

Our Cries in His Cry:  
Suffering and *The Crucified God*

By

Mick Stringer

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## Abstract

This study examines Jürgen Moltmann's trinitarian theology of the cross in *The Crucified God* (1974) in its relevance for the problem of human suffering. Throughout that volume Moltmann argues that the Christian church's identity and relevance are intimately tied into what Christian theology has to say about the suffering of the crucified Christ through the significance of Christ's suffering for the suffering of the created order.

Consciously reversing the soteriological question raised by anthropocentric contemplation of the cross - what does Christ's death mean for us? - Moltmann asks what does the cross mean for God? What does it mean for the doctrine of God and the problem of human suffering to say that the Son of God was abandoned by his Father on the cross?

Moltmann attempts to answer these questions through the elaboration of a theology of the cross that is at once thoroughly incarnational and trinitarian. Within this theology, the death of Jesus assumes a spectacularly profound significance as a revelation not only of what God has done for us, but more particularly of who the God is that is revealed in the event of the cross, as of the depth of that God's involvement in the suffering of the world.

Moltmann argues that the crucifixion of Jesus was first and foremost a trinitarian event in which all three persons of the Godhead participate in Christ's identification with, and redemption of, the suffering of the world. In arguing for the cross as an event within the life of the triune God, Moltmann re-engages the ancient teachings of theopaschitism and patripassianism which Christian tradition had previously deemed inadequate and misleading.

The result is a trinitarian theology of the cross which, in its exposition of the nature of the relationship between divine suffering and the suffering of the world, is judged to be an innovative and substantive contribution to theological discussion on the problem of theodicy, involving God's relationship to the suffering of humanity and creation.

The study concludes with a summary of scholars' criticisms of *The Crucified God*, together with some suggestions for further research.

## **Declaration of Authorship**

This dissertation is the candidate's own work and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other institution.

To the best of the candidate's knowledge, the dissertation contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the dissertation.

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Michael D Stringer

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Date

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This dissertation is submitted as a mark of respect to the memory of  
Harrison Michael O'Brien,  
who died on 17<sup>th</sup> August 1994  
without having breathed the air of this world.

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# Introduction

The 1900s began with a note of humanistic optimism. As the nineteenth gave way to the twentieth century there was an air of expectation that humanity had reached a golden age of maturity. This was perhaps epitomised in the euphoria that led to the construction and commissioning of three Olympic class ocean liners by the White Star Line: RMS Olympic, RMS Titanic, and HMHS Britannic. Fierce competition between Cunard Lines, White Star Lines, and the German passenger liners resulted in a scramble to secure the biggest, the most luxurious, and most importantly, the fastest ocean liner. While there are inherent dangers in employing shallow and simplistic generalisations to describe a complex and multi-faceted situation, we note Macquarrie's (1988:19) observation that:

... a certain buoyancy of spirit was evident in most schools of thought at the beginning of the century, ...[a] buoyancy [which] has been more and more weighed down as the world has become increasingly disjointed and unstable.

Even the most cursory glance at recent history reveals that such optimism was unfounded. On its maiden voyage to New York from Southampton the *Titanic* struck an iceberg at 11.40 p.m. on the fourteenth of April 1912. By 2.20 a.m. the following morning the 'unsinkable' ship had sunk (Pescher 1997). Not only had the flagship of the White Star line been lost together with the hopes and aspirations of those who had confidence in the feats of human engineering, but fully two thirds of *Titanic's* passengers and crew also lost their lives that night. The world was stunned by the apparent powerlessness of human ingenuity to prevent such a tragedy.

Such optimism was also called into question when, in the aftermath of a series of world-altering wars, humanity was forced to admit that it had not progressed to the point where human beings were capable of continuous and peaceful coexistence with peoples of other political, religious, or ethnic origins. The twentieth century, in fact, has witnessed a steady procession of one war after another, one atrocity after another, and one genocide after another. Idi Amin's Uganda, the killing fields of Cambodia, and the ethnic cleansing of the Balkans and Rwanda have all followed the horrors of the Western Front and the Jewish holocaust. These incidents, and many other acts of human inhumanity expressed toward other human beings, have given rise to the question: How is it possible to engage in theology in the aftermath of Auschwitz, Hiroshima and the Thalidomide children? (Moltmann 1991b:166).

Yet more than simply prompting the question of the possibility of engaging in theology, these and other acts of unrestrained inhumanity have provided, yet again, the grounds for the most-cited reason given by people for remaining uninterested in Christianity and unmoved by its teachings. That reason, according to Nicky Gumbel (1994:8), is the seeming contradiction between the existence of suffering – in particular, innocent suffering – and the Christian proclamation of an omnibenevolent, omnipotent and sovereign God<sup>1</sup>. C.S. Lewis, in *The problem of Pain* (1940:14), has restated the theodicy conundrum in the following manner: “If God were good, He would wish to make His creatures perfectly happy, and if God were almighty, He

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<sup>1</sup> John O'Donnell (1988:14) claims that “Human life reveals so much exploitation, oppression, persecution, injustice, violation of innocent victims, sickness and death, that it is difficult to believe in an all-good and all-powerful God, especially in one who is interested in the tragic state of human affairs.”

would be able to do what he wished. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore, God lacks either goodness or power, or both.”

It seems that human beings are still haunted by the shadow that has been cast by the uninhibited atrocities made manifest in the Jewish holocaust. Who can ever forget the account of the suffering of the sad-eyed angel who hung between life and death in *Night*, Elie Wiesel’s (1960:69-71) powerful recounting of his experience in Auschwitz? Or the pain contained within the god-forsaken confusion of the witness’s cry, “Where is God now?” Wiesel’s answer was that God was present, enduring the suffering of his people, in the person of the slowly suffocating boy. That answer finds amplification in Jerry Irish’s (1975:25) commentary, “Where is God now? He is there on the cross – and at Auschwitz, and Memphis, and My Lai, and at all the unnamed places where death reigns through oppression, ignorance and apathy.”

As the twentieth century gave way to the twenty-first, the world was left with no doubt that the question of innocent suffering was not simply a phenomenon confined to obscure and distant ‘unnamed places.’ The whole world community found itself unavoidably confronted by the reality of events of the eleventh of September 2001. Innocent suffering was brought to the very centre of international politics when a group of terrorists hijacked four commercial airliners and deliberately flew three of them into public buildings in New York and Washington.

Those events caused most of the western world to be struck by a form of paralysis for several days, such was the scale of devastation. Yet, as great as the loss of life was on that day, it is dwarfed by some other acts of human brutality. Karen Rooms (2001:26), for example, reminds us of the seven thousand Rwandan Tutsi,

men, women and children who, in 1994, sought shelter in a Roman Catholic church and were murdered there under the light of stained glass windows depicting the Risen Christ and Pentecost. “Where was he,” she asks, “when the militia came? Were these people abandoned, or was he right there with them as they gathered in his name – and as they were killed around the altar because they were different?” (Rooms 2001:26).

In the aftermath of these tragic events, we must acknowledge that Wiesel’s question has lost none of its power.

The events of the eleventh of September and all the other events alluded to above constitute a powerful challenge for the Christian church. How is Christian theology to presume to speak about an all-powerful and all-loving God in the face of such overt wickedness? For the fact is, Christianity itself seems so often unable to provide satisfactory answers inasmuch as “the God who lets the innocent suffer is the accused in theodicy’s court” (Moltmann 1993c:40). What is left for Christians to say to a world that is struggling under the burden of the reality that all is not well with humanity? For while the great majority of Christians would undoubtedly affirm the reality of Christian orthodoxy’s God, they recognise that

God so rarely seems to accomplish his will in the world. So often God’s purpose, if it can be discerned, seems to be defeated. The actual redemptive presence of God in the world is discerned less in God’s taking the sovereign lead in events and more in God’s picking up the pieces after history has misfired (Goetz 1986:386).

Nevertheless, it is Christian belief that God is neither absent nor disinterested in the affairs of the world. For two millennia Christianity has proclaimed Christ’s glorious victory over the powers of evil at the crucifixion and resurrection as *the* central tenet of God’s redemptive provision (e.g., Acts 2:23f; 3:15; 1 Cor 1:23).

Accordingly, the Christian response to the questions raised by the suffering of the innocent must be centrally Christological inasmuch as God was reconciling all things *in Christ* (2 Cor 5:19). Christianity, moreover, proclaims a *risen* Christ who is no less present in the world today than at the crucifixion, and no less involved in the redemption of all things now than he always was (2 Cor 5:18f). His immediacy to the world's problems is no more clearly expressed than in Godfrey Rust's exposition of the events of the eleventh of September 2001. Together with Wiesel, Rust asks, 'Where is God?' His answer:

... He was begging  
 in old clothes in the subway  
 beneath the World Trade Center.  
 He was homeless in Gaza,  
 imprisoned in Afghanistan,  
 starving in Somalia,  
 dying of Aids in an Angolan slum,  
 suffering everywhere in this fast-shrinking world;  
 and boarding a plane unwittingly in Boston,  
 heading for a meeting on the 110<sup>th</sup> floor.  
 When the time came  
 he stretched his arms out once again to take  
 the dreadful impact that would pierce his side,  
 his last message on his fading cellphone  
 once more to ask forgiveness for them all, before  
 his body fell under the weight of so much evil (Rust 2001:15).

How, then, is Christian theology to proceed? Throughout the course of the twentieth century increasing numbers of theologians have been drawn to the conclusion that Christian theology must re-consider the question of theopaschitism. Bonhoeffer (1971:361), for example, maintained that "only the suffering God can help." Later, Moltmann (1972b:28) claimed that "a God who reigns in a state of impartial blessedness in heaven cannot be accepted today", which inevitably led him to reflect upon the "unsolved problem of the suffering God" (Moltmann 1974a:11).

Classical theism presents God as a being who, by definition, cannot suffer. For this school of thought, any admission of divine suffering results in the conclusion

that either God's creation or creatures has the potential to affect God to the extent that change occurs within God or that God is not complete because some external 'thing' was necessary to perfect God's being. Both conclusions are considered by classical theists to have the undesirable effect of diminishing the deity of God (Johnson 1985:152). Yet, in contemporary society, especially since World War I and II, the concept of a God who remains totally unaffected, indeed *beyond* any possibility of being affected, has become more and more problematic. Indeed, it would appear that increasingly "an apathetic God no longer suffices" (Johnson 1985:154), with the present emerging as a favourable time (*kairos*) for a revision of the classical doctrine of the immutability and impassibility of God (Johnson 1985:152).

It would appear that the Christian church will only maintain relevance if what it has to say about the Christ that it proclaims addresses the questions arising in peoples' every-day lives. Among others, those questions have to do with the mystery of evil and the suffering of the innocent. If Christianity has nothing to say about such things then the church will indeed be irrelevant. And since Christ is the centre of its proclamation, the church and indeed Christianity would face nothing short of a Christological crisis. For many, this is precisely the situation which confronts the church today. Thus, Moltmann (1974a:6) asks, "Who is Jesus Christ, really, for us today?"

If, as Christians maintain, God was reconciling the world through Christ, then Jesus, as the one sent from God, is the one to whom the Christian church must look for answers to these deeply perplexing questions (Moltmann 1972b:32). Accordingly, a truly Christian answer can be nothing other than that which is derived

from a theology that takes full account of Jesus' experience of persecution, rejection and crucifixion. His life and ministry, and in particular his cry of dereliction from Calvary's cross (Mk 15:34), offer a far more convincing response to the problem of suffering than any abstract theological speculation since Christianity proclaims that God himself has entered into the suffering of creation in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Moltmann (1974b:276) argues precisely that when he states that

... God becomes man in Jesus of Nazareth, he not only enters into the finitude of man, but in his death on the cross also enters into the situation of man's godforsakenness. ... He humbles himself and takes upon himself the eternal death of the godless and the godforsaken, so that all the godless and godforsaken can experience communion with him.

In *The Crucified God*, Jürgen Moltmann, arguably “the best-known German-speaking academic theologian at the end of the twentieth century” (Müller-Fahrenheit 2000:15), attempts to re-orientate theology away from speculative contemplation and toward addressing what he considers to be the most fundamental crisis facing the Christian church today – the tension between the Church's identity and its relevance in relation to a suffering world. He states: “The more theology and the church attempt to become relevant to the problems of the present day, the more deeply they are drawn into the crisis of their own Christian identity. The more they attempt to assert their identity in traditional dogmas, rights and moral notions, the more irrelevant and unbelievable they become” (Moltmann 1974b:7). For Moltmann, it was essential that the reconciling of the Church's identity and relevance in the context of a troubled world be grounded not so much in “an abstract theology of the cross and of suffering [as in] ... a theology of the crucified Christ” (Moltmann 1974b:4), for only “the scandal and mystery of the crucified God can resolve the problem of human suffering” (Haar 1983:25).

This study aims to provide an examination of the theology of the cross in *The Crucified God* and its relevance for the problem of human suffering. It will be particularly concerned to examine the way in which Moltmann argues that the crucifixion of Jesus was, first and foremost, a trinitarian event in which all three members of the Godhead participate in their bearing toward the suffering of the world. Thus, the essay will be concerned to demonstrate that what Moltmann contributes to theological discussion in the contentious area of divine suffering is intimately connected to his doctrine of the Trinity and has immediate practical ramifications for the pastoral ministry of the church.

The inquiry will commence with a brief biographical introduction to Jürgen Moltmann and discussion of his theological context and methodology, before proceeding to an examination of the theology presented in *The Crucified God*. The primary concern is to analyse Moltmann's trinitarian theology of the cross and its significance for the key question of the precise relationship between God and human suffering.

# Chapter One

## Moltmann in Context: Biographical and Methodological Issues

All human beings are beings-in-context so that their identity and significance is, in large part, drawn from the context in which they find themselves. This is certainly true of Jürgen Moltmann whose theological motivation and contributions are profoundly linked to the question of how it is possible to talk about God in a post-Auschwitz world. Moltmann (1991b:49) himself answers that “as Germans we do this in awareness of Auschwitz” precisely because, for him, “[t]heology is never concerned with the actual *existence* of a God. It is interested solely in the *rule* of this God in heaven and on earth” (Moltmann 1993c:191). And this because when human beings experience the absence of the presence of God’s rule, it causes them to question the very existence of God, for if God does in fact exist, then God’s rule ought not be absent on earth.

