In our last lecture we were talking about theology of hope, and we looked at the theological and cultural background as well as the philosophical underpinnings of this system, and then we began to look at some of the key ideas in theology of hope. We were looking at the end of the hour at the methodology of theology of hope, and we had made some general comments about this, but then we were looking more specifically at the fact that theologians of hope want very definitely to distance themselves from neo-orthodoxy.

I want to pick up that thought in a minute and carry on from there, but before we do that, I want to begin with a word of prayer. Lord, we thank you again for the privilege of study. We thank you that you are our God and that you are accessible to us. We thank you, Lord, that you have both our past and our present and our future worked out and that all of it is within your hands. As we study in this lecture again about this theological movement that places so much emphasis on the future, we pray that you would help us to understand what is being said. We pray, as well, that we would see the positive emphases of it and be able to incorporate them into our own thinking. So help us in our time of study in this lecture. For it’s in Christ’s name we pray it. Amen.

At the end of last lecture, we were discussing, as I mentioned a few moments ago, the fact that neo-orthodox theologians definitely are to be distanced from theologians of hope, and I want to pick up at that point with what Moltmann says here in finishing off this thought about theology of hope not focusing on the present and on things that neo-orthodox theologians are concerned with. Moltmann tells us that we need to remember that hope makes us ready to bear the cross of the present. Hope does not cheat the present of its meaning, but instead it gives it more meaning than a neo-orthodox approach would because there’s still something that we can look forward to. Let me read to you about what Moltmann says about this on page 32. Moltmann
Moltmann also tells us that neo-orthodox thinkers and thinking place a great emphasis on the eschaton, but when they talk about the eschaton, they mean the transcendent, eternal breaking into the now, which is the present. They don’t mean instead something that’s yet future. Moltmann says that the eschaton needs to be seen as a future coming in history. “The logos of eschatology,” he says, “is not the Greek logos that sees in the logos the epiphany of the eternal present and finds the truth in that.” And from Moltmann’s perspective that’s what neo-orthodox thinking is telling us anyway, that the eschaton is that which involves an appearance right now and gives us truth in that appearance; instead Moltmann says the logos of eschatology is promise—the promise which has stamped the language, hope, and experience of Israel.

“Logos as promise,” Moltmann says, “means hope and this means that it is a knowledge in terms of hope.” On page 41, Moltmann sums up this point when he says the following. He says, “Eschatology as a science is therefore not possible in the Greek sense, nor yet in the sense of modern experimental science, but only as a knowledge in terms of hope and to that extent as a knowledge of history and of the historic character of truth.” I would like to suggest to you,
though, that what this in essence means is that it puts theology, if you read theology in the category of hope, as he's understanding it, it puts theology beyond verification and falsification because what he's saying is that eschatology as a science has nothing to do with investigating the present or the past.

Perhaps the strongest negative statement in regard to the method of neo-orthodoxy that we find in Moltmann appears on page 31, and let me read it to you. He says, “An acceptance of the present which cannot and will not see the dying of the present is an illusion and a frivolity, and one which cannot be grounded on eternity either.” In talking about the need to do theology as eschatology and the focus on hope, Moltmann also tells us of the relationship of faith to hope. He says here in the first place “that to believe means to cross in hope and anticipation the bounds that have been penetrated by the raising of the crucified.” In other words, to cross the boundary of the present and its realities that we're experiencing and to look toward the future, and crossing those bounds have been already penetrated, he's saying, by the raising of Jesus Christ from the dead. And when you have hope, you are no longer stuck with the present realities, but you are making that leap into the future, a leap which is suggested already by the raising of Christ from the dead.

He then says that “faith is the foundation on which hope rests. Hope nourishes and sustains faith. In fact the two of them are inescapable companions. And they are companions,” he says, “in the following ways: On the one hand faith recognizes the dawning of the future, openness, and freedom in the Christ event.” The hope thereby kindled by that recognition spans the horizons which then open over a closed existence, such as we would have if we only look at the present and the past. There is also a second way in which faith and hope are inseparable companions. Moltmann says that “faith binds us to Christ. Hope sets faith open to the comprehensive future of Christ.” Then he says, “Another way in which faith and hope go together, is that hope is really nothing else than the expectation of those things which faith has believed to have been truly promised by God.”

