Prophecy and Passion

Essays in Honour of Athol Gill

Edited by David Neville
ATF Series 5

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The ATF Series is a publication of the Australian Theological Forum. Each volume is a collection of essays focusing on a theological investigation of the interaction between the Christian faith and issues of a cultural, social or scientific nature.

Australian Theological Forum Inc
Adelaide

WHITLEY COLLEGE
The Baptist College Of Victoria
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Resurrection as Good News for the Poor: 
A Critical Appraisal of the Resurrection 
Theology of Jürgen Moltmann

Frank Rees

In an innovative approach to systematic theology, Christopher Morse has developed a ‘dogmatics of Christian disbelief’. Christian faith does not involve believing just anything. In accordance with the exhortation of 1 Jn 4:1 not to believe every spirit, Morse argues that we must reject some ideas and approaches if we are genuinely to follow the way of Jesus Christ. Unless we work out what we do not believe, concentrating only on what we do believe, we may well be committed to what Morse calls truth that contains a lie: ‘My thesis is that the truth in Christian doctrine harbours a lie whenever the faithful disbelief these doctrines entail go unrecognized.’ As a result, people are often led into misguided ways of living and acting. If we try to believe things that are true and things that are untrue, we become confused and may follow a destructive pathway without ever knowing where we went wrong.

Morse examines the major doctrines of the Christian faith by indicating what is denied as well as what is affirmed by these doctrines. Like Thomas Aquinas, he identifies a series of objections or possible misunderstandings of Christian doctrine. Then he offers a careful exposition of the positive meaning of Christian faith and a recognition of what we do not believe.

In this essay, I want to adopt aspects of Morse’s approach to develop a ‘critical conversation’ with Jürgen Moltmann’s theology of resurrection. My exposition of Moltmann will address five specific objections to resurrection belief:


1. It seems that the Christian faith in resurrection, especially the idea of heaven, is offered to those who suffer as ‘compensation’ for their suffering in this life.

2. It seems that resurrection faith does not deal with present realities, but is a means of avoiding engagement with the problems and potential of created life in this world.

3. It seems that resurrection faith is the ultimate expression of sarcophobias, a general attitude that devalues our bodily life by placing the ‘spiritual’ above and against the physical.

4. It seems that Moltmann’s theology of resurrection offers an ethic or lifestyle that basically requires people to save themselves, that is, to bring about their own ‘resurrection’.

5. It seems that Moltmann’s theology of resurrection is based upon speculation and is impossible to verify.

Some of these objections relate to the Christian hope of resurrection more generally, while others are specifically addressed to Moltmann’s theology. As we consider these objections in detail, we will find that we are dealing with several recurring issues, though perhaps in sharper focus or applied in different ways. In each section of this essay, I begin by stating the objection, then outline ways in which Moltmann’s theology addresses this issue and finally offer an appraisal of his approach. In my conclusion, I gather some of the insights we have derived to address the central theme of Athol Gill’s work, ‘Good News for the Poor’.

I am not offering a comprehensive exposition of Moltmann’s theology of resurrection. Though my purpose is a critical representation of Moltmann’s thought, the structure, method and emphases are mine, as an adaptation of Morse’s approach. I draw upon a number of Moltmann’s works, though with a specific focus on The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions.²

1. Pie in the sky when we die

It seems that the Christian faith in resurrection, especially the idea of heaven, is offered to those who suffer as ‘compensation’ for their suffering in this life.

This objection serves to illustrate one of the most consistent modern criticisms of Christian faith. Political theorists have alleged that religion in general and Christianity in particular function as a form of escape, an ‘opium for the people’, to enable them to cope with suffering. Karl Marx maintained that religion was an ‘illusion’, because it offered a future happiness that diverts people not only from their present alienation but also from the necessary struggle for radical change in the present. Religious institutions are thus seen as helping to maintain systems of oppression, while poor people are urged not to struggle against their conditions, on the basis of a ‘reward in heaven’. In the purview of such criticism, belief in resurrection is the ultimate form of escape. It implies that what matters most is the life to come, not this world but another world.

Moltmann has responded to various expressions of this critique by offering an understanding of the nature of heaven as part of God’s creation. He notes that the idea of heaven has been neglected by almost all recent theology. Yet the idea of heaven has been seen as the basis for Christian hope, so much so that those who have opposed Christian faith in the name of justice for the oppressed have developed a critique of this idea so as to overthrow Christian faith altogether. For example, the nineteenth century philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach developed Lutheran ideas of heaven in this way: Since God is the fulfillment of all human hopes and wishes, which is identical to heaven, and since heaven does not exist, there is no God. Noting the logical error in this argument, Moltmann rejects the initial premise, the identification of God and heaven. His purpose is to show that this line of thought has provided much of the foundation for modern atheism. He is concerned to distinguish God and heaven and thus seeks to give significant content to this idea.

Moltmann’s own approach begins with the basic assertion that we must understand heaven as part of creation. ‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth’ (Gen 1:1). A number of things may be signified by the idea of ‘heaven’ or ‘the heavens’ in ancient cosmologies and the Hebrew Bible, including the sky, the region of the air, the heights above, as distinct from the region of earth and that below. Also, ‘heaven’ may refer symbolically to a world other than this one, the world of angels, an invisible world that is beyond us, the domain of God.

Moltmann stresses that the doctrine of creation does not allow us to say that heaven is the domain of God while earth is not. Both heaven and earth are God’s, and both are created. He suggests that we think of heaven as different from earth in that heaven is a ‘sphere of reality which is inaccessible and unknowable’ for us. It is not, however, divine. It is part of the created world, even if it is distinguishable from the visible world. Heaven is ‘the term for the side of creation that is open to God’.

The world created by God has a dual character. In one dimension, this world is known and determinate. This aspect of creation is what is meant by the biblical term ‘earth’. But that is not all there is to God’s creation. The creating God, Moltmann says, ‘makes the world an ecstatic reality’. Creation has its foundation outside itself, in God. Creation is more than it appears to be; as well as ‘earth’ there is ‘the undetermined side “heaven”’. Heaven is a dimension of God’s creation, that part open to God; it is the domain of God’s energies, potentiality and power. For Moltmann, heaven represents the activity or movement of God’s power, gathering creation towards God’s kingdom.

Moltmann emphasizes that heaven is not to be identified with the possibilities of the earth alone, but is rather the potentialities of God. Yet heaven is not identical to God. To say that heaven is where God

3. Marx’s critique of religion was initially formulated in his Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy of Right (1844), which can be found in volume 3 of his Collected Works. A short excerpt, containing the central arguments about religion, can be found in Lewis S Feuer (ed), Marx and Engels: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy (New York: Anchor Books, 1959), 262-66. A helpful outline of the Marxist critique of religion can be found in Hans Kung, Does God Exist? An Answer for Today (New York: Random House, 1980), Section C, II.

