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Evangelical Quarterly

**An International Review
of Bible and Theology**
in Defence of the Historic Christian Faith

Vol. LXXXIII No. 4 October 2011

Editors: I Howard Marshall, John-Paul Lotz,
John G F Wilks



Paternoster:
thinking faith

Predestination and perseverance in the early theology of Jürgen Moltmann

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KEY WORDS: Reformed theology, predestination, Moltmann, perseverance, federal theology, Calvinism, covenants, Amyraut, universalism.

Introduction

Jürgen Moltmann (b.1926) ranks among the most outstanding, prolific and influential theologians of the second half of the twentieth century. He came to global attention in the wake of his books *Theology of Hope*¹ and *The Crucified God*² published in German in 1964 and 1972 respectively. Both works count as landmarks in recent systematic theology such that theological debate of this period can hardly be understood without them. Moltmann's reputation has been further enhanced by *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*³ and the five volumes of his so-called 'systematic contributions to theology' beginning in English translation with *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*⁴ in 1981 and ending with *The Coming of God*⁵ in 1996. Although Moltmann, like every theologian, has not always commanded agreement there is no doubt about his theological creativity and the fertility of his contribution to theological debate in the second half of the twentieth century.

Moltmann is often described as a Lutheran theologian. In part this is because he is German and because *The Crucified God* in particular has many Lutheran echoes, not least in the title. In actual fact he is very much and very decidedly a Reformed theologian. It is clear from his autobiography⁶ that he was born into an intellectual family with high ideals among which religious faith did not figure.

1 *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implication of a Christian Eschatology* (London: SCM Press, 1965).

2 *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1974).

3 *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (London: SCM Press, 1977).

4 *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (London: SCM Press, 1981).

5 *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (London: SCM Press, 1996). The intervening three volumes include *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of God*, The Gifford Lectures 1984-1985 (London: SCM Press, 1985), *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions* in 1990 and *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (London: SCM Press, 1992).

6 *A Broad Place: An Autobiography* (London: SCM Press, 2007).

Yet he was confirmed in the Lutheran church as a matter of form. His true search for God began when he survived the fire-bombing of Hamburg, continued when he was taken prisoner by the Allies in Holland and led to his discovery of faith through reading the NT while in a variety of American and British prisoner of war camps. He speaks warmly of the opportunities he was given to study theology at Norton Camp near Mansfield under the auspices of the YMCA. When he was released from captivity and returned to Hamburg in 1948 he left the Lutheran Church and on commencing studies at the University of Göttingen joined the Reformed congregation there. It is with Reformed theology that Moltmann's interest and commitment have remained ever since.

British Protestants tend to be unaware of the differences of thought and approach between German Lutherans and the Reformed, but they are long-standing and are present in the Reformation itself, revolving at that time largely around variant understandings of Christology and the eucharist. It should be understood, moreover, that in the German and continental contexts 'Reformed' connotes something broader and more varied than is often implied in the British context where the word is frequently applied quite narrowly.⁷ To say that the present-day World Alliance of Reformed Churches also includes churches stemming from Arminius and the Remonstrants partly makes the point. Indeed, one thing that becomes clear in Moltmann's theology is the degree to which the Reformed tradition is a 'world of discourse' within an identifiable overall tradition rather than a set of fixed positions. It will come as no surprise to know that Moltmann himself inhabits the most generous end of the available spectrum whilst being clear that he is not an Arminian.

Moltmann's early theological development

One justification of this paper is that it explores a stage of Moltmann's theological development that is relatively and perhaps surprisingly unknown, specifically the period before *Theology of Hope*, when he was laying foundations and learning his theological trade. Why this period should be relatively overlooked is clear enough. His writings to this point remain both untranslated and difficult to obtain without the assistance of a very well-stocked library. The linguistic challenge posed here is not only the ability to read German but also of following the extensive quotations in Latin which he frequently employed, as did the theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries who were his main focus. Furthermore, up to the point of *Theology of Hope* Moltmann was a historical rather than a systematic theologian, concentrating on relatively specialised areas of research, namely the formative phase of Reformed thinking between the Reformation and the Enlightenment. Still, it is noteworthy that this early period in his career has not been extensively explored, but rather swiftly passed over,

7 This theme has recently been explored in Kenneth J. Stewart, *Ten Myths about Calvinism: Recovering the breadth of the Reformed Tradition* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2011).

in books that engage with his later writings. Among these I include the three invaluable books on Moltmann's theology written or edited by Richard Bauckham.⁸ Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz's exposition of Moltmann's theology deals with the theological explorations of this period more fully and draws attention in particular to his short (35 pages) but programmatic early work *Die Gemeinde im Horizont der Herrschaft Christi: Neue Perspektiven in der Protestantischen Theologie*⁹ (*The Church against the Horizon of the Rule of Christ: New Perspectives in Protestant Theology*).¹⁰ But as this author points out, given all the consideration that needs to be expended on the later works, lack of sustained attention to Moltmann's early period is unsurprising. Significantly, in his autobiography Moltmann makes little mention of this particular work and instead characterises this period, as we shall see, as one in which the themes reflected in the title to this paper, predestination and perseverance, were to the fore.¹¹ This suggests that an exploration of this period may contribute to wider examination of the sources of Moltmann's theological instincts and constructions.

