

# SILT 2005 Session Summaries

## Session 1: Professor Jürgen Moltmann

### **Reborn to a Living Hope: Personal Experience and Political Consciousness**

The Institute began the afternoon of April 26 at the Bonhoeffer House, the home of Charles and Karen Marsh. After a reception and introductions, Professor Moltmann opened with his talk “Reborn to a Living Hope: Personal Experience and Political Consciousness” through which he shared his autobiography, including how he came to faith as a prisoner of war after World War II and the sources and shaping of his theological thinking through the decades. By beginning in such a manner Professor Moltmann legitimized two interconnected methods of theological conversation: first that theology can and, perhaps at its best, must arise out of the individual’s own life and experience; theology is, in an important sense, autobiography, an expression of God’s intimate involvement in the lives of us human beings. Professor Moltmann shared that theology is a passion which comes “from the open wound of God in one’s own life,” from the missing of God, from the hunger for the Kingdom of God in the face of suffering. Furthermore, theological inquiry is about God’s delight as well as God’s pain. It also springs from an overabundant joy that loves and affirms this life. This certainly is not to say that theology is done in isolation. In fact, the second way in which Moltmann led us in theological conversation was by continuously placing the personal and the political in dialogue, with the implication being that these are two interconnected dimensions of all theological themes, such as trust, hope, justice and suffering. Religion should not be a private affair but a “theology with its face turned towards the world.”

## Session 2: Professor Jürgen Moltmann

### **There Is Enough for Everyone: The Spirit of Life and Social Consciousness**

The second day began in the Solarium of the university’s Colonnade Club with Professor Moltmann’s lecture “There is Enough for Everyone: The Spirit of Life and Social Consciousness” followed, as was each session, by fruitful conversation with the participants and their responses. “There is enough” became the maxim through which we spoke of the Spirit’s movement and our responsibility in the midst of the realities of injustice and suffering in the communities in which we live and work. The experience of the first Christian community began at Pentecost as described in Acts 4:31-35 and inaugurated the reality — and not just ideal — that “there was no one needy among them.” In community there is enough. This participation in God’s overabundance stands in opposition to our capitalist norm of competition which is based on the principle of lack — that there is never enough. Such competition shatters community and makes nations, ethnicities, classes, and genders rise against each other. Professor Moltmann also led us in a discussion of how we reconcile personal freedom and social equality. Can there be true democracy of freedom without social equity? When the justice of God is added to the abundance of life there is enough. Out of a joy of life and a trust that we will be taken care of comes repentance from the greed of life and a consequent moderation, a willingness for just distribution of riches.

### **Session 3: Mark Gornik**

#### **Signs of the Spirit in the City**

After lunch Mark Gornik presented “Signs of the Spirit in the City” in which he shared both his experience in the Sandtown neighborhood of Baltimore and his work with African immigrant churches in New York City. Gornik was the pastor of New Song Church in Sandtown which began as a house fellowship among members of the community that asked the simple question, “What did God intend our neighborhood to look like?” Children took crayons and papers and drew the beautiful neighborhood of renovated homes and proper social services that Sandtown has now become and is continuing to become. Starting from the pictures of children, a vision not of optimism but of hope has been realized through community grassroots participation. In the Psalms and in the book of Revelation the “new song” is the victory hymn of the cross that reconciles people together. As a white privileged pastor moving into an impoverished African-American neighborhood Gornik described himself and his colleague Allen Tibels as “a divine joke” who moved in knowing that they had no practical solutions but simply wanted to be neighbors. They came not with established programs but with the humble desire to share life together as community. And they came as an act of repentance. They were a part of the white privileged class that benefited and lived off of the urban environment. In other words, they came to participate in a ministry of justice and not charity. They were drawn into what Professor Moltmann called “the wide space of the Spirit” which is “the dawn of the Kingdom of God.”

#### **Third Annual CAPPs Lecture in Christian Theology: Professor Jürgen Moltmann**

##### **In God We Trust, In Us God Trusts: On Freedom and Security in a Free World**

The third annual CAPPs lecture was held at 5:00 PM on April 27th at St. Paul’s Memorial Church and was an opportunity for the broader university community, as well as Charlottesville residents and even groups from around the region, to hear Professor Moltmann present his lecture, “In God We Trust; In Us God Trusts: On Freedom and Security in a Free World.” Professor Moltmann explicated how trust is “a necessary habitat for freedom.” He asked if we can trust in God and answered that the God who bears, endures, and shares our grief and sorrows is the foundation of our trust in the divine. Trust is mutual and so the next question must be whether God trusts in us? Indeed God believes in us and even expects our living to be a manifestation of God’s glory on earth. God’s trust in us is the final word. God’s confidence in us is a liberation of the soul from depression, resignation and lack of self-confidence. Such trust liberates us to participate in the Spirit who is always already at work in our midst in both private and public life. Moreover, vital to a theology of trust is a theology of doubt. The doubt, for example, that questions certain political powers helps ensure that we serve the living God rather than idols. A politics that contradicts the face of the crucified Christ is erroneous and Christians must publicly criticize such idols.

#### **Session 4: Professor Jürgen Moltmann, and Willis Jenkins responding**

##### **The New Earth in which Justice Dwells: The Creative Spirit and Ecological Consciousness**

The next morning, Professor Moltmann spoke on “The New Earth in which Justice Dwells: The Creative Spirit and Ecological Consciousness” with Willis Jenkins, a PhD candidate in Religious Studies, introducing and responding to Moltmann’s environmental theology. The gospel addresses the whole earth and all things — human beings, animals and nature — are interconnected in their participation in grace. Such an acknowledgment connects environmental ministry to social justice. However, we live in the midst of an environmental crisis rooted in modern scientific technology whose logic and will is domination and whose purpose in the political world is to acquire, extend and wield power. The modern picture of the divine is a one-sided understanding of an almighty God, as absolute determining subject over against the world as passive object; this in turn leads to human beings seeing ourselves as subjects authorized to dominate the earth which we view as an object to manipulate. What is necessary is a paradigm shift from domination to community. We have disrupted our relationship with nature and thus must repent, but our lack of confession and repentance reveals the ecological crisis to also be an ecclesial one. The book of Genesis teaches that every creature is included in God’s covenant and has its own dignity, with each creature being a partner in God’s covenant in differing but important ways. This sacramental understanding of the whole world allows for a kind of pantheism: that God’s presence is in all things and all things are in God. Creation exists by, in and through God and thus the creative spirit that is in everything holds it together as Colossians reminds us. In nature we find God’s transcendent immanence; we find the presence of the creator and thus whatever we do to the earth we do to Christ and the Spirit. Rather than define the Trinity and the earth in stark and discontinuous differentiation, this new type of ecological thinking affirms the description of Revelation 21:3, the mutual cosmic indwelling of the Trinitarian God and creatures. Furthermore, human longing and redemption is interconnected with that of creation as Romans 8 expresses. Pentecost is the renewal of our own lives as well as the beginning of the outpouring of the divine spirit on all living things. According to Psalms, God is renewing the face of the earth. And the new earth is destined to become the home of God.