Yet for many, simply to exist is a struggle because their life experience is that God’s rule and divine righteousness are absent from human affairs. Such experience gives rise to much reflection upon not only the possibility of God’s existence, but also upon God’s purpose or purposelessness. These concerns are foundational for Moltmann, because his theology is born out of the desolation of spiritual, cultural and political upheaval.

The following brief biographical outline should serve as an introduction to the extent to which historical and contextual issues have combined to influence Moltmann's theology and, in particular, that of *The Crucified God*. In short, we

... need to examine the inner developments in the life of this man to be able to understand the elementary decisions and impressions which govern his work. So the key question is: what are the key experiences which have given this life its unique direction? (Müller-Fahrenholz 2000:16).

### Biographical issues

As a young man of barely nineteen years of age, Moltmann found himself caught up in the midst of World War II. He experienced several significant life-forming events during battle and later as a Prisoner of War in European and British camps. He makes reference to these events in the first chapter<sup>2</sup> of *The Source of Life: The Holy Spirit and the Theology of Life* (1997). Each of those events had a profound impact upon him and have exerted far-reaching influence on his subsequent life and work.

In July 1943 he served in an anti-aircraft battery located in central Hamburg. The eastern part of the city was targeted during the Royal Air Force's 'Operation Gomorrah' and in one week alone some eighty thousand people died as a result of the aerial bombardment (Moltmann 1993b:19). In the midst of one of the raids by allied bombers the battery in which Moltmann served suffered a direct hit. That incident was to prove nothing less than a point of complete and absolute desolation for the young German soldier.

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<sup>2</sup> Moltmann (1997c:ix) notes in the foreword to *The Source of Life: the Holy Spirit and the Theology of Life* that the first chapter comprises the text of an address entitled *Wrestling with God. A personal meditation on Jacob's struggle at the Brook Jabbok, following Genesis 32.25-32*. This address was given by Moltmann at the Bonhoeffer Church, Forest Hill, London on the thirteenth of August 1995 in remembrance of the place where he 'discovered' theology – the theology school of Norton Camp (1945-1948).

The friend standing next to me at the firing predictor was torn to pieces by the bomb that left me unscathed. That night I cried out to God for the first time: 'My God, where are you?' And the question 'Why am I not dead too?' has haunted me ever since. Why are you alive? What gives your life meaning? Life is good, but to be a survivor is hard. One has to bear the weight of grief. It was probably on that night that my theology began, for I came from a secular family and knew nothing of faith (Moltmann 1997c:2).

Later, in 1945, Moltmann found that he was one of a number of German troops who had been overtaken by allied tanks during a battle in Holland and was captured by Allied forces. He was held in a succession of European prisoner of war camps before being sent to a Scottish internment camp. In that camp Moltmann encountered his second catalytic experience:

And then came what was for me the worst of all. In September 1945, in Camp 22 in Scotland, we were confronted with pictures of Belsen and Auschwitz. They were pinned up in our huts, without comment. Some people thought it was just propaganda. Others set the piles of bodies which they saw over against Dresden. But slowly and inexorably the truth filtered into our awareness, and we saw ourselves mirrored in the eyes of the Nazi victims. Was this what we had fought for? Had my generation, as the last, been driven to our deaths so that the concentration camp murderers could go on killing, and Hitler could live a few months longer? Some people were so appalled that they didn't want to go back to Germany ever again. ... The depression over the wartime destruction and a captivity without apparent end was exacerbated by a feeling of profound shame at having to share in this disgrace. That was undoubtedly the hardest thing, a stranglehold that choked us (Moltmann 1997c:3f).

Yet, in the midst of such anguish Moltmann was given a Bible by an army chaplain and there he found comfort and solace in the Psalms of Lament. Eventually he was drawn to the Passion narratives of Christ's crucifixion, and came to a most profound understanding of, and identification with, Jesus' cry of dereliction from the cross: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mk 15:34). Indeed it could be said that Moltmann's faith and theology have grown out of an awareness of this verse's significance (Müller-Fahrenheit 2000:23). While he denies that he 'decided for Christ' in the conventional contemporary sense, Moltmann concedes that there was a time when he clearly understood that Christ had decided *for him* and that moment is recorded in Mk 15:34 (Moltmann 1997c:5).

There was to be one more crucial and foundationally formative experience for the young Moltmann. When shifted to Camp Norton in the autumn of 1946, the expectation of most of the prisoners was that this ‘special’ camp was where “young Germans were supposed to be ‘re-educated’ for a better Germany” (Moltmann 1997c:6). However, Camp Norton proved to be a uniquely “generous gift of reconciliation” (Moltmann 1997c:6) where the prisoners of war had the opportunity to study theology under a succession of truly eminent biblical and theological scholars. In the summer of 1947, some of those prisoner of war students were invited to attend the inaugural International Student Christian Movement conference. Moltmann (1997c:5) claims that that event “turned my life upside down”.

We came there still wearing our wartime uniforms. And we came with fear and trembling. What were we to say about the war crimes, and the mass murders in the concentration camps? But we were welcomed as brothers in Christ, ... In the night my eyes sometimes filled with tears.

Then a group of Dutch students came and asked to speak to us officially. Again I was frightened, for I had fought in Holland, in the battle for the Arnhem bridge. The Dutch students told us that Christ was the bridge on which they could cross to us, and that without Christ they would not be talking to us at all. They told of the Gestapo terror, the loss of their Jewish friends, and the destruction of their homes. We too could step on to this bridge which Christ had built from them to us, and could confess the guilt of our people and ask for reconciliation. At the end we all embraced. For me that was an hour of liberation. I was able to breathe again, felt like a human being once more, and returned cheerfully to the camp behind the barbed wire. The question of how long the captivity was going to last no longer bothered me (Moltmann 1997c:5f).

The significance of this event is not lost on Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz (2000:18), one of a number of commentators on Moltmann and his theology, who summarises this culminative event as “[i]n imprisonment, liberation.”

Moltmann (1991b:166) maintains that even though these prisoner of war camp experiences initially caused a disintegration of the certainties in his life, nevertheless in the midst of such uncertainty he found hope through Christianity. It was this hope that rescued him from spiritual and psychological despair, ensuring

that he survived the temptation simply to give up. Thus, in the end Moltmann's theology is born out of the crucible of life's questions in the search for truth and meaning; it

... comes into being in the night of an immediate and cruel proximity to death, and therefore in the end it is never about learned intellectual games but about questions of life and death. It does not arise out of the peaceful and cheerful awareness of an unshakeable certainty in God but out of the abyssal experience of the remoteness of God (Müller-Fahrenheit 2000:19).

### Contextual Issues

Together with the personal experiences of Moltmann which have impacted upon the development of his theology, the collective experience of the familial and ethnic groups to which he belongs has also been a formative factor. Moltmann's theology has also been influenced by the experience of living with a severely disabled brother (Moltmann 1997c:33; Gorringer 2001:33), as well as by the common, shared experience of the German people. Thus, Moltmann's experience, and his theology that has developed out of it, is intricately and inseparably bound together with the corporate experience of the German people.

My biography was shaped, interrupted and radically changed, in a very painful way, by the collective biography of the German people in the last years of the Second World War and by a lengthy imprisonment after it. The 'individual approach' of my faith and thought and therefore also of 'my theology' is embedded in the collective experiences of guilt and suffering in my generation (Moltmann 1991b:166).

Moltmann's theological endeavours cannot be properly read and understood, therefore, without due regard for his context. His experiences of life have caused him to conduct his theological inquiry *out of* that context and those experiences. He writes "I must stress this because theology for me has never been a neutral scientific study or an objective doctrine, but an existential experience, which must be

personally suffered, digested and understood” (Moltmann 1987:vii). The key experience in Moltmann’s situation, according to Müller-Fahrenholz (2000:23), was and is nothing other than that “God is precisely present also in Godforsakenness.” Indeed, throughout his theological struggles Moltmann has been drawn to the conclusion that *the* question for theology concerns not so much how it might be possible to talk about God, but rather how it would be possible *not* to talk about God in the aftermath of Auschwitz (Moltmann 1991b:166).

His answer, as has been noted above, is that a post-Auschwitz theology must be conducted precisely “in awareness of Auschwitz” (Moltmann 1991b:49). This is so because

... theology after Auschwitz would be impossible, were not the *sch'ma* Israel and the Lord’s prayer prayed in Auschwitz itself, were not God himself in Auschwitz, suffering with the martyred and the murdered. Every other answer would be blasphemy (Moltmann 1974a:10 ).

Such forthrightness of theological insight, directly derived from Moltmann’s own experiences of godforsakenness, leads Robert Cornelison (2000:15) to conclude that two reasons especially require that any attempt to understand Moltmann’s theological contribution must give due recognition to his context. The first is that “Moltmann’s work is intimately tied in with the social and political upheaval in post-World War II German culture”; the second, that his theology is “deliberately and decidedly political in character, demanding that one always look to the political sources and results of his theology.” In fact, throughout Moltmann’s work there is a decidedly marked absence of any attempt to separate academic theological pursuits from the concerns of life, and hence from the political aspects of human existence. Evidence for this is no more clearly seen than when Moltmann challenges

Pentecostal and Charismatic elements within Christianity to review their own ‘neglect’ of the spiritual gifts. He writes

If charismata were not given us so that we can flee from this world into a world of religious dreams, but if they were intended to witness to the liberating lordship of Christ in this world's conflicts, then the charismatic movement must not become a non-political religion, let alone a de-politicized one (Moltmann 1992:186).

Since this present study is concerned with an analysis of Moltmann's theology of God and God's relationship to human suffering as this is to be found in *The Crucified God*, it is helpful to understand the influence that Moltmann's experiences during and following World War II have had upon this work in particular. His own description of his first three books<sup>3</sup>, of which *The Crucified God* is the middle work, is that they “were written from the time for the time, and are thus to be understood as contextual theology, set within the conflict of contemporary life” (Moltmann 1991b:173). As with his theology in general, so it is the questions of life that have given rise to the theological engagement of *The Crucified God*.

Besides their impact upon his theology, it remains to be shown how Moltmann's life's experiences have also shaped his theological methodology, particularly that of *The Crucified God*, the object of this present essay.

## Theological Method

Throughout his academic career and writings, Moltmann (1996b:103) has been concerned to avoid the temptation to develop a theological “immunization

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<sup>3</sup> The first of Moltmann's work to gain a widespread readership was *A Theology of Hope* published in 1965 (English edition 1967). This was followed by *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* in 1972 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1973, and English edition in 1974) and *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* in 1975 (English edition 1977).

strategy” that would stand over against any and all internal or external contradictions, whether in life or in theory. He deliberately resisted the temptation to engage in a theological abstractionism that lays claim to coherent systematisation of all knowledge about God because to do so would be to withdraw from life into a fortress of defensible concepts. Those who retreat into such fortresses are faced with being ‘starved-out’ by their own irrelevance to life, which continues in oblivious disregard of their construction. Rather, Moltmann desired to speak about God in a way that was more concerned to articulate *what* had been ‘discovered’ about God and God’s work of revelation and redemption, than it was to present these truths suchwise as to ensure that they were entirely logically consistent. His concern was, and remains, to engage in a theology of listening as much as of pronouncement, of dialogue between partners rather than one of “monological dictatorship” (Moltmann 1996b:103). Truth, for Moltmann (1993c:xiif), therefore, resides in the freedom of open dialogue within the community of believers and is not solely located within an unswerving adherence to a dogmatic position.

This opens the door for theological innovation expressed in a more creative and adventurous approach where theology becomes experimental, indeed an adventure in ideas (Moltmann 1996b:*passim*). Moltmann freely admits that his theological methodology is nothing other than an articulation of an “*imagination for the Kingdom of God in the world and for the world in the Kingdom of God*” (1996b:103). As such, it produces a theology that is “neither modernist nor fundamentalist, directed neither toward conformity nor retreat, but toward the future of God and of life” (Moltmann 1996b:103).

It has been observed above that Moltmann's reading of the passion of Christ was one of a number of formative experiences in the development of his theology. In particular, Jesus' cry of dereliction from the cross (Mk 15:34) forms not only a key point in Moltmann's own spiritual journey, but also forms the central insight of *The Crucified God*. Jesus' cry, uttered in "a loud voice" (Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34), is nothing other than the articulation of his confusion, frustration and outrage at his, apparent, abandonment by God.

Moltmann's analysis of the crucifixion events and the apparent separation between Father and Son is founded upon a dialectical epistemological principle where like is known via recognition of unlike, rather than the analogical epistemological principle where like is known by like. In fact, Moltmann (1974b:27) argues that "revelation in the opposite" creates the very possibility of the analogical epistemological principle. He also contends that a theology of the cross that is founded solely upon the analogical principle can only ever result in a *theologia gloriae* (Moltmann 1974b:28). The adoption of a dialectical methodology is important for Moltmann as a basis upon which to argue for the relevance of the cross to a suffering world. His point is that the omnipotent God is revealed in the impotency of the crucified one, and the love and provision of the Father is known by his resurrection of the one who was abandoned. The Son's experience of godlessness and godforsakenness in abandonment is nothing other than his identification with all of those who are also victims of violence – the 'godless' ones. For Moltmann, the adoption of a dialectical method is important, for insofar as God is revealed in his opposite, he can thereby be known in and by the godless and those who are abandoned by God, a knowledge which brings them into correspondence with God.

“It is the dialectical knowledge of God in his opposite which first brings heaven down to earth of those who are abandoned by God, and opens heaven to the godless” (Moltmann 1974b:28).

