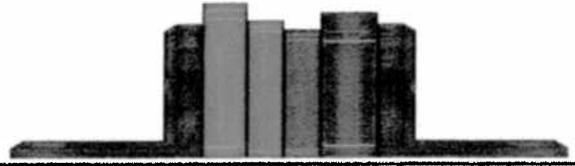


# Book Reviews



## A Broad Place - An Autobiography

By Jurgen Moltmann, translated by Margaret Kohl  
Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008

“Post-Traumatic Growth” is a positive term used by our Army’s Comprehensive Soldier Fitness Center to describe helpful development and progress which can occur after trauma invades one’s life. German theologian Jurgen Moltmann’s recent autobiography, *A Broad Place*, is an excellent illustration of Post-Traumatic Growth.

A formative period in Professor Moltmann’s life was his time as a Soldier during and immediately after World War II. Experiencing the nearby death of his friend during a firestorm in Hamburg in 1943, the young Moltmann asked “Why am I alive, and not dead like the others?” (p. 381) He experienced mental and spiritual torment while a Prisoner of War near Ostend, Belgium. Later interned within a Scottish Prisoner of War camp, Moltmann felt depression brought on by wartime destruction and seemingly endless captivity. Then, confronted with pictures of Buchenwald, a “feeling of profound shame at having to share in shouldering the disgrace of one’s own people...the weight of it has never left me to the present day.” (p. 29) Yet, despite the overwhelming weight of all these events, the kindness he experienced in friendly encounters with Scottish working families, and the gift of a Bible from a chaplain enabled Moltmann to experience positive spiritual growth out of the trauma of war.

This autobiography is exceptionally helpful to Unit Ministry Teams in the following ways:

**Understanding** - In reading this book, we discover foundations for Moltmann’s influential text *The Theology of Hope*. A productive, combative hope available to the poor, assailed, forsaken and imprisoned (all of which Moltmann experienced during the War) underlies much of his

theology. In *The Crucified God*, he addresses themes of abandonment “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” stirred by memories of concentration camp victims. His work on the Kingdom of God, going beyond words and into the world of politics, society and culture, addresses areas of disquiet found in the church’s mute voice during Nazi Germany. And, his focus as a systematic theologian, trying to understand the individual in the context of the whole, is helpful for our theological education.

**Resources** - The text contains many personal stories, experiences and illustrations that can bring color and life to sermons, studies, talks and classes chaplains and chaplain assistants may lead. The post-wartime perspective in dealing with personal and national trauma is exceptionally helpful in building spiritual resilience and steadfastness. Likewise, Moltmann’s positive “standing on the threshold of possibilities” (p. 285) attitude brings freshness of insight and can infuse new energy into our thinking and person in whatever stage of life we may find ourselves.

**Challenge** - This autobiography challenges members of Unit Ministry Teams in a number of ways. Now in our eighth year of war, do we offer our Soldiers and Family Members opportunities to grow deeply and with rigor when seeking to answer the harder questions that are raised by our OEF/OIF experiences? Are we cultivating settings whereby future “Professor Moltmanns” may flourish and grow as a result of God’s Spirit working within the lives and wartime circumstances of our Soldiers? Do our Detainee Operations Centers in Bagram, Kandahar, Bucca and Tikrit provide opportunities for moral and intellectual growth for detainees similar to that provided POW Moltmann within Scottish POW camps in 1945-1947? (pp. 30-35) Are we “stretching the minds” of our parishioners to address the hard questions brought on by war, and offering God’s steady hope and peace in the

process?

*A Broad Place* is part travel journal, part summation and critique of Moltmann's theology, and throughout a personal narrative and autobiography that offers distinct clarity that moves and inspires.

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