

## GOD AND HISTORY IN JÜRGEN MOLTSMANN

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It is the judgment of Jürgen Moltmann that God and history must be conceived in dialectical relation. In this way the idea of God garnered from history will be devoid of the philosophical prejudice that has ostensibly plagued Christian conceptions of the Deity hitherto. Although Moltmann purports to derive his historical orientation from the OT, this essay will endeavor to show that he has actually imposed upon the OT a revisionist Marxist view of history, resulting in a view of God that is alien to the OT and that is instead the processive becoming of humanity.

### I. THE IDEA OF HISTORY IN ISRAEL

According to Moltmann, if Christian theology is to have a proper concept of God it must think historically since for Israel there was a dialectical interplay between God and history. In the words of von Rad, "there was history for Israel only insofar as God accompanied her; only this and no other temporal expanse can be so described."<sup>1</sup> Hence, Moltmann says, "The experience of reality as history was made possible for Israel by the fact that God was revealed to Israel in his promises and that Israel saw the revealing of God again and again in the uttering of his promises."<sup>2</sup> The promise of God opened up history for Israel and controlled all its experiences. Hence history is a peculiarly Hebrew phenomenon.

As an originally nomadic people, Israel by nature had a religion of promise since the nomad does not live within the cycle of seedtime and harvest as do agrarian peoples, who hallow times, places and seasons that thereby become bearers of hierophanies and are sanctified as protection against chaos by being anchored in the eternal cosmic order. In the agrarian cultus, time the great destroyer is thus regenerated by means of the periodic celebrational return to the beginning (*restitutio ad integrum*). "To the sanctification conferred at the places of epiphany upon the area in which man lives and builds, menaced as it is by chaos, there corresponds

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<sup>1</sup> G. von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1957-60) 2.120.

<sup>2</sup> J. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (New York: Harper, 1967) 107. This is despite E. Bloch's assertion that in Israel almost none of the promises were kept (*Atheism in Christianity: The Religion of the Exodus and the Kingdom* [New York: Herder and Herder, 1972] 30).

the sanctification of time in the cyclical recurrence of the epiphany of the gods in times of festival."<sup>3</sup> Epiphany religions thus conceive a world out of which man flees to an unchangeable God in whom is no chaos but rather rest. Epiphany religion underlies any religious speech of the "self-disclosing" of the divine.

The striking thing for Moltmann is that Israel was little concerned to understand the essential meaning of the "appearances" of Yahweh in terms of such hallowing of places and times. For Israel the "appearing" God was linked to the divine promise. The promise pointed away from the appearances in which it was uttered into the still unrealized future that it announced. The real category of history, then, is the future, derived from the Hebrew linear orientation toward a goal, not from the static and cyclical nature of Greek *logos* thinking.<sup>4</sup>

Moltmann agrees with Ernst Bloch that the Bible brought into the world an orientation toward the future:

For a biblical, Israelite Christian theology, the reality of man is understood through an eschatological disclosure to be "history." The course of history is determined and directed by a once-for-all, radical, unique, unrepeatable event.<sup>5</sup>

The once-for-all event that epitomizes history for Moltmann is the exodus. God reveals himself to Moses (Exod 3:14), saying, "I will be who I will be," emphasizing his enduring faithfulness to Israel in history (over against the traditional translation "I am who I am," which purportedly evinces the epiphany God of eternal being). The exodus God is the God of liberation who goes ahead of his people, leading them in faithfulness to freedom.

In the exodus experience God's liberating activity is the unique ground and the abiding guarantee of the freedom of the people. Therefore, the coming world dominion of the exodus God can be hoped for as the universal "kingdom of freedom." Every other representation of the dominion of God would contradict the exodus experience.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* 98.

<sup>4</sup> This view is as common as it is false, and were it truly fundamental to the criticism of Moltmann much could be said against it. J. Barr, however, has furnished an irrefutable criticism of the notion that the Greeks held to a cyclical view of time and the Hebrews to a strictly linear view. Actually both Hebrew and Greek literature provide examples of linear and cyclical views of time. See J. Barr, *Biblical Words for Time* (London: SCM, 1969); C. Westermann, *What Does the Old Testament Say About God?* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979) 32-33. Although Moltmann makes much of the presumed linear historical perspective of the Hebrews over against the presumed cyclical view of the Greeks in his establishment of the centrality of the future, he does in fact relinquish this strictly linear perspective once it has served his purposes, subsuming it with the cyclical view against which he here so virulently inveighs: "Linear time grasps only the simple course of events. The course of events stands, however, in a network of correlation and multiples; hence, one must develop time networks in which the linear and cyclical time concepts are combined" ("Verschränkte Zeiten der Geschichte: Notwendige Differenzierungen und Begrenzungen des Geschichtsbegriffs," *EvT* 44 [1984] 217).

<sup>5</sup> J. Moltmann, *Hope and Planning* (New York: Harper, 1971) 103-104.

