



# World Council of Churches

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Geneva, March 31, 2017

Spectabiles,  
Prof. Jürgen Molmann,  
Prof. Johan Bruitendag, Dean of the Theological Faculty,  
Esteemed representatives of the University of Pretoria,  
Honourable leadership of the Dutch Reformed Church,  
and of other churches,  
Dear brothers and sisters,

It is a great pleasure for me as General Secretary of the World Council of Churches to greet you all in the name of the Triune God we all worship, on this special occasion of the awarding to Prof. Dr Jürgen Moltmann an honorary doctorate by University of Pretoria, as proposed by the Theological Faculty.

This festive occasion holds several layers of significance and brings together several churches, personages, academic institutions, and even different hemispheres of the same *oikoumene*, God's created world. On the one hand, the Theological Faculty in Pretoria celebrates this year its centenary with numerous academic, ecclesial, and ecumenical events, including the conference held today. Further, the ordinary meetings of the Faith and Order Commission will be hosted by your Theological Faculty in June this year with the generous support of the Dutch Reformed Church and of other churches in South Africa; they will be integrated into this series of celebratory events. A centenary is indeed a great occasion for celebration, remembrance, and evaluation of the past but also for planning and envisaging the future. Part of celebrating, but also of planning and envisaging, is recognizing and honouring persons who have made a substantial contribution and a real difference in terms of theological reflection, in reshaping the role of theology for today's world and for the future.

Professor Jürgen Moltmann is certainly one of the theologians of 21<sup>st</sup> century whose theological contribution most bears hearing, reflection, and honouring. By awarding this doctorate to Professor Moltmann, your university joins an already-large group of academic institutions of various confessional backgrounds from all around the world who have awarded him with different academic titles. Because he is someone who experienced at a personal level the

horrors of the Second World War, formulated the startling insights of the theology of hope and of political theology, has been deeply engaged in the ecumenical quest, and has influenced the religious life of the churches, the impact of his theology crosses confessional and international borders. But he is one of today's most influential systematic theologians because his unique ability to reframe and rethink classical theological topics in truly creative, profound, and life-giving ways inspires theologians everywhere, not least in new contexts and in newly established churches, especially in the global South.

As WCC General Secretary, I personally value Professor Moltmann's ecumenical theology and vision. In January 2016, he visited the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva and launched his book, published by WCC Publications, entitled *The Living God and the Fulness of Life*. In his lecture, addressed to a large audience composed of staff from the WCC and other ecumenical institutions and of students from Bossey Ecumenical Institute and the University of Geneva, as in the book itself, Professor Moltmann developed a prophetic reflection on how theology can bring the living God we all believe in to the world today, so that human beings and the entire creation can experience the fullness of life that God promised to us all. We, as Christians living in 21<sup>st</sup> century, are empowered in this mission by the example of early Christians, who were able to conquer the ancient world "with [their] message about Christ: He is 'the resurrection and the life'" (p. vii). Professor Moltmann's strong message to us was and is: if early Christianity was able to transform the ancient world, then today's Christianity contains the same potential for transformation of the contemporary world.

I am delighted that Professor Moltmann's theology and his ecumenical visions speak to your context and inspire theological reflection in your Faculty. By awarding Prof. Moltmann, a theologian from the global north, an honorary degree here in Pretoria, in an academic institution that serves peoples and churches in a particular context in the global South, you are embracing with us all a vision of unity that is meaningful for the entire *oikoumene*.

Congratulating the university for this initiative and Professor Moltmann for receiving it, I remain yours in our God and Saviour Jesus Christ,



Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit  
General Secretary  
World Council of Churches