After his introduction to serious theological thought at Norton Camp, Moltmann returned to his native Germany in 1947 to study theology informally with the pastors in Hamburg during the post-war reconstruction. He then applied himself between 1948 and 1952 to the state examinations at the University of Göttingen that would qualify him to become a pastor in the Reformed Church. Here he was influenced by a number of teachers who had taken part in the Confessing Church, the section of German Protestantism associated with Karl Barth, Martin Niemöller and Dietrich Bonhoeffer which had resisted the Nazi regime, a legacy into which he was pleased to enter. In Göttingen he also met his future wife, Elisabeth Wendel, who was one year ahead of him in gaining her doctorate in theology. Chief among their teachers was Otto Weber (1902-1966), a Reformed preacher and theologian and a prime promoter of the theology of Karl Barth.¹² Moltmann was to write of Weber, 'He always remained my model, my friend, and my mentor'.¹³ At this time Moltmann, under Weber's influence, was inclined to believe that Barth had said everything that needed to be said in theology and that repetition of his theology was the order of the day.¹⁴ His further theological development was to entail realising this not to be true and then growing beyond

8 *Moltmann: Messianic Theology in the Making* (Basingstoke: Marshall-Pickering, 1987), *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1995) and, ed., *God will be All in All: The Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1999).

9 (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1959).

10 Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz, *The Kingdom and the Power: The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann* (London: SCM Press, 2000), 26-39.

11 *A Broad Place*, 76-77.

12 Otto Weber, *Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics: An Introductory Report on Volumes I:1 to III:4* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1953); *Foundations of Dogmatics* Volumes I and II (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981 and 1983 respectively).

13 *A Broad Place*, 48.

14 *A Broad Place*, 47.

this point. Weber steered Moltmann's first research interests by directing him for his doctoral dissertation to the French Reformed theologian Moysse Amyraut (1596-1664). It was for this work, entitled *Prädestination und Heilsgeschichte bei Moysse Amyraut: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der reformierten Theologie zwischen Orthodoxie und Aufklärung*¹⁵ that Moltmann was to receive his first doctorate. It also set him off in a specific direction that characterises this early stage of his theological learning. 'Through Otto Weber', comments Moltmann, 'I had come to love the Reformed tradition'.¹⁶ And it was this tradition that he continued to explore, especially in that variant of Reformed thinking that has come to be known as 'federal theology'.

To prepare for pastoral ministry Moltmann spent six months at the Reformed Preachers' Seminary at Wuppertal-Elberfeld where, he says, he learnt nothing. But in the seminary library he discovered the works of Johannes Coccejus (1603-1669), the German born seventeenth century theologian who is generally regarded as the founder of the federal theological approach, although he had a variety of precursors in this.¹⁷ The relationship between God and humanity was understood by Coccejus in terms of covenant, first of all a covenant of works between God and Adam and, when this failed, a covenant of grace. In this way Coccejus was opposed to the scholastic Calvinism developing under the tutelage of Theodore Beza (1519-1605) of Geneva and Francis Gomar (1563-1641) of Leiden what he considered to be a more biblical, historical understanding of salvation. The effect of his work was to bring the history of the covenants into the foreground and push the idea of unilateral decrees made by God in his secret eternity into the background, so producing a more moderate and less harsh form of Calvinism.¹⁸ During his first and only pastorate in the farming community of Bremen-Wasserhorst (1953-1958) Moltmann found substantial time to pursue his emerging theological interest and did the research for an article published in 1957 entitled 'Zur Bedeutung des Petrus Ramus für Philosophie und Theologie im Calvinismus'.¹⁹ In the same year he was 'habilitated' after researching for his senior or professorial doctorate in the topic, 'Christoph Pezel und der Calvinismus in Bremen'.²⁰ In the years 1958-64 Moltmann lectured at the church semi-

15 The title translates as, *Predestination and the History of Salvation in Moysse Amyraut: A contribution to the history of reformed Theology between Orthodoxy and Enlightenment*.

16 *A Broad Place*, 53.

17 'Geschichtstheologie und pietistisches Menschenbild bei Johannes Coccejus und Theodore Undereyck', *Evangelische Theologie*, Volume 19 (1959), 343-361. ('The theology of history and the pietist conception of humanity in Johannes Coccejus and Theodore Undereyck'.