<sup>6</sup> J. Moltmann, "Gott und Freiheit," *Heute von Gott Reden* (ed. M. Hengel and R. Reinhardt; Grünewald: Chr. Kaiser, 1977) 72.

Succinctly, for Moltmann "history" means exodus.<sup>7</sup>

Israel's history, characterized by the exodus of the promising God, can lead man today to open himself to the future. This requires a reexamination of the idea of revelation, for traditional views of revelation "no longer call forth hope into life."<sup>8</sup> The revelation of God is known only in promise. The concept of promise is grounded in the exodus event. Any other view would be extrahistorical. A promise is "a declaration which announces the coming of a reality that does not yet exist."<sup>9</sup> It is not a description of existing reality but a dynamic word about acts of faithfulness to be awaited from God, binding man to the future and taking him up into the historic, dividing reality into what is and what will be.

Promise opens up the horizons of the historic. "The horizon is something in which we wander and which wanders with us. . . . The horizon of the past, out of which all men live and which is there by way of tradition, is always in movement."<sup>10</sup> In the horizon of expectation to greater advance, events are hoped for and experienced as unique historic events in their connection to the future. "Gerhard von Rad rightly reproduces the general impression of the historic experience of the Old Testament: there everything is in movement, things never clearing up (*gehen nie auf*), and the promise of the greater suddenly arising from the fulfillment."<sup>11</sup> No fulfillment carries a final meaning, for each entails a latency to greater fulfillment.

Promise has the character of transcendence. "It is in promise, which keeps the hoping mind in a 'not yet' which transcends all experience and history."<sup>12</sup> The promise "transcends every present" by pressing man forward to the future of a new reality. "The promise opens meaning and being-beyond (*Aus-sein*) in history."<sup>13</sup> There is an "overspill of promise," for the promise is provisional (*pro-visio*), pointing forward to something latent that must be passed on for future expectation.

The latencies of future pregnant in God's promises and in the history of Israel pertain only to the historic (*Geschichte*), however, not to history (*Historie*). History (*Historie*) is the objectified past having no interest in the subjective presence of past traditions (*Geschichte*).

*Historie* . . . has to do with texts, witnesses, fragments, and monuments of tradition. That which has been handed down and preserved or excavated and discovered is its material. In traditions the original preserved past becomes powerful when bound to the present in recollection. . . . *Historie*, however, has no such living interest of presence in the recollected, but defers the recollected

<sup>7</sup> J. Moltmann, *The Experiment Hope* (ed. M. D. Meeks; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 47.

<sup>8</sup> J. Moltmann, "Die Kategorie *Novum* in der christlichen Theologie," *Perspektiven der Theologie: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1968) 181.

<sup>9</sup> Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* 103.

<sup>10</sup> H.-G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1965) 288.

<sup>11</sup> J. Moltmann, "Verkündigung als Problem der Exegese," *Perspektiven der Theologie* 124.

<sup>12</sup> Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* 102.

<sup>13</sup> Moltmann, "Verkündigung" 124.

and attested to the time of its origin: dating, localizing, classifying the past, investigating the original situation of the text, style analysis, etc. are the means of historical method. While in living recollection and tradition the past is presently undated, it is the first work of historical consideration to date the handed down objects back to their time and to reduce the embellishments which give the tradition its present interest in order to achieve the original "historical content" (*historische Sachverhalt*). . . . Historical consciousness thus breaks tradition or presupposes an unconscious demolition of tradition as event.<sup>14</sup>

In history (*Historie*) the past is observable and reproduceable. The historical consciousness, however, terminates the historic (*Geschichte*) in wiping out the subjective experience of the historic from the experienced and conveyed matter of fact. As a result the meaning and worth of the historical "matter of fact" are jeopardized.

Promise opens up the horizon of the historic and invites to greater advance. In the horizon of expectation, events are historic in their uniqueness and connection to the future, in opposition to static cosmic events. "Only in the 'horizon' of promise and fulfillment are historic events dealt with. Abstracted from that, they become a collection of dead facts."<sup>15</sup> "The very use of the term 'fact' . . . implies a concept of being . . . which refuses to be combined with promise, hope and future, and therefore also with 'history.'"<sup>16</sup>

Although Moltmann criticizes von Rad for historical double bookkeeping, for permitting the mutual existence of objective critical history and confessional personal history in Israel, it is very difficult to see how Moltmann has himself in any way escaped the fundamental distinction between real objective history (what really happened) and the confessional history of personal experience. Moltmann has admitted that his view of revelation, promise, can have nothing to do with facts, with what really happened, but only with the traditions and experiences he perceives Israel to have had (whatever the embellishments). The history of which Moltmann speaks, then, is symbolic and mythical,<sup>17</sup> conveying in pictorial terms experiences or confessions the factuality of which it is impossible to verify. One may say that "for Israel there is only a world of experience arising from a knowledge apparatus in which the knowledge of reason and knowledge of faith do not differ,"<sup>18</sup> but human epistemology and the interpretation of experience remain anthropocentric if the duality of *Historie-Geschichte* be maintained, for the unity of any mediating hermeneutic is

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 114.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 123.