7. Moltmann, God in Creation, 163.
8. Moltmann, God in Creation, 163.
dwell or that heaven is the kingdom of God’s energies is not to say that heaven is God.

Given these distinctions, Moltmann argues that the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ signify the joining of heaven and earth in ‘the movement of God’. Here the central motif is the idea of ‘the open heaven’. In biblical thought, ‘the closed heaven’ is the symbol of God’s judgment and the exile of humans. God’s face is turned aside, and the idea of a darkened heaven signifies apocalyptic judgment. But the opened heaven signifies the era of grace, in which the earth is fruitful once again and ‘all things’ are united in Christ, ‘things in heaven and things on earth’ (Eph 1:10). The union of heaven and earth is brought about through Christ: ‘heaven too opens itself for the earth, and earth for heaven. Heaven and earth are clasped and gathered into a whole, and in the all-embracing peace of Christ arrive at their open communication with one another’.10

It is crucial to this argument that we do not look for the consumption of God’s purposes on earth alone. To do this, Moltmann argues, is to be without hope. Earth alone is a closed system; it does not have the horizon of possibilities essential to hope. Christian faith sees creation in the light of God’s future. Creation has a future in the movement of God. Creation, both earth and heaven, moves towards that unity in God’s purposes made known to us in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

There is a need for some clarification here about the eventual or hoped-for relationship between heaven and earth. Moltmann is not proposing a ‘heaven on earth’. It is more that he sees earth as having the potential to become like heaven. The ‘open earth’, an earth fully responsive to the movement or purpose of God, as seen in Christ, would be what heaven already is. In that sense, what Moltmann envisages is not heaven on earth but earth with heaven and both with God. At present, however, this potential is only partially realised on earth. Earth is potentially ‘open to God. Jesus Christ has made this opening effective, eschatologically. But in history, that movement of God towards a new creation is not yet complete.

There is much in Moltmann’s approach to applaud, not least because he reopens a consideration of the idea of heaven to make it comprehensible to people living in the age of space travel. While we have abandoned any idea of heaven as a place somewhere ‘above’ the earth, we have not developed much to put in place of this idea. Moltmann sees heaven and earth not as two opposing realities but as potentially related. Indeed, heaven interpenetrates the life of the world as we know it. We might say that heaven is a dimension of all creation, except that we do not know this dimension of the universe. It is the totality of creation, that which is known to us (and to God) and that which is known only to God. Yet, as Moltmann suggests, this ‘other dimension’ of creation is not utterly closed to us. It is open to us in and through the ‘movement’ of God towards us, particularly in Jesus Christ, seeking to gather us into the fullness of God’s life and presence.

One implication of Moltmann’s view of heaven is that it must include the sinful and broken elements of the world. If heaven is the life of God ‘knowing’ the whole creation and its potentialities in God, then it must include all those elements on earth that resist and oppose God’s purposes, as well as those that are attuned to God’s way. But in heaven sin is forgiven, its consequences negated, and brokenness is healed. In this sense, for Moltmann, the entire universe is ‘present’ to God and is saved by God. Nothing is lost; all is redeemed. It is important to note, however, that for Moltmann this is a statement of eschatological hope. It is the future promised in the resurrection of Christ. It is earth made new, as suggested by Rev 21:1 and 2 Cor 5:17.

The idea of a promised future in heaven brings us back to the objection that a reward in heaven has been offered as ‘compensation’ to those who suffer in this world. This challenge is not answered simply by a biblical and theological clarification of the concept of heaven. The difficulties flow into wider questions. If, as Moltmann maintains, heaven and earth interpenetrate in the presence and purposes of God, does this mean that God is engaged with the life of the world, in all its aspects? Does heaven impinge upon all our lives, including our physical life, and how does this relate to what we call resurrection? Moltmann seems to imply that resurrection life or the reality of heaven (if for the moment we can differentiate between the two) relates to all creation. In short, if we are to make further sense of Moltmann’s thought, we must proceed to his argument that the resurrection of Jesus Christ reaches out to include all aspects of our life and indeed all of creation.

10. Moltmann, God in Creation, 171.
2. Living in another world

It seems that resurrection faith does not deal with present realities, but is a means of avoiding engagement with the problems and potential of created life in this world.

This objection is similar to the first, though with a more specific focus. It points to an apparent implication of the Christian hope, namely, that if we focus on a future hope we may not be giving full and appropriate attention to the present. Just as the idea of heaven can be seen as a denial or avoidance of the present, so too ‘resurrection hope’ can be a means of avoiding engagement with our immediate situation.

Christian spirituality in many of its forms has revealed a tendency towards dualism. Dualism is a philosophical or cosmological framework that posits two realities or two worlds. In broad outline, one form of dualism sees the physical world, made up of matter and flesh, atoms and molecules, as radically different and separate from the spiritual world. The spiritual world is formed by spiritual beings only. This form of dualism is often expressed in the popular idea that human beings are mortal physical beings inhabited by an immortal soul. On this view, our hope is that this soul will eventually escape from its physical limitation and be translated to the fullness of spiritual life, with God. It has to be acknowledged that there are many phrases in the NT that support these dualistic tendencies. A spirituality shaped by Jesus’ statement in Jn 18:36 that his kingdom is ‘not of this world’ and by Paul’s longing to escape from the body and be at home with the Lord (2 Cor 5:8) is likely to develop into dualism, unless balanced by other ideas, most importantly John’s assertion that the divine Word became flesh (Jn 1:14).

We find much in the NT addressed to people who are enduring acute suffering, perhaps persecution. 1 Pet 1:3-25 encourages those who presently undergo suffering to keep their hearts and minds on the hope of future redemption. When these ideas are coupled with a politically conservative stance, which enjoins Christians to obey the civil authorities as agents of God’s own rule, we have a formula for a spirituality that is largely disengaged from the social and physical possibilities of life. The stress is upon a ‘spiritual life’ separate from and unaffected by what happens in the world. The ‘Christian hope’ is for a future life, a resurrection that removes us from this world. Resurrection hope is thus a basis for endurance but not a means for engagement with and change of our present circumstances. In short, resurrection faith is a form of opting out.

Moltmann’s theology has addressed this objection directly. Indeed, it could be said that the concern to relate Christian hope to present experience, especially the experience of suffering, is a major formative influence upon his thought.

