



# A Theologian of Hope: Memories of Jürgen Moltmann

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Jürgen Moltmann's death on June 3, 2024 in Tübingen caused German online church publications to herald him as "the last bridge builder" (*der letzte Brückenbauer*),<sup>1</sup> a "theological freedom fighter" (*ein theologischer Freiheitskämpfer*),<sup>2</sup> a "world-class theologian" (*ein Theologe von Weltrang*),<sup>3</sup> and "a one-time gift for the Protestant church"

<sup>1</sup> Thorsten Dietz, "Nachruf auf Jürgen Moltmann: Der letzte Brückenbauer?" *Die Eule*, June, 7, 2024, <https://eulemagazin.de/juergen-moltmann-der-letzte-brueckenbauer/>.

<sup>2</sup> Susanne Richter, "Theologischer Freiheitskämpfer - Jürgen Moltmann gestorben," *NDR*, June 5, 2024, <https://www.ndr.de/kirche/radiokirche/Juergen-Moltmann-Theologischer-Freiheitskaempfer,-moltmann100.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Stephan Cezanne, "Theologe von Weltrang: Jürgen Moltmann 98-jährig verstorben," *Evangelische Kirche im Reinland*, June 4, 2024, <https://news.ekir.de/meldungen/2024/06/theologe-von-weltrang-juergen-moltmann-98-jaehrig-verstorben>.

*The late German theologian, Jürgen Moltmann is best remembered for his influential book *Theology of Hope* (1964), in which he advocated for Christian hope in the midst of the traumas of the modern world. This reminiscence of Moltmann is written by his final doctoral student, and gives an insight into his life and theology.*

(*ein einmaliges Geschenk für die evangelische Kirche*).<sup>4</sup> An official statement from the Protestant Church in Germany (*Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland*) even had the headline, “grieving the theologian of the century Jürgen Moltmann” (*Trauer um Jahrhundert-Theologen Jürgen Moltmann*).<sup>5</sup> The wider society in Germany also took notice of his death, with *Tagesschau* (a kind of German hybrid between NPR and PBS) even writing a short story on him.<sup>6</sup> And these are just some of the accolades that have been written about him in Germany. His death has also garnered international attention, through online publications from both his former doctoral students and outsiders to the Moltmann “spiritual family” alike, in such diverse sources as *Christianity Today*, *The Christian Century*, *The New York Times*, Candler School of Theology, Yale Center for Faith and Culture, the World Council of Churches, and Evangelical Focus.<sup>7</sup>

It is no doubt that the worldwide ecumenical Christian church and the worldwide theological academy lost a great theologian when Jürgen Moltmann died.<sup>8</sup> For me, however, Jürgen’s importance was

<sup>4</sup> Annika Lukas, “Bischöfin Fehrs: Moltmann war ‘ein einmaliges Geschenk für die evangelische Kirche,’” June 4, 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/mtjshvaz>.

<sup>5</sup> Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, “Trauer um Jahrhundert-Theologen Jürgen Moltmann,” June 4, 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/yn4r2725>.

<sup>6</sup> Ulrich Pick, “Theologe Jürgen Moltmann gestorben,” *Tagesschau*, June 4, 2024, <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/theologe-juergen-moltmann-tot-100.html>.

<sup>7</sup> See Paul Zahl, “The Generous Genius of Jürgen Moltmann,” *Christianity Today*, June 10, 2024, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2024/june-web-only/generous-genius-of-juergen-moltmann-tribute.html>; Nancy E. Bedford, “Moltmann the Teacher: Studying theology with him offered me new possibilities for justice and abundant life,” *Christian Century*, June 27, 2024, <https://www.christiancentury.org/features/moltmann-teacher>; Clay Risen, “Jürgen Moltmann, Theologian Who Confronted Auschwitz, Is Dead at 98,” *New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/06/08/books/juergen-moltmann-dead.html>; Steffen Lösel, “Remembering Jürgen Moltmann,” Emory University, Candler School of Theology, June 10, 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/4m99z8cd>; Miroslav Volf, “In Memoriam: Jürgen Moltmann (1926–2024) – Remembering a Theologian of Hope,” Yale Center for Faith & Culture, June 5, 2024, <https://faith.yale.edu/media/in-memoriam-juergen-moltmann-1926-2024>; World Council of Churches, “Jürgen Moltmann, theologian of hope, dies at 98,” <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/juergen-moltmann-theologian-of-hope-dies-at-98>, June 6, 2024; and Jonatán Soriano, “Jürgen Moltmann (1926–2024): ‘His influence on Protestant theology has had a great impact,’” *Evangelical Focus, Europe*, June 7, 2024, <https://evangelicalfocus.com/life-tech/26972/juergen-moltmann-died-his-influence-on-protestant-theology-has-had-a-great-impact>.