Moltmann then has a further comment about faith, and I think it's worth noting. He says that “faith can have absolutely nothing to do with fleeing the world with resignation and escapist.” There are those who sometimes have looked at faith as an escape from the way things are, to have wishful thinking, pie in the sky by and by, we might say, but Moltmann says, no, faith cannot have that
escapism associated with it. Instead Moltmann says that “in this hope that is kindled by the resurrection of Christ, the soul does not soar above earthly existence to some imagined heavenly bliss, nor does it sever itself from the earth.” Then I quote him on page 21, he says, “For in the words of Ludwig Feuerbach, it puts in place of the beyond that lies above our grave in heaven, the beyond that lies above our grave on earth, the historic future, the future of mankind.” So there’s no escapism to some hoped-for world that is extraworldly or outside of this world. Rather, genuine faith and genuine hope look to the historic future of mankind.

Moltmann then moves on to tell us what sin is, and he tells us that sin is to be opposed to hope. We’ve seen the relation of faith to hope, and now he’s going to tell us the relation of sin to hope. Faith and hope go together; sin on the other hand does not go together with hope. Moltmann says, and I quote him here from page 22, “If faith depends on hope for its life, then the sin of unbelief is manifestly grounded in hopelessness. To be sure, it is usually said that sin in its original form is man’s wanting to be as God, but that is only one side of sin. The other side of such pride is hopelessness, resignation, inertia, and melancholy.” He then tells us that hopelessness, which is his definition of sin, can assume one of two forms. And he says in both cases “each form is a sin against hope.”

The first form that hopelessness can assume is presumption. Presumption is a premature, self-willed anticipation of the fulfillment of what we hope for from God. This turns out to be, if you will, a certain impatience with God in demanding fulfillment right now. Moltmann says that we can see this attitude of presumption exemplified by early nineteenth-century German idealist philosophers such as Goethe, Schiller, Ranke, and Marx. And then Moltmann says that Prometheus became the great saint of the modern age, so to speak. Presumption, of course, was involved in Prometheus stealing fire from the gods, and Moltmann is saying that this presumption is very much typical of our modern age. But presumption is one form of hopelessness, and, of course, hopelessness is sin.

The other form of hopelessness is despair, and despair is to be understood, Moltmann says, “as the premature, arbitrary anticipation of the nonfulfillment of what we hope for from God. The idea that there is absolutely no hope whatsoever,” Moltmann says, “is itself sin against hope.” This attitude appeared in the middle of the twentieth century, he tells us, in a number of the
existentialists theologians. On page 24, Moltmann writes this. He says, “In the middle of the twentieth century we find in the literary writings of the existentialists, the other form of apostasy from hope.” That’s pretty strong word, “apostasy.” “Thus the patron saint that was Prometheus now assumes the form of Sisyphus who certainly knows the pilgrim way and is fully acquainted with struggle and decision and with patient toil, yet without any prospect of fulfillment. Here the obedient servant of God can be transformed into the figure of the honest failure. There is no hope and no God anymore. There is only Camus’s thinking clearly and hoping no more and the honest love and fellow feeling exemplified in Jesus, as if thinking could gain clarity without hope, as if there could be love without hope for the beloved.” So very clearly he thinks that in modern existentialism you have the sin of despair, and obviously that, coupled with the sin of presumption, are two different forms of hopelessness, and both of them are contrary to hope and as such are sin.

Let me move now to look at theology of hope’s concept of God. We talked an awful lot about doing theology as eschatology and what that means to matters such as faith and sin and things like that, but now let’s look more specifically at what theologians of hope say about God. Moltmann begins by raising what he calls the question of God’s existence, and he feels that’s the place to begin. He says, “The notion of a God who can be proved from the natural world,” as natural theologians attempted to do, “that idea is to be removed as is the notion of proving a transcendent God through existential encounter.” So what Moltmann is saying here is we are not ready to buy into the God of the philosophers who thought that through natural theology, through reasoning, you could get to God. We’re not ready to buy into the God either of the neo-orthodox who said that in some way above and beyond reason we would know that there’s a God, but rather the question about God’s existence is to be handled in some other way. What is that way?

