

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Christology, Session 8, Modern Christology, Part 3, Jurgen Moltmann, Catholic and Processed Theology

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This is Dr. Robert Peterson and his teaching on Christology. This is session 8, Modern Christology, Part 3, Jürgen Moltmann, Catholic and Process Theology.

We continue our study of modern Christology with Jürgen Moltmann.

A similar line of thought, but leading to far greater consequences for the doctrine of God, is found in another post-Barthian Christological project, that of Jürgen Moltmann. Moltmann tells us his theology is in his interest in a theology of the cross, which goes back to the years immediately following World War II when he and other survivors of his generation were returned from camps and hospitals to the lecture room. In that situation, quote, a theology that does not speak of God, in the sight of one who was abandoned and crucified, would have nothing to say to us, close quote.

That's from his book, *The Crucified God*. Of course, Martin Luther previously had a theology of the cross against the medieval Roman Catholic theologies that he called theologies of glory, claiming just to march right into God's presence and know everything about him and like that. Instead, Luther said, no, true theology is a theology of the cross, of Christ suffering on the cross for our sins.

It's a theology of humiliation and humbling and suffering and so forth. The new Christology of the cross and the new theology of the cross are developed by Moltmann in order to give an answer to the desperate cries of a suffering and dying humanity. The epistemological principle of the theology of the cross can only be this dialectical principle.

The deity of God is revealed in the paradox of the cross. Moltmann, excuse me, develops this into a dialectical principle that governs his whole theology and leads to a new Christian praxis of liberation. What is the meaning of the cross for Moltmann? Jesus died there as the one rejected by the Father.

It is that God who raised Jesus is the God who crucified him. This can only mean we must seek to understand God in the passion, in the crucifixion of Jesus. He says Barth did not go far enough in talking about God in Christ's suffering.

In other words, Barth's idea according to Moltmann was not sufficiently Trinitarian. When one considers the significance of the death of Jesus for God himself, one must enter into the inter-Trinitarian tensions and relationships of God and speak of the

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The cross is not just something that happened to the man Jesus, but it happened to God himself.

The Christ event on the cross is a God event. Therefore, the cross is the self-revelation of God as the triune God. He speaks of the death of God with reference to Christ's death without implying the death of the Father.

At the same time, he upholds the idea of *patra*, he rejects *patrapassionism*, the suffering of the Father, but he affirms *patracompassionism*, the Father suffered with the Son. Christ is the accursed of God. A theology of the cross cannot be expressed more radically than it is here.

There is, therefore, only one conclusion possible. Quoting Jürgen Moltmann, in the passion of the Son, the Father himself suffers the pains of abandonment. In the death of the Son, death comes upon God himself.

And the Father suffers the death of his Son in the love for forsaken man, in his love for forsaken man. Therefore, in the death of Jesus on the cross, Moltmann contends, God has taken up all the suffering of this world into himself. All human history quoting him, however much it may be determined by guilt and death, is taken up into this history of God, that is, into the Trinity, and integrated into the future of the history of God.

There's no suffering which is, which in this history of God is not God's suffering. No death, which has not been God's death in the history of Golgotha. How seriously this is meant by Moltmann appears from the fact that in this context, he emphatically mentions Auschwitz.

Even Auschwitz is taken up by God and integrated into his history. The bifurcation in God contains the whole uproar of history within itself. And this means true salvation for all, if, for, for, this means true salvation.

For if all human history, with its suffering, guilt, and death, is taken up into this history of God, it is also taken up into the future of the history of God, that is, the victory of God over suffering, guilt, and death. If this seems to apply to universalism, you're right. Once again, the end result of modern theologians' meditations and theologizing is the divinization of the whole human race.

Klaas Ruina, the Dutch theological, evangelical theologian, evaluates Moltmann's program. His book seems to take the reality of suffering and death utterly seriously. It does this by relating both this reality of suffering and death to the cross of Jesus Christ and the cross itself to the very heart of God's being.