Moltmann’s intention was also to argue for the existence of “an irreplaceable dialectic between cross and resurrection” (O’Donnell 1982:161). Indeed, the death of Christ on Calvary’s cross is a unique event in the history of God’s self-disclosure to his people: “an event of divine kenosis in which the trinitarian life of God is thrown open for all to see” (Dabney 1993:97). Yet, the interpretative key to this event lies within the “identity-in-contradiction” (Bauckham 1987:56) that exists in the person of the crucified and the risen Jesus – i.e., in the fact that it is none other than the godforsaken and abandoned one who is also the godblessed and resurrected one. As a result, the Christian cannot know the eschatological promises of resurrection and eternal life other than through the godforsakenness of the Son’s abandonment by the Father.

However, this orientation has led some commentators, Douglas Meeks (1996:96) for example, to suggest that Moltmann’s theology is one-sided and overly speculative.

With regard to the accusation of one-sidedness, Moltmann (1987:ix; 1991b:165-182; 1993c:xi) openly acknowledges that in his first three books a single focal point of inquiry inspired and was pursued throughout each of those works. However, he argues in his own defence that the singularity of focus then employed was and is not a liability but a distinctive strength, flowing out of his particular concern to intentionally engage not only in dialectical but in *dialogical* theology:

... theology in dialogue is theology engaged in the struggle for the truth, which liberates, and in opposition to nihilistic ideologies, which oppress. So dialogical theology cannot be timeless or without location. It must forego correctness in order to be concrete. *It cannot afford balance, but must take sides and speak onesidedly.* Its intention is not to satisfy itself, but to make a contribution to the healing of everything in church, culture and creation (Moltmann 1987:viii emphasis added).

For although, as previously noted, Moltmann employed a dialectical epistemology, he came to understand, according to Lyle Dabney (2000)<sup>4</sup>, that the weakness of dialectical theology lay in the realisation that “simply to *contradict* is not to *transform*, and *transformation* is what his thought is all about.” Moltmann (1993c:xiii) himself writes:

It is only in free dialogue that truth can be accepted for the right and proper reason – namely, that it illuminates and convinces as truth. Truth brings about assent, it brings about change without exerting compulsion. In dialogue the truth frees men and women for their own conceptions and their own ideas. In liberating dialogue teachers withdraw into the circle of brothers and sisters. The pupil becomes the friend. Christian theology would wither and die if it did not continually stand in a dialogue like this, and if it were not bound up with a fellowship that seeks this dialogue, needs it and continually pursues it.

As to the allegation that it is overly speculative (Meeks 1996:96), Moltmann (1975:646; 1996b:103) defends his work by replying that ‘speculation’ is not considered a derogatory term in German academic circles. In fact, to speculate presupposes that one is engaged in a process that retains an all-encompassing view of the whole, especially the relationships existing between the individual inquirer, the influence of his/her own context with all of its associated biases and presuppositions, and the object being considered. Abstractionism, on the other hand, is doomed to failure because it is an attempt to seek out the truth about a matter while the inquirer either remains blinded to the influence of his/her own context, or simply ignores its

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<sup>4</sup> This article was accessed in an electronic format and, therefore, individual page breaks and numbers throughout the article were unavailable. As a consequence, in-text citation of this work does not include page numbers. However, complete bibliographical data relating to the print version of the article was available and has been included, in full, in the bibliography.

impact upon their endeavours to objectively study the topic under discussion. Moltmann moreover contends that it is entirely acceptable to formulate statements that extend thought beyond that which remains logically 'provable', because of the phenomenological validity of the theopoetic enterprise, an enterprise which is at base a poetic and joyful doxological expression of knowledge of God, using ideas that transcend present experience (Moltmann 1996b:103).

Notwithstanding the allegations of a tendency toward a one-sided and an overly speculative theological methodology, Moltmann has produced "a powerful eschatological theology from the raw ore of various theological, philosophical, and historical materials in the fire of the struggle he faced in post-war Germany" (Dabney 1993:89). Just as his own experiences of godforsakenness issued in a unique theological passion within himself, so Moltmann (1991b:172) sought to articulate his belief that the centre of Christian theology should be nothing other than Christ's experience of godforsakenness and abandonment during the event of the crucifixion. Moltmann (1974b:47) claims that such understanding led him inexorably to that "monstrous phrase 'the crucified God'."

Although Moltmann's volume *The Crucified God* has "produced a firestorm of controversy which perdures in some forms even today" (Freske 2000:85)<sup>5</sup>, it

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<sup>5</sup> Ronald Goetz (1986:385), for example, describes a rise in the acceptability of divine passibility as "the new orthodoxy". Moltmann (1991b:xvi) himself contends that the "doctrine of the essential impassibility of the divine nature now seems finally to be disappearing from the Christian doctrine of God." Such sentiments have led Shirley Guthrie (1996:22) to claim that the "doctrine of the sovereignty of God, especially as it is expressed in the Calvinist-Reformed tradition, is being attacked from all directions today." The debate, it seems, is set to pass over into the twenty-first century since Thomas Weinandy (2000) has recently devoted an entire volume to an examination of the theological trend toward the normalisation of the view of God's passibility, which, in his view, contradicts centuries of belief in God's impassibility (see also the discussion of divine *apatheia* in O'Brien 2000:*passism*; Parsons 2002:*passism*). At the same time, proponents of Free-will theism (also known as Opentheism or Neotheism) argue that the doctrine of divine impassibility "arises more from Plato than from the Bible" (Pinnock 1994:118) while taking a significantly different position than that proposed by Moltmann in *The Crucified God*. It should be noted that where Weinandy rejects the

contains the central tenet of Moltmann's theology, viz., that Christ crucified is "the irreplaceable criterion of theology" (Meeks 1996:98). For the centrality of a crucified Christ demands that the "cross is either the Christian end of all theology or it is the beginning of a specifically Christian theology" (Moltmann 1972b:32).

Moltmann (1974b:65ff) maintains that such a specifically Christian theology will serve as a "*critical theory of God*" and a "crucifying theology". These ideas are located and articulated in his use of the double expression 'godlessness and godforsakenness'. These terms refer not only to the experience of *the* crucified one; but also to the experience of all the other godless and godforsaken ones who are 'crucified' daily in the struggle for existence in a world marked by the absence of the presence of divine righteousness (Bauckham 1987:61). *The Crucified God* is the result of Moltmann's reflection upon his own experience of godforsakenness and the apparent absence of the presence of God in the world. It seeks to address this experience of absence by expounding "a full-fledged theology of the cross" (Rumscheidt 1974:355), indeed a 'theology of the cross' in Luther's sense<sup>6</sup> (Bauckham 1989:249f; 1995:3). To "a world that in misery and despair cries out for a ray of hope, this book [*The Crucified God*] seems to take the reality of suffering and death utterly seriously" (Runia 1984:42).

This discussion has so far considered the impact that biographical, historical and contextual issues have had upon Moltmann's theology, both as to its content and

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trend toward this 'new orthodoxy', Goetz (1986:389) observes that although there may well have been a paradigm shift in theological consideration of divine (im)passibility, "doctrinal consolidation of that revolution [is] far from complete."

<sup>6</sup> This assessment is not without its critics. Stephen Williams (1989:10), for example, questions whether it is possible to accurately describe Moltmann as a theologian who can be correctly interpreted as following the tradition of Luther.

its methodology. It has shown that his theology has developed out of the key formative experience that God's presence can be known even in the depths of godforsakenness. These biographical, historical and contextual issues have not only influenced Moltmann's theological motivation, but have led him to the formulation of the core theological insight articulated in *The Crucified God*: i.e., the immediate presence of the Father *in* the Son's experience of godforsakenness on Calvary.

An examination of Moltmann's portrayal of divine suffering in *The Crucified God* and the implications that that divine suffering has for the suffering in and of creation forms the primary focus of the next two chapters. Of especial interest will be the way in which Moltmann employs the dialectic of abandonment and abandoning, absence of the other's presence, and the presence of the other in seeming abandonment, to speak about divine suffering. It will be shown that it is precisely in the cry of the abandoned Son (Mk 15:34) that the cries of the suffering creation (Rom 8:22f) are heard, incorporated, and finally, redeemed.

## Chapter Two

### The Trinity and *The Crucified God*

The most casual of readings of twentieth century history would reveal that a series of social, political, economic and diplomatic crises in Western Europe ultimately led to two world wars. The tragic loss of human dignity resulting from the aggression and inhumanity manifest in those two world wars provided the impetus for some Christian theologians to undertake a re-evaluation of the doctrine of God in God's relation to the violence and suffering of the world. Their work was prompted by the pressing realisation that the magnitude of the violence and horror associated with those and other events provided unequivocal evidence that all was not well with human nature. Indeed, they were painfully aware that in the aftermath of two world wars, it

... appeared that humanity could be more brutal than the beasts, that human moral progress was a charade, and that evil and suffering were a fundamental part of human existence. Talk about an impassible, immutable God was for many simply inconceivable. How could God be love and not lay wounded on the battlefields of France? Only a God who suffered with the victims of war could speak to the disillusionments created by the war (Goetz 1986:387).

This process ultimately led authors like John Hick (1966:280) to question whether the undeniable presence of evil presented such a profound challenge to the orthodox Christian affirmation of a wholly good and loving divine Being as to render impossible continuance of a rational belief in an omnipotent God.

Christian theology was being confronted afresh with the logical conundrum posed by the theodicy issue. The justification of God, it seemed, was very much still an open question. For many centuries philosophers and theologians had been

struggling to find a way in which reconciliation could be brought to the logical contradictions inherent in a belief in an all powerful, omnibenevolent Creator and the indisputable evidence of the existence of evil. In the aftermath of the atrocities of war in the twentieth century, and the two world wars in particular, the awful reality of the presence of evil ruled out any conclusion that the ‘good’ had, or even would, triumph. And yet, for Christians, the prospect of the triumph of evil was equally unacceptable because it would have meant that all hope had been surrendered in the denial of any saving efficacy to the death and resurrection of Christ.

The realisation by some theologians that Christian theology had not adequately addressed the problem of the existence of evil continued to prompt theological reflection upon the possibility of divine suffering and the relevance it might hold for the suffering of the world.

Moltmann rejects any resort to a facilely abstract approach in his attempt to address this issue. Rather his approach involves engaging the immediacy of life with its challenges in an attempt to provide a truly realistic and life-promoting theological response to the problem.

His first move in this regard is to concentrate upon the radical nature of the incarnation. Throughout *The Crucified God*, Moltmann argues that, contrary to the general tendency of evangelical Protestant theology, the incarnation must take precedence over purely staurological concerns because one cannot truly comprehend *what* took place at Calvary without first knowing *who* it was that hung upon the cross. Moltmann’s insistence here is calculated to guarantee the priority of God’s

action in redemptive history, a move that finds support in von Balthasar's (1990:11) declaration that

Were we to ... regard the Passion as the centre of everything, with the Incarnation simply a means to that end, should we not then make God's self-glorification in this world dependent on human sin, and reduce God himself to an instrument for promoting the purposes of the creation?"

Furthermore, since God's action in redemption is revealed in the *person* of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, any discussion of *who* it is that was crucified on Calvary can, for Moltmann, only be conducted using personal, relational, and finally trinitarian concepts and language. Thus Moltmann's answer to the theodicy question is ultimately, as we shall see, a trinitarian one.

Before any attempted exposition of what Moltmann has to say about the precise nature of divine suffering and its relatedness to the suffering of humanity, it is important to note the background tradition against which he develops his thought.

## The Tradition

Moltmann (1974b:214) asserts that traditional Christian theism is thoroughly imbedded with metaphysical conceptualisations, and that metaphysics itself has always conceived of divine reality as all that finite beings are not. He claims, for example, that theism depicts God as an all-powerful, perfect and infinite being, while human beings are helpless, imperfect and finite (Moltmann 1974b:249).

Classical metaphysical theory afforded protection against the terror of nothingness that would threaten to overtake mortal human beings if change, chaos, suffering, and death were judged to exist within the divine. These negating

influences were therefore excluded from the divine being because divine omnipotence compensates for human impotence, divine omniscience counters limited human knowledge, while divine omnibenevolence guarantees that the lack of love evident within humanity will not triumph. Similar thinking lay behind the metaphysical concepts of immutability and impassibility being applied to God. And this because if, for example, the divine being was subject to passions, as human beings are, then it was deemed conceivable that created reality might exert such coercion upon the Creator, by way of inflicted suffering, as to effect some change upon or within the divine being.

According to Moltmann, however, a God who cannot suffer is also one who cannot love because love presupposes relational involvement; and relational involvement, by definition, excludes any notion of unconcerned insensitivity toward the other. In fact, an impassible God is “so completely insensitive, he cannot be affected or shaken by anything. He cannot weep, for he has no tears” (Moltmann 1974b:222). In the end we are faced with the prospect that if the God of the Bible is to be identified with the impassible God of metaphysics, the cross is then necessarily evacuated of any notions of deity because God cannot suffer and die (Moltmann 1974b:214).

However Moltmann (1974b:215) suggests that the biblical record is nothing other than the announcement that something new and radical has taken place in the cross of Christ. He maintains that if the cross (and resurrection) is to remain as the central tenet of the Christian church’s proclamation, as it was for the apostolic preaching (1 Cor 1:18-25; esp. v23; 1 Jn 3:16), it must be recognised to herald the arrival of some new thing in the metaphysical world. Indeed, Christian theology must

henceforth “think of the suffering of Christ as the power of God and the death of Christ as God’s potentiality” (Moltmann 1974b:215) because therein lies the possibility that human beings might be freed from the limitations of suffering and death. Whereas traditional theism sought to provide protection against the limitation, finitude and vulnerability of mortal beings by means of a divinity which could not suffer or die, Christian faith has proclaimed that “God suffered in the suffering of Jesus, God died on the cross of Christ, ... so that we might live and rise again in his future” (Moltmann 1974b:216). As a result, Christian theology’s challenge is to adequately differentiate the God of the Bible from the god(s) of the pagans and the philosophers (Moltmann 1974b:215).