<sup>16</sup> Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* 110.

<sup>17</sup> Stories are always more important than facts. "Stories are designed to force us to consider possibilities. To that extent they are grounded in hope" (W. J. Bausch, *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith* [Mystic: Twenty-third, 1984] 195). G. Green (*Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination* [San Francisco: Harper, 1989]), writing under Moltmann, asserts that Scripture can be normative as imagination (p. 119), that it can be fiction and yet the Word of God (p. 122). The factuality of the Bible is trivial as long as one trusts the author's imagination (p. 144).

<sup>18</sup> G. von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1970) 86.

thereby denied in favor of a persisting adherence to the autonomy of reason standing in opposition to the Biblical accounts. The *Historie-Geschichte* duality, rooted in Kant's phenomenal-noumenal scheme, is an instrument of practical reason invoked by admirers of critical method to safeguard a remnant of meaningfulness for the Biblical documents. "In the collapse of all proofs, the poet responds with a salve of the future" (René Char). Should not the Christian faith do similarly?"<sup>19</sup>

As James Barr puts it, "the distinction between *Geschichte* and *Historie*" is "an artificiality." "If God really acted in history, and if history is to be so very central, then the history involved must be not the history as the documents confess it but the history as it really happened; 'really' here means, 'as the modern historian states it.'"<sup>20</sup> In fact, the Biblical authors "meant to furnish fair and accurate representations of Israelite antiquity," for "the Israelites did distinguish myth from history, fact from fictitious convention."<sup>21</sup> That Moltmann refuses to take the Biblical accounts as intended, but instead feels compelled by the autonomy of reason to reject supernaturalism, leaves him no other option but to use the Bible imaginatively as a collection of myths and symbols that give rise to thought (Ricoeur), the thought of social transformation. Hence Moltmann's proposal to ground his theology in history is fundamentally subverted.<sup>22</sup>

Moltmann thus grounds his theology not in objective, factual history (*Historie*) but in the subjective historic moment (*Geschichte*),<sup>23</sup> in "revolutionary history as the succession of attempts to realize freedom in time by creating a new future in the same place."<sup>24</sup> Because he speaks of realizing freedom in time, it might be surmised that Moltmann does look for fulfillment in

<sup>19</sup> J. Moltmann, "Worte Gottes und Sprache," *Perspektiven der Theologie* 112. According to P. Ricoeur who, with E. Bloch, is rightly considered "one of the profound mentors" of Moltmann (M. E. Marty and D. G. Peerman, "Introduction," *New Theology* No. 5 [ed. Marty and Peerman; New York: Macmillan, 1968] 11), revelation is contingent on the "poetic function" of the text that projects ahead of itself a world in which the reader is invited to dwell and find realization for his ownmost possibilities. "Through all the traits it recapitulates and by what it adds, the poetic function incarnates a concept of truth that escapes the definition by adequation as well as the criteria of falsification and verification. Here truth no longer means verification, but manifestation, i.e., letting what shows itself be. What shows itself is in each instance a proposed world, a world I may inhabit and wherein I can project my ownmost possibilities. It is in this sense of manifestation that language in its poetic function is a vehicle of revelation" (P. Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980] 102).

<sup>20</sup> J. Barr, *Old and New in Interpretation: A Study of the Two Testaments* (New York: Harper, 1966) 67–68.

<sup>21</sup> B. Halpern, *The First Historians: The Hebrew Bible and History* (San Francisco: Harper, 1988) 3, 269.

<sup>22</sup> The failure of A. J. Conyers (*God, Hope, and History: Jürgen Moltmann and the Christian Concept of History* [Macon: Mercer University, 1988]) to do in-depth analyses of the concepts involved in Moltmann's use of "history" (e.g. his uses of *Historie* and *Geschichte*) and "God" (e.g. his use of the ontology of not yet) renders his work of little value.

<sup>23</sup> Moltmann admits that "the expressions 'verbal prolepsis' (promise) and 'real prolepsis' (anticipatory event) . . . say the same things on different levels" (*The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* [New York: Harper, 1974] 173).

<sup>24</sup> J. Moltmann, "Author's Preface," *Religion, Revolution, and the Future* (New York: Scribner, 1969) xiii.

history. This is, however, not the case. There is always more in the promise of the new than is experienced. There cannot be a final completion of an open process, which history must be for Moltmann. Hence his fulfillment can never come.

Moltmann has really not gotten beyond the dilemma of crisis theology to establish a basis for projecting the final consummation of the historical dialectic as something that could conceivably happen. This dialectic itself is perfectly adequately explained by Garaudy's description of the infinite as endless movement. The demand in human nature for a consummation of this dialectic is the *mythos* out of which he lives. This "infinite exigency" won't ever be fulfilled.<sup>25</sup>

This allusion to the Marxist revisionist Roger Garaudy draws attention to revisionist Marxist historiography, from which Moltmann has obtained the view of history that he has imposed upon the historical consciousness of Israel.