In the opening pages of The Crucified God we read: ‘Unless it apprehends the pain of the negative, Christian hope cannot be realistic and liberating.’ Christian hope is not merely ‘the power of positive thinking’. It must engage with the seemingly meaningless suffering not only of human beings but of the entire creation. Similarly, in The Way of Jesus Christ Moltmann asks: How does the cross of Jesus relate to sufferings of humanity and of creation? The chapter on ‘The Apocalyptic Sufferings of Jesus’ provides the crucial elements in his argument. In the NT, Jesus’ suffering is to be understood in terms of apocalyptic. But in this process apocalyptic is itself transformed in the light of the eschatological understanding of the resurrection. On this basis, the suffering of Jesus is seen not only as his own suffering but as ‘the apocalyptic sufferings which he suffers for the world’. As a result, all suffering may be understood in the light of Jesus’ suffering and resurrection. Since this argument is so crucial to Moltmann’s resurrection theology, I will examine each step in more detail.

The first step is to see the suffering of Jesus not as an accidental outcome to an otherwise felicitous life, but rather to see the death of Jesus as the outcome of his passionate life. Jesus’ suffering, in the context of the NT, is continuous with his life, but more than that (Moltmann argues), it is also continuous with the sufferings of the martyrs and prophets of Israel. Jesus himself is bound into a community of tradition with the suffering Israel and her persecuted prophets. Neither Jesus himself nor his followers were the first to undergo such suffering. But Jesus did encourage, it would seem, the understanding of this suffering as apocalyptic. These are ‘end-time sufferings’. In his prophecy of the destruction and replacement of the temple, a declaration of the messianic age having come, Jesus invoked

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this apocalyptic framework of understanding. Jesus' suffering and death are seen as an apocalyptic 'summation' and 'anticipation' of the 'end-time suffering' in which the present world will come to an end and a new order will begin.

This apocalyptic element, however, is only part of the NT understanding of Jesus' passion and must not be separated from another perspective in which apocalyptic is recast in the light of the resurrection. In the NT, apocalyptic expectation is transformed into eschatological hope.

The expectation of the imminent end of days is not a sense of catastrophe ... As the New Testament shows, expectation of the approaching end is directed, not towards the death of this world, but towards the birth of the world that is new. Because the kingdom of God is 'at hand', the end of this Godless world has also come into view.\(^\text{14}\)

This is the absolutely crucial step. Put succinctly, apocalyptic suffering plus eschatological resurrection becomes good news. The resurrection hope enables Christian believers to see the significance of their sufferings and, together with that of Jesus, as indicating an end of the present aeon and the coming of another. Thus present sufferings are an occasion for joy.

Moltmann attributes immediate significance to the present suffering of human beings and of the whole creation, in the context of the 'end-time' announced in the apocalyptic preaching and suffering of Jesus and transformed by his eschatological resurrection. For the NT writers, the sufferings of Christ have now come to include the sufferings endured by the apostles and martyrs 'for Christ's sake'. In Col 1:24, Paul's sufferings are sufferings with Christ, 'for in the apostolic passion for the gospel and for the new creation of the community of Christ's people, Christ himself is present'.\(^\text{15}\) Similarly, in 2 Cor 4:10 and 5:17, the Apostle directly relates present sufferings to Christ's presence. Phil 3:10, however, takes the idea a step further, beyond the apostles themselves to embrace 'the whole community of Christ's people'. Finally, Moltmann extends the argument to include not only those who suffer as Christians but the whole creation. The primary victims of the sufferings of this present time are 'the weak, the poor and the sick', and with them nature. 'Nature dies her dumb death first of all, and the death of the human race follows.'\(^\text{16}\)

Moltmann's argument here reflects his deep sense of ecological crisis and the risk of an end to all life on this planet. Yet his affirmation is that God has not abandoned us to an apocalyptic disaster. Eschatological hope in Christ reaches into our present life to transform the crisis of suffering and death into resurrection life. This hope is not entirely futuristic, but for Moltmann embraces life in the present.

In evaluating Moltmann's thought here, there are numerous matters to address. First, it is helpful to have such a clear assertion that our eschatological hope is not entirely futuristic. For Moltmann, hope is of no value if it does not have an impact upon life in the present, and especially if it does not address the problem of suffering in the present. In so doing Moltmann insists on the value of present life as well as a future hope in God, since that future hope is made from our present life.

There is an extensive scholarly debate about the nature of NT apocalyptic and how this relates to early Christian eschatology.\(^\text{17}\) We will not enter these debates here; but we can note that Moltmann offers an account of these two elements and how they relate to one another in the witness of the NT communities. Whereas many have seen the apocalyptic imagery in the gospels as difficult material, perhaps indicative of Jesus' first-century thought-world but of no immediate relevance to us, Moltmann suggests that these elements are a crucial part of the gospel witness, when understood in the light of the resurrection. They should not be ignored by contemporary theology; on the contrary, when understood in the way Moltmann suggests, they are crucial elements of our gospel witness.


\(^{17}\) The following collections of papers provide an introduction into the range of scholarly opinion about apocalyptic and its role within the NT: Joel Marcus and Marion L. Soards (eds), Apocalyptic and the New Testament (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), and John Collins and James Charlesworth (eds), Mysteries and Revelations (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991).

\(^{14}\) Moltmann, The Way of Jesus Christ, 158.

\(^{15}\) Moltmann, The Way of Jesus Christ, 156.
Moltmann's insistence on the present significance of resurrection hope is perhaps the most valuable element in his thought. It is a view that enjoys considerable support in the NT epistles, as he demonstrates. Nonetheless, there are several critical issues that need further development or clarification. The first of these is the question of credibility. In what ways is this present eschatological hope different from wishful thinking? How is hope distinguished from 'the power of positive thinking', in which we convince ourselves that all will be well? In particular, how does this hope relate to the present sufferings, especially physical sufferings, of those who are hungry or homeless, the victims of violence and abuse, and of the earth which (as Moltmann says) is being choked to death?

These questions lead us to further issues and objections, which we will consider in turn, for without a stronger account of how Christian hope impacts upon our physical lives in the present and a consideration of the veracity of resurrection belief, Moltmann's theology threatens to collapse into mere speculation.

3. Hatred of the body

It seems that resurrection faith is the ultimate expression of sarcophagic, a general attitude that devalues our bodily life, placing the 'spiritual' above and against the physical.

John Dominic Crossan has helpfully distinguished sarcophagic from sarcophagic forms of faith. The former welcomes our bodily life in the world and attempts to integrate the understanding of faith with a holistic perspective. Faith and theology must engage with science, history, politics and economics, towards a lifestyle of integrity, justice and peace, an integrated vision of reality and of God's salvation. By contrast, a sarcophagic spirituality tends to place its premium on what it calls 'spiritual things', which are 'not of this world'. Our life in time and history is of little consequence compared with eternal life, the reward for those who have faith in Christ and who are obedient to his word. Each of these forms of spirituality—or perhaps it would be better to call them tendencies within our spirituality—can be expressed in various theological frameworks. It would be wrong to associate either of them with any one theological view, though perhaps there are some prevalent associations. Nonetheless, Christian faith as a whole is subject to the criticism that at the point of its resurrection belief it fosters a sarcophagic attitude. That is, it could be argued that there is an inherent tendency to believe that our present life and especially our physical bodies are not of ultimate significance. We are mortal, while God is immortal, and the life to come is a life wholly different from our physical and temporal life. Paul's assertion, 'We shall be changed' (1 Cor 15:51), suggests that what we are now is both temporary and not of lasting worth. In the end, 'spiritual realities' overcome and supersede the physical; heaven replaces earth, and God will be all in all.