To do so, Christian theology, according to Moltmann (1974b:227), must revisit the ancient theopaschite formula if it is to think of ‘God in Christ’ rather than God in absolute metaphysical terms. Indeed, he argues that before it presumes to speculate about

... the history of Christ’s suffering for the history of the world’s suffering, Christian theology must have faced the intrinsic problem of the history of Christ’s suffering and have understood God’s being in the godforsakenness of Christ. Only when it has recognized what took place between Jesus and his Father on the cross can it speak of the significance of this God for those who suffer and protest at the history of the world (Moltmann 1974b:227)<sup>7</sup>.

To argue for divine passibility, Moltmann (1974b:267) engages in a discussion of *pathos* and God’s alleged *apatheia*. He claims that *apatheia* was a metaphysical axiom in the ancient world, which in its pluriform interpretations was used for governing conceptions of the divine: “In the physical sense *apatheia* means unchangeableness; in the psychological sense, insensitivity; and in the ethical sense,

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<sup>7</sup> This understanding finds support in Burton Cooper’s (1992:179) assertion that “God could not be God without suffering because those who do not experience the suffering of the other do not understand the reality of the other.”

freedom.” *Pathos*, on the other hand “denotes need, compulsion, drives, dependence, lower passions and un-willed suffering” (Moltmann 1974b:267).

However, when considered from a biblical perspective it is evident that the “concept of an apathic God is inevitably alien” (Moltmann 1974b:271) to the Judaeo-Christian tradition. In the experience of Israel, for example, Israel’s God is a God who, in his concern for his people, effectively delivers them out of Egypt, provides for their sustenance in the desert, and who ultimately provides them with a land of plenty. Throughout Israel’s history, and particularly through its prophets, God repeatedly calls his people to return to faithfulness and obedience. This concern for the welfare of his people is such that it is none other than God himself who accompanies Israel into the sufferings of the Babylonian exile (Moltmann 1974b:273). For Christians, this passion of God for his people, and through them for all peoples, reached its ultimate expression in the Christ event where God the Son became flesh so that there might be a way for all people back into relationship with their Creator. In the incarnation, when “God becomes man in Jesus of Nazareth, he not only enters into the finitude of man, but in his death on the cross also enters into the situation of man’s godforsakenness” (Moltmann 1974b:276).

For Moltmann (1974b:226), a God who is foreign to suffering and “who sits enthroned in heaven in a glory that no one can share is unacceptable” simply because, for him, the God who embraces the agony and suffering of crucifixion contradicts in the starkest possible way the impassible God of metaphysical theism. The point that Moltmann is making here finds its fullest expression in the introduction to *History and the Triune God: Contributions to Trinitarian Theology* (1991), where he writes “I have therefore replaced the metaphysical axiom of the

essential impassibility of the divine nature with the essential passion of the eternal love of God” (Moltmann 1991b:xvi).

## Divine Suffering

The importance of *The Crucified God* for Christian theology derives from Moltmann’s insistence that “God’s being is in suffering and ... suffering is in God’s being itself” (Moltmann 1974b:227). How is it that Moltmann can make such a startling claim when the majority of Christian theologians before him refused to recognise the possibility that God could suffer, let alone affirm that suffering had been taken into God?

Moltmann’s (1974b:227) answer commences from the scriptural assertion that “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8, 16) and proceeds to argue from the fact that simply because traditional orthodox Christianity affirms that God is incapable of suffering – which to admit would, according to the traditional view, argue for some deficiency of being in God – does not, in and of itself, rule out the possibility that God may embrace suffering out of a fullness of God’s own being, viz., out of the fullness of God’s love. Moltmann (1974b:230) argues that a rejection, as with the tradition, of the notion of God’s (passive) suffering need not necessarily preclude the active suffering of a God who acts out of love because, as noted above, love presupposes sensitive relational involvement.

According to Moltmann (1972b:31), then, “God does not suffer, like his creature, because his being is incomplete. He loves from the fullness of his being and suffers because of his full and free love.” This same argument is repeated in his later

work. In *The Trinity and the Kingdom: the Doctrine of God*, for example, Moltmann (1993c:22) argues that if we are to understand the suffering of Christ as nothing other than the suffering of a passionate God, we must then abandon the notion of apathy as the starting point for any inquiry into the possibility of a suffering God. Instead, Moltmann (1993c:23) asserts that it is acceptable to argue that God's active, willing embrace of suffering is something that promotes rather than diminishes the perfection of God's being, for "God does not suffer out of the deficiency of his being, like created beings. ... But he suffers from the love which is the superabundance and overflowing of his being" (Moltmann 1993c:23). God's suffering does not indicate incompleteness within the being of God, as if God were lacking something; rather, God's suffering issues forth from God's completeness. Because God is complete in every respect he is able to suffer without any threat to his being. But if God's suffering derives, not from any deficiency in being, but is the eruption of an abundance of love, this love can be nothing other than the outward expression of the relational communion of the three divine persons in their intra-trinitarian relationships, as this is to be found in John's statements "God is love" (1 Jn 4:16), a "God [who] so loved the world ..." (Jn 3:16). Indeed this very point is central to Moltmann's entire thesis of *The Crucified God*: the death of Jesus *is* the revelation not only of *what* God has done, but also of *who* God is in his relationship to the world.

In the end, Moltmann's answer to the issue of divine passibility is grounded in the incarnation and the cross and as such can only be understood in incarnational/trinitarian terms, for the God who suffers and redeems in Christ is a God revealed as personal and relational. Redemption is effected in the person of

Jesus Christ precisely because it is in him that the *passionate concern of the triune God* for all people becomes incarnate. It is in this connection that Moltmann (1974b:236) criticizes a tendency toward a "weakly Christianized monotheism", a criticism which finds its resonance in Karl Rahner's (1974:10) observation that most Christian believers are practical 'monotheists' since most Christian theology and ecclesiology is not informed by a thoroughly integrated trinitarianism. According to Rahner (1966:79), Christians, by and large, may be said to subscribe to an impoverished theology of the incarnation if the event to which they refer is merely a modalistic, and not a fully trinitarian, incarnation.

Moltmann (1974b:236) extends Rahner's critique by claiming that it is not merely the doctrine of the incarnation that is affected by an impoverished trinitarianism, but also the doctrines of grace, creation and eschatology. It is here that Moltmann locates the root cause of the Christian church's crisis in identity: viz., the acceptance of a weak modalistic Christianity in place of a thoroughgoing trinitarian theology. He argues – and this is his principle concern in his efforts to rethink the tradition's position on God as apathetic – that such practice weakens Christian theology's ability to 'speak' about the relevance and relation of God to creation's suffering. According to Moltmann (1974b:24f), it is precisely this 'ability to speak' about the experiences of suffering encountered by God in the crucifixion of Jesus that constitutes the relevance and validity of the Christian church's message to a suffering world.

## The Rise of a ‘New Orthodoxy’

In its presentation of a distinct and cogently argued challenge to the classical view that God is impassible and immutable, *The Crucified God* was but one of a number of works<sup>8</sup> that argued for the possibility of divine passibility. These attempts to investigate and expound the relationship between God and suffering, according to Ronald Goetz (1986:385), have led to the normalisation of the view that God suffers, a view that is finding increasing acceptance as the “new orthodoxy.” In fact, almost two decades after *The Crucified God* was published, Moltmann (1991b:xvi) claimed that the “doctrine of the essential impassibility of the divine nature now seems finally to be disappearing from the Christian doctrine of God.”

*The Crucified God*, first published in German in 1972<sup>9</sup>, is widely considered to have been a significant turning point in the process of re-evaluation of the relationship between the suffering of creation and the divine response to such suffering. In that work Moltmann (1974b:201) argued that, on the one hand, preceding evangelical Protestant theology had only been concerned with the salvific import of the cross of Christ for humanity; indeed, that the cross was viewed simply as an object of soteriological contemplation and speculation. On the other hand, however, Protestant Jesuology advocated the view that Jesus’ crucifixion simply provided a moral example that his disciples were encouraged to follow. According to Moltmann both approaches are asking the wrong question of the crucifixion event.

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<sup>8</sup> Thus, in 1946, Kazoh Kitamori published *Theology of the Pain of God*, a work which claimed to be the first original Japanese theology (Meyer 1962:262f). In that volume Kitamori (1958:147) argued strongly that “the pain of God *gives* meaning and value to human suffering.”

<sup>9</sup> Jürgen Moltmann’s *Der gekreuzigte Gott: Das Kreuz Christi als Grund und Kritik christlicher Theologie* was published by Christian Kaiser Verlag, Munich, with a second German edition appearing in 1973. SCM Press of London published the English translation (*The Crucified God*) by R.A. Wilson and John Bowden in 1974.

Rather than ask what does the cross mean for us – either in terms of salvific benefit or moral example – Christian theology should be concerned with asking first what does the cross mean for God in order only then to ascertain the significance of divine suffering for the world. It was his view that such an approach would lead to “a revolution in the concept of God”<sup>10</sup> (Moltmann 1974b:201).

Similar views are also to be found elsewhere within Protestant theology. Karl Barth (1957:123), for example, maintains that the crucifixion of Jesus is a revelation of the nature of God precisely because the crucified Jesus is none other than the “image of the invisible God.” Barth’s Christocentrism led him to relate the doctrine of the two natures of Christ with that of the two states such that “the divinity of Jesus is revealed precisely in his humiliation and his manhood in his exaltation” (Moltmann 1974b:203).

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<sup>10</sup> This kind of thinking is not restricted to the theology of Moltmann. Similar approaches are to be found in Roman Catholic theologies of the same era. Among these the most notable is perhaps that of Karl Rahner, a German Jesuit, who argues that if Christian theology insists upon claiming that only the human reality of the incarnate Logos suffered upon the cross, then “only half the truth has been stated” (Rahner 1969:207). Rahner advocates that it is much better to understand the crucifixion as the revelation of God’s *will-to-act* as *God-is-in-God’s-own-self* because, properly understood, “Jesus’ death belongs to God’s self-utterance” (Rahner 1969:208). Thus, Jesus’ crucifixion is nothing other than a statement about, and revelation of, God-self and God’s purposes. Similarly, Hans Urs von Balthasar (1990:71ff), another major Roman Catholic theologian, treats the crucifixion as a revelatory event leading to greater knowledge and understanding of God. Moltmann (1974b:202) argues that von Balthasar’s theology is more sophisticated than Rahner’s in that it traces “the self-surrender, the grief and the death of the crucified Christ back to the inner mystery of God himself and conversely finds in this death of Jesus the fullness of the trinitarian relationships of God.” This is clearly seen in von Balthasar’s (1990:49) claim that:

If without the Son no one can see the Father (John 1, 18), nor anyone come to the Father (John 14, 6), and if, without him, the Father is revealed to nobody (Matthew 11, 27), then when the Son, the Word of the Father is dead, then no one can see God, hear of him or attain him.

Von Balthasar (1990:125) contends that Jesus’ cry of dereliction from the cross (Mk 15:34) can only be understood from within its own theological context where “that word [i.e., the cry of Jesus] directs us to the unique point which is Jesus, and in no way to the beginning of a psalmic recitation which finishes with the glorification of the suffering individual.” He argues that the central biblical message is that the Son of God bore the full weight of the sin of humanity on the cross (Rom 5:15-21), died in godforsakenness, was buried, and was resurrected for the justification of believers (Rom 4:25). And this, according to von Balthasar (1990:122),

... is not myth, but the central biblical message ... [so that] where Christ’s Cross is concerned, it must not be rendered innocuous as though the Crucified, in undisturbed union with God, had prayed the Psalms and died in the peace of God.

Moltmann (1974b:203) suggests that Barth's Christocentrism led him to "speak almost in theopaschite terms of God's suffering and being involved in the cross of the Son." So much so that in "God's eternal purpose it is God Himself who is rejected in His Son. The self-giving of God consists, the giving and sending of His Son is fulfilled, in the fact that He is rejected in order that we might not be rejected" (Barth 1957:167). In spite of obvious points of contact between Barth's theology and his own, however, Moltmann (1974b:203) ultimately dismisses Barth's contribution as being too *theo*-logically informed inasmuch as it places too much emphasis upon the 'oneness' of God. As such, it must remain, according to Moltmann, an insufficiently trinitarian exposition of what took place in the crucifixion.

The nub of Moltmann's (1974b:203) criticism of Barth revolves around his claim that Barth's trinitarian theology fails because of its insistence upon maintaining a distinction between the wholly otherness of God and the God who acts for the world in Christ, which in trinitarian terms effectively separates the immanent and economic trinities. In seeking to address this perceived weakness in Barth's theology, Moltmann (1974b:203) argues that the *God-who-acts* (the economic trinity) cannot be any other than the *God-who-is* (the immanent trinity). This, of course, was not a new proposal because fully six decades earlier Hugh R. Macintosh (1913:512) had argued that the twin concepts of *God-for-us* and *God-as-God-is-within-God's-own-self* are inseparable<sup>11</sup>. Beyond Barth, Moltmann proceeded to construct a more integrated incarnational/trinitarian theology of the crucifixion event in which all of

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<sup>11</sup> This position receives a fuller exposition from Catherine Mowry LaCugna in *God for us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (1991). Although she argues that the 'economic' and 'immanent' Trinity are potentially misleading terms (1991:23ff), LaCugna (1991:229) concludes that trinitarian theology's founding premise must be "that God's being and God's being *for us* may not be separated from each other" (emphasis added). LaCugna's views find support in the work of Thomas Torrance (1996:4), who claims that "God is who he is in the Act of his revelation, and his Act is what it is in his Being."

the trinitarian persons participate in the suffering of the event of the cross, a theology based on the fact that the biblical record presents the story of Jesus with great emphasis placed upon the relationship existing between two subjects – Father and Son (Jn 14:11; 17:21). His approach stands over against traditional trinitarian theologies that tended “to fix or freeze divine self-relatedness as something which happens inside God but does not immediately touch the world” (LaCugna and McDonnell 1988:203).