## II. THE IDEA OF HISTORY IN REVISIONIST MARXISM

As is well known, Hegel had understood philosophy and history as the self-development of the Absolute, the idea. While Karl Marx could concede in his *Critique of Hegel* that Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* contained all the elements for his thought, Hegel's freedom through knowledge of the idea was only an imaginary freedom in his head. Hence Marx sublated Feuerbach's materialism with Hegel's dialectical method to develop the method of dialectical materialism. Although subsequent Marxist theoreticians "dogmatized" Marx's dialectical materialism into the certain and manipulable advance of history into totality, this totalitarian view betrayed Marx's original intent by giving dialectical materialism a metaphysical and nonhistorical sense. "As soon as one abandons the indivisibly scientific and humanist attitude and accepts the myth of an absolute truth, transcending the men who live it and create it in the day-to-day activities that make up their history, murderous and authoritarian methods are the inevitable fruit of the necessity to impose that truth from above."<sup>26</sup> Revisionist Marxism has thus emphasized the import of pluralism. "Pluralism constantly requires a synthesis, but this synthesis, in its turn, is seen to be not a final term but a stage starting from which a new pluralism is born, which again will call for a new synthesis, and so on."<sup>27</sup>

Moltmann also sees truth as an open question, known provisionally in synthesis and ultimately at the "end of history." "As long as the question of truth is open as the question of the salvation or condemnation of the future, man is aware of the finiteness and temporality of his plans."<sup>28</sup> "The

<sup>25</sup> R. R. Ruether, *The Radical Kingdom: The Western Experience of Messianic Hope* (New York: Harper, 1970) 218.

<sup>26</sup> R. Garaudy, *Marxism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Scribner, 1970) 16.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 47.

<sup>28</sup> Moltmann, *Hope and Planning* 212.

whole,' then, is not an eternal reality which provides the basis for each individual fact, but is rather always at stake in the process of history."<sup>29</sup>

History is thus processive for Moltmann, as it is for Marxism. "If matter is considered historically by setting it in the categories of 'future,' 'novum,' and 'front line,' then this historical and dialectical materialism must also prevail against the mythical and philosophical model of the circle, of the 'eternal return of the same,' and subjectivity of *anamnesis* (remembrance)."<sup>30</sup> Physical process, rooted in Aristotle's definition of matter as "dynamic *ôn*," of "being-in-possibility," requires what Bloch calls "a highly actual (though not as yet decisive) presence of Nothing (that is, of possible total defeat)" to motivate it.<sup>31</sup> The "Nothing" that Moltmann supplies to motivate his process is, with Marxism, the God who is not yet. What Geertruida M. van Asperen says of Bloch also holds true of Moltmann, who has adopted Bloch's ontology of the not yet:

By transcending us in time, the non-existent goal becomes the tendency of the process, thus exerting its directive influence on the course of the process. That the non-existent can exert an enduring attraction is due precisely to its absence. The goal's failure to appear causes the process to continue.<sup>32</sup>

Man, viewing himself "as the product of nature and—theologically too—as *imago mundi*,"<sup>33</sup> moves out of himself in creative becoming, for he has no fixed nature. "Man is an open process."<sup>34</sup> As the Marxist Garaudy says, man is an existence with an essence, although not in the sense of existentialism, "primarily because freedom possesses an historical character, and then because subjectivity, for a Marxist, is not ignorant of what determines it."<sup>35</sup> The creative act of man is the point of departure for Marxism, distinguishing it from all earlier forms of materialism.

The creative ability of human reason, "a kind of productive imaginative power,"<sup>36</sup> launches out in projects toward the overcoming of human misery. "Because of its ability to transcend the self, man's life points beyond itself"<sup>37</sup> to "new possibilities for a meaningful incarnation of man and new possibilities for a humanization of his alienated conditions."<sup>38</sup> Transcendence, an inner dimension of human subjectivity,<sup>39</sup> gives rise to possibilities

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Moltmann, *Experiment Hope* 33.

<sup>31</sup> Bloch, *Atheism* 228, 247–248.

<sup>32</sup> G. M. van Asperen, *Hope and History: A Critical Inquiry into the Philosophy of Ernst Bloch* (Utrecht: Vrije Universiteit, 1973) 41.

<sup>33</sup> J. Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (San Francisco: Harper, 1985) 51.

<sup>34</sup> J. Moltmann, *Mensch: Christliche Anthropologie in den Konflikten der Gegenwart* (Berlin: Kreuz, 1971) 9.

<sup>35</sup> R. Garaudy, *From Anathema to Dialogue: A Marxist Challenge to the Christian Churches* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966) 74–75.

<sup>36</sup> Moltmann, *God in Creation* 266.