18 John T. McNeil, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (Oxford: OUP, 1954), 266.

19 'On the meaning of Petrus Ramus for Philosophy and Theology in Calvinism'. The German article was published in *Zeitschrift zur Kirchengeschichte* Volume 68 (1957), 295-318.

20 'Christoph Pezel and Calvinism in Bremen'. I am not aware that this has been published. The *Habilitationschrift* qualifies a scholar to teach in a university.

nary in Wuppertal and in this period contributed a series of historical articles on federal theologians or related figures to the third edition of *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*.²¹ He was also to edit a symposium on Calvin in 1959 to which he contributed the article 'Erwählung unter Beharrung der Gläubigen'.²² Then in 1961 Moltmann was to publish what he called his first 'independent' work (by which I understand him to mean the first work not to be directed towards a university qualification in some way). This is entitled *Prädestination und Perseveranz: Geschichte und Bedeutung der reformierten Lehre "de perseverantia sanctorum"*.²³ This book marks both the end of the first, historical phase of Moltmann's work and the beginning of a new phase, as he himself indicates.²⁴

By this time therefore the pattern is clear. Moltmann is an historical theologian, rooted in his chosen Reformed tradition with a special interest in federal theology on the 'progressive' wing of Calvinism. Within this field he focuses in particular upon themes of predestination and perseverance. In his own words, 'My researches into the history of Reformed theology culminated in my book on the perseverance of believers "until the end" (*usque ad finem*); in the faithfulness of God the Father, in the advocacy of Christ, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, their faith is preserved in persecutions and temptations'.²⁵ With the appearance of the *Theology of Hope* in 1964 Moltmann moved into a new and expansive stage developing the themes of promise and kingdom in interaction with the philosophy of Ernst Bloch. It was through this that he first came to international prominence. But the foundations of his theological thought were by then already laid and it is with these that we are concerned.

Moltmann's concern with predestination

After this brief historical and biographical sketch we now turn to the actual content and concerns of his writings to this point. As always, Moltmann is candid and clear about what he was seeking to do. He writes in his autobiography:

Inwardly my thoughts turned to the fundamental idea underlying the predestination doctrine of Calvin and the Calvinists. It seemed to me that there the point was not the dualistic notion of separating humanity into the elect and the damned, the good and the evil, in order to put oneself into the right side; the heart of the doctrine was the concept of the persever-

21 Including Amyraut, Ramus, Coccejus, Zanchi, and Camero.

22 'The Election and Perseverance of Believers': See *Calvin-Studien* 1959 (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1960), 43-61.

23 *Prädestination und Perseverance: The history and meaning of the reformed doctrine on the perseverance of the saints*. The German book was published as the twelfth volume in the series *Beiträge zur Geschichte und Lehre der Reformierten Kirche* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1961). Müller-Fahrenholz mistakenly identifies this as Moltmann's *Habilitationschrift*, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, 29 fn. 15.

24 *A Broad Place*, 77.

25 *A Broad Place*, 97.

ance of believers in temptations and persecutions: 'He who endures to the end shall be saved.' From Otto Weber I had also learnt the mutual efficacy of 'the faithfulness of God and the continuity of human existence'....After more than 40 years, my former Tübingen colleague Heiko Obermann, later in Arizona, praised my insight: 'Calvin's doctrine of election will remain open for misunderstanding as long as people do not realize that it serves to express the faithfulness of God and the perseverance of faith'.²⁶

Moltmann's intention therefore is to offer an alternative reading of Calvin and a different perception of the doctrine of predestination by returning to the 'fundamental idea' which he discerned in its depths. A faithful reading of Calvin sees that beneath the doctrine of double predestination he advances there is a practical and pastoral doctrine of divine faithfulness and of human preservation through trouble and tribulation. This is to read Calvin not as a speculative theologian but as a biblical scholar and a practical theologian. The faithful God of the covenant stays true to his eternal purpose and enables believers to hold fast to God despite everything that seeks to separate them from God. This is good and comforting news rooted in hope and in faith. Its resonance with Romans 8 should be clear. However this does not clear Calvin of teaching what Moltmann would later describe as 'the terrible doctrine' of double predestination.²⁷ Consider this key statement in Calvin's Institutes:

We call predestination God's eternal decree, by which he determined with Himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or death.²⁸

Although admirers of Calvin point out that these words occur under the doctrine of salvation rather than of God, and so are supposedly less central to Calvin's theology,²⁹ Calvin's statements are unequivocal and in due course I shall question whether the early Moltmann does properly address them. God has established 'by his eternal and unchangeable plan those whom he long before determined once for all to receive into salvation, and those whom, on the other hand, he would devote to destruction... by his just and irreprehensible but incomprehensible judgment he has barred the door to life to those whom he has given over to damnation'.³⁰ This is the decree of reprobation parallel to the decree of salvation in explanation of the observable fact that in this life some believe and are saved and some do not and are not. This division of the world of humanity into elect and reprobate is founded upon the decision of the eternal

26 *A Broad Place*, 77.