According to Moltmann, the question of God’s existence, like all other questions, is an open question. It will be solved only in the future. By having said this, I need to remind you that according to theologians of hope, history is an endless, directionless process, so we eventually in the future are supposedly going to get the answer to whether or not there is a God, and yet we’re told that history is going in no particular direction, has no particular end. So when you put those two ideas together, you begin to see that the hope that we’ll ever know that there’s really a God for sure is
as a matter of fact removed. But on the other hand, if you’ve never gotten to the point where you could disprove it, there’s still room for hope, which is, of course, the point of this theology.

Moltmann and other theologians of hope use God in their system, but they do so without ever answering or even allowing to be answered right now the question of His existence. Then what do they say about God? How is He to be understood? This brings me to what they say about the very nature of God. We are told by Moltmann that there is really no valid distinction to make between what God is in Himself and what He does in the world. God’s essence is confined to His history. We have already seen in the earlier course that God is removed as totally other by a number of theologians. He is very much transcendent, and you can hardly ever, if ever, get to that God. You surely cannot know Him in His essence, in his hiddenness. What Moltmann is saying is fundamentally don’t even think about that. The only thing you can know about this God is what you see in His history. Moltmann then says that “God is known and described in the Old Testament and the New Testament as the God of promise.” If someone were to say, “What is it that we find about God in history?” we find that He’s a God of promise. In fact, this is the key to God’s nature. “What is God is answered in terms of His promises,” Moltmann says.

On page 143 of *Theology of Hope*, Moltmann says, “His essence,” speaking of God, “His essence is not His absoluteness as such, but the faithfulness with which He reveals and identifies Himself in the history of His promises as the same. His divinity consists in the constancy of His faithfulness, which becomes credible in the contradiction of judgment and grace.”

Moltmann also speaks on pages 103 through 105 about the God of the promises. But now promises point to hope, and both hope and promises point to the future. So you can see how this concept of God that we’re getting fits right in with this theology that does theology as eschatology.

What do we conclude from all of this? The result is that the God of the Bible, we are told, is no intraworldly; that is, within this world, or extraworldly, a God outside of our experience. He’s not intraworldly or extraworldly, but rather He is the God of hope, a God with future as His essential nature. The God whom we, therefore, cannot really have in us or over us, but always only before us. He’s a God who encounters us in His promises for the future. And this means that we can’t have Him either, but we have to await Him in active hope. So whereas orthodox thinking
said that you could through tangible, historical means get a verification of the existence of God and then one could relate to that God; whereas neo-orthodoxy said you can get verification that there is a God, not through reason and argument but through the nonverbal encounter and you can get that verification in the very present; [by contrast] theology of hope is saying, “No, we can’t get this verification in us or over us or behind us. Instead we have to await it in the future in active hope.”

Carl Braaten, another theologian of hope, in his book *The Future of God*, says, “That God is the power of the future.” He defines Him that way. “God is the power of the future, pressing for a radical conversion of the present. The being of God,” Braaten says, “is God’s eschatological power. Futurity then is essential to His very being.” And this means that God is wrapped up in His promises which point always to the future. In fact, Braaten makes the comment that God is not other than His promises.

The symbol for God to be used, then, in talking about God is the symbol, the power of the future. You’ll remember that Tillich talked about God as the ground of being; now the theologians of hope are saying, “No, not that symbol, but rather the symbol, the power of the future.” And the reason for focusing on this power of the future is that it reactivates the eschatological orientation of Christ preaching of the kingdom of God. It is at this point that Braaten makes a significant point about the understanding of the kingdom of God. He goes back to the Greek word for kingdom, which is *basileia*, and he reminds us that modern research has shown that he basic concept involved in the word *basileia* is power, not a realm. So that’s why we need to focus on power, because that’s the focus of Christ’s eschatological preaching of the kingdom, and of course kingdom means power, and God of course is the power of the future.