Moltmann's resurrection theology is a thoroughgoing affirmation of the value and importance of physical, embodied life in the purposes of God. To outline his approach, our starting point is the familiar idea that in his death Jesus is the representative human being. Moltmann puts this idea to very different use here, focusing upon the impact of that death on the reality of death itself, invoking the Pauline assertion that Jesus' death means the death of death (1 Cor 15:26, 54). Here is the foundation of the argument that resurrection extends to all living things: Since the death of Jesus is in solidarity with all mortal creation, that same creation is drawn into the power of his resurrection. Furthermore, there is a cosmic dimension to this death and resurrection, as seen in Col 1:15-20. The cosmic Christology of this passage invites us to see a significance to Jesus' resurrection far beyond the boundaries of individual life and even the hope of humanity.

If his resurrection is the death of death, then it is also the beginning of the annihilation of death in nature. It is therefore the beginning of the raising of the dead and the beginning of the transfiguration of the mortal life of the first creation in the creation that is new and eternal.

18. Though he is not the first to recognise these different tendencies in Christian spirituality, Crossan has provided the labels for these two forms of spirituality, in John Dominic Crossan, The Birth of Christianity (San Francisco: HarperCollins; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 36-46. In Australia, historian Manning Clark described two forms of Christianity using the expressions, 'the straightseners' and 'life-deniers' as opposed to 'life-affirmers' and 'enlargers'. See particularly Manning Clark, The Puzzles of Childhood (Ringwood, Vic: Viking, 1989).

For Moltmann, the new creation is a transfiguration of the present, physical creation.

Resurrection involves a ‘transition in Christ’. The critical issue here is how we understand the nature of a raised or resurrected person. What is it like to pass from life as we know it, through death to be ‘resurrected’? Does resurrection life include bodily life? Moltmann argues that it does, for ‘a person is a living body’.20 With much contemporary philosophy, he rejects the idealist account of the ‘real person’ as the mind or soul, a disembodied self. Personhood includes bodily expression. We do not ‘have’ bodies; we are embodied. If our resurrection life excludes our bodies, it is not we who have been raised.

Moltmann argues that we must think of Christ, initially, as undergoing a transition ‘from human violation to divine glory, from mortal existence to immortal divine being’. Jesus’ mortal human body was changed, transformed, ‘so that he now “lives” in the body of glory which is so wholly and entirely permeated by the life-giving divine Spirit in which he “appeared” and will appear’.21 Here we note in passing how crucial for Moltmann’s understanding of resurrection life is the presence and activity of the Spirit. Jesus is raised into a life ‘permeated’ by the Spirit.

This suggests both a continuity and a discontinuity in resurrection. The transition is a change. In the resurrection of Jesus, he is changed from a person who participates in the spatial limitations of our physical life into one who participates in the omnipresence of God.22 His resurrection appearing is an ‘embodied promise’ for all creation, the promise of this transition into immortality. Christ’s transition is the promise that our mortal humanity will also ‘put on immortality’. But for Moltmann this is not only a futuristic idea or hope. It has its foundation in the resurrection of Christ; indeed, he says that with the resurrection of Christ our mortal humanity is raised and transformed into immortality. We are ‘gathered up’ into the new creation.23

When he attempts to explain what resurrection life is actually like, Moltmann offers a different view from that so widely held since Augustine, which envisages the death of the body but the translation

of an eternal soul into immortality. For Moltmann, Christian eschatology uniquely overcomes this ‘enmity between soul and body, spirit and matter’.24 A special strength of Christian faith, then, is its affirmation of bodily existence. Moltmann takes this to its next implication, to say that resurrection life also must be bodily life.

There are two elements or stages to this argument. The first can be seen in this sentence: ‘But if eternal life can only be bodily life, the consequence is the abolition of the soul’s repression of the body and the unreserved ensouling of the body.’25 This means a gathering of our bodily life, which has been so limited by our concern for ‘control’, into a passionate life, a life of love. Indeed, Moltmann now introduces the phrase, ‘a body of love’. Here he refers to Norman O Brown’s books, *Life Against Death* and *Love’s Body*, which provide a psychoanalytic critique of the ways in which our human bodies have become subjected to ‘technology’ and the consequences for personal and social relationships.26 The ensouling of the body means the passionate living of a renewed unity of our selves, as persons who are both body and soul. It means living with energy, the energy that flows from our bodies, but is ultimately the energy of the Spirit of God.27 To live this way requires the ‘spontaneous passion of love’; it is a continuous giving of oneself to and for life.

It is crucial to note the logic of Moltmann’s argument here. It does not suggest that ensouled living enshrines our resurrection, nor that by this means we create resurrection life (present or future). Just as God raised Jesus, so too our resurrection is utterly dependent upon God’s gift of new creation. But in the strength of that hope, already embodied in Christ, we can even now enter into this quality of life and engage in the ‘first fruits’ of eternity. Furthermore, in describing the quality of resurrection life here and now, Moltmann helps us to comprehend what eternal life is like. It is the transformation of our ensouled living into the fullness of love. The body that is raised, then, is ‘the body of

love', for 'the life lived in love will rise and be transfigured'.\textsuperscript{28} What is lost in death is not our embodiment, but all the limitations by which we fail to live fully, to engage in ensouled living.