27 *The Coming of God*, 247.

28 *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III.21.5.

29 See the editor's comments at this point in the Library of Christian Classics edition of the *Institutes* translated by J. T. McNeil (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1995).

30 *Institutes*, III.21.7.

God. Moltmann is proposing however that a proper interpretation of Calvin locates his concerns in the desire to stress the faithfulness of God in keeping and preserving those who believe and therefore as much more pastoral in intention.

Belief in divine election is the strength of Reformed faith providing, as it does, deep assurance that one is loved by God and justified by the grace of Christ. One suspects that whatever the contribution of the federal theologians to his thinking, Moltmann would never from the outset have been sympathetic to the doctrine of double predestination. However, we now seek to trace what it was in the federal theologians that drew his attention and supported his argument. We have noticed the importance of Coccejus for Moltmann. His doctoral thesis on Amyraut is important in this regard. But both Coccejus and Amyraut were preceded by Petrus Ramus and it is to this fountainhead that we turn. It should be understood that in what follows I am summarising Moltmann's analysis rather than advancing my own, although I do from time to time insert my own questions and comments.

Petrus Ramus (1515-1572) was roughly contemporary with John Calvin (1509-1564). Like Calvin a native of Picardy, he was a French humanist who converted to Protestantism in 1561 and later perished with many other Protestants in the St Bartholomew's Day massacre of 1572. Moltmann's interest in Ramus concerns his role as an anti-Aristotelian philosopher to be sharply distinguished from the Aristotelian logic adopted first by Philip Melancthon (1497-1560) in the Lutheran Reformation and by Calvin's successor Theodore Beza (1519-1605) in its Calvinist counterpart in Geneva. A conflict emerges therefore between the influential high Calvinism of the Beza school and the more historicist Ramist school generally opposed to it.³¹ The essence of the Ramist position was to take with a new seriousness a less abstract, less syllogistic, more empirical and practically engaged philosophy of history in the humanist tradition. This was seen in some Calvinist circles as a carrying through of the Protestant reformation into the realm of philosophy, the triumph of historical revelation over deductive philosophy.³² Over against Beza's *a priori*, deductive approach to dogma, Ramus was positing a new *a posteriori* position which accented salvation history. In turn this was foundational for the growth of federal theology (*foedus* = covenant) which was rooted in the history of the biblical covenants. Ramism needs to be understood not as an assault on Calvin, to whom it looked for support. Rather it was directed against Beza who systematised Calvin's teaching on predestination into a linear doctrine of divine decrees which in turn became the central doctrine of orthodox Calvinism. According to Moltmann, Calvin's theology was a living and complex attempt to hold together diverse biblical insights and it defied easy systematisation. But Beza's Aristotelianism led to just such an attempt. Its particular influence is to be seen in the doctrine of predestination in which the Prime Mover, which is itself unmoved, is understood to decree immutably from before the creation of the world the salvation of some and the reprobation of others according to the

31 Moltmann, 'Zur Bedeutung des Petrus Ramus', 296-97.

32 Moltmann, 'Zur Bedeutung des Petrus Ramus', 301-02.

unconditioned and absolute will of God. All subsequent history was therefore already determined from the beginning. 'Immutability' came to be understood in terms of an Aristotelean metaphysic in which the 'unmoved mover' was inserted into the biblical-reformed understanding of the faithfulness of God.³³ In part this development in Calvinism is to be attributed to the Reformed theologian and refugee Zanchi (or Zanchius) who brought neo-aristotelean influences with him when he fled from persecution in Northern Italy.³⁴

Calvin by contrast was no speculative metaphysician but biblically speaking a rational empiricist, a dialectical positivist and a psychologist, patiently tracing the acts and works of God as revealed in salvation history and seeking to hold conflicting statements dialectically in tension. Ramism, and its effects upon later Calvinist recoveries of Calvin from the distorting impact of Beza's approach, represented a legacy that was to form the basis of subsequent Calvinistic humanism, empiricism and pietism.³⁵ It also contributed an impulse that would in time issue in the Enlightenment's concern with history. For Moltmann, Petrus Ramus supports a recovery of the doctrine of predestination from its systematisation as a series of decrees and places it within the workings of the Triune God in history in intimate association with the purposes of God achieved through the covenants of God with humanity, with Israel and in Christ.