The place then where the nature of God is best revealed is in Jesus Christ, according to Braaten, and in particular we see it in His resurrection. Let me just read to you a little bit about what Carl Braaten has to say in the book *The Future of God*. On page 67 we see the following. He says, “If we bring our question of God to Jesus of Nazareth, we may let Him show us His Father. ‘He that has seen me, has seen the Father.’ This is the favorite text of so called Radical Theology, by which it claims biblical warrant to dispense with God while keeping Jesus only. The text, of course, does not mean that we can have Jesus instead of His God, rather it means that God has identified Himself in Jesus.
Jesus represents God to us. God the Father is united with Jesus as one who is different. There is not a unity of dead identity, but a unity in difference. Jesus, that is the name Jesus, is not the name of a substitute for God. It is the essence of heathenism,” says Braaten, “to make divine substitute. The God is Dead Theology is a revival of heathenism on Christian soil, only blessing itself with the unction of a few Jesus phrases. If we wish to refer our hopes to Jesus, we must see how He referred them to the approaching kingdom of God. Jesus did not draw attention to Himself for His own sake. The claims He made about Himself were entirely based on the authority of the kingdom of God. Jesus can define God for us only because He first let Himself be defined holy by the future of God’s coming kingdom. If we delete the reference to God in His kingdom in the appearance of Jesus of Nazareth, there is nothing left in Jesus to which we can refer our own hopes. And if Jesus can no longer define and mobilize our hopes, He is irrelevant to our future. Then Jesus, that is the name Jesus, is but an empty name in no way exalted above all others.”

What do theologians of hope say about knowing this God? If God’s essence is futurity, then how in the world are we going to know Him? Seems like it would be impossible. But the answer, we are told, lies in the fact that His power of the future rests on His promises about the future. Knowledge of God right now then can be had if we are prepared to understand divine revelation and knowledge of God within the horizon of history as the sphere of promise. If we are willing to do so, then we are told by Moltmann that the following conclusions can be drawn. In the first place, we’re told that we can conclude that God reveals Himself as God where He shows Himself as the same and is thus known as the same. How does God reveal Himself as the same? He does this when and where He has been faithful to His promises. I quote from page 116 of *Theology of Hope*, where Moltmann says, “Where God in His faithful to a promise He has given stands to that which He has promised to be, He becomes manifest and knowable as the self-same Self.”

The second conclusion that we can draw: Moltmann says that “since the revelation of God means that God confesses to God in historic faithfulness to His promises, then historical events in themselves do not, in fact, reveal God, but the history of the promise,” and by that he means the history initiated by promise and expected as result of them, “does reveal the faithfulness of God to the extent that in it God keeps faith with His promises and thereby remains true to Himself. God then is known first
in the midst of history and only later at the end of history, but what we have to understand is that the way He is known in the midst of history is not by looking at some specific set of historical events or even one historical event in isolation from others, and saying ‘Ah, yes, that was God,’ rather this knowledge in the midst of history is always a knowledge that anticipates the future and what He's going to do.”

On page 118 in *Theology of Hope*, Moltmann says, “Knowledge of God is then an anticipatory knowledge of the future of God, a knowledge of the faithfulness of God which is upheld by the hopes that are called to life by His promises. Knowledge of God is then a knowledge that draws us onward, not upward into situations that are not yet finalized, but still outstanding.” Moltmann then says that the guarantee of the promises fitting together or being congruous with reality lies in the faithfulness of the one who gives us the promises. But that isn’t the whole story because we need to remember that the promises look to the future fulfillment of those promises. And the future to which they look is, Moltmann says, “the personal future of God Himself.” Now this doesn’t mean that our hope is in God Himself or in God as such, but rather hope that His future faithfulness will bring to hope what has been promised.