<sup>37</sup> J. Moltmann, "God's Kingdom as the Meaning of Life and of the World," *Why Did God Make Me?* (ed. H. Küng and J. Moltmann; New York: Seabury, 1978) 98.

<sup>38</sup> Moltmann, *Religion, Revolution* 189.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 181.

for man's creative ability to realize in the process of history. Transcendence means "the space ahead of us in the open future where historical transformations take place."<sup>40</sup> This is not quantitative extension but qualitative transformation. The wholly other (*Ganz-Andere*) is the wholly transforming (*Ganz-Ändernde*).<sup>41</sup>

All of the aforesaid is taken from revisionist Marxism. There the end of human labor preexists in the consciousness of man and constitutes the law that guides his action. "It is this active presence of the future, this anticipation, this project, which is characteristic of man. This imaginative or conceptual projection lies at the root of all human activity."<sup>42</sup> For Marxism the project is a way of transcending the given and anticipating the real in order to justify the existing order or rebel against it. "Christianity in fact raised the problem of transcendence, and with it, moreover, that of subjectivity," "the possibility for man of beginning a new future."<sup>43</sup>

Moltmann believes Marxist-Christian dialogue can help each vantage point realize history, for the possibilities for which Marxists and Christians are striving are the same. Both understand "the process of history" as "the process involving true humanity, the truth and the revelation of the true man."<sup>44</sup> "Man still lives everywhere in prehistory, indeed each and everything still stands before the creation of the world as a right world."<sup>45</sup> Christianity and Marxism work for a common goal.

We may not know what true humanity is and how a just order of the world looks. But what mankind should not be and which order of things is false we can know by consideration of the past and also by consideration of the future's possible development. Only in the concrete negation of the negation is the other, the positive, open to us.<sup>46</sup>

Marx's categorical imperative is Moltmann's eschatological imperative.<sup>47</sup>

The ability of man to transcend, to project and to create in history all seems to betoken Moltmann's ideas of hope and faith. "Hope's statements of promise anticipate the future."<sup>48</sup> Hope alone is realistic, for it does not strive after things that have no place, but that have no place "as yet" but can acquire one.

The freedom of man, when it is understood as creative freedom, always has room in the realm of the possible and in that future to open the present forwards. Where any of these elements (freedom, possibility, or future) are

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 190.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. This is a central tenet of the Frankfurt School of T. W. Adorno and M. Horkheimer. For an introduction to the critical theory and its impact on faith cf. E. Schillebeeckx, *The Understanding of Faith* (New York: Seabury, 1974).

<sup>42</sup> Garaudy, *Marxism* 125.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 133-134.

<sup>44</sup> Moltmann, *Hope and Planning* 89.

<sup>45</sup> Moltmann, *Experiment Hope* 26.

<sup>46</sup> Moltmann, *Religion, Revolution* 81.

<sup>47</sup> The processive nature of "eschatology" in Moltmann is elucidated in my article "The Eschatological Nature of Moltmann's Theology" (forthcoming in *WTJ*).

<sup>48</sup> Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* 13-14.



abandoned, the others also fall. Concrete utopian thought is therefore indispensable to the freedom and humanity of man.<sup>49</sup>

"Hope is not something which one man has and the other does not have, but is a primal mode of existing or the most important constituent of life."<sup>50</sup>

If "faith means . . . to cross over the boundaries of given reality and to live in the project of hope"<sup>51</sup>—that is, to transcend toward the possible—and if "the opposition of hope and experience, consciousness and being, essence and reality is always the driving force of ethical thought and historic action,"<sup>52</sup> then it becomes extremely difficult to see what significance God and Christ can possibly have in Moltmann's theology. Marxism has clearly propounded a philosophy of history in virtually the same terms without any use of "God." If man is an open process, with hope as a primal mode of being, and if he can transcend in making projections that he can then fulfill through creative imagination, he most certainly has no need for any God to make promises so as to open history for him. The effect of the promise is easily accomplished by the Marxist's simple negation of what is. Moreover if man is not yet himself he certainly needs no God to provoke him forward, for his own natural inclination for wholeness will compel him so to do, as is the case in Marxism. While Moltmann criticizes Marxism for being closed and without a future for its utopian hopes since it lacks God and the resurrection,<sup>53</sup> he has justified dialogue with revisionist Marxism because it "is not directed . . . against the liberating content of the Bible's hopes, such as the 'kingdom of God' and the 'resurrection of the dead.'"<sup>54</sup> He equivocates about the significance of Bloch's atheism, saying that "if he is an atheist, why this incessant preoccupation with Christianity?" "Faith or atheism, the theoretical question is not whether there is or is not a God, but the practical question of the achievement of freedom."<sup>55</sup> Moltmann really caricatures revisionist Marxism in condemning it as closed, for "Marx postulates neither absolute knowledge nor an end to history" but rather an open system of endless creation.<sup>56</sup> It seems clear that, far from

<sup>49</sup> Moltmann, *Mensch* 67.