<sup>8</sup> A small sign of Jürgen’s theological importance not only in the twentieth century, but also in our present century, is that he received his twentieth honorary doctorate in November 2022 from the Kirchliche Hochschule Wuppertal for his contributions to the church, the academy, and the broader society. See Jürgen Moltmann, *Weisheit in der Klimakrise: Perspektiven einer Theologie des Lebens* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2023), which is his final book, published

not primarily in being a world-renowned theologian and professor. He was first and foremost my friend and teacher. As his fifty-first, last, and youngest doctoral student, I would like to share some of my memories about my time with Jürgen, and how my friend and teacher has shaped my own theology.

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I first met Jürgen in July 2018 in Tübingen when he was ninety-two years old, but my story with him begins during my time as a Master of Theology student at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. I wrote a chapter on Jürgen’s theology for my M.Th. thesis in 2017 and was encouraged to send the thesis to him by my thesis committee, consisting of Professors Guillermo Hansen, Lois Malcolm, and Patrick Keifert, for which I will forever be grateful. So, thanks to the encouragement of my committee, I sent the thesis to Jürgen, accompanied by a handwritten letter, literally shaking as I went to the post office in downtown Minneapolis. In my letter, I told him what his theology had meant to me, and that I hoped he felt well represented in my work. Jürgen did not respond for six months, and I assumed that he was too busy to read my thesis or perhaps uninterested in it. I entered the Ph.D. program in systematic theology at the Lutheran School of

in appreciation for this honorary doctorate from Wuppertal. Wuppertal was also Jürgen’s first teaching position, where he was colleagues with Wolfhart Pannenberg and published his first official contributions to systematic theology through an edited collection of essays from the so-called “dialectical theologians.” See Jürgen Moltmann, *Anfänge der dialektischen Theologie, Teil 1: Karl Barth, Heinrich Barth, Emil Brunner* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1962), and Jürgen Moltmann, *Anfänge der dialektischen Theologie, Teil 2: Rudolf Bultmann, Friedrich Gogarten, Eduard Thurneysen* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1963). For Jürgen’s personal recollections of his time in Wuppertal, see Jürgen Moltmann, *Weiter Raum: Eine Lebensgeschichte* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2006), 77–87.

Theology at Chicago (LSTC), under the supervision of the late Professor Vitor Westhelle, and figured I might not hear from Jürgen again.

In actuality, Jürgen lost my address, and wrote me two letters apologizing that he had done so. He said he felt very well represented in my work, that I should publish an abstract of my thesis, and that I should develop the central argument into a dissertation and a book. He wished me well, offered me “much inspiration” for my Ph.D. studies, and asked me to let him know about my dissertation’s theme. What struck me most about Jürgen’s first letter (sent to Luther Seminary because he still could not find my address) was how he signed it: “In Christ’s brotherhood, Jürgen Moltmann.” His second letter (written to me after he found my address at LSTC amid what he called the “chaos” of his papers) said he was praying for me, and how he wished that the “great joy of Christmas” might be with me. I admit to still being quite star struck in those days at having the privilege of communicating with such an important academic in my field. However, that Jürgen would sign letters to someone he had never met the way he did told me more about him than all of his academic and church accolades combined: he was human. He was a Christian. He was *authentic*.

I wrote Jürgen back with delight and thanked him for his advice. In those days, my academic and ecclesiastical future was fraught with uncertainty and anxiety. I had resigned from candidacy for ordination in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) to pursue doctoral work, and Vitor Westhelle had died tragically of cancer on May 13, 2018. The Womanist Theologian and Anthropologist Professor Linda E. Thomas became my official advisor at LSTC per my request, and immediately urged me to go to Jürgen and ask if I could study with him. I wrote Jürgen again, and he then agreed to meet with me at his home in Tübingen in July. Meeting with him in person for the first time, I remarked again how authentic he was. He immediately treated me like I was his equal, pouring me a glass of mineral water and saying, “on a hot day, you need a cold glass of cold water.” I also noticed what other friends and doctoral students of his have called that characteristic twinkle and/or gleam in his eye.<sup>9</sup> Theology was clearly a joy for him, as was meeting new people. During our meeting, which lasted just over an hour, he advised me to work on his friend James H. Cone’s black theology of liberation for my dissertation, and

