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# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MOLTMANN'S ESCHATOLOGY, THE THEOLOGY OF HOPE, AND THE CONTEMPORARY HISTORY OF THE KOREAN CHURCH

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## INTRODUCTION

Jürgen Moltmann is a twentieth-century reformed theologian who opened a new theological paradigm. He broke away from existentialist and orthodox theology and opened a theology of 'hope.' He identified 'eschatology', overlooked in Christianity, as the most significant aspect of Christianity. His eschatology does not address the end, but rather the future and hope after the end. Moltmann's book, *Theology of Hope*, published in 1964, attracted attention from the global theological community. His theology gave rise to a discussion about what kind of Christian hope can exist in a place where one must confront the difficulties of reality. I would like to look at how Moltmann established the *Theology of Hope* and compare it with other theologians who mentioned 'hope' like him. In addition, I also would like to know how Moltmann has influenced the Korean church from the 1970s to the present, from 'Minjung Theology,' Korea's progressive political theology, to conservative theology and the Pentecostal Church.

## MOLTMANN'S THEOLOGY OF HOPE

Moltmann published *Theology of Hope* in Germany in 1964. His book deconstructed the existentialist and secular theologies that became popular after World War II, bringing him fame worldwide. This work sought to bridge the gap between present Old Testament theological studies and New Testament theology. He also attempted to overcome postwar existentialist views. This book contains five chapters, excluding the introduction. Chapter 1 focused on eschatology and revelation. He compared and evaluated Barth and Bultmann's theologies, and showed how salvation-historical and universal-historical eschatology can merge to form an eschatology of revelation. Chapter 2 "Promise and History" discusses the relationship between God's promise and revelation in the Old Testament. Chapter 3 "The Resurrection and the Future of Jesus Christ," argues for the eschatological dimensions of the crucifixion and resurrection in the

New Testament. Chapter 4 discusses 'eschatology and history' and offers an eschatological approach to understanding history. Chapter 5 examines Christianity in modern culture from an eschatological perspective, emphasizing the character and mission of the church as a gateway to the future. *Theology of Hope* has a stunning introduction. Moltmann made it very evident in the introduction why he seeks hope.

He objected to the theological climate in which eschatology was regarded as insignificant for Christian doctrine. This is because eschatology—it seemed at the time—had no logical connection to Christ's cross, resurrection, exaltation, and reign.<sup>1</sup> However, Moltmann redefined the term "eschatology." Eschatology is a teaching that includes both the object of hope and the hope that is fuelled by it. This is also a hope, anticipation, and a forward-looking march. The Christian faith comes from Jesus' resurrection on the cross and leads toward the promise of his universal future. He argued that eschatology is the suffering and passion caused by the Messiah. The God of eschatology is a God of hope known through the Exodus and prophecies in the Old Testament and a God who has the future as an attribute of existence. Because this God meets us in future promises, we can wait with hope for God in our lives. Christian eschatology starts from the historical reality of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus and talks about its future, possibility, and power.

Moltmann explains the relationship between faith and hope as follows: Christian faith can break down the boundaries of life surrounded by pain, sin, and death when they collapse. Faith can be expanded into hope through the resurrection of the Crucified One, even when all human hope has been crushed. This faith links people to Christ. Hope allows this faith to open itself to the great future of Christ.<sup>2</sup> Faith is the foundation upon which hope is built, and hope nourishes and supports faith. In the Christian life, faith comes first, but hope is superior. Without the recognition of Christ through faith, hope becomes a vain utopian hope. However, if there is no hope, faith collapses, becomes smaller, and eventually becomes a dead faith. In this way, faith turns hope into certainty. Hope expands this faith and brings it to life. For those who hope, resurrection is a consolation given to lives that must suffer and die, and God's resistance against the wickedness of suffering and evil. Paul called death 'the last enemy' (1 Corinthians 15:26), but paradoxically, the resurrected Christ and the hope of resurrection became the enemies of death.<sup>3</sup> Hope does not

<sup>1</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (London: SCM, 1967), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 5.

<sup>3</sup> Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 7.

allow humans to be satisfied until the day when all of God's promises are fulfilled. It is a restless hope for God.