It also stands in contraposition to much Protestant thought which considers the doctrine of the Trinity to be little more than “a theological speculation with no relevance for life, a kind of higher theological mystery for initiates” (Moltmann 1974b:237). The issue of the Trinity’s ‘relevance for life’ finds its articulation in the question whether we can “make something practical and relevant to Christian self-understanding out of the way in which God acts towards God?” (Moltmann 1974b:239). His answer is clearly affirmative, though it first involves dispensing with the distinction of the early Church between *God-as-God-is-within-God’s-own-self* (i.e., immanent Trinity) and *God-as-God-is-for-us* (i.e., economic Trinity). In the end, Moltmann (1974b:245) affirms Rahner’s axiom (1966:87ff) that the economic trinity is the immanent trinity<sup>12</sup>, acknowledging in a later work that “I found myself bound to surrender the traditional distinction between the immanent and the economic Trinity” (Moltmann 1993c:160).

In clarification of the direction of Moltmann’s thinking here in relation to the question of divine suffering, it is necessary to appreciate his abandoning of theistic

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<sup>12</sup> Rahner’s (1974:22) succinct definition of this particular axiom is: “The ‘economic’ Trinity *is* the ‘immanent’ Trinity and *vice versa*.”

notions of God since, when a theology dares to speak of ‘God in Christ’, it must move, epistemologically speaking, from the external to the internal, and from the concrete to the abstract, i.e., from what *God has done* to what *God-is-in-God’s-own-self*. Moltmann proposes a movement away from a theistic-centred theology toward a more thoroughgoing trinitarian theology. He argues that this methodological reorientation is demanded by the fact that talk about the Trinity must be centred upon the cross of Jesus, not upon resort to speculation in “heavenly riddles” (Moltmann 1974b:207)<sup>13</sup>, since the death of Jesus constitutes “the *centre* of all Christian theology” (Moltmann 1974b:204). In keeping with his earlier emphasis on the significance of the incarnation as identifying whose death it is upon the cross<sup>14</sup>, Moltmann observes that all

... Christian statements about God, about creation, about sin and death have their focal point in the crucified Christ. All Christian statements about history, about the church, about faith and sanctification, about the future and about hope stem from the crucified Christ. The multiplicity of the New Testament comes together in the event of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus and flows out again from it (Moltmann 1974b:204).

Thus, when the Scripture affirms that Jesus is the image of the invisible God, this means, according to Moltmann (1974b:205), nothing other than:

... *this* is God, and God is like *this*. God is not greater than he is in this humiliation. God is not more glorious than he is in this self-surrender. God is not more powerful than he is in this helplessness. God is not more divine than he is in this humanity.

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<sup>13</sup> LaCugna and McDonnell argue that speculative approaches to trinitarian theology are not consistent with the biblical revelation of God. They argue that trinitarian theology would be better served by acknowledging that it is simply:

... impossible to make true statements about something which is inaccessible to us, viz., the innermost life of God. This is as it should be. Not a single New Testament text speaks of God in ‘immanent’ terms. From this we learn that our attention should be directed in trinitarian theology to the disclosure of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in history (LaCugna and McDonnell 1988:205).

<sup>14</sup> Of course, Moltmann is aware of the circulatory involved here insofar as talk of the incarnation already implies some knowledge of the Trinity (Moltmann 1974b:205).

In this way the cross stands as the hermeneutical principle that guides Moltmann's theology of both the triune God and his views on suffering and abandonment in creation (Thompson 1994:50).

Here, then, is the major contribution of *The Crucified God*: while the God of theism may well provide protection and support for those who suffer, the God who engages in the suffering of the suffering ones *is the only one* who is able *truly* to identify with them, and to bring life out of death for those who are lost. This is so precisely because the God who suffers death and who thus shares in the suffering of the world is resurrected to life and hence brings the promise of hope and resurrected life to all the godless and godforsaken ones (Moltmann 1974b:216).

While it may be acknowledged that the crucifixion of the Son of God is an event that is best interpreted from a trinitarian perspective, it remains to be shown precisely how Moltmann proceeds to argue that God embraces suffering in the event of the crucifixion of Jesus. For example, in what way have the cries of suffering humanity been taken up in the cry of dereliction from the cross (Mk 15:34)? What are the implications of making such claims in the light of the fact that the Christian theological tradition has largely failed to acknowledge the possibility of divine suffering? And, ultimately, how is the suffering of humanity redeemed by the divine suffering that took place at the crucifixion of the Son of God?

## Chapter Three

# Suffering and the Trinitarian God

The previous chapter has demonstrated how, in *The Crucified God*, Moltmann argued that *God-as-God-is* is revealed precisely through what God *has done* in the crucifixion of Jesus so that talk of this event can only be described in trinitarian rather than theistic terms. Since it is, for Moltmann, at the crucifixion of Jesus that we most clearly witness the interaction of the divine persons, it comes as no surprise that Moltmann's primary focus should be upon the crucifixion of Jesus. For Moltmann (1974b:204), indeed, the cross is the central criterion of Christian theology. And it is such not so that we may simply determine what the cross means for us (soteriology), but that we may learn what the cross reveals about God, and about God in his relation to us in our suffering and the suffering of the world.

Reflection on the crucifixion leads Moltmann to formulate the central thesis of *The Crucified God* with its claim that God does not stand removed from and unmoved by the suffering of his creation, but willingly embraces that suffering in the person of Jesus Christ, the crucified/risen one, thereby ultimately redeeming that suffering. Thus, Moltmann's choice of title and subtitle – *The Crucified God: The Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* – serves to bring together his twin ideas of the crucifixion as a trinitarian event whereby the very being of God is involved in the suffering of the world.

The Christ event on the cross is a God event ... Here God has not just acted externally, in his unattainable glory and eternity. Here he has acted in himself and has gone on to suffer in himself (Moltmann 1974b:205).

This brings our discussion to the very heart of the matter under consideration: what does Moltmann have to say about the nature of divine suffering in *The Crucified God*, and how is that suffering related to the suffering that is all too present in the created order? Of crucial interest here is the way in which Moltmann connects the suffering that is embraced by God in the cross of Jesus with that experienced by all the human victims of exploitation, intimidation, manipulation, and domination. In a later work, Moltmann (1993c:60) unambiguously states his conclusion that the “suffering of God *with the* world, the suffering of God *from the* world, and the suffering of God *for the* world are the highest forms of his creative love” (emphasis added). His point is that Jesus’ experience of suffering, abandonment and death during the crucifixion event cannot be anything other than an integral part of the revelation of the triune God as that God acts to redeem his people. Accordingly, the crucifixion of Jesus cannot be anything other than a trinitarian event, a salvific event to be expressed and understood in trinitarian terms (Moltmann 1993c:4).

### Biblical Foundations of Moltmann’s Theology of the Suffering God

The New Testament records that God sent his only Son (Jn 1:14, 18) so that those who believe in him might not suffer the consequences of their sinfulness but might inherit eternal life (Jn 3:16). That such an act was necessary at all was due to human beings having sinned and therefore having lost the ability to please God (Rom 8:8), to obey God (Jer 32:23; cf. Dt 6:25), or indeed even to come to God (Jn 6:44). God acted to bring human beings back into rightful relationship through the reconciling ministry of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 5:18-20). The question that had engaged

Moltmann in the prisoner of war camps in Scotland and England concerned the *how* of this reconciliation.

The writers of the New Testament claim that the reconciliation of sinful human beings with God was effected by the triune God through the Father's delivering up of his Son (Rom 4:25). This 'delivering up' is biblically described as a multifaceted action whereby God the Father gave up the Son (Rom 8:32), abandoned the Son (Mk 15:34; Mt 27:46), delivering him to an accursed death (Gal 3:13). More tellingly, the Son is described as having been "made sin for us" (2 Cor 5:21), "made a curse for us" (Gal 3:13), bearing the sin of humanity as a sacrifice of atonement (Rom 3:25; Moltmann 1974b:242). Thus, central to Pauline theology is the notion that the Son of God was 'given' for godless, godforsaken humanity. Moltmann (1974b:242) interprets Paul here to the effect that:

Because God 'does not spare' his Son, all the godless are spared. Though they are godless, they are not godforsaken, precisely because God has abandoned his own Son and has delivered him up for them. Thus the delivering up of the Son to godforsakenness is the ground for justification of the godless.

For Moltmann, this 'delivering up' is not simply a result of an act of the Son alone. All of the trinitarian persons are involved in the work of redemption. This 'delivering up', that is to say, was, according to Moltmann, not simply a matter of a unilateral action taken by one of the trinitarian persons without consultation, an act whereby the Father acted as subject and the Son served merely as the object of the 'delivering up'. He notes, to the contrary, that Galatians 2:20 presents the Son as the subject of the verb 'deliver up', for it is none other than the Son of God who "... loved me and *gave himself* for me." From this it is clear that the Son did not simply endure suffering in a passive sense, as if the agony of crucifixion were something

that *happened* to him. Rather, the Son actively willed to deliver himself into a situation where suffering would occur (Moltmann 1974b:243).

Moltmann finds supporting evidence for such a reading in the passion narratives where the Son willed to act in obedience to the will of the Father even to the point of giving his life (Mt 26:39; Mk 14:36; Lk 22:42). Here the action of the ‘delivering up’ of the Son is not described as an autocratic, authoritarian decision taken by the Father in isolation, but rather as an action of the triune God whereby both the Father and the Son will to act in accord. Indeed, in “this event of the giving up ‘for us’ lies the unity of the Trinitarian self-distinction of God” (Moltmann 1981:54), inasmuch as the mutual indwellingness and conformity of will of the persons of the triune God guarantee that the delivering up of the Son is as much an action of the Son as it is of the Father. Moltmann’s position here finds support in von Balthasar’s (1990:111) claim that a “theology of the delivering up can only be maintained in a Trinitarian fashion.”

For Moltmann (1974b:243) it is “theologically important to note that the formula [i.e., the ‘delivering up’ of the Son to crucifixion] in Paul occurs with both Father and Son as subject, since it expresses a deep conformity between the will of the Father and the will of the Son in the event of the cross”. Even more startling, according to Moltmann (1974b:244), is the fact that such a conformity of will between the Father and Son exists and is made manifest at precisely the point of their deepest separation, “the godforsaken and accursed death of Jesus on the cross.” This reveals the paradoxical truth that in community is separation, but a separation expressive of unity in the divine will so that “in the cross, Father and Son are most

deeply separated in forsakenness and at the same time are most inwardly one in their surrender” (Moltmann 1974b:244).

In this way, the death of Jesus on the cross cannot, according to Moltmann, remain as simply the object of a religiously monotheistic contemplation but can only be rightly perceived from the perspective of a fully integrated incarnational and trinitarianly-informed theology. The cross is nothing other than the cross of the triune God. Thus, Moltmann arrives at a point where he can claim that any talk of the Trinity must, of necessity, be a discussion of the cross of Jesus; and, conversely, any talk of the cross of Jesus must also be talk of the relationships existing within the triune God. There is simply no place in such a scheme for the tendency toward indulgence in speculation for speculation’s sake (Moltmann 1974b:207). He concludes that

... the doctrine of the Trinity is no longer an exorbitant and impractical speculation about God, but is nothing other than a shorter version of the passion narrative of Christ in its significance for the eschatological freedom of faith and the life of oppressed nature (Moltmann 1974b:246).

### Moltmann and the Traditional Interpretation of the Cross

Throughout *The Crucified God* Moltmann (1974b:204f; 212f) argues that Christian theology’s discussion of the crucifixion must, first and foremost, involve a consideration of what the cross reveals about God in order to reveal the depths of God’s self-commitment to involvement with the suffering of the world. Any resort to a simply traditional staurological focus is, for Moltmann, incapable of providing access to the full significance of what transpired on the cross. This is so, according to Moltmann (1974b:205), because any theology of the cross must be a theology of the incarnation, and any theology of the incarnation must be trinitarian. In Moltmann’s

view, then, the crucifixion of Christ is a God event which takes place between the abandoned Son and the abandoning Father so that the possibility might exist for all those who experience abandonment to be reconciled to God *through identification with and incorporation into the Son's abandonment*. Moltmann's point is, of course, that the Christian understanding of salvation derives its fullest explication from an understanding of *who* it is that hangs upon Calvary's cross, rather than from a simple historical recitation of the events leading up to the cross, of *how* redemption was won there, and of *what* significance it had for those who benefit from it.

When the Christian tradition insisted upon approaching the cross with questions of a soteriological nature its focus was primarily Christological and expounded in terms of the relationship existing between the two natures of Christ.

Moltmann (1974b:244) points out that if theology insists upon attempting to understand the cross solely from a Christology dominated by a focus upon the *divine* nature of Christ, then all that can be said of the cross is that it is an event between "God and God." Ultimately, of course, we will be left with the paradoxical conclusion that at the cross "God is dead and yet is not dead" (Moltmann 1974b:244). On the other hand he points out that if the suffering and death of Christ experienced at Calvary is predicated only of Christ's *humanity*, as the tradition has maintained – the divine nature being impassible – this results in a theology in which the cross is evacuated of deity (Moltmann 1974b:245).

According to Moltmann, then, the tradition's discussion of the cross fails to maintain an adequate emphasis upon the essential unity of the two natures of Christ. When the tradition attempts to answer the soteriological question – what does the

cross mean for us? – it does so by evacuating the cross of humanity: i.e., the *divine* Christ died. And, when considering questions of the relationship between Christ's divinity and suffering – what does the cross mean for God? – it answers by evacuating the cross of deity: i.e., the *human* Jesus died.

In contrast to the general emphasis of the tradition, Moltmann argues that in the event of a thoroughly theological interpretation of the cross, Christian theology will write and speak of it in terms of 'Father', 'Son' and 'Spirit.' Whereas a Christological examination of the cross yields a discussion concerning the relationship between two qualitatively different natures – i.e., Christ's divinity and humanity – an incarnational/trinitarian examination will focus on the relationship existing between divine *persons*! Then it will be the case that

... we have not just seen one person of the Trinity suffer in the event of the cross, as though the Trinity were already present in itself, in the divine nature. And we have not interpreted the death of Jesus as a divine-human event, but as a Trinitarian event between the Son and the Father (Moltmann 1974b:245).