<sup>9</sup> See especially Bedford, “Moltmann the Teacher.”

introduced me to Alan E. Lewis’s Holy Saturday theology.<sup>10</sup> He also agreed to join my doctoral committee at LSTC as the second reader for my various doctoral exams and my dissertation, and that we could do an independent study together in Spring 2019 in Tübingen related to my dissertation. Further, he told me explicitly that I should not give up hope of being ordained, because I needed pastoral experience, like he had acquired through five years of pastoral ministry after completing his own doctorate.<sup>11</sup> Finally, he signed my copy of the English translation of his *Der gekreuzigte Gott (The Crucified God)*, “To Brach Jennings, in hope and patience.”

I left Jürgen’s home on July 20, 2018 overjoyed. More than I ever thought could be possible had happened—he had become my teacher, and a member of my doctoral committee! Plus, he had re-instilled hope in me that I might, indeed, be able to be ordained as a pastor one day, in addition to being a systematic theologian. But this was just the beginning of the adventures I had with him. As he told me in a phone call in December 2018, “you don’t know what you’re getting into studying with me!” And he was right. I spent the next semester and a half at LSTC, finishing the bulk of my course work for the Ph.D. there, attempting to sharpen my German reading skills, and writing the Qualifying Exams, a set of two six-hour written exams and one two-hour oral exam in order to “qualify” for the advanced stages of the program and to receive a second Master of Theology degree. Jürgen provided questions for and read my written Qualifying Exams and participated in the oral exam by phone. Particularly moving for me was his offer to pray the “Come, Holy Spirit,” (*Komm, Heil’ger Geist*) prayer in German before my exams. It was during and after these exams where I noticed the first important shift occurring in my theology due to him—for the first time in an academic setting, I argued for the decisively *bodily* resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead as the springboard of the new creation (cf. 2 Cor. 5:19). Previously, I had sided with a more “metaphorical” position, for lack of a better term, arguing the resurrection did not need to be *physical* and/or decisively *bodily* for it to be *real*. However, Jürgen challenged me to think through why one should be Christian at all if at the end of the

<sup>10</sup> Alan E. Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> See Moltmann, *Weiter Raum*, 61–73.

day Christ's resurrection was little more than a good story. For him, Christian hope was *embodied* through the crucified Christ's *bodily* resurrection from the dead.<sup>12</sup>

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*However, Jürgen challenged me to think through why one should be Christian at all if at the end of the day Christ's resurrection was little more than a good story. For him, Christian hope was embodied through the crucified Christ's bodily resurrection from the dead.*

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Having now passed my Th.M. Qualifying Exams, it was time to spend a semester with Jürgen in Tübingen. Thanks to the generosity of the Eric W. Gritsch Memorial Fund, and an exchange program between LSTC and the Evangelisches Stift, Tübingen, I was able to study with Jürgen that semester without financial burden. What was planned as a one-semester exchange residency in Tübingen in 2019 has become almost five-and-a-half years living, studying, and now working in Germany, with no current plans to leave what has become my new home.

In retrospect, that first semester in Tübingen with Jürgen was probably my best throughout my academic studies. After initial greetings, and a few weeks of him giving me some interesting American theological books to read, he upped the ante, and became my Karl Barth teacher. And German-style Barth teacher, at that! Jürgen was not pleased that I had neglected Barth in my theology studies, and he

<sup>12</sup> While I ultimately affirm a theology of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ as the basis for hope in the universal new creation that is quite similar to Jürgen's own understanding, I also find that public theologians such as Marcus J. Borg and Hans Küng have done excellent work around the meaning of the mystery of Jesus Christ's resurrection for those persons steeped in Enlightenment scientism who find a physical/bodily resurrection to be a stumbling block to Christian faith. See Marcus J. Borg, *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2003), 54–56; Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 261–92; Hans Küng, *Credo: Das Apostolische Glaubensbekenntnis – Zeitgenossen erklärt* (München: Piper, 1992), 139–42; and Hans Küng, *Jesus* (München: Piper, 2012), 243–56. Further, Jürgen also affirmed the positive aspects to theologians such as Rudolf Bultmann and Paul Tillich's more metaphorical understanding of the resurrection. See Jürgen Moltmann and Eckart Löhr, *Hoffnung für eine unfertige Welt* (Ostfildern: Patmos, 2016), 66–67.