<sup>50</sup> Moltmann, *Experiment Hope* 20.

<sup>51</sup> J. Moltmann and E. Moltmann-Wendel, *Humanity in God* (London: SCM, 1984) 62.

<sup>52</sup> Moltmann, "Kategorie Novum" 183.

<sup>53</sup> Moltmann, *Religion, Revolution* 161–162.

<sup>54</sup> Moltmann, *Experiment Hope* 31. It is important to note that for Moltmann "the question 'what is God?' . . . is the question concerning the kingdom" ("Antwort auf die Kritik der Theologie der Hoffnung," *Diskussion über die "Theologie der Hoffnung" von Jürgen Moltmann* [ed. W.-D. Marsch; Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1967] 215). Moreover, Moltmann's idea of resurrection has nothing to do with life after physical death but is sociologically reinterpreted as "the humanization of the human condition as a whole" (*Religion, Revolution* 59), being what Marx called "the human emancipation of man" (*Experiment Hope* 87). See R. E. Otto, "The Resurrection in Jürgen Moltmann," *JETS* 35/1 (March 1992) 81–90.

<sup>55</sup> J. Moltmann, *Im Gespräch mit Ernst Bloch* (Munich: Kaiser, 1970) 70.

<sup>56</sup> Garaudy, *Marxism* 145. The horizon of Marxist projects is not a set future but one moving and expanding in proportion to their progress (Garaudy, *Anathema* 92), just like Moltmann's horizon.

drawing his view of history from the OT, Moltmann has imposed upon the Bible a view of history derived from revisionist Marxism.

### III. THE HISTORICAL GOD

For Moltmann the history of Israel, with its linear direction, demonstrates a God very different from the gods of Israel's neighbors who, with their cyclical view of time, conceptualize deity as eternal presence. The "I am" who eternally "is" provides for epiphany religion a means of escape from the chaos and nothingness of this world. Such a god can have no concern for history, future, or the world, for it is the negation of all that is earthly. The god of Parmenides is removed from all pain and suffering and cannot love. Moltmann thus opposes the idea of the divine as eternal presence for cosmologico-metaphysical reasons as well as ethico-political reasons.

The connection between cosmology and politics becomes especially clear from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (Book 12) where he presents his philosophical theology with a quote from Homer's *Iliad*: "Being, however, did not want to be governed badly; rule by many is not good. Let one be the Lord." From the politics of the *Iliad* Aristotle derived the monarchical structure of the cosmos. Moltmann wonders whether Aristotle had the Greek monarchy of Alexander the Great in mind as he formulated his metaphysical views. "The political ideologies developed in the theocratic empire of Byzantium, and later in the time of European absolutism, by praising the one imperial ruler as the exalted image of the one God, legitimized God's dominion."<sup>57</sup> For Moltmann, monotheism entails monarchy:

Wherever the religion of patriarchalism gains acceptance, the tendency arises religiously to *monotheism* and politically in the development of *monarchical rule*: the one God in heaven corresponds to the one Lord on earth. If this monotheism is carried out with exclusivity, then the corresponding political lordship becomes *imperialistic*: one God—one law—one world. To it corresponds: one ruler—one will—one humanity.<sup>58</sup>

"God, thought of as subject, with perfect reason and free will, is in actual fact the archetype of the free, reasonable, sovereign person, who has complete disposal over himself"<sup>59</sup> and others, buttressing male dominance over women and minorities.

The monotheistic Lord God was always, and remains, the masculine God, the Almighty. He determines everything, but is determined by nothing else. He is loved by all but he loves only himself: a heavenly narcissus.<sup>60</sup>

Against monotheism Moltmann pronounces for Israel's God of promise: "no intra-worldly or extra-worldly God, but the 'God of hope' (Rom. 15.13),

<sup>57</sup> Moltmann and Moltmann-Wendel, *Humanity* 92.

<sup>58</sup> J. Moltmann, "Ich glaube an Gott den Vater: Patriarchalische oder nichtpatriarchalische Rede von Gott?", *EvT* 43 (1983) 400 (italics his).

<sup>59</sup> J. Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* 15.

<sup>60</sup> Moltmann and Moltmann-Wendel, *Humanity* 93.

a God with 'future as his essential nature' (as E. Bloch puts it), as made known in Exodus and in Israelite prophecy, the God whom we therefore cannot really have in us or over us but always only before us, who encounters us in his promises for the future, and whom we therefore cannot 'have' either, but can only await in active hope."<sup>61</sup> This God of hope is not above or beyond history but is rather before it, leading man in faithfulness to the promise to freedom. "In the Old Testament Yahweh was experienced, not as heavenly substance but as a divinely historical person, and the promise of his presence was believed in his name: 'I am who I am'—'I will be who I will be'—'I will be there' (Ex. 3.14)."<sup>62</sup>