That is, he is the crucified God, citing Moltmann's book title. And yet, Ruina says at this very point, our questions must start. Number one, is the idea of the crucified God really scriptural? Luther, therefore, does not hesitate to say that God suffers in Christ, but can we go beyond this? Luther always refused to do this.

To him, the suffering of God was an incomprehensible mystery that even the angels could not fully understand here. Ruina says, I believe that Luther was right on this point. It is the man Jesus hanging on the cross as a representative who was forsaken by his God.

It's certainly quite different from Moltmann's interpretation of the cross as an event within God himself. In Ruina's opinion, Moltmann here goes beyond the restrained language of scripture, and the resulting theology of the cross is a speculative construction that at crucial points shows more affinity to Hegel than to the biblical kerygma. Two, Moltmann's almost exclusive concentration on the cross is not at the expense of the resurrection.

Admittedly, the second point is the question as to whether it is not the case that Moltmann's concentration on the cross minimizes the resurrection of Jesus. He doesn't deny it in his *Theology of Hope*, his first major work. He very much emphasized the resurrection. But now, it's just the opposite in his book, *The Crucified God*.

Paul never speaks of God as the one who suffered with Jesus on the cross, but again and again, he speaks of God; Paul speaks of God as the God who raised Jesus from the dead. The resurrection is not only the manifestation of the hidden meaning of the cross, but it is the next stage in the history of salvation. Moltmann's emphasis on the crucified God downplays to a point of a real problem: the resurrection of Christ.

Can we really speak of death in God, number three? Nowhere does the Bible speak in these terms. A similar question arises when Moltmann speaks of the inclusion of all human suffering and death in the history of God. Is this view not Hegelian rather than scriptural?

Five, next Moltmann's view, just as that of Pannenberg, seems to lead to an eschatological and universalistic divinization of man.

"Man is taken up without limitations and conditions into the life, the death and resurrection of God, and in faith participates corporeally in the fullness of God. There's nothing that can exclude him from the situation of God between the grief of the Father, the love of the Son, and the drive of the Spirit. The human God who encounters a man in the crucified Christ thus involves a man in a realistic divinization."

Again, one cannot help wondering whether this is not in line with the Hegelian rather than the biblical eschatology.

Six, finally, there's the question, what is left of Chalcedon? This seems like a very hard question to answer. Moltmann agrees with Chalcedon that Jesus is very God and very man. On the other hand, the doctrine of the two natures does not really play a part in his book, *The Crucified God*. The question that cannot be avoided here is whether, in Moltmann's emphasis on the crucified God, the humanity of Jesus is still taken seriously.

So, there are many more questions about the theology of Jürgen Moltmann than that of Wolfhart Pannenberg. And so, we move to Catholic theology. It is striking that the search for an alternative Christology is going on in both Roman Catholic and Protestant circles.

The new theologians, we'll call them, are all agreed on two things. First, we have to take our starting point in the man Jesus. That means a Christology from below, which we have repeatedly seen, is very problematic.

Secondly, especially if it's an absolute Christology from below, which it is in most of these theologians. Pannenberg is the exception, not the rule. Secondly, we have to take his true humanity absolutely seriously.

Well, we do, but if we start absolutely from below, do we take his deity seriously? Is he God? The potential problems I just hinted at are regrettably true of another famous Roman Catholic theologian, Hans Kung, who is no longer an official Roman Catholic theologian. His conflicts in Rome resulted in his dismissal as a teacher of Roman Catholic students at the University of Tübingen, and his influence is still considerable, including in Protestant circles. First of all, he wishes to be an apologist of the Christian faith in a world that is involved in an increasing process of secularization.

We must abandon the old medieval picture and world picture and accept the picture that has arisen out of modern science. Kung calls for a new paradigm. The consequences of the doctrine of Christ he has discussed at length in his last two major works on being a Christian and whether God exists. From both works, it's evident he opts for a Christology from below, starting with Jesus Christ as a man on earth.