was determined to amend my error. So, I met him at home for one hour every week that summer, and he guided me in a systematic exegesis of Barth's Doctrine of Election (*Erwählungslehre*) from 2.2 of the *Church Dogmatics* directly from the German text. I was allowed to include the English translations as footnotes if I wished, but he expected me to work deeply with and in the German original. As he put it once to me, "exegete Karl Barth like it [CD 2.2] is the Bible." So, I came to his house weekly with my newest pages of excerpts from Barth's *Erwählungslehre*. Jürgen provided hand-written comments, markings, and questions to my excerpts, and convinced me that summer that Karl Barth was a deeply faithful theologian of the cross. Here, then, is the second significant shift in my theology that occurred because of Jürgen—I developed a deep appreciation and respect for Karl Barth overall, and became a "Lutheran Barthian," so to speak. Although I have critiques of Barth around mysticism and sacraments in the *CD*, am more committed to a clear theological method than what I find in the *CD* overall, and I am more interested in the question of how systematic theology relates to other academic disciplines in the university than Barth was, thanks to Jürgen, Karl Barth's *Erwählungslehre* became and remains foundational to my theology.<sup>13</sup>

About six weeks into my stay in Tübingen, I decided to ask Jürgen the very bold question of if he would accept me as his doctoral student at the University of Tübingen, and thus act as the lead supervisor of my dissertation. He asked to see a two-page dissertation proposal, which I wrote, re-wrote, and wrote again within the space of a week, and then read aloud to him in his study. After hearing my proposal, he agreed to accept me as his doctoral student. This was an exceptional event, and I was overjoyed, to say the least, especially since he was ninety-three at the time! He counseled me about the overall themes for my dissertation on a theology of the cross beginning in the early Martin Luther and ending with James Cone, with Karl Barth and himself as "bridges" to Cone. (We later added Dietrich Bonhoeffer as a third "bridge.") Jürgen was even fully supportive of me writing my dissertation in English, under one condition: I *had* to learn to speak, read, and write German, and we would no longer communicate

<sup>13</sup> For my reading of Barth's Doctrine of Election as a Trinitarian theology of the cross, see Brach S. Jennings, *Transfiguring a Theologia Crucis through James Cone* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2023), 105–132.

with one another in English. We conversed and wrote emails to one another exclusively in German from then on.

The Tübingen Protestant Theology faculty officially accepted me as a doctoral student on June 25, 2019, the anniversary of the presentation of the Lutheran *Augsburg Confession* in 1530, and my third significant theological shift due to Jürgen happened: I began what has now become my overall mission as a hybrid, German university-trained, American theologian—to bring the United States and Germany together in academic and church life. To this end, Tübingen's excellent church historian Professor Volker Leppin (now Professor of Historical Theology at Yale Divinity School) graciously agreed to serve as the second supervisor of my dissertation, and particularly to advise me on the Introduction and Luther portions of my dissertation (over 100 pages of the final book), and Linda Thomas was allowed by the Tübingen Protestant Theology faculty to serve as a special outside third reader, due to her expertise in James Cone's theology. God gave me the best team of academic mentors I could have wished for, even if they might have seemed an odd combination to people uninterested in hybridity and the resulting adventure of bringing two different cultures and styles of theology together.

Doctoral studies with Jürgen now as my official *Doktorvater* were a continual adventure. Thanks to a generous dissertation fellowship through the Claussen-Simon-Stiftung in Hamburg, I was given three years to research, write, improve my German, attend any and all university lectures I wished, and to learn Hebrew, Greek, and (to my dismay) Latin. Through my experiences in Tübingen, I saw my theological writing style expand to what the Germans call science (*Wissenschaft*), even as I still wrote from the overall perspective of theology as wisdom (*Weisheit*).<sup>14</sup> Jürgen and I met (at least) once per month now rather than weekly, and he continued to counsel me about my dissertation. He would also often email me or call me, asking me to come by to help him with English translations of various Forewords he was writing, or merely to show me something interesting he