In seeking to trace the flow of Moltmann's analysis, it is worth pointing out that his knowledge of this period is highly detailed. He shows himself to be aware of a wide range of Reformed thinkers and centres which divided not only into those inclined to follow Beza and those not but also into sub-variations within these fields. But Moltmann is concerned to trace a line of descent. Having found a fountain-head of an alternative approach to Beza's within the emerging Reformed family of theologians he is then concerned to show where this stream then flows. In his doctoral thesis he identifies as a carrier of Ramus' approach the Scottish theologian John Camero, (Moltmann prefers this designation to the more obvious 'Cameron') (1579-1625). Much of Camero's career was pursued in France and he became a shaping influence or theological father for the French Huguenot theological academy in Saumur which was to produce Moises Amyraut (1596-1664). Camero learnt his approach from the school at Heidelberg.³⁶ He developed his own understanding of federal theology which emphasised the willing nature of human response to the divine covenant. Response to the divine covenant came through the movement of the human will on hearing the Word and being enlightened in understanding and not through some despotic act of divine power. All of this reflects God's own gracious action towards human beings in giving them time for development and response.³⁷ Camero's approach was to anticipate and give impetus to Amyraut's later and controver-

33 Moltmann, *Prädestination und Perseveranz*, 132.

34 Moltmann, *Prädestination und Perseveranz*, 137.

35 Moltmann, 'Zur Bedeutung des Petrus Ramus', 316-18.

36 *Prädestination und Heilsgeschichte bei Moysse Amyraut*, 271.

37 *Prädestination und Heilsgeschichte bei Moysse Amyraut*, 279.

sial doctrine of 'hypothetical universalism', or the idea of universal predestination to salvation.³⁸

I presume that this term is chosen since from this perspective no-one can exclude the possibility that God may expand the circle of election to include the whole of humanity. This is a hypothetical possibility that cannot be ruled out. It remains a divine mystery. Since the covenant of grace is based upon the satisfaction of the work of Christ and not on some hidden decree it must potentially embrace all. Camero distinguishes between *electio in Christo* (which embraces all) and *electio ad Christum* (which embraces those who believe) with the elect being those who in actuality accept the offer of divine grace. Salvation is available for all but only becomes effective for those who believe. What finally condemns people is not inclusion in original sin but the refusal of Christ. In this way Moltmann judges that Camero takes up the Arminian concern for the universal reach of the gospel into his salvation-historical theology while holding this together with orthodox particularism in making faith dependent on election.³⁹ Yet Moltmann denies that this is Arminianism, presumably on the grounds that Camero's empirical epistemology enables us to say who are among the elect but does not enable us speculatively to say who are not, and God's intentions are not known to us. For the Beza school this was to deny the immutability of God according to which this decision has already been taken.⁴⁰

Camero's successors in Saumur, of whom Amyraut was one, saw themselves as defenders of Calvin and Camero, and as preserving the humanist influences of Calvin's theology against the scholasticism of orthodox Calvinism. Amyraut reproduced Camero's covenantal theology and extended it. So, in place of a theology deduced from absolute decrees, Amyraut advanced one that took seriously the human-historical dimension of revelation. The intentions of God are unfathomable and so can only be deduced from the covenant of grace which is historical. The decrees of God are historicised in such a way as to make the will of God mutable rather than immutable so that God works with and accommodates himself to human beings in a progressive way. Predestination is therefore to be understood historically as the work of God in realising salvation, rather than eternally as an immutable decree. This saving work is to be understood in Trinitarian, historical and progressive terms. God is known from his history with the world.⁴¹ Moltmann sees Amyraut negotiating the territory between Arminianism and orthodox Calvinism (Gomarism) in that he posited a dialectic between universalism and particularism and between God and humanity.⁴² Christ atones for the world and God in his grace grants human beings time to fulfil the condition of faith that would realise their election. God's grace is for all. It is faith rather than election that is the condition of salvation. Amyraut can therefore say, presumably rhetorically, that even a non-elect person can be saved if she

38 *Prädestination und Heilsgeschichte bei Moyse Amyraut*, 282.

39 *Prädestination und Heilsgeschichte bei Moyse Amyraut*, 284

40 *Prädestination und Heilsgeschichte bei Moyse Amyraut*, 285.

41 *Prädestination und Heilsgeschichte bei Moyse Amyraut*, 287-88.

42 *Prädestination und Heilsgeschichte bei Moyse Amyraut*, 292-93.

believes or an elect person be lost if he does not believe.⁴³ It is possible therefore to understand Amyraldianism as ‘four point Calvinism’ in that while it posits an unlimited atonement it holds to the need for unconditioned grace. On the other hand it can be understood as Arminianism in that it makes salvation dependent on faith that is foreseen. Moltmann understands it as a variant between the two.