*The Crucified God*, then, in its consideration of God's relation to human suffering proceeds from a fundamentally different starting point to that of the tradition (Moltmann 1974b:245). Moltmann's particular methodological approach allows him to inquire into what the crucifixion of Jesus reveals about the nature of God, dispensing, as it does, with metaphysical and moral concepts of God in favour of a focus upon relation and the concepts governing relationship. Whereas the tradition spoke in metaphysical abstractions that had been adopted from Classical philosophy, and nineteenth century Protestant Liberalism in terms of moral exemplarism, Moltmann (1974b:245) is freed to speak in terms of the relational unity existing between the divine persons. That relational unity is constituted by love.

Moltmann's attempt to articulate what took place between the Son and the Father at Calvary is grounded in the love that marks the crucifixion of Jesus as a uniquely trinitarian event ordered to humanity's redemption in the overcoming of sin and suffering.

God allows himself to be forced out. God suffers, God allows himself to be crucified and is crucified, and in this consummates his unconditional love that is so full of hope. But that means that in the cross he becomes himself the condition of this love. The loving Father has a parallel in the loving Son and in the Spirit creates similar patterns of love in man in revolt. The fact of this love can be contradicted. It can be crucified, but in crucifixion it finds its fulfilment and becomes love of the enemy (Moltmann 1974b:248f).

In the immediate wake of Moltmann's claim that the Trinity was involved in the event of the cross, a number of theologians were quick to decry such a move as nothing more than a simple re-presentation of ancient heresies that had been dealt with by the early church.

### Theopaschitism, Patripassianism, and Patricompassionism

When, in *The Crucified God*, Moltmann (1974b:24) argued that God actively embraces the suffering of all of creation by participation in those sufferings in the cross of Jesus, he came very close to adopting some positions which the early Church Fathers had declared to be heretical.

Two terms are of particular concern here: theopaschitism and patripassianism.

Theopaschitism was the belief, promoted in the writings of John Maxentius during the sixth century, that one of the Trinity was crucified. Although it is possible to employ theopaschite language "in a perfectly orthodox sense" (McGrath

1997:254), it was perceived by some ecclesiastical authorities, notably Pope Hormisdas (d. 523), that whilst not essentially heretical, such language could be potentially misleading, so that the formula passed into disuse. Theopaschitism reappeared in some of Martin Luther's works and was finally rehabilitated in the twentieth century through the works of Kitamori and Moltmann. Richard Bauckham (1977:308), one of the foremost commentators on Moltmann's work, describes Moltmann's theology of the cross as "boldly theopaschite."

Patripassianism, on the other hand, a far more dangerous heresy, first found voice during the third century in the writings of Noetus, Praxeas and Sabellius who claimed, in modalistic fashion, that the Father suffered on the cross *as the Son* (McGrath 1997:253). It held, therefore, the suffering of the Son on Calvary to be nothing other than the suffering and death of the Father, failing "to make a distinction between the Father and the Son" (Sarot 1990:370). Its roots, therefore, are located in its failure to make and maintain adequate distinctions between the trinitarian persons. Patripassianism failed trinitarianly!

In contrast, Moltmann's whole project in *The Crucified God* is governed by an incarnational/trinitarian theology whereby he unambiguously distances himself from the ancient heresy of theopaschitism, declaring that "Jesus' death cannot be understood 'as the death of God' but only as death *in God*" (Moltmann 1974b:207)<sup>15</sup>. Elsewhere, the connection between the differentiated suffering of the trinitarian persons and the redemptive mission of Jesus forms the key to distancing *The Crucified God* from claims that it is simply a restatement of patripassianism.

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<sup>15</sup> Others, however, have not been quite so sympathetic to such subtle distinctions. Klaas Runia (1984:41), for example, suggests that "Moltmann balances on a tightrope of pure theopaschitism, even patripassianism."

We cannot therefore say here in patripassian terms that the Father also suffered and died. The suffering and dying of the Son, forsaken by the Father, is a different kind of suffering from the suffering of the Father in the death of the Son. ... The Son suffers dying, the Father suffers the death of the Son. The grief of the Father here is just as important as the death of the Son. The Fatherlessness of the Son is matched by the Sonlessness of the Father (Moltmann 1974b:243).

With this, Moltmann avoids the charge of patripassianism by maintaining sufficient distinction between the nature of the suffering of each of the trinitarian persons. He is able to maintain these distinctions because of his understanding of the crucifixion as an event that takes place between divine subjects, utilising relational, theological language, rather than the abstract conceptualisations of traditional theism. In so doing, Moltmann's claim that God suffered at the crucifixion becomes an articulation of the "deepest theological reality of the event of the cross" (Bauckham 1990:10) because he has in view the suffering of the Father, who suffers the loss of his fatherhood and the grief associated with the death of the Son, and the suffering of the Son who dies abandoned by and separated from his Father. Where the Son suffers pain, abandonment and death, the Father suffers *with* the Son as the Son suffers. This is known as empathetic, compassionate suffering or patricompassianism.

Patricompassianism, according to Ngien (1995:245 n.77), is "the theological position which advocates a trinitarian understanding of the suffering of God, according to which 'the Son suffers dying, the Father suffers the death of the Son'." By intentionally and consistently adhering to the principle of patricompassianism throughout *The Crucified God*, Moltmann has differentiated the suffering of the divine persons. Patricompassianism itself has a heritage almost as ancient as patripassianism, going back to Tertullian<sup>16</sup> for whom, indeed, it is simply an 'improved' version of patripassianism with its claim that the Father co-suffered with

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<sup>16</sup> Tertullian. *Adversus Praxeas*. *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* II, 1160, II: 1-4.

the Son. This divine co-suffering came to be equated with compassion, with the Father and Son united in the suffering of the crucifixion by virtue of the Father's 'suffering in compassion' with the Son's suffering.

For Douglas Hall (1986:214), however, Moltmann's use of the term patricompassianism cannot be considered an alternative to patripassianism. This is because, in his view, the Father's suffering is either suffering in the fullest sense or it is not. Hall argues that the adoption of some middle approach to the situation is inadequate for such "ambiguity is hardly clarified by the theological sophistry which argues that while Jesus "suffered," as the Creeds declare, God the Father had *compassion*; for, as Tertullian observed long ago, what is compassion if it is not suffering-with?" (Hall 1986:214).

Hall's objection notwithstanding, Moltmann argues throughout *The Crucified God* that it is the principle of compassionate, participative suffering which ultimately leads to redemption and provides something of an adequate response to the problem of human suffering and God's relationship to it.

At this point our discussion passes over to a consideration of how Moltmann attempts to link the divine suffering of the trinitarian persons at the crucifixion to the suffering of the created order. Can there be an answer to the question of suffering, especially the suffering of the innocent, that is simultaneously thoroughly Christian and authentic enough to honestly face the horrors experienced by its countless victims? Is it true to say that the one who suffers in their place has redeemed the suffering of those victims? Furthermore, is it possible to claim, as Moltmann

(1974a:16f) does, that the cries of the suffering ones are included in Jesus' death-cry of dereliction from the cross?

### Application to Human Suffering

It is noteworthy that throughout *The Crucified God* Moltmann consciously avoids the use of traditional soteriological language which claims that Jesus "died a righteous man in the place of the unrighteous" (Bauckham 1977:307). For him, the only fitting answer to questions of suffering and the redemption of suffering is to be found within the actions of the trinitarian God who redeems dehumanised humanity by entering into the suffering of humanity. Refusing to remain aloof and distant from the suffering of creation, as dictated by the theistic conception of "a closed circle of perfect being in heaven" (Moltmann 1974b:255), God became flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth and entered into the suffering of all creation. This means, as noted earlier, that all soteriological questions must be given an adequate basis and contextualisation within statements encompassing the event of the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

Moltmann's theology in *The Crucified God* is primarily concerned to provide a theological response to the problem of suffering by providing an explication of *who* it is that acts in the crucifixion of Jesus so that we might gain a greater understanding of *what* has taken place there. *The Crucified God*, therefore, presents a theology of God's action at the cross, which is nothing other than a demonstration, for all of creation, of the conformity of will-to-act on its behalf that exists between the persons of the Trinity. The crucifixion of Jesus is the event in which God the Father delivers

the Son over to death as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world (Rom 3:25; 1 Jn 4:14). It is also the climax of God the Son's will-to-act in obedience to the will of the Father (Mt 26:39; Mk 14:36; Lk 22:42; Heb 9:26). And the Spirit's presence is guaranteed by the mutual self-giving of both Father and Son for what "proceeds from this event between Father and Son is the Spirit which justifies the godless, fills the forsaken with love and even brings the dead alive" (Moltmann 1974b:244).

Moltmann (1974b:243) argues, as we have seen, that the crucifixion of the Son of God cannot be understood as an event in which the Son remains passive or is overtaken by events so as to become merely another victim of fate. Rather, what takes place in Christ's passion is an active embracing of the suffering that comes when he is cast "into the godlessness of Golgotha" (Moltmann 1974b:51). Nor can the death of Jesus be understood as simply the death of yet another godless man, no matter how excellent the example of that man's dying might have been, but as the death of the one who represents the godless so as to provide the grounds for the justification of the godless and godforsaken as this is realised in the resurrection of the crucified one (Moltmann 1974b:242f). Jesus' crucifixion therefore serves as the divine identification with, and the redemption of, the suffering of humanity because at the cross Christ is both *beside us*, sharing in our suffering and pain, and *for us* as he relieves us of the burden of our guilt (Moltmann 1993b:25; 1994:38).

Christ suffers with us and Christ suffers for us. The two images of Christ belong together. Without the brother in our anxiety there is no fellowship with Christ. Without the Christ who substitutes for us in our anxiety, we cannot be freed from that anxiety (Moltmann 1980:50).

Moltmann further argues, again as has been seen, that the Father does not stand totally unmoved by the events of the crucifixion of his Son either. Throughout *The Crucified God* Moltmann is insistent that the Father actively and willingly

participates in the suffering inherent in the crucifixion – albeit in a differentiated form to that which the Son experiences. While the “Son suffers and dies on the cross, the Father suffers with him, but not in the same way” (Moltmann 1974b:203) for the “Son suffers dying, the Father suffers the death of the Son. The grief of the Father here is just as important as the death of the Son” (Moltmann 1974b:243) because the “Son suffers in his love being forsaken by the Father as he dies; the Father suffers, in his love, the grief of the death of the Son” (Moltmann 1974b:245). Just as death is first encountered in an experiential sense, not in our own deaths, but in the death of a beloved, – “we do not experience death in ourselves but in those we love” (Moltmann 1973:134) – so God the Father ‘suffered’ the death of God the Son, suffering the experience of grief at his death. The crucifixion, with the suffering it involved, is therefore “something that took place between God and God. The abandonment on the cross which separates the Son from the Father is something which takes place in God himself” (Moltmann 1974b:151f).

In this way the question of innocent suffering posed at the beginning of this essay is answered by Moltmann’s (1974b:46) assertion that the ‘problem’ of suffering “can be summed up by saying that suffering is overcome by suffering, and wounds are healed by wounds” because Christ’s suffering is not exclusive, but rather inclusive suffering: our suffering is included in his suffering (Moltmann 1993b:25; 1994:39). This conclusion of *The Crucified God* is even more clearly expressed in Moltmann’s (1981:53) later work where he writes

... the Father “did not spare” his own Son ... he becomes the Redeemer of all the Godforsaken. The Father loads the Godforsakenness of the Judgement onto his own Son in order to give to all the Godforsaken his grace and eternal presence. ... in the giving up and the abandoning of Jesus by the Father a cleft opens up in God which reaches so deeply that through it every cleft of sin and of judgement between God and humankind can be embraced and healed. ... The Trinitarian self-distinction of God in

the death of the Son on the cross is so deep and so broad that all the lost and abandoned will find a place in God.

However, despite the profound nature of such declarations we are still faced with problems that until this point have remained unaddressed. Thus far the discussion has been approached in an objective and distanced manner. Yet the subject matter with which we began this inquiry refuses to allow us to remain at arm's length from the issues under discussion. For it is not simply a matter of an academic discussion about the reality of suffering in the created order. Questions of profound social inequality and injustice are involved here and must also be answered, for they are all too often found to co-exist with the suffering of the innocent. And these are the very questions, according to Moltmann (1974b:12-17; 23-25), that lie at the heart of Christianity's crisis of relevance and identity.

Moltmann's theology is unashamedly political as evidenced in the claim that the God "of the poor, the peasant and the slave has always been the poor, suffering, unprotected Christ, whereas the God of empires and rulers has usually been the Pantocrator, Christ enthroned in heaven" (Moltmann 1974b:45f). The powerful are those who can distance themselves from the harshest realities that the world has to offer, while the poor have no recourse to the power and resources of the world, particularly the world of modern technological society. In the light of this, we are bound to follow Moltmann's lead and push past the contribution of Kitamori (1958:52f), who argued that our present human pain is a testimony to the divine pain already suffered by God on our behalf.

As he inquires further, Moltmann (1974b:47) enters into a fuller explication of the question: “Why and in what way did the suffering crucified God become the God of the poor and abandoned?”

Moltmann is well aware that “the mysticism of suffering can be easily perverted into a justification of suffering itself” (Moltmann 1974b:48). Nevertheless, he argues that Christ’s suffering and rejection experienced on the cross combine to incorporate the godlessness and godforsakenness of the suffering of the poor and rejected of the world. For while suffering might be considered to be glorious, even admired and celebrated by some, when that suffering is combined with rejection it leaves no room for either admiration or glorious appreciation. Rejection is the poison that makes the bitterness of suffering so deadly (Moltmann 1974b:55). The suffering Son of God’s experience of rejection was not only to be rejected by his friends and colleagues, but to be abandoned and rejected by his Father. With this, Moltmann is concerned to disallow a slide into either asceticism or a simplistic denial of the reality of the world, however ugly, unjust and inequitable that world may be.