The second, inspirational phase of Moltmann's argument is to define the scope of resurrection life. His title for this section is 'Becoming alive in the Spirit of the resurrection', with the subtitle 'The unifying of what has been separated'. I shall deal with each of the five sections only briefly. Moltmann is speaking here of the dimensions of resurrection life and is describing a quality of life that here and now may be commenced. The implication is that the hope of resurrection makes it possible for us to reach out to these dimensions of new life here and now.

i. The unity of body and soul. Against the deathly tendency in Western culture to degrade, subjugate and control the body, thus contributing to illness in many forms and a fear of death and indeed of life itself, resurrection means a new unity of body and soul in eternal life. The Spirit enables an end to 'life-hating divisions' and 'necrophilic conflicts'.\textsuperscript{29} We are drawn into a wholeness in which mortal life is fully loved and embraced; we may live fully and die fully, in hope and wholeness.

ii. The unity of person and time. Whole personhood requires the ability to 'own' and recognise ourselves in all the phases of our lives, past and future. This means a continued sense of identity with who we are, who we have been and who we will be. The resurrection hope is not only for our death but also for 'hope for all the hours of life from first to last'. Every phase of our life, from embryo to senility, has the same dignity and rights in the eyes of God.\textsuperscript{30}

iii. The unity between person and community. Since bodily existence is necessarily social, the resurrection of the body has implications not only for our individuality but also for our sociality. Between 'egotistical individualism' and 'debased collectivism', there must be a genuine unity of personhood and community. Resurrection living calls for the integrity of both individuals and society.

iv. The unity of the human race in the generational contract. Human life exists within an 'unwritten contract' between generations. Moltmann argues, and it ceases when this contract is broken. We need to regain the conviction that life itself has been passed on to us from previous generations and is to be held in trust for future generations. Resurrection hope, resisting the power of death, enables us to see our place and our responsibility in this dimension of life also.

v. The unity between human civilisation and nature. Here Moltmann draws together most concisely his ecological doctrine of creation and his doctrine of resurrection. He begins with these pithy assertions: 'Hope for the resurrection of the dead has to do with human persons. Hope for the resurrection of the body has to do with human nature.'\textsuperscript{31} Human beings can recognise, in the strength of resurrection faith, that they too are part of 'nature' as well as 'person'. Indeed, we cannot be persons without the whole created order within which we live. God's purpose in creation is to come to an eschatological Sabbath, where God indwells and rests with the whole creation.

In this extended argument, Moltmann makes clear that for him resurrection faith extends to the whole of life—past, present and future. He seeks to address many of the polarisations experienced by people today, which he rightly sees as giving rise to much of the suffering of people and the earth. Resurrection faith includes the hope that these things will be healed and calls forth a life in which they are already being overcome.

Moltmann's willingness to engage constructively with these elements in our situation and experience is, I think, one of the most valuable features of his theology. He has acknowledged the tendency towards 'hatred of the body' and responds with a comprehensive theological account of the character of resurrection life as 'ensouled living'. His argument has many strengths. It coheres with contemporary ecological thought and with the emphasis on embodied personhood in feminist and other ethical perspectives. In his emphasis upon embodiment as an essential dimension of resurrection life, Moltmann also has considerable support from the NT. In particular, the argument of 1 Corinthians 15, concerning the resurrection body, supports Moltmann's approach. As James Dunn has argued, by distinguishing carefully Paul's ideas of sark and soma we can see that Paul regards human life as embodied existence and resurrection life also as embodied. Dunn rightly sees that Paul's theology here has 'an

\textsuperscript{28} Moltmann, The Way of Jesus Christ, 263.
\textsuperscript{29} Moltmann, The Way of Jesus Christ, 266.
\textsuperscript{30} Moltmann, The Way of Jesus Christ, 267-68.
\textsuperscript{31} Moltmann, The Way of Jesus Christ, 270.
unavoidably social and ecological dimension.\textsuperscript{32} The ‘spiritual body’ of Paul’s resurrection theology is a body, since corporeality is integral to being human. What is lost or left behind in our resurrection are those aspects of our current life that Paul denotes as ‘flesh’. This is not our physicality or embodiment, but those mortal and corruptible aspects that belong to the world and cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. For Paul, ‘body’ can be transformed into resurrection life, while ‘flesh’ cannot. Furthermore, embodied resurrection life begins with our baptism into the body of Christ.\textsuperscript{33} Moltmann’s extensive elaboration of the ‘dimensions’ of resurrection living, through his concepts of ‘ensouled living’ and the ‘body of love’ are imaginative, almost poetic developments of Paul’s thought, enabling us to grasp in more detail how the hope of resurrection actually relates to the way we live today.

It is also important to note that for Moltmann (as for Paul), our present participation in resurrection life is dependent upon the work of the Spirit. This is an element of his thought we have not yet addressed adequately, and without it we cannot do his theology justice. We will redress this failing in section 4.

At this point, however, there is one critical issue that needs to be introduced, for it represents a major limitation of the credibility of Moltmann’s position. In the development of his understanding of resurrection life, Moltmann places almost all his emphasis upon what is called ‘the general resurrection’, the resurrection of human beings and creation more generally. He does not address in the same detail the question of the resurrection body of Jesus. Indeed, he seems to side-step the question of the nature of Jesus’ risen body.

To clarify the issue, Moltmann is explicit in his affirmation of the historical event of Jesus’ resurrection. All his theology of resurrection is dependent upon the affirmation that Christ is risen, yet he places all his emphasis upon the subsequent implications of this event. Thus he has written, ‘The raising of Christ is not a phrase describing a past happening. It is the name of a confronting event in the past in which the Spirit determines our present because it opens up the future for eternal life.’\textsuperscript{34} What happened on that first Easter morning was the lifting up of our entire world into a new creation. Here we see that Moltmann moves quickly away from the resurrection of Jesus to the historical and theological implications of that ‘confronting event in the past’.

Given his affirmation of the historical event of Jesus’ resurrection, however, it seems appropriate to press the question of the nature of Jesus’ risen body. The logic of his argument requires that the risen Jesus is embodied, but what was the nature of this body? Moltmann seems to place most of his emphasis upon the resurrection of Christians rather than of Christ. The resurrection of Christ is the foundation of the general resurrection, and some further consideration of the embodied resurrection of Jesus might assist the credibility of his case.

In recent scholarship, we find a range of approaches to this matter. John Dominic Crossan is an example of one approach. He considers that Jesus’ body was most likely thrown into a mass grave and decomposed as do all such bodies. Crossan regards the stories of the empty tomb as ‘gospel fiction’ and the appearance stories as accounts of visions. His positive account of resurrection sees Jesus as raised together with all the saints, into an embodied, corporate life.\textsuperscript{35} Crossan interprets 1 Cor 15:13 and 16 as suggesting a general resurrection that includes Christ, rather than (as traditionally understood) Christ’s prior resurrection leading to a general resurrection. As a consequence, the individual body of Jesus is of no importance for his idea of resurrection.

An opposite position is that of N T Wright, who argues that resurrection means coming back to the bodily life that has been forfeited in death. This includes physical life: ‘What the early church insisted about Jesus was that he had been well and truly physically dead and was now well and truly physically alive.’\textsuperscript{36} Wright expressly rejects the approach of Gerd Lüdemann, who, like Crossan, holds that the resurrection appearances were visions, whilst Jesus’ actual body

\textsuperscript{32} James D G Dunn, The Theology of Paul the Apostle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 61.

\textsuperscript{33} Dunn, The Theology of Paul the Apostle, 71-73; 487-88.