Yet clearly here a question is building which concerns exactly how Amyraut’s position differs from that of Arminius. Moltmann acknowledges the ‘puzzle of amyraldian theology’ (‘das Rätsel der amyraldischen Theologie’)

In his work of election God is bound to his own, prevenient covenant of grace. He can bestow salvation on none except those who actually believe, and he elects only those whose faith he foresees. On the other side, faith is not a human achievement but springs from the gracious election of God... This contradictory way of speaking is the puzzle of amyraldian theology... Looked at from the perspective of the covenant of grace the eternal decision of God is dependent upon the event of faith which God foresees. Looked at from the perspective of election faith is only an effect of free election.⁴⁴

One might say that this same puzzle applies to Arminian theology, if that is the direction in which Amyraut is to be understood. Those who read Amyraut in more Calvinistic terms accuse him of peddling not ‘hypothetical’ but ‘hypocritical’ universalism since a person’s fate is still determined by predestination. Moltmann considers that this is a misunderstanding which comes from reading Amyraut wrongly. He is not concerned with the decrees as divine *intentions* but as divine *effects*. The wisdom of God by which he knows that some will refuse the offer of grace does not prevent God from offering salvation still to the maximum.⁴⁵ But although this approach may help us understand the universal grace of God it hardly helps us resolve the puzzle to which Moltmann points.

Moltmann has taken a particular interest in certain strands of Reformed theology associated with the term ‘federal theology’ and has traced this line of thought from Peter Ramus, via John Camero to Moise Amyraut as interpreters of Calvin to be radically distinguished from the high Calvinism of Theodore Beza. In 1959 and 1962 he made two further contributions on a broader canvas, one to do with Calvin himself and the other with the wider Reformed tradition. Both were concerned with the election and perseverance of believers and cover once more some of the ground with which we are becoming familiar.

In his contribution to the symposium *Calvin-Studien*, which he himself edited, he insisted that the doctrine of perseverance was at the heart of Calvin’s doctrine of election and that this doctrine should be understood historically: faith is rooted in God’s faithfulness, and this cannot be broken.⁴⁶ God’s gracious promise is to preserve believers through temptations, testings and failures. The

43 *Prädestination und Heilsgeschichte bei Moyse Amyraut*, 296.

44 *Prädestination und Heilsgeschichte bei Moyse Amyraut*, 299.

45 *Prädestination und Heilsgeschichte bei Moyse Amyraut*, 300.

46 ‘Erwählung und Beharrung’, 46-47.

promise is based not on any capacity in believers but on Christ's sacrifice, his continuing intercession for believers, his almighty power and reign and his eternal love and grace.⁴⁷ If this underlying concern is not grasped then Calvin's teaching on the subject is liable to misunderstanding.⁴⁸ An existential understanding of Calvin's doctrine is primarily pastoral and ethical and not at all to do with the division of humanity into elect and reprobate. Christ is the mirror of our election and therefore the antidote to our weakness of faith and assurance. Not even our sin can separate us from the love of God.⁴⁹ Fuller exposition of these themes is given in the book on predestination and perseverance that Moltmann saw as closing this period of his theological career. The doctrine of election is to be understood from the perspective of perseverance as the ground of our hope in God's intention to fulfil his promise. Because of this we may hope that we cannot finally go astray and be lost.⁵⁰ This practical and heart-warming dimension is the 'other side' to Calvin's doctrine of the elect and the reprobate without which his doctrine will be misunderstood.⁵¹ Reformed theology is therefore concerned not with speculative determinism but with the unity of predestination, justification and perseverance. This is where the true emphasis should fall.⁵² Moltmann contrasts Calvin's doctrine with the more ambiguous opinions of Luther on the question of perseverance and with those of Martin Bucer which located perseverance in the constitution of the believer rather than the faithfulness of God.⁵³

More could be pursued around this whole area but a summary statement from Moltmann helps to undergird what has already been said:

The Christian doctrine of God has from the beginning allowed itself to be established on a Greek foundation with what we would see today as a questionable lack of criticism and so has held more to a concept of God derived from Parmenides than from a Judaeo-Christian source. In the problem we are dealing with this has shown itself in the philosophical and theological axiom of the *immutabilitas Dei* that has characterised the orthodox doctrine of predestination and perseverance, corrected only by numerous federal theologians and uniquely brought into question by Amyraut. If the doctrine of perseverance is grounded properly on trust in the faithfulness of God, it must become clear that the God who proves himself time and time again in contingent events in a history which has an eschatological *telos* is not to be exchanged for one who is a timeless duration of eternal Being.⁵⁴

With these words Moltmann offers an historical judgment, but also one that is consistent with his later development.

47 'Erwählung und Beharrung', 49.

48 'Erwählung und Beharrung', 50.

49 'Erwählung und Beharrung', 52-53, 54.

50 *Prädestination und Perseveranz*, 47.

51 *Prädestination und Perseveranz*, 50-51.

52 *Prädestination und Perseveranz*, 72-73.

53 'Erwählung und Beharrung', 56-60.

54 *Prädestination und Perseveranz*, 172 (my translation).

Moltmann and federal theology

It is clear that Moltmann believes that Calvin is misunderstood if he is read in any way other than the way he proposes, and that the tradition of federal theology takes more seriously the biblical, historical and covenantal dimensions in Calvin's theology over against the Aristotelean reading of Calvin that came to predominate in orthodox Calvinist circles. He would not be alone in making this judgment, or others similar to it. Has he however established his case?

