

THE THEOLOGY OF HOPE BY JURGEN MOLTSMANN (JM)

1. In 1964 The Theology of Hope appeared in German (English in 67).
Four main influences on JM:
 - a. Personal suffering and despair as a WWII German soldier and POW, his return to hope
 - b. Von Rad's theology of Exodus/promise in the Hebrew Scriptures
 - c. Kasemann's emphasis on the Kingdom of God and resurrection of Jesus
 - d. Hegel on History and Bloch's Principle of Hope. Huge success worldwide, translated into many languages. Published during the turbulence of the 60's amid a prevailing sense of anxiety and despair. JM follows Kierkegaard in defining despair as sin, the systematic denial of the promises of God. Camus wrote, "Think clearly and do not hope anymore." Existential angst in Europe is JM's context.
2. Antidote for despair is Hope: "The expectation of those things faith believes promised by God." Hope is a posture, outlook, stance that trusts God's promises, not mere optimism. Theology in the major key of hope. Promise of God: "Declaration announces coming of what does not yet exist, which binds us to the future that God has revealed to faith and creates tension with the present moment and makes us yearn for the not yet." Basic premise=God is faithful to promises made. Promises to Abraham, to Israel in Egyptian bondage and Babylonian captivity, and the hope of a messiah. Christian promise grounded in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Romans 4 as key text. Lord's Prayer: "Thy kingdom come" is central. Christian hope of the Novum vs. secular philosophies of history ("seen one, you've seen them all"). Debates about the resurrection narratives (form criticism, existentialist theology). Resurrection as missional texts promising righteousness, eternal life and the final triumph of the kingdom.

Parousia is the ultimate revelation/apocalypse. Final word is “he will come again in glory.” Role of eschatology in the Philosophical/Theological Triangle: God/Self/World (history).

3. Role of Christianity in Modern Society. Post-Constantinian Church, secularism. extreme individualism, loneliness and isolation of modern life, breakdown of community. Small group refuge for needy individuals. Institutionalism that gives meaning to many. True Christian community as the people of promise/hope, basis for meaningful action and ministry. Call to transform the world in hope of final transformation. Basis for love and authentic community in the risen Christ.

THE COMING OF GOD: Christian Eschatology (1996)

1. 20th Century on eschatology begins with Albert Schweitzer, dispensationalism, Barth, Bultmann, and Jewish thought post-Auschwitz. Need for comprehensive eschatology.
2. Focus in this book is the content of eschatology, WHAT a Christian can hope for. Divided into four types of eschatology: Personal, historical, cosmic, and divine.
3. Personal Eschatology and Eternal Life. JM’s own near-death experience in WWII. Immortality of the soul or resurrection of the body. Why this matters? Do animals and all nature have a future? Is death the consequence of sin or life’s natural end? Where are the dead now? Purgatory, sleep, risen, or “with Christ”? Communion of saints. Karma and reincarnation. Mourning vs. Melancholia. Can there be reconciliation with the dead in memorial services?
4. Historical eschatology and the Kingdom of God. Diverse views about where history is headed. What are we to expect when we pray “thy kingdom come”? Apocalyptic eschatology as in Book of Revelation, emphasis upon the coming messiah. Eschatology in time includes dispensationalism and political eschatology and hopes for a Thousand

Year Reign of Christ (Rev. 20). Debates about the Rapture, pre- and post- and a- millennialism and the various views of the future of Israel (Rom. 9-11). The Holy Roman Empire as political millennium, as well as Spanish Conquistadors in New World and then the U.S. as the New Israel with its Manifest Destiny. Ecclesiastical Millenarianism in the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church. Modern European millennial hope in the French Revolution and its successors including Marxist views of the future classless society.

Apocalyptic visions in the modern age. Nuclear war and mass extermination. Ecological disasters and climate change are destroying our habitat. Economic apocalypse with the impoverishment of the Third World. Apocalyptic visions yearn for a messiah-“We don’t know what is coming but we know who is coming.”

The Meaning of the Last Judgment. The debate over universal salvation vs. double predestination. Christ’s descent into hell and the restoration of all things. JM’s basic method is to provide Christological answers for eschatological questions. What happens in/to Christ is key to our destiny. Luther on the “wounds of Christ” as salvific. General pardon in the cross.

5. Cosmic Eschatology and New Heaven and New Earth. Promise of New Jerusalem with Paradisal Garden. Renewal of time and space. Sabbath rest. Shekinah fulfilled: God dwells with humanity. Annihilation of world (II Peter 3: 12) vs. New Heaven and New Earth (Rev. 21). Transformation? Deification? End of time in the Eternity of the age to come. Unchangeable past. Reality of the present. Promise of the future. Heavenly Jerusalem-a communal future in the presence of God. Cosmic Shekinah-the dwelling place of God in the midst of people.

6. Divine Eschatology and the Glory of God. The purpose of Creation and New Creation is the glorification of God forever and ever. Meaning of the glory of God:

- a. Self-glorification of God?
- b. Self-realization of God?
- c. Interaction between divine and human activity?
- d. The fulness of God and the feast of eternal joy? JM prefers d, Image of the Messianic banquet with joy forevermore.

7. In conclusion, the Theology of Hope focuses on the human posture of expectation, trusting in the promises of God over against mere optimism (“things have a way of working out”). Written to counteract anxiety and despair of Europe in the 60’s. The Coming of God written 30 years later to elucidate exactly what we hope for, the content of eschatology. There are many views about Christian eschatology and JM seeks to address the various alternates. He ends up with eschatology that encompasses the personal hope for eternal life, the communal hope for the coming Kingdom of God, the global desire for a cosmic renewal, and the spiritual hope to “love God and enjoy God forever”, for God’s own glory alone.