Moltmann argued that despair, on the other side of hope, is sin. God provides humans with prospects, hope, and promises for the future, but humans get discouraged and frustrated. Not trusting expectations is a sin. The same applies to helplessness and grief. Hope presupposes despair. Despair is defined as a hurried desire for the fulfilment of hope or a refusal to have any hope at all. This is despair in the guise of presumption. This type of presupposition is seen in early nineteenth-century German idealism. This is the sanctification of Prometheus. They also changed the image of Christ into Prometheus. The mid-century existentialist literature focused on Sisyphus. Sisyphus symbolizes frustration. Despite his fight, determination, and endurance, he became the image of a failure. However, the power to transform life lies not in presumption and despair, but in steadfast hope that lasts till the end. Hope does not look to 'no place', but rather to 'no place as yet' that may exist eventually.<sup>4</sup>

He declared that the fiercest objection to a theology of hope comes from religions of humble acquiescence in the present. Christian hope and its consequent objection to the transcendence of consciousness always assert the rights of the present, the interests at hand, and the eternal truth of each moment. This eternal present rejects hope for what does not yet exist. Christian hope seems to cheat people by deceiving them of present happiness. However, Moltmann found the 'God of hope' in the history of the Bible. The God of hope exists by promising the future of God, humanity, and the world, and sending humans into a history that does not yet exist. God makes promises to those who obey God's mission. God promises God's presence and kingdom and offers a vision of the future. Moltmann discovered a God who 'has the future as an attribute of existence' and a God of promise, a God who escapes from the present into the future, and a God who provides the future and newness from God's freedom. Because God's promises open the future, God's truth is also experienced in history.<sup>5</sup> God is present when we live God's promises through hope and transformation. Faith does not exist within each day but rather extends beyond it in expectation of what is to come, as promised by the One who created from nothing and revived the dead. Hope permits us to bear the 'cross of the present', embrace the deceased, and anticipate the unexpected. Hope does not deceive people into seeing present happiness; rather, it creates present happiness. Hope leads to cheerful waiting because it is waiting on God. This pleasant waiting allows you to accept

<sup>4</sup> Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 10.

<sup>5</sup> Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 15.

all of your gifts. As a result, even during difficult times, humans can feel happy.

Moltmann stated at the end of the introduction that through hope, which is further encouraged by God's promise, all historical concepts would take on an eschatological tendency and become provisional.<sup>6</sup> Christians think that God, who exalted Jesus from the dead, would make everything new. This hope paves the way for a comprehensive future that includes death. Christian hope is a valuable complement to faith. This hope of faith gives the prospect of a fresh start in the promised future, making it the finest option for anything that can be sought on this earth. As a result, these hopes expand reality and make us look forward to the future.

### THE HOPE OF BLOCH, BONHOEFFER AND MOLTMANN

How did the concept of 'hope' that goes throughout Moltmann's eschatology arise? His memories of war and prison camps shaped his theological understanding of 'hope'. Bloch's work, *Principle of Hope*, had a profound influence on him. Bloch was a Marxist Jewish philosopher, who wrote the *Principle of Hope* during World War II, creating his worldview despite the godlessness of harsh reality. Unlike Marx, who saw religion as the 'opium of the people,' he highlighted its importance. He saw religion as a reflection of human hopes and utopian desires.<sup>7</sup> He thought apocalyptic hope meant a radical vision for a better future on Earth. However, Bloch removed God from the kingdom of hope he had created. This is because the kingdom of God that he built was a kingdom of freedom without God's intervention. Therefore, for Bloch, the highest good of human beings is the new heaven and the 'freedom' for it. He thought that human freedom could only be guaranteed if God did not exist, and that where there is a great ruler of the world, there is no freedom.

By way of contrast Bonhoeffer developed his religious views while resisting Nazism. Eschatology provided the foundation for his theology's core concept. His eschatology focused on world transformation rather than exchange. His eschatological studies expanded to include the relationship between the 'ultimate' and the 'penultimate', or everything preceding the ultimate.<sup>8</sup> Bonhoeffer, unlike Bloch, does not reject the exist-

<sup>6</sup> Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 18.

<sup>7</sup> Hyongsang Ko, "Eschatological Hope in the Era of Godlessness and Its Ethical Implications: A Focus on E. Bloch, D. Bonhoeffer, and J. Moltmann," *Korean Journal of Christian Studies* 117 (2020): 127.

<sup>8</sup> M. R. Lindsay, "Bonhoeffer's eschatology in a world 'come of age,'" *Theology Today* 68.3 (2011): 300.

ence of God in his eschatological vision. To him, God is a powerless being who is aware of human misery and pain. He believes that, despite God's powerlessness in the world, God is nevertheless there and helping us. This is because for him Jesus is God and God is the most powerful in powerlessness. He states, "without God before God," which means we must accept responsibility for our life and live "as if God did not exist." This refers to human independence and responsibility without dependence on divine intervention.<sup>9</sup> Jesus Christ was the model that best represented his claims. This is because Jesus participated in God's suffering without God in his secular life. He presented the cross of Jesus as an absolute model for our lives and encouraged us to follow His cross. By following the cross, we can practice responsible love for others.

Moltmann's theology of hope built on these foundations. For him, eschatology is the fulfilment of hope for the future. It does not mean the fulfilment of any specific event, but rather the promise of God that will soon come true. The most important events in his eschatology are the crucifixion and resurrection. The two events are connected. There is no resurrection without crucifixion. Crucifixion is God letting Jesus die, and resurrection is God raising Jesus from death. Moltmann argues that this allows us to see God's future promises. He meditates on God's promise to come to resist the social evils that create violence and injustice in reality.