Moltmann (1974b:52) argues that the poor have always only ever looked to the cross *of Christ*, while the religious consider *the Cross* of Christ. Here he is pointing to a clash of subjectivism and objectivism that takes place when the central truth of Christianity - the meeting of subjects, Christ and his people – is replaced by a consideration of Christ as object by the religiously devout, who retain for themselves the position of subject! Thus, Moltmann (1974b:52) is led to talk of “the church of the crucified”, which is none other than the church of the oppressed, the poor, the outcast, those for whom the crucified one died, and who are so often excluded by the religiously devout.

Anyone who suffers without cause first thinks that he has been forsaken by God. God seems to him to be the mysterious, incomprehensible God who destroys the good fortune that he gave (Moltmann 1974b:252).

Yet Jesus died, according to Moltmann, precisely that the godless ones might, through participation in the very godlessness of God's own Son, be drawn into union with the God who sent his Son that there might be an adoption of many sons and daughters through faith (Eph 1:5). In effect;

God overcomes himself, God passes judgement on himself, God takes the judgement on the sin of man upon himself. He assigns to himself the fate that men should by rights endure (Moltmann 1974b:193).

Here, then, is Moltmann's answer to the question; how are the cries of the suffering ones included in Jesus' cry of dereliction from Calvary's cross? And to how those articulations of godlessness and godforsakenness are redeemed by the one who is, himself, forsaken by his Father.

Moltmann (1974b:277) maintains that the one who follows Jesus has identity with the crucified Christ because of the intensity of Christ's suffering on her/his behalf; for the crucified Christ has experienced the godforsakenness inherent in the experience of anyone who perceives that God has abandoned or deserted them. "Anyone who cries out to God in [their] suffering echoes the death-cry of the dying Christ, the Son of God" (Moltmann 1974b:252). In Moltmann's view, then, God's redeeming love has ensured that the bitterness of all human loneliness and rejection has been taken into God's being through the experience of the crucified Christ. Indeed, in Hegelian terms, Christ's death is the death of death and the negation of all negation (Moltmann 1974b:254). In the cross of the crucified Son, God is "vulnerable, he takes suffering and death upon himself in order to heal, to liberate, and to impart his eternal life" (Moltmann 1975:645).

Indeed for Moltmann God's redeeming love, as made manifest in the cross of Christ, borders upon the incomprehensible (Haar 1983:28) for it is the *crucified* God who provides the possibility of love, the possibility for living with the terror of history, and for living with guilt and sorrow. These possibilities exist because all have been taken up into God through the experience of the crucified and godforsaken Jesus. Even the horror of what took place in "Auschwitz is taken up into the grief of the Father, the surrender of the Son and the power of the Spirit" (Moltmann 1974b:278). Thus, the very possibility of theology in the aftermath of Auschwitz exists precisely because God does not stand over and apart from those events, but rather those events have been incorporated into God through Christ.

God in Auschwitz and Auschwitz in the crucified God – that is the basis for a real hope which both embraces and overcomes the world, and the ground for a love which is stronger than death and can sustain death. It is the ground for living with the terror of history and the end of history (Moltmann 1974b:278).

It was possible for Moltmann to reach this conclusion because, in his view, Christ's cry of godforsakenness on the cross includes within itself all the cries of the innumerable victims of suffering. Accordingly, God is there at the cross as Father abandons Son, and Son suffers abandonment and death. God enters into suffering, incorporates suffering into God's own being through Jesus' identification with the godless and godforsaken insofar as the Son of God experiences abandonment by his Father. Thus, Jesus as the godless and godforsaken one becomes one-in-identification with those who suffer as godless and godforsaken. The divine promise of Jesus' resurrection reaches the godless and godforsaken, for Jesus

... humbles himself and takes upon himself the eternal death of the godless and the godforsaken, so that all the godless and the godforsaken can experience communion with him (Moltmann 1974b:276)

Yet simply to remain with Christ's identification with the suffering of the godless and godforsaken does not in and of itself explain how that suffering is redeemed. Here Moltmann's theological method comes into its own in his understanding of the cross and resurrection in their dialectical interrelationship. As with Paul, so with Moltmann. The centre of soteriology is not the cross – as in the majority of evangelical discourse – but *the person* of Jesus Christ as the crucified/risen one. The theology that underpins *The Crucified God* holds in central focus both “*the resurrection of the crucified Christ*, which qualifies his death as something that has happened for us, and *the cross of the risen Christ*, which reveals and makes accessible to those who are dying his resurrection from the dead” (Moltmann 1974b:204). Thus, in the resurrection Christians behold *the crucified one* – interpreting the resurrection through a retrospectively informed hermeneutic – and in the crucifixion they behold *the resurrected one* – interpreting the cross by way of an eschatologically informed hermeneutic (Moltmann 1974b:73-75; 1975:638f). Within the perspective of Moltmann's dialectic, then, the sin and suffering of the entire creation have been dealt with in the cross of the resurrected one precisely because as crucified he is the one to whom resurrection glory belongs.

Moltmann presents a cogent argument for the incorporation of all of humanity's godlessness and godforsakenness grounded in Jesus' cry of dereliction, uttered at the point of his existential awareness of the absence of the presence of his Father. Though on the cross the Father is present in absence, Jesus' utterance is nothing other than a cry borne out of the awareness of his own godless and godforsaken situation (Moltmann 1974b:150f); indeed this exclamation is the articulation of “the godforsaken Christ's experience of God” (Moltmann 1993b:23).

It is therefore precisely in Jesus' cry of bewilderment and utter dereliction that the cries of all of the godless and godforsaken innocent victims of violence are included in God. However, those cries are redeemed when he, in whom the cries have been included, is raised from the dead by his Father. Indeed, it is, for Moltmann, true to say that in Jesus' cry our cries have meaning, are heard, and are, ultimately, redeemed through his cross and resurrection.

Jesus' cry of dereliction (Mk 15:34), moreover, is his participation in the cries of *all of creation* – the cry of a longing for redemption (Rom 8:22). Indeed, Moltmann (1974b:246) goes so far as to claim that Jesus' cry contains “the whole uproar of history”. George Hunsinger (1973a:274) argues that here Moltmann intends that Christ's cry of abandonment include not only the historical reality of Jesus' own abandonment, but also the cosmological protest-cry of the entire creation, protesting the presence of evil. In that event, then, the eschatological purposes of the redeeming God are seen to coalesce with the cosmological desire of all of creation for re-created wholeness in which all things will be made new (Rom 8:19-21). In fact, there is a continuing teleological uniformity of purpose in the God who abandons, the abandoned God, and the Christian hope of resurrection that exists precisely because that God is none other than the Father who, through the power of the Spirit, resurrects the Son from death: the very same God who creates *ex nihilo*. Thus, hope for the whole created order has been made possible because of the ministry of the crucified one, for God became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth so that, through *him*, the possibility might exist for the dehumanised and the inhumane to attain ‘true’ humanity (Moltmann 1974b:231).

Therein lies redemption – the possibility of, the power for, and the actualisation of God’s gift of love in the person of the crucified one given for all those who are lost and perishing. For although Christians continue to live in the midst of suffering, Moltmann has shown that it is possible for them to live in the fullness of the knowledge that Jesus’ suffering of death and estrangement on the cross together with his resurrection has redeemed those experiences in their lives. Thus, authentic Christian life in a world wounded by evil is that which is lived with a steadfastness of faith in an eschatological hope guaranteed by communion/union with Christ (Jn 3:16; 14:23) rather than a simplistic jubilation over being included amongst those who are being saved (Moltmann 1971:26).

Moltmann’s thought is a contemporary exposition of Gregory’s<sup>17</sup> claim that what is not assumed is not healed – *To gar aproslepton aqerapeuton* – even though Moltmann has consciously reversed the negative formulation of Gregory’s axiom. It is precisely because Jesus has assumed the experience of separation from, and abandonment by God, when he embraced evil, suffering and death, that these experiences of humanity have been healed.

Jesus’ identification with those who are godless and godforsaken, according to Moltmann, then, is the locus of the soteriological efficaciousness of God’s plan of redemption. It is because the experiences of suffering and separation have been redeemed that Christians are able to live in the fullness of a life that comes from participation in the divine creator of all life. This life, then, can be nothing other than that which Jesus described as life in the fullest sense (Jn 10:10).

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<sup>17</sup> *Letter to Cleodnius the Priest Against Apollinarius* PG 37, 181.

## Chapter Four

### *The Crucified God: critics and criticisms*

The previous chapters of this study have centred on an analysis of the theology presented in *The Crucified God* and the various personal and contextual reasons that led Moltmann to give voice to such ideas. They have not thus far, however, included any attempt to identify or comment upon the weaknesses that other biblical scholars and theologians have identified in that particular work of Moltmann's, a matter which this chapter will now seek to address.

According to Richard Bauckham (1995:15f), one of the foremost commentators on the theology of Moltmann, there were three crucial steps in Moltmann's logic which led him to the conclusion that the cross of Christ is an event in which God suffered in solidarity with the world. The first was Moltmann's insistence that any discussion of the cross must necessarily involve the employment of a trinitarian theology utilising a language that would place due emphasis upon the relationships existing between each of the divine persons. The second was his understanding that the cross "necessitated a doctrine of divine passibility, not only in the narrow sense that God can suffer pain, but in the broader sense that he can be affected by his creation" (Bauckham 1995:15). Thirdly, and most controversially, was Moltmann's conviction that, if the cross was to have any real significance for the world, the traditional separation between the immanent and the economic trinities had to be abandoned. Not only with regard to this latter proposal but on several other

grounds as well, *The Crucified God* has, since its publication, been subject to a number of significant criticisms.

The most serious of these criticisms are concentrated around (1) biblical and historical matters, (2) Moltmann's trinitarian theology, (3) concerns raised by feminist theologians, and (4) issues pertaining to metaphysics.

### 1a: Biblical Issues

A number of scholars<sup>18</sup> have pointed to a series of inconsistencies between the biblical record and Moltmann's argumentation in *The Crucified God*.

Klaas Runia (1984:43-45), for example, presents a series of criticisms, the first of which questions whether or not the idea of a 'crucified' God is consistent with scripture (Runia 1984:43).

In the first place he argues that Moltmann is correct to dispense with the overly metaphysical emphasis of the tradition and to move away from the notions of an apathetic God who remains distant from suffering in the world and the suffering of Christ. He notes, however, that the scripture itself does not use the phrase 'the crucified God', nor does it refer to 'the death of God'<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Apart from the criticisms offered by Klaas Runia (1984:43-45) and William Loewe (1977:533) which will be discussed at length, Carl Braaten (1976:118), John Cobb (1984:174f), Edward Schillebeeckx (1963:27), and David Coffey (1999:124-127) also take issue with Moltmann's treatment of the biblical data.

<sup>19</sup> Runia's critique is supported by Paul Helm's (1990:128) observation that if anthropomorphisms must be taken into account by biblical interpreters, then systematic theologians should be wary of anthropopathisms.

Runia points out that Moltmann's repeated reference to the crucifixion as an event within the Godhead is a claim that is not found in the biblical record. Rather, the New Testament writers are most particular in their presentation of Jesus as the Son of God and when "they speak of the crucified One they always speak of him as the *Son* of God, never as *God*" (Runia 1984:43). "When he is forsaken by God," therefore, "he does not cry out: 'My Father, my Father, why hast thou forsaken me?', but he cries: 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' It is the man Jesus, hanging on the cross as our representative, who is forsaken by his God" (Runia 1984:43). Runia (1984:43) concludes that Moltmann "goes beyond the restrained language of scripture [and finishes up presenting] ... a speculative construction" that shares more with Hegelianism than with the biblical witness.

Secondly, Runia (1984:43) questions whether "Moltmann's almost exclusive concentration on the cross is not at the expense of the resurrection." Runia argues that even the most casual of glances at the Pauline corpus reveals a gospel that does not affirm that *God* suffered in Christ, but rather that God was reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor 5:19) through *raising* the crucified Jesus from the dead (cf. Rom 4:24; 8:11; 2 Cor 4:14; Gal 1:1 Col 2:12; 1 Th 1:10). In fairness to Moltmann, however, it is to be noted that, as with Paul, Moltmann's treatment of Christ is of Christ as the *crucified/risen* one and not simply as Christ crucified.

Thirdly, Runia (1984:44) asks if it possible to speak of death *in* God? He argues that the scripture always presents death as the enemy of God, and the New Testament writers point to the fact that, in Christ's resurrection, death is *destroyed* by God – firstly in Jesus' resurrection (2 Tim 1:10) and, secondly, in the resurrection of believers (1 Cor 15:26). Ultimately, one must conclude, according to Runia

(1984:44), that the scriptures do not present “a trace of the idea that God takes up death into himself, into his own being.”

Finally, according to Runia (1984:44), Moltmann’s focus upon developing a theology of the cross and attempt to articulate, theologically, the relational dynamics of interaction between Father and Son on Calvary to the exclusion of metaphysical interests, leads to confusion over the function of a two-natures Christology. For while Moltmann wishes to predicate suffering of God himself – incorporating suffering into the very being of God – he is nonetheless finally forced to admit the existence of “a reciprocal relationship between two qualitatively different natures, the divine nature which is incapable of suffering and the human nature which is capable of suffering” (Moltmann 1974b:245). Runia (1984:45) argues that although Moltmann’s concern was to focus attention upon the relationship between the divine persons at the crucifixion, it was inevitable in such a scheme that the suffering humanity of the Son be afforded less serious consideration than that of the divinity.

Other biblical scholars have also advanced criticisms of Moltmann’s volume. William Loewe (1977:533), for example, has pointed to what he considers to be a key methodological confound in Moltmann’s exegetical work when he, i.e., Moltmann (1974b:146), stresses that Jesus’ words of Mk 15:34 are “an interpretation of the church after Easter”, while, only two pages later, Moltmann (1974b:148) interprets the words of Ps 22:2 as being words *as Jesus spoke them*. Loewe (1977:533) argues that either the words attributed to Jesus by Mark are placed there as a result of community theologising in a post-Easter context, or they are *the* words of Jesus. They cannot, by definition, be both!