Although it has come into vogue in recent OT theology to speak of God as "the coming God"<sup>63</sup> with "futurity as his characteristic mode of being,"<sup>64</sup> there can be no question that the Jews have historically understood the OT to portray their God as ever present and omnipresent, immanent and yet transcendent over all that is physical and natural, omnipotent and everlasting, enthroned as the sole ruler of the universe.<sup>65</sup> While Judaism has historically spoken of its God in terms that Moltmann has characterized as "epiphanous" and "Greek," the Jewish scholar Epstein adamantly maintains that "the God of the Bible is a living God, not the impersonal being of Greek metaphysics."<sup>66</sup>

For the Jews the *Shekinah* means "divine presence." Their God was not only ahead of them but also behind and above them. Martin Buber has drawn attention to the centrality of Yahweh as the Present One, based on his understanding of Exod 3:12–15. "YHVH is 'He who will be present' or 'He who is here,' he who is present here; not merely some time and some where but in every now and in every here."<sup>67</sup>

Contrariwise God's presence in Moltmann's promissory history is quite suspect. The promise is a "language event" that announces a reality that has not yet arrived. In announcing this not-yet reality, the future becomes a "word-presence." Word-presence, however, is anticipatory and distinct from actual presence.<sup>68</sup> God is not actually present in the promise, which is proleptic. God lies ahead. Nonetheless "the word of the promise itself creates something new."<sup>69</sup> The word (*dābār*) "takes effect already in the present," while the name (*šēm*), and thus the essence, "form the futural goal."<sup>70</sup> God is thus absent in person and present only in word. His universal presence is the goal of history.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* 16.

<sup>62</sup> J. Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (New York: Harper, 1977) 122.

<sup>63</sup> Westermann, *What Does the Old Testament Say* 21.

<sup>64</sup> W. Zimmerli, *Man and His Hope in the Old Testament* (Naperville: Allenson, 1971) 165.

<sup>65</sup> I. Epstein, *Judaism* (New York: Penguin, 1959) 14, 22, 28, 36, 136–138.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* 198.

<sup>67</sup> M. Buber, *Moses: The Revelation and the Covenant* (New York: Harper, 1958) 53.

<sup>68</sup> Moltmann, *Crucified God* 173.

<sup>69</sup> Moltmann, *Experiment Hope* 49 (italics his).

<sup>70</sup> Moltmann, "Worte Gottes" 101.

<sup>71</sup> Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* 282.

Moltmann's apotheosis of promise provokes question as to what is behind the "language event." "We can see that agency plainly is attributed to the promises in that they are said to do such things as 'announce,' 'bind,' 'open up,' 'inaugurate,' 'obtain,' and 'create.'"<sup>72</sup> Given this creative ability of the word of a God who for Moltmann is not yet but only "possible" (*Gott-möglich*),<sup>73</sup> one may reasonably doubt as to any actuality behind (or in front of) the creative word. If language can work creatively apart from divinity in the thought of the later Heidegger, deity is superfluous to Moltmann's "language event" too.

The presence of God only in word, not in person, becomes all the more problematic when one considers Moltmann's seemingly casual identification not only of "promise" and "God" but also of "hope" and "God." For instance Moltmann speaks of "hope's statements of promise,"<sup>74</sup> of "that which moves us in the biblical testaments of hope as the Other,"<sup>75</sup> and of "sin against hope."<sup>76</sup> Since hope is a primal mode of man's existence, one can conclude from such anthropocentric statements that the deity itself is merely a projection of man.

Furthermore, although Moltmann argues against monotheism in every form, that belief has historically distinguished Jewish religion from all others.

Monotheistic beliefs and tendencies existed before Abram arrived on the scene. But these had little in common with Abram's monotheism. Unlike the deities of other religions . . . Abram's God was not a Nature god—a sky- or sun-god—subservient to Nature; nor was he a territorial god restricted to a particular locality or country. As the Creator of Heaven and earth and all that is therein, the God of Abram was independent of Nature and of any geographical limitations. Furthermore, unlike other deities, Abram's God was essentially an ethical God to whom the doing of justice and righteousness was of supreme concern.<sup>77</sup>

The monotheism of Judaism bears little resemblance to the epiphanic deities of Moltmann's description.

Moltmann's heuristic use of the OT entangles him in conceptual confusion as to who the OT God is. Generally the God of the exodus, of liberation, constitutes Moltmann's conception of the OT deity. "The God of the exodus out of slavery . . . has nothing to do with any faith in the beyond and any authoritarian theism."<sup>78</sup> "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is not the God of the pharaohs, the caesars, and the slaveholders,"<sup>79</sup> Molt-

<sup>72</sup> C. L. Morse, *The Logic of Promise in Moltmann's Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 54.

<sup>73</sup> Moltmann, "Kategorie Novum" 186.

<sup>74</sup> Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* 18.

<sup>75</sup> "Das, was uns in den biblischen Testamenten der Hoffnung begegnet als das Andere" (J. Moltmann, *Theologie der Hoffnung: Untersuchungen zur Begründung und zu den Konsequenzen einer christlichen Eschatologie* [Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1964] 12).