<sup>14</sup> Here I want to explicitly thank my teacher Lois Malcolm for initially introducing me to the understanding of theology as wisdom in independent studies on Karl Rahner, Paul Tillich, and Jürgen's theology when I was her M.Th. student at Luther Seminary in 2015 and 2016. What I worked on with Jürgen in Tübingen is thus the outcome of the seeds Lois Malcolm initially planted in me, which became clear to me during Holy Week in 2023 as I was nearing the completion of the revisions to my dissertation for publication.

had found for me. He gave me “just for fun” reading at least once per month as well, which either meant loaning me various books from his library, or giving them to me, in addition to giving me various first drafts of articles, book chapters, and personal musings he wrote. This “just for fun” reading helped keep me anchored in the understanding that theology is first and foremost an expression of desire for and delight in the Triune God.<sup>15</sup> My remaining time was spent in rich conversations about academics and life with Linda Thomas, and in stimulating conversations with the Tübingen church historians, the latter of whom are largely responsible for showing me how to shift my theological writing style to German *Wissenschaft* and for my (at times obsessive) preoccupation with theological method. My preoccupation with method made Jürgen roll his eyes more than once, but he let me go my own way, which is not self-evident in academia, and which I appreciated greatly.

Even the Covid-19 pandemic did not halt Jürgen's and my visits. In the summer months, we would even sit on his balcony together, drink mineral water, and talk about my dissertation, as well as other short pieces I published as journal articles. During this time, I convinced Jürgen to take more seriously Luther's so-called “third mode of Christ's presence,” wherein the humanity of Christ is present in all things due to his ascension to the omnipresent “right hand of God the Father” than he previously had done.<sup>16</sup> Also, when I began to write my dissertation chapter on Jürgen's theology (a very strange experience in retrospect, because I was writing *about* him *for* him), he told me explicitly, “feel free to criticize me.” This shows something very important about Jürgen—he understood theology as a continual *dialogue among equals*. I was fortunate to experience him living out with me what he writes about so beautifully in his autobiographical book

<sup>15</sup> See Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay on the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> See Brach S. Jennings “Interpreting Martin Luther's Theologia Crucis Eschatologically as Deep Incarnation for Ecological Justice,” in Gotthold Knecht, ed., *Erhebt eure Häupter, weil sich eure Erlösung Naht: Dankesschrift für Jürgen Moltmann zum 96. Geburtstag* (Nürtingen: Denkhäus, 2022), 178–188. My “doctor sibling” Idar Kjølsvik initially began to shift Jürgen's opinion on this issue. See Idar Kjølsvik, *Christus Praesens: Jürgen Moltmanns Geschichtsverständnis und die Lehre vom gegenwärtigen Christus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008).

on theological hermeneutics—every person who thinks about God is a theologian, and deserves to be addressed and respected as such.<sup>17</sup>

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In 2021, Jürgen celebrated his ninety-fifth birthday with a symposium in Bad Boll, the home of two of his favorite theologians, Johann Christoph Blumhardt (1805–1880) and Christoph Blumhardt (1842–1919). The symposium (originally planned for April but delayed to October because of the pandemic) was not cheap by doctoral student standards, and Jürgen paid my way for me to go because he wanted me to be there. It was a wonderful gathering, with greetings pouring in for him all over the world. Added to this, he treated everyone present to an evening of unlimited drinks. Even then at ninety-five, Jürgen knew how to party and how to savor the gift of life. At the event, he introduced me to some of his friends as his fifty-first and "last" doctoral student. Even though he had been speaking about his "last" doctoral student ever since Nancy Bedford began her doctoral studies with him in 1988 (the year I was born), and had accepted several other doctoral students after her, he stayed true to his insistence of my really being his last doctoral student.<sup>18</sup> After twenty-seven years of "active retirement," as he called it (he retired from Tübingen in 1994), he now wanted to move to "passive retirement." He would give no more public lectures due to problems with his speech and supervise no more dissertations after mine was finished.

While he stayed consistent about my being his "last" doctoral student, there was another "last" he was entirely inconsistent about. His "last" book was supposed to be his essays on death and resurrection, published in English translation in 2021 as *Resurrected to*

<sup>17</sup> See Jürgen Moltmann, *Erfahrungen theologischen Denkens: Wege und Formen christlicher Theologie* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1999), 23–33.

<sup>18</sup> See again Bedford, "Moltmann the Teacher."

