Review of Jürgen Moltmann, *Ethics of Hope*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 2012)

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There can be few contributions to twentieth century theology with more obvious import for theological ethics than that of Jürgen Moltmann. His *Theology of Hope* (1964; ET 1967) made the case for Christian expectancy regarding God's work in the world, leading to the ethical demand for Christians to participate in its transformation. *The Crucified God* (1972; ET 1974) had relevance for the fundamental question of whether theology could be a moral enterprise after Auschwitz, and made clear a Christian responsibility to stand with God in solidarity with those who suffer. *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (1975; ET 1977) emphasized the role of the church in the mission of the Spirit to prepare the way for the kingdom of God. Other works address themes of relevance to particular areas of ethics, with a particular focus on political theology and ecology: among many possible examples one could note *On Human Dignity: Political Theology and Ethics* (1984); his Gifford Lectures published as *God in Creation* (1985; ET 1985); *Creating a Just Future: The Politics of Peace and the Ethics of Creation in a Threatened World* (1989; ET 1989); and *Sun of Righteousness Arise: God's Future for Humanity and the Earth* (2009; ET 2010). Moltmann's corpus is therefore an influential contribution to many areas of method and content of Christian theological ethics.

Despite the ethical import of much of his work, as can be seen from this survey, Moltmann has only occasionally given his direct attention to ethical topics. In the Preface to this volume he reveals, however, that turning to ethics has been a long term goal. After publishing *Theology of Hope* he considered writing on ethics of hope, but his awareness of the limits of his knowledge concerning medical ethics and the need to develop an ecological doctrine of creation to guide an ecological ethics. The need for such a work weighed on him, however, and so he reports that 'at the close of my contributions to theological discussions, I shall try to say what I mean by an ethics of hope, and how I have ethically perceived, judged and acted in line with that ethics' (p. xi). He notes that the book is not intended as a survey or introduction, nor as political advice to the German Protestant church. Instead, his aim is

‘turning to Christians in order to make suggestions for action with hope as its horizon’ in the face of ‘endangered life, the threatened earth and the lack of justice and righteousness’. The work ‘is not a discussion of timeless general principles; but in the face of these dangers, it focuses on what has to be done today and tomorrow with the courage of hope’ (pp. xi–xii).

Part 1 of the book treats the topic of eschatology and ethics, rejecting Lutheran two kingdoms as conservative rather than innovative, apocalyptic alarmism, and theologies of armageddon that create a permanent state of war (pp. 13–17). Karl Barth’s christological eschatology is rejected by Moltmann as annulling the Old Testament promise of surplus beyond the coming of Christ. Instead, ‘for an ethics of hope, a futurist eschatology is indispensable’ (p. 23). Anabaptist ‘separatist’ eschatology withdraws from swords to ploughshares rather than accepting the challenge to turn swords into ploughshares, he comments (p. 30), and he delivers summary judgement on Stanley Hauerwas, who ‘fails to confront the world with the gospel at all and does not disturb the world,

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either, let alone call it into question’ (p. 32). Instead of these Lutheran, Reformed, or Anabaptist approaches, Moltmann commends a ‘transformative eschatology’ that ‘anticipates as far as possible, and as far as strength goes, the new creation of all things’ (p. 41). He had already set aside in the Preface Roman Catholic theology as either relegating hope to a supernatural virtue, so that ‘it is hardly possible to discern the birth of the Christian hope out of God’s future’, or a liberation theology which has not been convincingly fused with wider church social teaching (p. xiv). All this eschatological ground is covered in the first 40 pages, which indicates that Moltmann has no time to engage in detail with the positions he critiques, or to develop the rationale for his judgements.

In Part 2, ‘An Ethics of Life’, Moltmann treats ‘A Culture of Life’, pointing to New Testament visions of salvation in the gospels and epistles (pp. 53–57). This ‘Gospel of Life’ is God’s Yes ‘to loved and loving life, to personal life and to a life of fellowship, to human and natural life on God’s beloved earth’ and God’s No ‘to terror and death, to injustice and violence against life, to resignation, apathy and the death wish’ (p. 60). This understanding of the meaning of human life must be set in a cosmic context that rejects anthropocentrism: ‘The cosmos does not have to be aligned towards the appearance of the human race on the planet earth, but we human beings are aligned towards the cosmos and dependent on it. We are

“stardust”.’ (p. 69). Moltmann then turns to medical ethics, emphasizing human responsibility for the use of scientific and technological power, the freedom of human nature, the need to respect human life as the image of God, and the requirement to decide for life in cases of doubt (pp. 71–75). He discusses contraception, declaring that in the context of the AIDS crisis, Vatican opposition makes it ‘co-responsible for the mass deaths of the poor’ (p. 85), concludes that one cannot differentiate between the value of ‘the fertilized egg-cell, the embryo, the unborn child, the adult, the disabled person and the person who is dying’ (p. 88), and while he counsels respect for the decisions of persons to take their own lives (p. 97), to ask someone else to minister to one’s death in euthanasia is imposing an unbearable responsibility on them (p. 99).