An explicit Christology emerges from the implicitly Christological speech, actions, and suffering of Jesus himself. In fact, we see several diverse Christologies emerge in the New Testament, according to Kung. I have a friend who did a PhD on Tübingen Catholic theology.

At one point, he went to Tübingen in Germany, and he interviewed Roman Catholic theologians, including Hans Kung and Walter Kasper. He came back a very sad man. He said every single person he interviewed, with one exception, was not Orthodox.

Every single one of them began absolutely from below, with the man Jesus, and by doing that, you cannot attain a Chalcedonian or biblical Christology with the second person of the Godhead, God the Son, becoming a man in Jesus of Nazareth. The one exception was not Hans Kung, but Walter Kasper, who believed in the incarnation of the Son of God. My friend was very encouraged by that, but overall very saddened by bright, famous, writing German theologians who didn't really believe in Orthodox Christology.

Kung's own view is that of functional Christology, as distinct from an essence of Christology. Jesus' relationship to God should be expressed in categories of revelation. Jesus is God's word and will in human form.

The true man Jesus of Nazareth is, for faith, the real revelation of the one true God. These are quotations. In Jesus, God shows us who he is and shows us his face.

In the same Jesus, in this sense, Jesus is the image, the word, the Son of God. Within this same context, pre-existence, as attributed to Christ, means he's always been in God's thought. That is not biblical pre-existence.

And the relationship between God and Jesus existed from the beginning and has its foundation in God himself. Biblical pre-existence means that before there was a man, Jesus, there was the eternal Son of God, who always existed in heaven with the Father and the Holy Spirit. And that this divine being became a man while retaining fully his divinity.

There can be no doubt, Runia writes, that this is a functional Christology indeed. But does it agree with what the ancient church confessed at the councils of Nicaea, Ephesus, and Chalcedon? Kuhn believes the answer is positive. To be sure, the councils expressed themselves in metaphysical terms, homoousios, of the same substance, but they could not do otherwise because there is simply no other conceptual system available.

Yet what they stood for, the true God and the true man, should be maintained in our day also. "That God and man are truly involved in the story of Jesus Christ is something to be steadfastly upheld by faith even today."

Does that language demand a true incarnation? It does not. What does the *Wer* Deus, the true God, conception mean to Kuhn? The whole point of what he's here's a quotation from Kuhn, the whole point of what happened in and with Jesus depends on the fact that for believers, God himself as man's friend was present, at work,

speaking, acting, and definitely revealing himself in this Jesus, who came among men as God's advocate, deputy, representative, and delegate, and was confirmed by God as the crucified, raised to life. All statements about divine sonship, pre-existence, creation, meteorship, and incarnation, often clothed in the mythological or semi-mythological forms of the time, are meant in the last resort to do no more and no less than substantiate the uniqueness, unrivalability, unrivalability, new word for me, and unsurpassability of the call, offer, and claim made known in and with Jesus, ultimately not of human but of divine origin, therefore absolutely reliable, requiring man's unconditional involvement.

As to the weary homo, the true humanity of Christ, Kuhn says, Jesus was wholly and entirely man, a model of what it is to be human, representing the ultimate standard of human existence. Of course, he does. He believes in this way, nothing is deducted from the truth taught by the councils; it's only transferred to the mental climate of our own time.

But sadly, an evaluation of this shows otherwise. This is plainly a Christology that is absolutely, not relatively, but absolutely from below. At no stage is the idea of incarnation seen as the ultimate statement of who Jesus really is.

Kuhn cannot go beyond a functional statement. Jesus is a revelation of God's power and wisdom. Perhaps one could say that in Kuhn's Christology, ontological language is functionalized.

In a lengthy review of *On Being a Christian* by Kuhn, British evangelical Richard Baucom has called this a kind of naive biblicism. Baucom does not deny that New Testament Christological language is primarily, though not entirely, functional. And by the way, I agree with that.

But this functional Christology requires further reflection. And once reflective questions are asked about it, it appears to demand an essential Christology to back it up. I heartily agree.

