and especially Christians who have theological foundations for the hope of a renewed living cosmos - must act immediately to avert the potential disaster on earth. First World lifestyles leave the poor, the Third World countries, and the earth vulnerable to destruction by putting the costs of our development on them. The only way forward is a radical change of lifestyle that preserves and promotes life, which rejects anthropocentrism and honours God at the centre, with humanity and the rest of nature coexisting in complete solidarity. Christian theology - rightly understood - restores an embodied connection to the natural world, and can provide a way forward.

Part 4 addresses the political dimension of ethics, or an "ethics of just peace." Here Moltmann covers topics such as human righteousness and God's righteousness, Justice- distributive and justifying, peacemaking (as "dragon taming" rather than "dragon slaying"), Just War doctrine, control versus trust in government policy, the integration of human and civil rights, and the integration of economic human rights with the ecological rights of nature. His perspective on all of these is shaped by his understanding of the Christian hope. For instance, he writes (with reference to God's righteousness), "Christianity must push for the relevant

legal enactments and legal reforms, for the Christian understanding of God's righteousness is not meant just for Christians but is intended to be an anticipation of the new earth for all human beings" (184). Of particular interest might be his response to the Russian Orthodox Church's statement on human rights, wherein human dignity is understood as a moral category. Moltmann regards the *imago Dei* as "God's relationship to human beings" (226), and is "therefore non-disposable, inalienable, and indestructible" (227).

The final section (Part 5) offers some short "aesthetic counterpoints." Moltmann concludes his work with evocative reflections on "God's Sabbath rest," "the Easter jubilation over the raising of Christ," and "the 'peace in the midst of strife.'" This section provides a fitting devotional grounding, a Christian disciple's framework, for applying all that preceded.

There are so many strong points made throughout this book it is difficult to summarize. One simply must read and mediate upon it, which will encourage one to embrace a thorough, deep, and life-giving ethics of hope for the earth. I highly recommend this book to anyone who cares deeply about Christian ethics – as all Christians should. The book is a treasure chest of wisdom and insight gathered over a lifetime of fruitful labour. Moltmann, as a master theologian, has provided a fully integrated ethics of hope, bringing together his well-grounded theology of resurrection and new creation with the key questions and concerns of our modern technological world. This is essential reading for Bible scholars, theologians, ethicists, scientists, medical practitioners, politicians, business leaders, and all active Christians. Not only them, but non-Christians also would be well-served by reading these erudite reflections as they also engage many of the same subjects. We share a common world with common problems, hopes, and needs. Moltmann is a trustworthy guide for us all.

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