As for Korean reception, Hyeongsang Ko organized the main differences in the three scholars' thoughts on hope in his article. According to him, their hopes can be summarized with the keywords 'freedom', 'responsibility', and 'promise'.<sup>10</sup> They all present a position of eschatological hope and its ethical implications. I think Moltmann's hope combines Bloch's hope for the future kingdom of God and Bonhoeffer's hope that responsible Christian practice can change the world. It proclaims that God is not a helpless and weak being who suffers along with humans, but is a powerful God of hope who will come as a promise through the historical event of resurrection.

## CRITICAL REFLECTION

The more I searched his materials and activities, the more I understood why I was fascinated by Moltmann. First, the reason is the interconnection of his theology and the Minjung Theology. The church I grew up in was founded by a generation influenced by the Minjung Theology. It was natural for us to comment on and criticize social issues and pray for

<sup>9</sup> Ko, "Eschatological Hope," 134.

<sup>10</sup> Ko, "Eschatological Hope," 144.

society. Fundamentalist conservative denominations have attacked my denomination's position for the reason that it secularizes God. However, I do not think that our faith should be directed to the upper reaches of the sky. The world is full of various violence and social issues such as war, poverty, and crime, and that is our life. Our theology cannot be separated from these realities, and we can try to overcome these problems of social evil through theological discussion and reflection. I think this is also connected to Moltmann's political theology. He also took the position that theology should not be divorced from reality but should work together with real problems. Progressive churches in Korea have grown by embracing people who are suffering. However, as society's wealth accumulates, more complex and diverse social problems emerge not just poverty and unreasonable labor contract. Each time Moltmann visited Korea since 1975, he prepared a lecture customized to Korea's changes and diversity. His analytical abilities and understanding have influenced many Korean churches.

The second reason is a link between eschatology and hope. Eschatology is a narrative about the end. (Naturally speaking, nobody knows what happens after death.) Eschatology is inextricably linked to death because death represents the end of humanity. However, Moltmann contends that eschatology announces hope for Christians' futures. Those who believed Jesus was God's Son and the Messiah recalled the terrible disappointment of weakness, rejection, abandonment, and crucifixion.<sup>11</sup> However, by resurrecting from the dead, Jesus proved God's presence once more. This was the fulfilment of God's promise. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead on the cross has given Christians hope for a new world filled with God's promises. According to Moltmann, this hope is not only for eternity but also for our concrete future and immanent transcendence. Messianic hope is a healing energy that counteracts the helpless' indifference and the powerful's cynicism.<sup>12</sup> The word "hope" has positive connotations. Hope is inevitably directed toward the future. As a result, we hold onto the 'hope' of God's promise and live for the world beyond we die. I believe in the power of this 'hope'. No matter how dark the valley we walk through is, the 'hope' that the Lord promised and will come in the end keeps us going. I believe Moltmann was also aware of the good impact his theology of 'hope' had on individuals throughout his horrible experience in World War II. Despite oppression and resistance, he witnessed the

<sup>11</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, "The presence of god's future: The risen Christ," *Anglican Theological Review* 89.4 (2007): 580.

<sup>12</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, "The future of theology," *The Ecumenical Review* 68.1 (2016): 11.

spirit of Christianity prospering through hope in many places, including Korea.

Finally, I am drawn to Moltmann's understanding of reality and the variety of relationships. Rather than treating theology as a sacred subject and studying God and his word, he concentrates on how to apply theology in our actual reality. His theology is quite practical. This is demonstrated even more clearly by the themes he talked about during his visit to Korea. When he first visited Korea in 1975, he delivered a lecture titled "Hope in the People's Struggle." After meeting Pastor Yong-gi Cho at a Pentecostal Church conference, he presented "Theology of the Holy Spirit and Life" in 2000 and "Theology of Hope and Life" in 2004. The presentation was entitled "The Gospel Full of Life." Since then, he has given contemporary analyses of the realities of the Korean church and society in lectures like "The Name is Justice: God's Justice for Victims and Perpetrators of Evil" (2009) and "Love, Justice, and Peace" (2012).<sup>13</sup>

#### THE INFLUENCE OF MOLTMANN ON KOREAN CHURCH

Four years after Moltmann published *Theology of Hope*, his book was introduced in Korean churches through journals and symposiums starting in 1968. In 1973, *Theology of Hope* was translated into Korean. This led to many discussions about Moltmann's theology within the Korean church.<sup>14</sup> Afterward, many of his books were also translated into Korean. The translation process was very quick and accurate. This is the decisive factor that made Moltmann's theology widely accepted and understood in Korea.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, some theologians returned to Korea after receiving their doctoral degrees from the University of Tübingen, where Moltmann worked. They contributed greatly to the popularization of Moltmann's theology in Korea. They played a very important role in Korean seminaries and churches.