On page 119, he talks about hoping in God, and here’s what he says. He says, “This future to which the promise points can be expressed by a theological personalism only as the personal future of God Himself.” Our hope in the promises of God, however, is not hope in God Himself or in God as such, but it hopes that His future faithfulness will bring it also the fullness of what has been promised. To be sure, it can be said that our hope is hope in the coming of the faithfulness of God, that it expects the promised future from the coming of God Himself and not apart from Him. Yet it would surely be an abstraction which would not do justice to the Old Testament hope if we were to describe this hope as *purisima en daum purisimum* (a Latin phrase). He then says, “Hope where it holds to the promises, hopes that the coming of God will bring it also this and that, namely, His redeeming and restoring Lordship in all things. It does not merely hope personally in Him, but has also substantial hopes of His Lordship, His peace, and His righteousness on earth.”

Moltmann also tells us that hopes knowledge recalls the faithfulness of this God in history and anticipates the fullness and fulfillment, I should say, of His promises in the future. I would suggest to you that as you reflect on this you may find it a bit
confusing and it may sound like this is a rather strange kind of knowledge. By that I mean, how are we to make sense of this idea that we in fact know God? That is, in what sense can one be truly said to know God? Moltmann’s *Theology of Hope* says that you know Him in the sense that you’ve seen His faithfulness in the past and you anticipate what He will do later. This seems to amount to the following: If God acts in the future as I’ve seen Him act so far, then I can, at that time, say I knew something right now about Him more than just His past actions. But if He doesn’t act in the future as He has before, I guess then that I really don’t know Him for sure except in his past action. You can see the kind of problem that this gives you. You really are always sort of on the edge of your seat wondering if you really know much of anything about God and if you do, what it is. Seems to me that the inductive leap that all of this necessitates leaves the question of knowing God’s attributes truly open; that is, it leaves that question truly open. By that, I mean, we can’t really know about them. We can’t say that he has the qualities of love and goodness and omnipotence and omniscience because any statement that we might make right now about His attributes may later on be disproved if we find out in the future that He hasn’t acted in ways that are loving and good and omniscient and omnipotent. So, as I say, at any point in one’s life it’s hard to know what sort of knowledge you can actually have of God, and it seems that it’s always possible at some time in the future to find out that anything you thought you did know about God because you thought you had seen it confirmed, as a matter of fact gets falsified.

Let’s move on at this point to begin to look at theology of hope’s Christology, and we’ll finish up this lecture with this topic and then we’ll move on into the next lecture and continue with theology of hope’s thinking about Christ.

Moltmann says that “the gospel of the revelation of God in Christ is in danger of being incomplete and collapsing altogether, if we failed to notice the dimension of promise that is in it.” You would expect him to say that because everything in theology of hope is viewed from the perspective of hope and promise and the future. But Moltmann says that “Christology deteriorates if the dimension of the future of Christ is not regarded as a constituted element in it.” If you try to do Christology without thinking about what Christ is going to do in the future, then you’re going to have a rather bankrupt Christology. Then what do we come up with when we put the future of Christ into Christology? For one thing, Moltmann says that “Christ’s Incarnation is God’s participation
in the history of the rejection and humiliation associated with Jesus’ death, and Jesus represents true humanity in the midst of inhumanity.” Incarnation, then, means God’s sharing in mankind’s suffering to remove this inhumanity, and, as you can tell, this is going to open the door for what God is going to do in Christ in the future. And to that, Moltmann immediately moves. He says, “When we speak of the future of Christ, we are speaking of the parousia of Christ.” And here parousia is translated as “return” or “coming” rather than “present.” “But we think of the return of Christ,” Moltmann says, “in the sense of something new that is yet to come.” It’s not a reappearance of the same old thing. “The parousia of Christ,” he says, “is a different thing from the reality that is experienced right now and given now. It brings something new that as a matter of fact you can’t experience now even if you wanted to.”