But of course, at that stage, a return to a naive functional Christology is no longer possible. One cannot pretend that these questions have never been asked. Kuhn can only escape by declaring that the mature fruits of Christological reflection in the New Testament, pre-existence, incarnation, mediation, and creation, belong to mythological ways of thought that must be discarded.

But is this not a highly unscientific way of treating material that does not fit into one's preconceived scheme? It is not surprising either to see that Kuhn has difficulty in squaring his own view with that of the ancient councils, especially with the true God and true man statements of Nicaea. In fact, he appears to be greatly angered by

the German Bishops' Conference that accused him of denying the Christological statements of the Nicene Creed. Good for them because he does.

Oh, my word. It cannot be denied that Kuhn says some great, wonderful things about Jesus. But it cannot be denied either, that these statements are less than what Nicaea said.

Nicaea undoubtedly also believed that Jesus was the revelation of God. But it went on to say that he is the revelation of God because he is the Son of God in an ontological sense of the same substance as the Father. This Kuhn refuses to do.

Hans Kuhn makes a confession of Jesus as Lord and Savior. This causes me great problems. I utterly respect Klaas Runia. He says, I deeply respect this confession which comes from the heart. Here speaks a man of genuine faith in a language that appeals to the soul. One, therefore, hesitates to analyze and criticize it.

But even a genuine confession that comes from the heart is not beyond analysis and criticism. And we have to say, this confession does not go beyond the revelational level. While it does interpret true manhood without any qualification as holy and entirely man, true divinity is not interpreted in the same unqualified way as holy and entirely God.

Yet this was Nicaea's real concern. It is no wonder that Kuhn also interprets the Trinity functionally rather than essentially. In the final analysis, Kuhn cannot go beyond the statement that the unity of Father, Son, and Spirit is to be understood as a revelation event and revelational unity.

It's an important statement, but we also notice it speaks of an economic rather than an essential unity. Overall, my friend's sadness in interviewing Kuhn at Tübingen is confirmed. His Christology falls short of a biblical and, hence, Chalcedonian Christology.

Karl Rayner is a very important Roman Catholic figure. He stands with Balthasar, Kuhn, and Rahner among the leading and most influential Catholic theologians of the later 20th century. I would say Karl Rahner is the most important.

He was a shaping influence on Vatican II, 1962-65. He was a professor in Münster from 1967-71. On divine grace, he followed Henri de Lubac in regarding grace as both supernatural and part of being human.

Yet grace is also free and gratuitous. Mighty deeds, signs, and wonders were part of the ministry of Jesus in history. But Jesus was more.

He was an eschatological prophet with a unique mission. Rayner vehemently attacked docetism, the view that Jesus was not fully human. His main argument was to retain a Chalcedonian Christology within the frame of transcendental philosophy.

In contrast to Bultmann, he argued that the ontological, that is what Christ is in himself, the God-man, is the foundation of the existential, that is, what Christ means to us. Rahner wrote we shall find the proximity of God in no other place but in Jesus of Nazareth. The atonement, he argued, brings not only expiation but also God's involvement with the world.

I just want to mention two other things concerning him because he's famous for these. His famous statement is that the economic trinity is the imminent trinity, and the imminent trinity is the economic trinity. In other words, the trinity, the functional trinity, the trinity revealed in motion in the Bible, is who the trinity is in his invisible essence.

The economic distinctiveness of Jesus Christ the Son and of the Holy Spirit in our salvation reflects real antecedent eternal distinctions. I'm just mentioning this because it is very important. Robert Lethem, in his systematic theology, says there are both valid and invalid uses of Rayner's axiom.

Positively, it can indicate that God himself reveals himself in history as he is in himself in eternity. In this sense, the economic trinity differs not in the slightest from the imminent trinity. There's only one trinity.

The triune God reveals himself and, in so doing, reveals himself. He is faithful. We can count on his revelation being true to who he eternally is.