\textsuperscript{35} Crossan, The Birth of Christianity, 498-511, 545-73.

was buried and decomposed in a mass grave. Wright distinguishes the NT witness from a range of Jewish expectations of a resurrection. Those who did believe in a ‘resurrection body’ expected that God would give the dead new bodies, but there was no expectation that this would occur to a single individual ahead of all the righteous. For the earliest Christians, Jesus had been raised from the dead ‘attaining a newly embodied existence through and out the other side of physical death’. As a result, though the ‘present age’ yet continued, the ‘new age’ had already begun, and Jesus’ followers were recipients and agents of its benefits.

In evaluating these two approaches, we can note several crucial factors. In Crossan’s thought, much weight is given to an interpretation of Paul, developed on the basis of the Gospel of Peter, while the witness of the canonical gospels is discounted as fiction. Wright acknowledges important differences in emphasis between Paul and the gospels and attempts to address these. Nonetheless, a number of basic puzzles remain concerning the risen body of Jesus. If, as Wright insists, the risen body of Jesus was a physical body, in the direct meaning of that term, was this body susceptible to another possible death, or was it in some ways different from the mortal body that was crucified? We might also wonder what became of it. The Lukan story of ascension simply removes the puzzle to another level, as we wonder how an earthly physical body can ascend to heaven. On the other hand, those who hold that the risen Christ ‘appeared’ to the disciples, notwithstanding that his body was buried somewhere in a mass grave, must explain how a person can be recognised without physical embodiment. If the ‘risen body’ of Jesus was not his physical body, then what was it?

Hans Küng seeks to avoid these puzzles by asserting that we are not meant to imagine the resurrection. ‘Raising up’ and ‘resurrection’ are metaphorical, pictorial terms drawn from our awakening from sleep. Waking or rising from death is not returning to the wakeful state of ordinary life. It is, rather, ‘a radical transformation into a wholly different, unparalleled, definitive state: eternal life. Here there is nothing to be depicted, imagined, objectified’. For Küng, while we may hope for the new life, it is nonetheless beyond our vision or imagination. He contends that the NT writers embrace this puzzlement. They know they are speaking in paradoxes, and the limits of language. Küng’s conclusion is that we should not attempt to ‘imagine’ the resurrection body, but engage with the hope of resurrection here and now. In place of inappropriate imagining, Küng describes the quality and dimensions of eternal life, in categories similar to Moltmann’s ideas of ensouled living.

The credibility issue we have been exploring concerns the relationship between belief in the embodied resurrection of both humanity and creation and the historical resurrection of Jesus. On what basis are we to hope for a general resurrection of all created life if we cannot give a meaningful and coherent account of the embodied resurrection of Jesus? It seems as if Moltmann’s approach is an attempt to give greater credibility to the general hope of resurrection, with a stress on the praxis of resurrection, without offering any further insight into the nature of the risen life of Jesus.

Here we seem to have reached a dilemma in Moltmann’s thought. On one hand, he seems to be suggesting (like Küng) that Christian faith is not primarily concerned with knowledge about the historical event of Jesus’ resurrection, but is rather about present engagement with and entry into that quality of resurrection life he calls ‘ensouled living’. This seems to imply, however, that we can only know what it really means to say ‘Christ is risen’ if we actually live this way. Praxis is a form of epistemology; understanding follows doing. Presumably we must enter into this praxis with some understanding, some belief, and the confidence that we shall reach further understanding and knowledge ‘on the way’. The difficulty with this approach is that it looks like a form of fideism. Moltmann seems to be suggesting that it is only as we enter into this form of life, ‘ensouled living’, that we can come to understand what resurrection means. This implies that those who do not enter this pathway cannot understand it, and those who do enter it must do so by a leap of ‘blind faith’. In effect, the historical resurrection of Jesus is of no decisive significance for Christian faith. What matters is the ‘meaning’ injected into Christian beliefs through the lifestyle of Christians today. If this is the real effect of Moltmann’s

theology, it is open to the charge of being a system of human self-
salvation. In the next section we will consider this objection in detail.

On the other hand, if Moltmann wishes to reject these implications,
he needs some more detailed account of the way in which the present
practice of resurrection faith is meaningfully and credibly related to
and founded upon the resurrection of Jesus. The specific means by
which Moltmann seeks to address these concerns is his stress upon the
work of the Holy Spirit, who enables us both to believe in the resur-
rection of Jesus and to enter into liberating life.

4. A system of self-salvation?

It seems that Moltmann’s theology of resurrection offers an
ethic or lifestyle that basically requires people to save them-
theselves, to bring about their own ‘resurrection’.

The objection we are dealing with here has already been implied in the
preceding discussion. It involves the suggestion that Moltmann's the-
ology is essentially a personal and social program, sketching a style of
life that people may follow. This objection implies that Moltmann has
engaged in reductionism, whereby the traditional Christian idea of a
future life created by God is now understood as a lifestyle in this world
to be achieved by human effort. The practical meaning of Christian
belief is neither to describe an historical event called ‘the resurrection
of Jesus’ nor to refer to a future situation beyond this world. Rather,
the argument runs, Moltmann is using stories about Jesus and a future
hope, but is in fact advocating a system of self-salvation, through
which people bring about their own ‘resurrection’.

Randall Otto sees Moltmann’s theology in this way. Otto has
argued that through his ‘sinful reason and idolatrous imagination’
Moltmann seeks to make human beings divine and to create a world
better than the one God has created.40 This conclusion derives from a
detailed argument about the place of revelation in theology and the
subsequent methodology appropriate to theology. While we cannot go
into those issues here, what is pertinent in Otto’s critique is his claim
that Moltmann’s theology of hope is an essentially humanist program
to ‘save the world’.


In response to this objection, it is important to begin by agreeing
that for Moltmann resurrection faith is indeed a way of life. It is about
the will and purpose of God that all things should live and not be
overwhelmed by death. ’All life is intended to live and not to die.’41
Resurrection faith centres on the creative power of God towards life,
resisting and defeating death. Resurrection is a way of living that
resists all that closes life in on itself. This, we have seen, is what
Moltmann sees as the meaning of death or the life that resists God; it is
the opposite of heaven and the absence of hope. Resurrection life is
earthly life transformed such that it is open to the eternal purposes of
God.

In this way, resurrection faith is an ethic, a system of values to be
lived out in the lifestyle of those who believe in the resurrection of
Jesus Christ. This faith is not only a matter of belief; it is a call to live in
the power of the Spirit who raised Jesus and is raising and will raise us
(Rom 8:11). Here we see the twin foundations of Moltmann’s theology:
Resurrection faith is grounded both in belief in what God has done in
Christ and in the activity of the Spirit, drawing us towards what God
will do.