<sup>76</sup> Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* 23.

<sup>77</sup> Epstein, *Judaism* 12.

<sup>78</sup> Moltmann, *Mensch* 87.

<sup>79</sup> Moltmann and Moltmann-Wendel, *Humanity* 57.

mann says, ignoring the numerous Biblical attestations of slave ownership by the Hebrews (including Abraham) and clear Biblical testimony to Israelite domination over other peoples. For Moltmann, essentially, "God means freedom," and whoever loves freedom loves God.<sup>80</sup> Insofar as the God of the OT serves as a symbol of liberation he is admired.

If, however, that same God is not seen as liberating but rather as oppressive, then Moltmann abandons the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. "The God of the exodus is a God of power. . . . But is not Egypt also God's beloved child?"<sup>81</sup> Any domination by one group over another, as in the ancient Godhead of the patriarchs with their domination over women, is to be repudiated. The Father of Jesus Christ is therefore "a different God" from the God of the patriarchs.<sup>82</sup> While it is no doubt true that Moltmann agrees with von Rad that "Israel had no normative doctrine of God for all times,"<sup>83</sup> it is clear that Moltmann attributes diametrically opposite doctrines of God to the OT, evincing a wholly utilitarian use of "God."

Such utilitarian use of the "God" symbol becomes all the more evident in Moltmann's notion of the "mutual in-being of God in history and of history in God."<sup>84</sup> Moltmann develops this dialectic of God and the world in order to emphasize the depth of God's suffering and love in and for the world. He therefore lashes out against the traditional doctrine of God's *apatheia*, criticizing it as a Greek concept fostered by Plato and Aristotle in their aversion to the caprice, passion and vengefulness of the gods of Olympus. Moltmann takes up Abraham Heschel's description of the *pathos* of God, which delineates the way in which God is affected by events and actions in history. This means that God so identified with his people that he himself was in bondage and in need of redemption when Israel was taken captive by Egypt. "Because his name has been bound up with Israel, Israel is redeemed when God has redeemed himself, that is, has glorified his name; and the suffering of God is the means by which Israel is redeemed."<sup>85</sup>

The *pathos* of God opens up man to the needs of God and others, not simply his own. As a result, man's ethical ideal will change from one of isolated indifference to participation in the sufferings of others, including God.

We realize that God is not simply the point of our hope in heaven, but that we are his hope on earth. In such experience man attains the unforgettable impression that he is, together with other people and this whole creation, the utopia of God. . . . That gives man an unambiguous certainty of hope [and]

<sup>80</sup> Ibid 55, 69

<sup>81</sup> Ibid 60

<sup>82</sup> Moltmann, "Ich glaube . . ." 397

<sup>83</sup> von Rad, *Gottes Wirken in Israel Vorträge zum Alten Testament* (Neukirchen Neukirchen, 1974) 165

<sup>84</sup> J. Moltmann, "Antwort auf die Kritik an 'der gekreuzigte Gott,'" *Diskussion über 'der gekreuzigte Gott'* (ed. M. Welker, Munich Chr. Kaiser, 1979) 155. Notwithstanding, W. McWilliams ("The Passion of God and Moltmann's Christology," *Encounter* 40 [1979] 320) thinks Moltmann needs to show God's relation to the world more closely.

<sup>85</sup> Moltmann, *Crucified God* 273

simultaneously places him in the open question of how he wants to fulfill, personally and together with society, that hope which God has placed in him and this world.<sup>86</sup>

A suffering God who hopes in man will, Moltmann avers, topple the problems of metaphysical monotheism, which exalts God at man's expense, and protest atheism, which is a critical negation of the God who permits pain. Metaphysical theism must end, for God's sake as well as for man's. Man yearns today for the righteousness of God. OT righteousness is not agreement with an ideal ethical norm or a *logos* of eternal being but rather describes the historic communal relation of men founded on promise. The righteousness of God is the expectation of new being for all things, the hope for a new creation, the denial of what is in the hope of something better. The critical theory of Max Horkheimer is a longing for the "wholly other," for the righteousness of God in the world. While Horkheimer does not assign the name "God" to this "wholly other," his being "*a negative theology which prohibits images*," his faith is still a protest against immanent forms of righteousness.<sup>87</sup> In a suffering world, critical theology and theory converge between theism and atheism in the open system of the world, characterized by self-transcendence, and God, the world's "extra-worldly *forecourt*, into which it is evolving."<sup>88</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Moltmann, *Experiment Hope* 27.

<sup>87</sup> Moltmann, *Crucified God* 223–224 (italics his). R. Siebert (*Horkheimer's Critical Sociology of Religion* [Washington: University Press of America, 1979]) says Horkheimer is a socialist atheist for whom all God-images are mere human projections without objectivity. For Horkheimer, religion is mainly the historical product of human hope and longing.

<sup>88</sup> Moltmann, *God in Creation* 205 (italics his).