Nevertheless, the most frequent use of the axiom, the imminent trinity is the economic trinity, and the economic trinity is the imminent trinity, has been by social Trinitarians, effectively eliminating the imminent trinity altogether. In this line of thought, the economy is all there is, connected with the pantheism of process theology. Pantheism says God is everything and everything is God.

Panentheism, with the Greek word en, which means in, stuck in the middle there, means God is not everything, but he's in everything. For such thinking, the economic trinity is the imminent trinity, since there's nothing else. For all is governed by history.

Let them argue, Moltmann, Pannenberg, Catherine, Lacuna, and Robert Jensen come into this category. When one depicts the trinity as a community akin to a human family, as social Trinitarianism does, the invisibility, indivisibility of the trinity is at best threatened, and the door opened to tritheism. Just want to mention that, perhaps to stimulate viewers to do more study on their own.

The other thing is that since the middle of the last century, Rome has moved to an explicitly inclusivist position. Jesus' death and resurrection are the only way of salvation, but one can be saved by Jesus and his death and resurrection without hearing his name or believing the gospel in this life. Karl Rayner, in a lecture in 1961, introduced the phrase, anonymous Christians.

He wrote that the others who oppose the church are merely those who have not yet recognized that they nevertheless really already are or can be, even when on the surface of existence they are in opposition, they are already anonymous Christians. Indeed, the Christian cannot, quoting again, quoting Rahner, cannot renounce this presumption of anonymous Christianity. It should engender tolerance to all religions, and it's no surprise, because of his powerful influence on Vatican II, that they too affirmed something very much akin to this, and now Rome holds an openness, not only accepting Protestants as separated brothers and sisters in Christ, but now accepting adherents of the religions of the world as anonymous Christians, and hoping for the salvation of all of them.

I mentioned J. A. T. Robinson earlier. He, like Moltmann, opts for a functional approach. He has no place for a doctrine of two natures unified in one person.

He only says we have to use two sets of language about the one man Jesus. He definitely does not want to go beyond a functional Christology in his book, his important book. Help me, what's the name of the book? Honest to God.

Yes, in his important book, Honest to God. Sorry. At the end of the day, although he was a bishop in the Anglican church, at the end of the day, Jesus differs from us only in degree, not in essence.

Once again, once again, an absolute and consistent Christology from below. The Christology of Process Theology. Process Theology, taking its cue from the philosophies of Albert North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne, proceeds on the assumption of the pan-entheistic conception of God.

Quote, God is operative in the whole creation, at every level of existence. He moves through it, works upon it, accomplishes his goodwill in it. Yet God is not identical with the creation.

He also transcends it. He is undoubtedly in the world, but is equally, it's true to say, the world is in him. The world is in God.

He is the unexhausted and unexhaustible reality who works through all things, yet ever remains himself. Whereas traditional Christian orthodoxy said there was God, who then created the world out of nothing, the world did not previously exist,

Process Theology says God and the world mutually exist, and God needs the world, even as the world needs God. There have been few Process Christologies, but Norman Pittenger is one who has given us that very thing.

Jesus Christ, he says, is the focus of the pervasive and universal activity of God. He's the focal manifestation of man of God in action. Rejecting the idea of a literal incarnation as incredible and impossible, he opts for the idea that in Jesus, the energizing and indwelling of God by mutual interpenetration of the divine and human reaches a climactic stage.

A mature book of Pittenger is *Christology Reconsidered* 1970. He gives three points in the very first chapter. In some fashion, we meet God in the event of Jesus Christ.

Two, God is thus met in a genuine, historically conditioned, and entirely human being.

Three, God and this man are in relationship with each other in the mode of the most complete interpenetration. For Pittenger, the difference between God's activity in Jesus and that in the affairs of other people is a difference in degree rather than in kind.

Surely, this is a Christology absolutely from below that denies the incarnation, the deity of Christ, and therefore, a Christian atonement and so forth. I'd like to end our survey of modern Christology with a debate about the myth of God incarnate. In the late 1970s, a debate on the incarnation took place in the United Kingdom.