Part 3 of the book treats ‘Earth Ethics’, giving James E. Lovelock’s Gaia theory favourable mention alongside biblical perspectives on the goodness of the earth and its future in a new creation (pp. 109–119). Moltmann emphasises the congruity between Darwinian evolutionary theory and Christian theology, but suggests that the principle of co-operation needs to be recognized as more basic than the ‘struggle for existence’ (pp. 121–27). In a chapter on ecology, Moltmann argues that while the biblical traditions are primarily theocentric, ‘the concepts of the *imago Dei* and the *dominium terrae* still reveal a secondary anthropocentrism’ (p. 135) and Jewish-Christian-Islamic monotheism left ‘Mother nature’ as unclaimed property (p. 136). Instead, Christian theology must recognize the immanence of God’s Spirit, the importance of a cosmic Christology, and non-anthropocentric anthropology (pp. 136–39). Moltmann notes that in the recognition of the animal as ‘fellow creature’ in the 1986 German Animal Protection Act, a theological framework is used for the first time in a secular German statute, and argues that the next logical step is to extend this recognition to inanimate life (p. 144). He recalls his participation in the 1975 General Assembly of the World Council of Churches that linked the exploitation of human labour and natural resources and notes the need for a transition to a vegetarian diet on the grounds of economy, fairness and human health (p. 157).

In Part 4, ‘Ethics of Just Peace’, Moltmann objects to ‘tit-for-tat’ interpretations of disasters as the judgement of God, such as Jerry Falwell’s interpretation of the 9/11 attacks

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on the World Trade Center as God's punishment for 'homosexual New York' and similar pronouncements in relation to the AIDs crisis or the tsunami in Indonesia (pp. 170–71). He finds accounts of distributive justice wanting in relation to *justitia justificans* — justifying justice — focussed on the establishing of just conditions for the oppressed (pp. 174–80). Moltmann argues that given the global challenges that the world faces, there is a need to move to a global monopoly of force controlled by the United Nations and trans-national courts to address global internal policy of nations, terrorist threats, and ecological catastrophes (pp. 198–99). The much shorter final Part 5, 'Joy in God', treats the Sabbath as the feast of creation and proposes that Christians should make a Sabbath from midday Saturday to midday Sunday in order to celebrate the created things around them and then turn to resurrection and the anticipation of new creation as the new week begins (p. 236).

In line with his express aim of making suggestions for action to Christians, Moltmann's *Ethics of Hope* is more a catalogue of ethical judgements than a systematic statement of the relevance of hope for theological ethics. As such, it cannot stand as any kind of parallel to the earlier and programmatic *Theology of Hope*. Many will be interested to see the ethical positions he takes in relation to this wide range of issues, but few will be satisfied with the scant argumentative support he is able to provide for them in a work of this size and compass. Readers seeking an account of the basis for the answers he gives to ethical questions will need to follow the references he provides to discussions in sections of his previous publications. There is very little evidence of engagement with work in theological ethics that addresses the topics under discussion. This lack of evidence of detailed engagement with relevant literature is a particular problem in relation to the positions and authors he critiques: his brief and dismissive six-point critique of Hauerwas (pp. 32–33), for example, is conversational rather than academically persuasive. Moltmann indicates his indebtedness to other scholars who have given consideration to the ethical implications of this thought, singling out for particular commendation Timothy Harvie's *Jürgen Moltmann's Ethics of Hope: Eschatological Possibilities for Moral Action* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2009), for which he wrote the Foreword. Such secondary scholarship is likely to be a better guide to the territory than Moltmann himself. This book leaves the reader in no doubt that an ethics of hope that attends to the significance of Moltmann's eschatological and

ecological insights would be a very valuable contribution to theological ethics, but in no less doubt that, in order to do justice to this task, more needs saying with more deliberative care, than has been possible here. Moltmann's clear continuing passion for Christian engagement with God's transforming of a world in which many so many of God's creatures stand in need of release from injustice and oppression should be ample inspiration for such an endeavour.