

Laudatio for Professor Jürgen Moltmann
Doctor theologiae honoris causa
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In 1945 Europe was in ruins. Not only materially, but also morally and theologically. Not only had European civilization collapsed in brutality, but faith in God was challenged. How could one still believe in a God that allows such atrocities to happen?

This was the horizon when the young Jürgen Moltmann in 1948 returned from war imprisonment in Britain to Germany to start his theological studies. 70 years later we are gathered here in Oslo to celebrate the unique way he contributed to restore faith and hope – including hope for theology.

In 1964 the book *Theologie der Hoffnung (Theology of hope)* brought Moltmann to everyone's attention. Here, he establishes *hope* as a fundamental category in theology, a hope that is rooted in God's activity in and for the world, in what God has already done in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and in what God will do when the world is recreated in the coming Kingdom. Through this book, Moltmann became a main contributor to the "eschatological turn" in theology, so important in the last decades, also here at MF: The insight that history should be understood in light of God's future for the world as anticipated in the resurrection of Jesus. But Moltmann gave this turn his own flavor: Not so much concerned with the "meaning" of history in an intellectual sense, but rather with the question of justice and righteousness. The Christian hope is not primarily an answer to our intellectual curiosity, but an answer to the human cry for life, righteousness and freedom.

A few years later (1972), in *Der gekreuzigte Gott (The Crucified God)* the anchoring of the hope in God's acts in Jesus was developed further. Here, Moltmann portrays a God that suffers with his creation when Jesus is forsaken by his Father. He does so not only for the perpetrators and sinners, but also for the victims and those that suffer. The cross thus becomes a sign of hope, a sign that God takes suffering on himself, and that he who raised Jesus from the death, will give new life also to the victims of evil.

These two books together points forward to a range of important theological themes that were covered by subsequent books. In 1975 he published an ecclesiology and from 1980 a series of books under the heading “Contributions to systematic theology” – all important and groundbreaking books.

This includes:

- a Trinitarian theology (1980), focusing on the relational character of God – often referred to as social trinitarianism
- a theology of creation (1985), picturing God not as separated from creation, but as an active creator in creation – through the Spirit.
- a Christology (1989), which is rooting the Christian understanding of Jesus in the Messianic hope of Israel – thus pointing to the common hope of Christians and Jews
- a pneumatology (1991) that does not confine the Spirit to the church, but pictures her as the spirit of life – the living power of God that fills creations and is the Spirit of hope
- an eschatology (1995) that locates the hope, not in a transcendent heaven, but in God’s recreation of the whole cosmos
- a book on theological method (1999) – typically not written as a prolegomena where all the principles is laid out before the real works starts, but rather as an afterthought – on what has been done.

Even if Moltmann has covered all the major themes of theology, and his work is quite consistent from beginning to end, it is not correct to say that it is a “system” in the usual sense of the word. Rather than being guided by principles or the architecture of a system, Moltmann’s theology has been guided by the material content itself, with its questions, perspectives and answers – what in German is called “die Sache”.

What is really unique about Moltmann’s work is in my view the remarkable combination of two things: On the one hand he is addressing the burning questions of his own time in a way that resonates with people’s daily experiences, and he talks about such things in a way that is understandable and engaging. Moltmann is a creative theologian in the best sense of the world.

On the other hand: Even if he is creative, Moltmann is not creating *ex nihilo* (from nothing) – he is deeply rooted in the Bible and the tradition of the church. His engagement with the Bible and biblical texts plays an important role for his theology, and his theological perspective helps open biblical texts and make them speak in a way that a purely historical approach is unable to do. Even if he is doing contemporary theology in the best sense of the word, he is deeply in touch with the doctrinal tradition, with theologians from the past who continues to speak to us today through Moltmann’s engagement with them. This engagement is not only limited to his own Reformed tradition, but is a genuine ecumenical engagement. Especially his engagement with Orthodox theology has been fruitful, in particular for his work with

pneumatology. If we could talk about a pneumatological turn in modern theology, Moltmann is one of the fathers of that turn as well.

In Moltmann's theology there is a close connection between theory and practice. His concept of hope does not mean that we should just wait in passivity for what is going to happen in the future. By showing us what the world is destined to become, hope enables us to seek change here and now, in our own lives, in society and in the church. Moltmann has given important impulses to political theology, and to movements that seek social and political liberation and justice.

Through his career, Moltmann has developed his theology in an academic setting, most of the time at the University of Tübingen. Through his teaching and writing he has contributed considerably to the development of academic theology, and he has been an important teacher for students and a tutor for new generations of academic teachers and researchers. His own theology has also become the object of research – in a vast number of doctoral dissertations and master theses.

However, his influence has not been restricted to the academic scene. His work is an example that the best academic theology is also interesting outside the university. Through his work he has influenced theology, preaching and practice in churches all over the world. He has also himself travelled more than most university teachers, giving lectures on all continents.

Especially important has been Moltmann's engagement in the ecumenical movement. In this context he has contributed guidance and leadership to churches finding their way together.

When celebrating Jürgen Moltmann and his theological work today, we are not only celebrating a theology of the past. It is my experience as a theological teacher that theological students also today are engaged by Moltmann's work. When reading his texts, they become inspired, challenged and sometimes provoked. Discussing his perspectives is always a fruitful part of a course.

It is therefore with great joy and thankfulness, *but also with hope*, that we today confer MF's honorary doctoral degree on Jürgen Moltmann.