It started with the publication of the volume *The Myth of God Incarnate* in 1977 by seven British theologians. The book created quite a stir because of its provocative title, and yet it didn't give much that was new, but it popularized it. In the same year, an answer was given by a number of evangelical theologians in the small volume *The Truth of God Incarnate*, edited by Michael Green.

Why did seven respected British professors of theology and New Testament and so forth write a book called *The Myth of God Incarnate*? All of them are of the opinion that the doctrine of the incarnation when taken as a description of factual truth, is no longer intelligible. Jesus was, they contend, as he is presented in Acts 2:21, a man appointed by God for a special role within the divine purpose, and that the latter conception of him as God incarnate, second person of the Holy Trinity, living a human life, is mythological or poetic, and a way of expressing his significance for us. Francis Young argues that the Christological titles derived from the surrounding cultural background and were used by the early Christians to express their faith response to Jesus.

Another contributor is Michael Goulder. These are respected British scholars. In the second part of the volume, Leslie Holden and Don Cupid discuss the doctrinal development leading to Nicaea and Chalcedon.

Klaae Runia evaluates for us. Well, I should summarize more of this Nicaea and Chalcedon business first because we spent so much time on it. Both Holden and Cupid, as contributors to the myth of God incarnate, reject this development from Nicaea to Chalcedon as a deviation from what the New Testament tells us about the historical Jesus.

Holden distinguishes between experiential language, which tries to describe the surging spring of inspiration, and creedal language, which turns this spring into a controlled flow of thought. Maurice Wiles writes myth in theology, and John Hick, one of the editors, argues that the doctrine of the incarnation, when taken literally, is pernicious because it implies that God can only be adequately known and responded to only through Jesus. And the whole religion of mankind, beyond the stream of Judeo-Christian faith, is thus, by implication, excluded as lying outside the sphere of salvation.

Runia's evaluation, number one, the doctrine of the incarnation, according to these writers, simply had to be repudiated. Number two, although the term myth is used in the title of the book, there's no unanimity among the authors as to its exact meaning.

Three, the authors generally show a deep and unwarranted skepticism as to the historical reliability of the New Testament writings.

Well, that makes sense because the New Testament teaches the truth of God incarnate, as the responding book said. It is further striking that the resurrection of Jesus, which plays a huge part in the New Testament, plays hardly any role in the myth of God incarnate at all. The volume is also entirely silent about the soteriological significance of Jesus.

That's not a surprise. If the incarnation is a myth, Jesus cannot save us. A mere man, no matter how great or wonderful or powerful or indwelt by God or empowered by God, cannot save us.

Only God can save us. Sin and guilt are hardly mentioned in the book. Again, I am not surprised.

A few of the writers even mentioned that the New Testament teaches the incarnation, but the authors still cannot accept it on philosophical grounds. All the authors admit that Jesus is someone very special and that he is indispensable to them. At times, they speak of him in glowing terms, and yet they reject the truth of

God incarnate, as the response volume affirms by the evangelical writers, who were frankly troubled by the popularization of liberal and critical ideas to the British public in a way that upset the faith of many.

These things were shared in a way that, if you're a thinking person, you'll certainly reject those old myths about Jesus, that kind of a thing. As our survey of patristic and modern Christologies, historical theologies of Christ, and patristic and modern Christologies comes to a close, I just want to introduce where we'll be going in future lectures. We'll combine systematic theology with the biblical text, drawing it out of the biblical text.

And thus, for the deity of Christ, we'll work extensively with John 1:1 to 18. For the humanity of Christ, we'll work with Colossians 1:15 to 20, which also is a good place to show the deity of Christ. We'll work with the two states of Christ, from Philippians 2:5 through 11, and more.

We'll discuss pre-existence as well, the unity of his person, and the communication of attributes, and I look forward to sharing those things together, beginning with our next lecture. Thank you again for your interest in these matters.

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