Whatever truth there may be in Moltmann's interpretation of Calvin and however much he and others would wish to read Calvin in the most positive terms, I am not persuaded that he has in the writings we have examined adequately addressed Calvin's doctrine of double predestination. Although we have been concerned in this paper with Moltmann's early theology it is worth showing how these nascent themes are addressed in some of his latest works. Here we find both continuity with his basic concerns and at the same time a more explicit handling and criticism of double predestination.

It is clear of course that Moltmann rejects this doctrine from the outset. In a brief but illuminating article in 2001, he acknowledges that Calvin taught double predestination and at the same time indicates how he himself embraces the reconstruction of that doctrine put forward by Karl Barth. Barth succeeded in rearranging the contents of the doctrine in such a way as to transform it into good news. In this version Christ himself is to be understood as both the elect and the reprobate. Humankind is elect in Christ, but on the cross Christ himself endures the fate of reprobation, of being given over to a God-forsaken death, in order that no human being need ever be so. God's primordial decision consists not in separating the world of humanity into two sections but in determining that he himself will be God for us and that Christ will be both his elect covenant partner and the one reprobated in the place of all. God's faithfulness avails therefore not only for believers but for unbelievers. In face of the fact that some believe and others do not, the task of the Christian is not to speculate as to why or how, nor to label people as reprobate or 'disgraced' but rather all the more to bear witness to them. As he had done with his analysis of the 'puzzle' in Amyraut, Moltmann sidesteps as unknowable speculation about the purposes of God for individuals and focuses instead upon historical effects. Grace is 'pure grace and as such unconditional and also universal, all-embracing and excluding of no one. This is the content of the Gospel and there is no terror in the doctrine of double predestination anymore.' Whereas Moltmann does not claim in this article that this necessarily leads to universal salvation, he does assert that even for those who die in unbelief there is hope since Christ 'was resurrected and has his possibilities with the dead, preaching the Gospel in the world of the dead.'⁵⁵ Universalism is therefore a thinkable thought despite the fact that it has been consistently condemned in the history of the church.

55 'Double Predestination: The Elected Ones and the Crowd of the Condemned', *The Bulletin of the Institute for Reformed Theology*, Vol. 2 No. 2 (Spring/Summer, 2001).

In fact before this article appeared Moltmann had already come down in favour of universalism, the final restoration of all things, and had done so for eminently Calvinist reasons. The doctrine of double predestination was, as he saw it, the result not of a *theological* concern but of the Aristotelean concern with *aesthetics*, with symmetry and with the 'theorem of juxtaposition' which Augustine under Aristotle's influence had applied to this doctrine.⁵⁶ Election is elegantly balanced with reprobation in an aesthetic of juxtaposition. Aesthetics therefore takes priority over, for instance, the doctrine of the love of God. But Christian theology is rooted in the cross and resurrection of Christ and to immerse ourselves here is to see that there is no limit to the possibilities of reconciliation.⁵⁷ Christian doctrine denies neither damnation nor hell but understands that these realities have been suffered and endured by Christ for us. To quote Moltmann:

The true Christian foundation for the hope of universal salvation is the theology of the cross, and the realistic consequence of the theology of the cross can only be the restoration of all things.⁵⁸

God wills to save and if we make this salvation conditional upon human decision we in effect surrender control of salvation to human beings. If however we attribute it to God's prevenient grace we are led to a doctrine of *apokatastasis*, of final restoration. It is at this point that Moltmann embraces universal salvation for Calvinist reasons:

The doctrine of universal salvation is the expression of a boundless confidence in God: what God wants to do he can do, and will do. If he wants all human beings to be helped, he will ultimately help all human beings. The doctrine of the double outcome of human beings is the expression of a tremendous self-confidence on the part of human beings: if the decision 'faith or disbelief' has eternal significance, then eternal destiny, salvation or damnation, lies in the hands of human beings.⁵⁹

In this way Moltmann translates his early doctrine of predestination and perseverance into a hope for the salvation of all. Furthermore advocacy of this doctrine has its more recent origins not in federal theology but in Pietism, first of all in the thought of Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687-1752) and then in the theology of hope espoused by Johann Christoph Blumhardt (1805-1880) and Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt (1842-1919), who were to exercise such influence on twentieth century theology in general and Karl Barth in particular. Moltmann concludes therefore that,

Judgment is the side of the eternal kingdom that is turned towards history. In that Judgment all sins, every wickedness and every act of violence, the whole injustice of this murderous and suffering world, will be condemned

56 *The Coming of God*, 247; see Augustine, *City of God* Book XI chapters 18 and 21.

57 *The Coming of God*, 250.

58 *The Coming of God*, 251.