*Eternal Life: On Dying and Rising*, which he was finishing when I first moved to Tübingen.<sup>19</sup> He even told me explicitly in December 2019 that he was not going to write any more books after this one, because he was "empty." His oldest daughter Susanne, having overheard him from the next room, then said to me, "oh, don't believe him, he's never empty." Jürgen laughed, but it was true! From December 2019 through August 2023, he published 3 short books, one collection of politically-themed essays collected and re-worked specifically for the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, and his final book at ninety-seven years old, *Weisheit in der Klimakrise: Perspektiven einer Theologie des Lebens*. This last text of essays about a theology of Wisdom during the catastrophe of climate change is one of his very best books overall, and certainly needs to be translated into English.<sup>20</sup> Added to this already impressive list, particularly given his age, was a re-issue of the German version of his *Theology of Play* and a new edition of his landmark text *Theology of Hope*, this time "for the 21<sup>st</sup> century," which included the Charles Gore Lecture that Jürgen delivered in 2020 at Westminster Abbey just before the pandemic began.<sup>21</sup> This lecture was his last public lecture, due to his speech problems, even as he continued to make appearances and write greetings for various events that others read aloud on his behalf. Again, Jürgen said he would go into "passive" instead of "active" retirement. I suspect that his version of "passive" retirement is many people's understanding of a rather "active" retirement, indeed!

To my knowledge, his last publication before his death was a collection of three new, breathtaking essays around the theme of "new creation," which he gave me for Christmas on December 28, 2023. These essays show his full embrace of the so-called "cosmic Christ" (a theme that has been present at least indirectly in his writings since

<sup>19</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Resurrected to Eternal Life: On Dying and Rising*, trans. Elen Yutzy Glebe (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2021).

<sup>20</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Auferstanden in das ewige Leben: Über das Sterben und Erwachen einer lebendigen Seele* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2020), Jürgen Moltmann, *Hoffnung für unsere Erde – Hoffnung auf das Reich Gottes* (Nürtingen: Denkhäus, 2020), Jürgen Moltmann, *Verantwortete Hoffnung* (Nürtingen: Denkhäus, 2021), Jürgen Moltmann, *Politische Theologie der modernen Welt* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2021), and Moltmann, *Weisheit in der Klimakrise*.

<sup>21</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Die ersten Freigelassenen der Schöpfung: Versuche über die Freude an der Freiheit und das Wohlgefallen am Spiel*, ed. Rosemarie Egger (Aachen: Bernardus, 2021); Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope for the 21st Century, with a new Introduction by James Hawkey* (London: SCM, 2021).

his book on Christology in the late 1980s) and a mystical, doxological Trinitarian theology beginning in Paul of Tarsus, and indebted to Jürgen's Romanian Orthodox fatherly friend, Professor Dumitru Staniloae.<sup>22</sup>

On April 8, 2022, at Jürgen's ninety-sixth birthday party at home in Tübingen, he said the following about me, "Brach came to me as a Lutheran from Chicago, and I have made him into an ecumenical Christian theologian." Here, then, is the fourth major shift in my theology that occurred due to studying with Jürgen—I have expanded my theological horizons well beyond Lutheranism, even as I cherish this theological tradition, especially the theology of the cross, and still consider myself to be broadly situated within Lutheran theology overall. In particular, I take Jürgen's critique of Lutheran theology seriously around the "doctrine of justification," which I argue is the reverse side of a theology of the cross.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, instead of only, or even primarily, accenting the justification of guilty sinners before a God who pardons us for our prideful sins, Lutherans should expand this doctrine to justification for victims and perpetrators of systemic sin and injustice.<sup>24</sup> If Jürgen's critique is taken seriously, there are fruitful possibilities for a Lutheran, liberationist theology of the cross today, wherein Jesus Christ stands in solidarity with the victims of sin and is their liberator, even as he is at work in movements for social justice worldwide through the Holy Spirit, in that both victims and perpetrators of systemic sin might be restored to full humanity as the beloved image-bearers of the Triune God that all persons are. I argue that this new Lutheran, liberationist theology of the cross finds its apex in James Cone's black theology of liberation.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Die neue Schöpfung* (Nürtingen: Denkhäus, 2023). Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, *Der Weg Jesu Christi: Christologie in messianischen Dimensionen* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1989), 297–336.

<sup>23</sup> To my knowledge, Regin Preter first argued that Luther's understanding of justification was the reverse side of his theology of the cross. See Regin Preter, *Luther's Theology of the Cross* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 4.