In considering the NT accounts of Jesus’ resurrection, Moltmann
notes that at some point the various appearances of the risen Jesus
stopped. He asks why the faith itself and the Christian community did
not also stop. The answer is that resurrection faith passed through a
transformation, now taking on the distinctive character of believing
rather than ‘seeing’. Now resurrection faith has three dimensions. First,
the gospel is now retrospectively the word of the cross. Present ex-
periences of suffering are now interpreted in the light of Jesus’ death
and resurrection. This gospel is also prospective, for the present mean-
ing of suffering is made possible through the anticipation of the
coming of God’s new creation. On this basis, the gospel is also a present
call to live in the presence and hope of the risen Christ.42

Here we see that for Moltmann resurrection faith includes, quite
fundamentally, a form of belief. We must believe the resurrection
kerygma about what God has done in Jesus Christ. But the other factor
in resurrection faith is our present experience, which gives content to
that belief. For Moltmann, these two factors are inextricably linked:

Anyone who talks about Christ’s resurrection from the dead and who believes in the power of God to raise the dead is talking in a single breath about the foundation, the future and the praxis of the liberation of human beings and the redemption of the world. This means that what we can know historically about Christ’s resurrection must not be abstracted from the questions: what can we hope from it? and what must we do in its name? The resurrection of Christ is historically understood in the fullest sense only in the unity of knowing, hoping and doing.43

Here we see clearly why Moltmann seems to place much greater stress upon the character of our present life in resurrection faith than upon describing the nature of Jesus’ resurrection body. For Moltmann, the epistemological issues cannot be separated. To know the risen life of Christ is also to engage with that same quality of life in the present and to hope for the resurrection of all things in the coming of God’s new creation.

We see here how Moltmann makes an essential link between faith in the resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection experience of Christian believers. Faith in the resurrection is a personal engagement with the life of God, a reaching out towards that future opened up for us in the resurrection of Jesus. Faith in the resurrection is, therefore, an activity of the Holy Spirit in us, drawing us towards the new creation. The Holy Spirit is thus not only the agent of Jesus’ resurrection but also ‘rises up’ in us, bringing us towards the redemption God wills for the whole creation.

We noted above that Moltmann’s description of the dimensions of resurrection life as ‘ensouled living’ is part of his exposition of ‘becoming alive in the Spirit’. It is the Spirit of God who enables us both to believe in Jesus and his resurrection and to engage with that new life as practical hope for ourselves and the world as we know it.

There are, then, two crucial foundations to Moltmann’s resurrection theology. The first is the historical actions of God in the mission, death and resurrection of Jesus. Without this foundation, there would be no resurrection hope. But this element is insufficient without the Spirit’s present and continuing activity, bringing us to faith in Christ and to the practical hope of resurrection. Together, these elements refute the suggestion that Moltmann’s theology reduces Christian faith to a system of self-salvation, an ethic in which we seek to create our own resurrection.

With Paul, Moltmann’s theology asserts that if Christ is not raised then we are without hope (1 Cor 15:14). But since Christ is raised, our lives in the Spirit reach out for the resurrection promised in Christ. It is not we who create this life, but ‘the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead’, dwelling within and giving life to our mortal bodies (Rom 8:11).

The adequacy and credibility of Moltmann’s response to this objection depends, finally, upon the truth of the claim that Jesus has been raised from death and that the Spirit of God enables us to enter into the same quality of new life. In short, the question of truth remains. If we can reject an interpretation that sees Moltmann’s theology as a reductionist ethic of self-salvation, can we also address the charge of fideism? Is Moltmann able to offer an account of the truth of resurrection faith that is not only comprehensible to those who already hold such beliefs, but is also persuasive to those not already committed to it? This brings us to the last objection we will consider.

5. The question of truth

It seems that Moltmann’s theology of resurrection is based upon speculation and is impossible to verify.

In the preceding discussion, we have seen that the meaning and credibility of Moltmann’s account of resurrection faith are recurring issues. Some of the earlier objections were met by offering wider and wider interpretations of the nature of resurrection life. Ultimately, however, the question of truth remains. On what basis can we assert this doctrine of resurrection life and hope?

In contrast to those who work from a more philosophical or analytical approach to theology, Moltmann rarely expounds the epistemological foundations of his theology as a separate element. There are, however, several places where he has addressed these questions, and it is there that we find a key to the wider epistemological basis of his thought.

Within a broader discussion of the relationship between the resurrection of Jesus and the knowledge of human history, we find a

brief discussion of the idea of verification. The argument here centres on whether we can see the resurrection of Jesus as providing a basis for faith in ‘the resurrection of the dead’. Moltmann argues that this general form of belief, the ‘eschatological symbol of the raising of the dead’, is an interpretative category through which we may understand the otherwise conflicting and confusing experiences of life in this world.\footnote{Moltmann, The Way of Jesus Christ, 221.} This would suggest a coherence view of truth. In effect, the capacity of resurrection belief to make sense of otherwise bewildering experiences in life, so that all these experiences ‘hang together’, is one form of validation of those beliefs.

Moltmann does not leave the matter there, however. As we have seen, the eschatological symbol of the resurrection of the dead is itself without foundation unless it is understood in the light of the resurrection of Jesus. Having identified this question of credibility, Moltmann states that the justification of Christian belief in the resurrection of the dead is subject to future verification. The foundation of this belief is yet to be made known: ‘The Christian belief in the resurrection remains dependent on its verification through the eschatological raising of all the dead. As long as this has not been manifested, the belief is still only hope.’\footnote{Moltmann, The Way of Jesus Christ, 223.}

Here it is clear that while resurrection faith may provide a coherent form of understanding that enhances our lives, it does not in itself constitute ‘proof’. Verification is pending. This clarifies the nature of resurrection belief. It is not so much belief that something is true, in the sense that it is already established to be the case; rather, resurrection faith is belief that something will be the case and will be shown to be true. The whole truth inherent in God’s raising of Jesus from the dead, at the first Easter, has yet to be fully realised. That is to say, we have not yet grasped it or entered into it.

What, then, of the objection that Moltmann’s ‘interpretation’ is in danger of becoming just so much speculation? The delineation of the resurrection hope may provide some basis by which we can understand and make sense of our present lives, but the question of truth remains. Is this true? Is it credible? Moltmann’s thesis seems in many ways to have raised the stakes even higher. He is asking us to believe not only in the resurrection of humans but also in the resurrection of the whole creation.

In a later discussion, Moltmann directly addresses the question of whether his notion of resurrection living is merely speculation. These forms of hope are not speculative fantasies. They are knowledge which founds and sustains existence.\footnote{Moltmann, The Way of Jesus Christ, 260.} The discussion following these words introduces the idea of ‘ensouled living’ and all that that entails. Seen in this light, it becomes clear that for Moltmann this quality of life is its own truth. Verification of Christian resurrection faith is to be found in the living. This faith, as it were, creates its own truth and is its own justification. The credibility of this faith is to be found in the health that it engenders.