Moltmann's first visit to Korea took place in 1975 at Hanshin University, at the invitation of his student, Professor Pong-Nang Park. He met students and theologians who opposed the military government. It was his first contact with Minjung theologians. He recalled how their way of resistance reminded him of Bonhoeffer.<sup>16</sup> Moltmann wrote 'Min-

<sup>13</sup> Ok Su Shin, "A Study of Reception and Understanding of J. Moltmann in Korea," *Korean Journal of Systematic Theology*, no.35 (2013): 195.

<sup>14</sup> Pong-Nang Park, "The Theology of J. Moltmann - The eschatological theology," *Theological Studies*, no.14 (1973): 93.

<sup>15</sup> Ok Su Shin, "A Study of Reception," 191.

<sup>16</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, "The Lord has set my feet in a spacious place." *Theological Studies* no. 54 (2009): 147.



jung Theology' in German in 1984 and was instrumental in introducing Korean Minjung theology to the global theological community. He noted that Minjung theologian Byeong-mu Ahn focused on the 'people' in the Gospel of Mark and attempted to demonstrate the unique bond between Jesus and the poor. Jesus served as the people's teacher, sibling, and family. Jesus represents the people, and they represent Jesus. In other words, Jesus died for the people, while the people died for him. This Christology was recognized as a Christology of Solidarity, in which Jesus bears and shares our suffering. This is similar to the suffering God in *Crucified God* published by Moltmann in 1972. His theology of hope and political theology had a great influence on Minjung theology and activists of the Korean democratization movement. However, Moltmann also pointed out the limit of Minjung theology. Minjung theologians said that Minjung bears the sins of this world and saves this world through his suffering. Moltmann said, "If the people save this world, who will save the people?" raised the question. This is because people try to overcome their hardships rather than trying to suffer them.<sup>17</sup>

Invited to an event commemorating the 100th anniversary of the introduction of Protestantism to Korea in 1984, Moltmann witnessed the conflict between progressive minjung theologians and conservative fundamentalists. He looked at the Korean Protestant Church growing at an incredible rate and the reality of a church that was divided and unable to unite.<sup>18</sup> Until this time, Moltmann had been evaluated in Korea only as a progressive theologian connected to Minjung theology. However, when Moltmann visited Korea in 1995, Pastor Jong-hwa Park, then general clerk of the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea, took Moltmann to a morning meeting with Pastor Yong-gi Cho of Yoido Full Gospel Church. From this period, his relationship with Korea's largest Pentecostal church began. In 2000 and 2004, Moltmann was invited to international symposia held by this church. The meeting between an ecumenical theologian and a pastor of a megachurch representing Korea's conservative camp was very unusual. His actions caused a stir in the Korean theological community, and progressive theologians who were critical of the Pentecostal movement even felt betrayed by him.<sup>19</sup> Pastor Yong-gi Cho announced in 2005, following his conversation with Moltmann, that he would abandon the ministry of individual soul salvation in favour of salvation that covers everything. Pastor Yong-gi Cho admitted that he neglected soci-

<sup>17</sup> Moltmann, "The Lord," 148-149.

<sup>18</sup> Moltmann, "The Lord," 150.

<sup>19</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, and David Suh, "Christ is the foundation of my theological thought." *Theology and Church* 1 (2014): 270.

etal injustice and was unconcerned about natural disasters and that he regretted his previous concentration solely on humanity. He proclaimed his desire to establish a Pentecostal church that embraces the world with Jesus Christ. Yoido Full Gospel Church experienced a fresh turning point thanks to its association with Moltmann.

His ecumenical stance originates from his desire to inspire all Korean theological lines and Christians with hope for the return of Christ and the establishment of a kingdom of justice and peace. His relations with the Korean church were both friendly and productive. He witnessed Korea's political difficulties and the resurgence and development of the Korean church. He served as a facilitator in the formation of Korean theology, as well as a friend who cared about the lives of Korean Christians. Moltmann and Korean theology maintain friendship through dialogue and cooperation.

## CONCLUSION

Moltmann's theology of hope revolutionized global Christianity. He shifted the theological community's emphasis, which had previously been on humans rather than God and death rather than life, to the powerful force of hope. He is still alive and continues to publish books and give seminars. He expresses hope in God's promise to come to Christians following the dramatic historical event of the Cross and Resurrection. His compelling message of hope became the light of a people under oppression, as well as the solace of those shivering in prison. It provided an opportunity for the church, which had previously solely looked for individual redemption, to shift its focus to social salvation. I believe Moltmann's broad fellowship and harmonious attitude teach a lesson to the Korean Christian community, which is divided and conflicted.

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