<sup>24</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Der Geist des Lebens: eine ganzheitliche Pneumatologie* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1991), 137–157; Jürgen Moltmann, *In der Geschichte des dreieinigen Gottes: Beiträge zur trinitarischen Theologie* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1991), 74–89; Jürgen Moltmann, *Christliche Erneuerungen in schwierigen Zeiten* (München: Claudius, 2019), 12–39. Cf. Jennings, *Transfiguring a Theologia Crucis through James Cone*, 188–191.

<sup>25</sup> See Jennings, *Transfiguring a Theologia Crucis through James Cone*, 261–268.

I passed my dissertation and the Rigorosum (doctoral oral exams) in Summer 2022, and began the German *Vikariat* in Pforzheim in September 2022 working toward ordination. I continued visiting Jürgen in Tübingen as often as possible, including for his ninety-seventh and ninety-eighth birthday parties, and we remained in fairly frequent email contact. Unfortunately, he caught Covid-19 in July 2022, and that resulted in it becoming especially difficult for him to speak anything more than very short sentences. This did not stop him from communicating with me, however, and he was always ready and eager to hear stories from my new life as a vicar in the United Protestant Church in Baden. So, I began to weave theology into stories about teaching in school, my confirmation kids, and church life in general. Jürgen also gave me very helpful written feedback on my sermons, beginning in 2023.

During this time, I was hard at work revising my dissertation into an academic monograph. In October 2023, my book was published with Mohr Siebeck in Tübingen, fulfilling my dream to be published in a German academic press as an American theologian. Jürgen was delighted for me, and we agreed to meet on Reformation Day in the evening at his home. I promised to bring white wine from Baden, and the music of Joan Baez and Ludwig von Beethoven. That night, he offered me the "Du" in German, meaning we went to a first-name basis. The story is an unforgettable one for me. He had commented that the wine was very good. I said I told the shop owner in Heidelberg where I had bought the wine that it had to be good, because it was for my *Doktorvater*. Jürgen replied, "The role of *Doktorvater* is in the past." I hesitated a bit and then asked him, "What are you, if not my *Doktorvater*?" He answered, "A friend. We are friends." He then asked me if we wanted to use "Du" from now on in German. I was shocked. I knew he had done this with several of his other doctoral students, but I figured the age difference between us was far too great for him to really consider me his friend. I then took his hands, and as we were looking into one another's eyes he said, "and my name is JÜRGEN!" That night Jürgen officially became my oldest friend.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> In 1990, Jürgen said the following related to being remembered by his doctoral students: "As I always say to my doctoral students, I want to be remembered not as a teacher, but as a friend." See Michael Bauman, ed., *Roundtable: Conversations with European Theologians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 40. I am grateful to my friend Stephen D. Morrison for alerting me to this source.

My last visit with Jürgen was on May 28, 2024, just six days before he died. He told me his favorite Psalm is Psalm 96 (in Luther's translation, of course), and said just before I left, "I love life. This earthly life, and eternal life." Six days later he entered into eternal life. I grieve the loss of my friend. Yet in my grief when the tears flow, I know he is close to me. In 2021, he promised me that his spirit would come over me at my ordination. I am holding him to that promise, because friends keep their promises. In addition to everything else he was for me, he was a true and loyal friend who showed me that friendship knows no age limit.<sup>27</sup> ⊕

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<sup>27</sup> For Jürgen's theology of friendship, which remains understudied, particularly in its implications for pedagogy and youth ministry, see Jürgen Moltmann, "In der Freundschaft Jesu," in Jürgen Moltmann, *Kirche in der Kraft des Geistes* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1976), 134-41, Jürgen Moltmann, "Offene Freundschaft," in Jürgen Moltmann, *Neuer Lebensstil: Schritte zur Gemeinde* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1977), 51-70, Jürgen Moltmann, "Humanität in Schule und Gesellschaft," in Jürgen Moltmann, *Menschenwürde, Recht und Freiheit* (Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 1979), 37-57, Jürgen Moltmann, "Offene Freundschaft," in Moltmann, *Der Geist des Lebens*, 267-271, and Jürgen Moltmann, "In offener Freundschaft erlebte Freiheit," in Jürgen Moltmann, *Der lebendige Gott und die Fülle des Lebens: Auch ein Beitrag zur Atheismusdebatte unserer Zeit* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2014), 120-130.