In conclusion, we see here that the strengths of Moltmann’s exposition of resurrection hope are also its vulnerability and possible weakness. Resurrection belief has no other grounds to convince us of its truth than the quality of life in the Spirit that it describes and promises. The question of credibility depends, therefore, upon our judgment about whether Moltmann has offered a coherent, comprehensive and compelling account of Christian hope. We have suggested that his theology has many strengths, addressing the needs and possibilities of life in the present, bodily life and some of the grounds of suffering in the world. He has also been able to give meaning to the concept of heaven in a fresh way. His theology has a systematic coherence and integrity, which also enjoys considerable resonance with biblical sources. Though we have identified some areas where Moltmann’s thought is incomplete or unclear, these seem minor in comparison with the strengths we have found. These achievements do not, however, constitute a final or ‘knock-down’ case for resurrection belief. In the nature of the case, resurrection faith is not something to be assented to but a promise and a life to be entered into. In Johannine terms, we might say it is not only a truth but a way and a life. Indeed, the order of terms seems important here: the ‘way’ precedes the ‘truth’ and thus enables the ‘life’. As Thorwald Lorenzen has argued, the resurrection is a reality that ‘...reaches into history in
and through the lives of those who participate in it.\textsuperscript{47} It can be known as ‘truly’ or reality only as we engage with its impact upon our lives and our world-view.

Resurrection faith is ultimately founded on Jesus Christ. In the major work we have been considering, Molmann makes a significant contribution to theology by developing a Christology ‘on the way’. This Christology is the basis of resurrection belief as life and truth. The gospel of the resurrection is the invitation to life in openness to God, life on the way to God. As we enter into this life, we discover or encounter this truth as the way.

Finally, then, we turn to consider briefly the sense in which this gospel of resurrection is good news for the poor.

6. Good news for the poor

Is the gospel of resurrection good news for the poor? The answer to this question requires a clarification of what is being promised. If by Christian hope we mean an expectation of utopia, then resurrection faith is not credible. Clearly man has hoped in Christ and their poverty has continued and indeed many have died in great suffering. Utopia has not come. But if by this hope we mean a sense of movement, a visionary helpfulness that is able to understand suffering and able to envision how reality might be otherwise, then already the situation of those who suffer is transformed by that vision and hope. The circumstances may not have changed, yet there is hope.

Resurrection belief does not deny the problems of the world, but engages them with hope. This hope, however, is credible only in so far as it is in fact a movement, that is, only in so far as it implies that the future is open, that life is more than the present. Without the dimension of ‘heaven’ or the notion that, despite appearances to the contrary, we are with God, hope founders. Resurrection ceases to be good news. But, as Molmann has argued, in the death and resurrection of Jesus we see that there is such ‘movement’. This is not something we have to create or achieve for ourselves. Rather, the good news is that God has already made this movement towards us: the ‘heavens’ are open to us. For all humanity, and especially for those who have no hope except in God, this is good news. Apocalyptic suffering is transformed by eschatological hope and becomes the occasion of good news.

These implications of resurrection theology lead us to consider exactly what it means to speak of ‘good news for the poor’. In one of his earlier books, \textit{The Church in the Power of the Spirit}, Molmann has a section on the gospel for the poor. Here he asks who the poor are and responds by arguing that the poor are ‘those who are at the mercy of others, and who live with empty and open hands. Poverty means both dependency and openness’.\textsuperscript{48} By contrast, the rich and powerful are those who live with clenched fists. The ideas of riches and poverty are multidimensional, he argues. Poverty should not be understood only in economic or political terms, though it has those aspects. To be poor means not only to have empty and open hands, but to be dependent, to be powerless to change one’s circumstances. To be poor is to be at the mercy of the rich and powerful, and thus to be without hope.

Molmann’s doctrine of resurrection suggests that the Christian gospel announces a transformation of this situation. It is an invitation to the poor to see that even when and though their hands are empty, they are not without hope. They are not ultimately dependent on the clenched fists. They are not ultimately at the mercy of the violent, the rich and the powerful. Rather, they are the most blessed ones, because they are ready and open to receive the way of life. The proclamation of the resurrection announces to the poor that they are in the front of the queue, while those who thought they were first in life are likely to be last. Conversely, as Athol Gill often put it, for the rich the gospel is bad news before it can be good news. The wealthy and powerful must learn to be poor and vulnerable if they wish to receive with joy the gifts of new life that cannot be earned, purchased or created for oneself.

Who are the poor? They are those who know that God is their only hope. They are those who know, perhaps from bitter experience, what death is and what life truly is, and therefore know whom to trust. For the poor, resurrection is the only hope.

The call to resurrection life is an affirmation and celebration of life, for all those who are ready to receive it and enter into it. Here, I


suggest, the poor have a particular advantage. The witness of the gospels is that when Jesus made such a proclamation, he found that it was the poor and outcast who were most ready to receive it.

As we have seen, Christian hope is not the same as wishing things were different. Hope requires, as Karl Rahner has argued, creating enough ‘space’ or openness in our lives so that hope may enter: ‘[Hope] is a process of constantly eliminating the provisional in order to make room for the radical and pure uncontrollability of God.’ To hope is to sense that we are ‘on the way’, even if we do not always know where it is we are going. To hope is to reach out for a reality beyond the present and seen, beyond what we can control and predict; it is to trust ourselves to that which is beyond our managing. In Moltmann’s terms, we cannot live in hope if we are not orientated towards the future of God—as distinct from the future we try to make for ourselves. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit to awaken such hope in us, as the story of Jesus becomes for us a liberating interpretation of the present, in the light of the promised future.

It is in this sense that those who suffer and mourn, those who are poor and outcast, have a special advantage in receiving the good news of resurrection. They have, as it were, a greater willingness to let go of the present, including present understandings and interpretations. Being poor is about being at the mercy of forces one cannot control. To be poor is to have, as it were, less work to do in order to ‘make way’ for hope. By contrast, the rich have a particular disadvantage. Those whose lives are defined by present power and wealth find it much harder to ‘move’, to make room for the entry of hope. The resurrection message is for them—and this means for me—a call to repentance, a turning away from the false realities and false hopes that have generated our wealth, power and supremacy, and the constant drive to create and control the future. These things may not directly lead to the death of the suffering poor. But they have contributed to the systems of injustice and, as Moltmann argues, they are leading to the death of nature, to a world in the clutches of death. Resurrection faith calls for repentance from our love of earthly ways to a love of life. It means clearing the way for hope to enter.