59 *The Coming of God*, 244.

and annihilated, because God's verdict effects what it pronounces. In the divine Judgment all sinners, the wicked and the violent, the murderers and the children of Satan, the Devil and the fallen angels will be liberated and saved from their deadly perdition through transformation into their true, created being, because God remains true to himself, and does not give up what he has once created or affirmed, or allow it to be lost.⁶⁰

Moltmann's universalism therefore emerges from his commitment to the divine faithfulness, but this faithfulness is not only to those who believe but to the whole world of humanity and, indeed, to the whole of creation. Christ's work is of universal significance and cannot ultimately be thwarted by the obstinacy of the human will but must lead to universal restoration. Furthermore, divine faithfulness has its counterpart in human perseverance. It is because of the divine perseverance that human beings can be enabled to trust in God and to hold fast to God. This is not a human achievement but a gift of the faithful God who is able to bring it to pass.

Critics of universal atonement have long agreed that it must lead inevitably to universal salvation. Since this is seen as scripturally untenable it can only be countered either by reverting to Arminianism, with the limiting factor on salvation being human decision, or to a doctrine of particular atonement and therefore by logical regression to double predestination: it is not the will of God to save all but only some. This view is vigorously maintained in some quarters still but in itself inevitably leads to a qualification of that most fundamental of doctrines, the confidence that God is love. If God intends from before the foundation of the world to damn some (many?) of his creatures for all eternity on the basis of nothing they have done but solely on that of the divine decision, in what sense can God be said to be a God of love? One answer to this question is to differentiate what is meant by love. J. I. Packer can argue, for instance,

So it appears, first, that God loves all in some ways (everyone whom he creates, sinners though they are, receives many undeserved good gifts in daily providence), and, second, that he loves some in all ways (that is, in addition to the gifts of daily providence he brings them to faith, to new life, and to glory according to his predestinating purpose). This is the clear witness of the entire Bible.⁶¹

Packer evidently finds this both biblical and satisfying. Others might wonder how coherent it is to portray the God of biblical revelation as loving providentially those he has secretly and eternally destined for eternal torment and damnation. More straightforward is the assertion of one of Packer's great heroes, John Owen, that in fact God's love is reserved not for the world but alone for the world of the elect:

60 *The Coming of God*, 255.

61 J. I. Packer, 'The Love of God: Universal and Particular', in T. R. Schreiner, ed., *Still Sovereign* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 283-284.

The fountain and cause of God's sending Christ is his eternal love for his elect and for them alone.⁶²

We deny that all mankind are the object of that love of God which moved him to send his Son to die; God having 'made some for the day of evil, Prov. xvi.4; 'hated them before they were born,' Rom. ix.11, 13; 'before of old ordained them to condemnation,' Jude 4 etc.⁶³

For those who find Packer's and Owen's sentiments both profoundly unbiblical and deeply inhumane, Moltmann's contention that the proper concerns of the doctrine of election lie in more pastoral and positive directions will be welcome. Moltmann could be more explicitly critical of Calvin than he ends up being and Barth's reconstructed doctrine is a welcome alternative. Yet Moltmann shows that the Reformed tradition is a lot more diverse than many assume and, whether or not we find Moltmann's universalism necessary or convincing, itself offers the resources that are needed to arrive at more constructive doctrinal expressions for those who firmly and truly believe that God so loved the *world* that he gave his one and only Son.

Conclusion

So to conclude. Whether or not Moltmann was right about what Calvin did mean to say, he was in my judgment on the right lines in terms of what Calvin should have said. The doctrine of predestination needs to be taken out of the context of an inscrutable past eternity and located within the covenantal purposes of God in history. The doctrine speaks of God faithfully pursuing the divine purpose of redemption. This same God enables those who trust in him to persevere through difficulty and hardship and to endure to the end. Our hope is in God. Whether or not Moltmann is right about a final and complete universal restoration, the doctrine carries our gaze in the direction of a greater hope more wonderful than any of us can currently predict or imagine. And whether or not Moltmann is right about federal theology being an alternative doctrinal construct to the Aristotelianism of High Calvinism rather than a possible variant of it, he is right in drawing our attention to the historical sphere as the realm in which God works out his good and saving purpose.

Abstract

For understandable reasons, Moltmann's theology prior to *Theology of Hope* has been relatively neglected. It is here that we see most clearly his identity as a Reformed theologian. His early theological concerns, captured in writings unavailable in English, deal with the doctrines of predestination and perseverance as these are expounded in the development of federal theology. This progressive

62 *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1959), 119.

63 *The Death of Death*, 115.

Calvinist tradition stands in contrast to the Aristotelianism of Beza and offers a more historical, biblical way of understanding predestination as God's faithful preservation of his own people through testings and temptations. Such a view is to be contrasted with the double predestination of the hidden, divine decree, and offers a more positive variant of Reformed theology. Moltmann extends the logic of his theology in the direction of universal salvation and in this way his early theology can be seen to undergird and continue in his later theology.

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