What does this coming of Christ amount to? He says, “The coming of Christ does not bring merely a repetition of Christ’s history, and it is not merely an unveiling of Christ’s history either. But rather it brings us something which has so far not yet happened through Christ at all.” Moltmann says that “the Christian hope awaits the fulfillment of the promised righteousness of God in all things, the fulfillment of the resurrection of the dead that is promised in Christ’s resurrection and the fulfillment of the Lordship of the crucified one over all things that is promised in Christ’s exaltation.” All of this brings me then to what Moltmann has to say about the resurrection of Christ, and Moltmann refers to the resurrection of Christ as the main emphasis for Christ’s future. And the first point that Moltmann takes up is the whole issue of the historicity of the resurrection. Did it actually occur as a historical fact, and can we know that it occurred as a historical fact?

Moltmann begins with the notion that clearly something or other has happened that the apostles are reporting in the New Testament. It’s unlikely to think that they have totally made up this story about nothing whatsoever, but the real question is whether or not this particular story is historical. Something has happened, but now is the story that they tell us historically accurate? Moltmann says that “the modern concept of the historical will lead us neither to the fundamental provability of the resurrection nor to a fundamental historical skepticism. The modern concept of the historical,” Moltmann says, “prevents theology from postulating historical facts on dogmatic realms, but it also prevents theology from abandoning the ground of
history in despair. Historical understanding today, then,” he says, “is acknowledged to be analogical. As a result, agreement with the normal, the usual, or at least things that are variously attested by other people is the mark of provability.” That seems to be the criterion that historians use for determining whether a given event happened or not. But now if that’s the criterion that we’re going to use for determining whether the resurrection occurred or didn’t occur, then we have to say that the resurrection cannot be historical in this sense of historical. But remember that he’s also said just a few moments ago that you’re not going to be able to conclusively prove that the resurrection did or didn’t occur. Now he moves on and says, “If the only way we can ‘prove anything historically’ is to do so on the analogy of similar events that have occurred, then from that perspective, from that as a criterion, we cannot say that the resurrection is historical.”

He then adds that there are also people who look at history as exemplifying the mechanism of cause and effect. And if that’s how you understand history, then from that perspective the resurrection looks like a myth. We’re not in a position that we can explain the causal connection that brought this event about. Then what is theology of the resurrection supposed to do in terms of the question of whether this is grounded in history or whether it’s a doctrine that is grounded in no historical event? Moltmann says that theology of the resurrection can try several ways of solving the problem of history as we have just presented it. The first thing it can do is to grant that the report of the raising of Christ is unhistorical and then it can look around for other ways for modern historically determined people to approach and appropriate the reality of the resurrection. “But,” says Moltmann, “if by the modern way of doing history the resurrection cannot be understood, then neither is the modern way comprehensible for faith.” So that that’s not going to be very acceptable. “Faith must give up any claim,” he says, “in that case, must give up any claim to an understanding of faith in the realm of history. And this means,” he says, “that the primary question becomes one of the character of the witnesses and of the claim that attaches to the proclamation of Easter faith. It no longer becomes a question of the reality of the resurrection as a historical fact; we’re left simply to judge how believable the people were who said this occurred.” And if that’s where we come to as a result of taking this approach to the resurrection and its relationship to history, then here’s what results, according to Moltmann. This is on page 178. He says, “The resurrection of Christ is then to be grasped neither mythically nor historically, but only in the category of revelation.”
But then the message of the resurrection is left hanging in the air, and so also is the existence affected by it without it being possible to understand the need for the proclamation and the necessity for decision in face of it at all.

So it appears that this way of attacking the problem of the theology of the resurrection and the relation of that theology to actual history is not going to be successful. You’re not going to be able to grant the report of the raising of Christ as unhistorical but then claim to appropriate the reality of the resurrection in some other way.

As I mentioned, Moltmann says that there are some other ways to address this problem, and I want to turn to the other two options that he gives us when we begin our next lecture. Then after we’ve seen what those options for handling this problem are, we’re going to see what Moltmann says is the significance of the resurrection after all, and then I want to turn to take a look at a major theme in theology of hope, namely, theology of hope’s call for social activism. More on all of this next time.