However, in defence of Moltmann, it would appear that Loewe has been overly selective in his choice of quotation taken from Moltmann's work. Closer scrutiny reveals that Moltmann recognises both the influence of the Christian community *and* the historicity of Jesus' words.

Mark 15:34 reproduces the cry of the dying Jesus in the words of Psalm 22.2: 'My God, why hast thou forsaken me?' This is certainly an interpretation of the church after Easter, and indeed Psalm 22 as a whole had a formative influence on the Christian passion narratives. *But it seems to be as near as possible to the historical reality of the death of Jesus* (Moltmann 1974b:146f emphasis added).

## 1b: Historical Issues

In terms of historical criticisms of Moltmann's work, Edward Schillebeeckx (1980:780) has argued that Moltmann shows scant regard for the historical fact that the crucifixion was a direct result of the actions of the political and religious authorities of the day when he ascribes to God "what in fact has been done to Jesus by the history of human injustice."

In similar vein, Millicent Freske (2000:94) has argued that *The Crucified God*, in its truncated appreciation of the full historicity of Jesus, presents an under-developed Christology inasmuch as "suffering God theologies like Moltmann's imply that God in no way shared our suffering before Jesus' crucifixion." Moltmann, according to Freske, would seem to locate the entire efficacious content of God's redemptive plan in the cross, a claim which, by default, infers that there is nothing salvific about Jesus' life-history and ministry prior to the crucifixion<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> In her attempt to do full justice to the historical Jesus and to thereby promote an integrated Christology, Freske draws support from Leonardo Boff's (1988:119) assertion that

... redemption in Jesus Christ is found neither in his cross, nor in his blood, nor in his death. Instead, we are redeemed by Jesus' attitude of love, surrender, and forgiveness. But it was not only his death that was loving, surrendering, and forgiving. It was his whole life. Jesus' entire existence was a "proexistence" – an existence of service to others. It is Jesus' whole life, then – and in supreme form, his death, as the organic outgrowth of his life – that is redemptive for us. His death is the crystallization and maximal expression of his life of service (Luke 22:27) and love to the end (John 13:1).

## 2: Trinitarian Issues

The criticism that *The Crucified God* has drawn is not only restricted to biblical/historical matters but extends to questions about the limitations of Moltmann's trinitarianism.

Throughout *The Crucified God*, Moltmann employed a dialectical epistemological principle that sought to explain revelation in terms of knowledge of the opposite – the revelation of like in unlike; the omnipotent God as revealed in the impotency of the crucified one, the love and provision of the Father known in the resurrection of the one who was abandoned. Later, Moltmann (1996b:104) was to write that in *The Crucified God* he utilised a dialectic of radically sharp contradictions: Christ is known through cross and resurrection, the experience of God 'delivering up' Christ to death, and then 'raising up' Christ to life.

However, in *The Crucified God*, this dialectic was expressed in an exclusively Christological manner and was, therefore, ultimately found to be, in Moltmann's (1996b:104) own words, "theologically inadequate." This admission is recognition that his pneumatology had been subsumed under a Christological rubric. In his later works – commencing with *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (1993) – Moltmann deliberately concentrated upon integrating the Christological dialectic within a social trinitarianism so as to be more consistent with the perichoretic mutual indwellingness and reciprocal interpenetration of each of the divine persons and in this way to give a more properly *theological*/trinitarian explication of the cross.

Nevertheless, Moltmann continues to face several major criticisms of the trinitarianism presented in *The Crucified God*. These include the scriptural silence about the roles of the Father and the Holy Spirit at the crucifixion, the work's inadequate, underdeveloped pneumatology, and his theology of the nature and application of redemptive suffering as applied to God.

With regard to the first of these criticisms, Moltmann (1991b:xvi) himself readily admits that the scriptural silence surrounding the Holy Spirit's role in the crucifixion is a weakness of the trinitarian theology formulated in *The Crucified God* to the extent that it has been developed from theological speculation. However, Moltmann's admission is merely an admission with respect to the *scriptural silence*, because as has been noted previously, he is unconcerned about criticism of the speculative nature of his theology. That lack of concern derives from the fact that for a work to be deemed speculative is not, according to Moltmann (1996b:103), considered a derogative evaluation in German insofar as a speculative treatment of a subject retains a fully integrated and contextualised view of the topic under discussion.

The second criticism of Moltmann's work is, however, a more substantive one. A foundational motivating factor of his whole enterprise was the desire to articulate a more thoroughly integrated incarnational/*trinitarian* theology of the cross than had hitherto been the case. Moltmann's intention notwithstanding, *The Crucified God* presents an underdeveloped pneumatology, indeed "an inadequate doctrine of the Holy Spirit" (Campbell 2001)<sup>21</sup>. Moltmann (1979a:184) himself is

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<sup>21</sup> This article was accessed in an electronic format and, therefore, individual page breaks and numbers throughout the article were unavailable. As a consequence, in-text citation of this work does not include page numbers. However, complete bibliographical data relating to the print version of the article was available and has been included, in full, in the bibliography.

aware that his treatment of the Holy Spirit is incomplete. Yet, however inadequate his treatment of the Spirit might be, *The Crucified God* is not silent about the role of the Spirit. On the contrary, the Spirit is presented as the divine love which overcomes the negative in God's confrontation with suffering, resolves the dialectic of cross and resurrection, and opens up the eschatological future for suffering humanity (Moltmann 1974b:244, 254f). Later, in *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, Moltmann (1993c:125f) will further identify the Spirit as the agent of glorification.

Nevertheless, an inadequate pneumatology is not the only consequence of a lack of attention to the role of the Holy Spirit. Moltmann's project of developing an integrated trinitarian theology must itself be considered to have failed insofar as the absence of an adequate pneumatology leads inevitably to the charge that his presentation is more binitarian than trinitarian. Lyle Dabney (1993:98), for example, judges that Moltmann has failed to carry his program to its logical conclusion by failing to provide a detailed treatment of the presence, participation, and person of the Holy Spirit at the crucifixion of the Son. Dabney's criticism finds no better illustration than the following quotation from Moltmann (1974b:243).

To understand what happened between Jesus and his God and Father on the cross, it is necessary to talk in trinitarian terms. The Son suffers dying, the Father the death of the Son. The grief of the Father here is just as important as the death of the Son. The Fatherlessness of the Son is matched by the Sonlessness of the Father, and if God has constituted himself as the Father of Jesus Christ, then he also suffers the death of his Fatherhood in the death of the Son. Unless this were so, the doctrine of the Trinity would still have a monotheistic background.

We see here, in Moltmann's own words, that despite the fact that the cross can, for Moltmann, only be understood in trinitarian terms, his discussion is limited to matters concerning the Father and the Son – the Spirit does not rate a mention!

What transpires on the cross is an event between God and God (Moltmann 1974b:244), and not “between God and God *and God*” (Dabney 1993:98 emphasis added). In the end, according to Dabney (1993:99), “Moltmann’s account of the God of the cross in *The Crucified God* is little more than binitarian.”

The importance of these concerns has not been lost upon Moltmann (1991b:174), in his earlier (than Dabney’s criticism) acknowledgement that

I did not get further than seeing a binity of God the Father and Jesus the Son of God. Where was the Holy Spirit, who according to the Nicene Creed is to be worshipped and glorified together with the Father and the Son?

While Moltmann’s doctrine of the Trinity as presented in *The Crucified God* has been considered unique because of its insistence that the cross is “internal to God’s own trinitarian experience” (Bauckham 1995:155), a third criticism relates to his understanding of the Son as godless and godforsaken as expressive of Jesus’ experience of the absence of relationship between Son and Father (Moltmann 1974b:245ff). In assessing this criticism it is crucial to note that for Moltmann the phrase ‘the godless and the godforsaken’ is understood to apply not only to the Son, but to all persons that the Son dies *for* and rises to new life *before* so that the experience of the godless and godforsaken one is the means by which new life is brought to all those who also suffer godlessness and godforsakenness.

Moltmann’s critics, however, insistently argue that appropriate care must be exercised when presuming to talk about the abandoned Son of God as ‘godless.’ Paul Zahl (1998)<sup>22</sup>, for example, suggests that the term ‘godless’ refers, not to Christ, but

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<sup>22</sup> This article was accessed in an electronic format and, therefore, individual page breaks and numbers throughout the article were unavailable. As a consequence, in-text citation of this work does not include page numbers. However, complete bibliographical data relating to the print version of the article was available and has been included, in full, in the bibliography.

to those who have come to the end of their works only to discover that their resources are insufficient to achieve their own salvation. Ernst Käsemann<sup>23</sup> is even more emphatic, claiming that it is unacceptable to suggest that the crucified Christ be counted among the 'godless', for God's servants (including the suffering Christ) should not be so casually included in the same breath as the unfaithful.

However, in Moltmann's defence, it is true to say that when he applies the twin terms, godless and godforsaken, to God's Son he is attempting to articulate what is taking place in the subjective realm of Jesus' experience. He is in no way inferring that, in any objective sense, Jesus has been consigned to godlessness and godforsakenness without the possibility of hope for redemption. Moltmann is simply pointing to the reality that, in Jesus' experience, there was an absence of the presence of the Father during those hours of agony spent upon Calvary's cross. At the same time, and given his dialectical treatment of the matter, his readers are meant to recognise that, with the mutual interpenetration and indwellingness of the divine persons, there is no possibility that the Father could be anywhere other than immediately present to the Son as he is crucified.

This observation highlights the centrality of the cross to Moltmann's trinitarianism to such an extent that there could be no possibility that he would be able to maintain any sense of the traditional distinction between the immanent and the economic trinities (Moltmann 1974b:239f). Thus, where Rahner (1966:87ff) argues that the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, Moltmann's trinitarian

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<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Zahl 1998. This article was accessed in an electronic format and, therefore, individual page breaks and numbers throughout the article were unavailable. As a consequence, in-text citation of this work does not include page numbers. However, complete bibliographical data relating to the print version of the article was available and has been included, in full, in the bibliography.

theology asserts that God *is* what God is *for-us* (Moltmann 1974b:203f, 245f). As a result and because the experience of God in the world effects change within the trinitarian relations – as the means by which change is effected in the world – there was no possibility, for Moltmann, that a doctrine of the immanent Trinity could survive, at least in any recognisable form. In Moltmann’s theology, the immanent Trinity is indeed collapsed into the economic Trinity: God, as *God-is-within-God’s-own-self*, is what *God-is-for-the-world*, in the cross of the crucified Son of God. This formulation, however, left him open to the criticism that “from *The Crucified God* onwards [Moltmann] seems unable to resist [the temptation], to see the cross as the key to the doctrine of God, not only in the sense that it reveals God as the kind of God who is willing to suffer, but in the sense that the actual sufferings of the cross are essential to who God is” (Bauckham 1987:109) with implications for his predication of godlessness and godforsakenness of the Son.

Certainly Moltmann (1991b:xvi) has admitted that this particular feature of his trinitarianism did lead to a problem with his presentation of a theology of atonement. It is clear that his use of the double expression ‘the godless and the godforsaken’ as applied to Christ was intended to refer to Christ’s identification with the plight both of sinners and those who are the innocent victims of pointless suffering. Yet, while Jesus may readily be identified as standing in solidarity with those who are powerless and who suffer, his identification with those sinners who are the perpetrators of violence and injustice is, according to Moltmann’s critics, far less certain. For them, the problem remains the identification of Jesus with the perpetrators of violence as well as with its victims, a problem overcome, to Moltmann’s satisfaction at least, by means of his dialectical method whereby *all* the

evil in the world, whether suffered or inflicted, is transformed and forgiven in being subsumed into the being of God.

The history of God [for Moltmann, the sum of the relations of the persons of the Trinity] contains within itself the whole abyss of godforsakenness, absolute death and non-God. ...Because this death took place in the history between Father and Son on the cross of Golgotha, there proceeds from it the spirit of life, love and election to salvation. The concrete 'history of God' in the death of Jesus on the cross of Golgotha therefore contains within itself all the depths and abysses of human history ... There is no suffering which in this history of God is not God's suffering; no death which has not been God's death in the history on Golgotha. Therefore there is no life, no fortune and no joy which have not been integrated by his history into eternal life, the eternal joy of God (Moltmann 1974b:246).

The question of the perpetrators of violence apart, an associated problem relates to Moltmann's alleged depiction of the Father as being somehow himself a perpetrator of violence in the infliction of suffering upon his Son, an issue raised especially by Moltmann's feminist critics.

### 3: Feminist Issues

The feminist critique of *The Crucified God* centres upon a two-fold allegation: first, that Moltmann's views of God and the Trinity are founded upon unhelpful patriarchal presuppositions and, second, that these presuppositions inevitably lead to the glorification of suffering.

Elizabeth Johnson (1985:153) points out that the abandonment experienced by the Son of God is mistakenly attributed to God the Father when the cross is presented as an event between God and God, in which God abandoned God (Moltmann 1974b: 151, 242, 243). She quotes Edward Schillebeeckx's (1980:780) summary of Moltmann's theology as claiming that

... Jesus not only shows solidarity “with publicans and sinners”, with the outcasts and those who are everywhere excluded; not only has God identified himself with the outcasts; no, *God himself has cast him out as a sacrifice for our sins* (emphasis added).

A consequence of this line of thinking, according to Johnson, is that it finishes up ascribing to God’s agency what was in fact “something inflicted on Jesus by an act of human injustice”(Murphy 1988:157). Such thought also contains the potential to lead to a confused interpretation of the nature of divine love revealed by Jesus Christ inasmuch as it depicts “the Father in an act of sadism” (Johnson 1985:153). Indeed, according to Dorothee Sölle (1975:26f), *The Crucified God* places the Father in the invidious position of facing the charge of divine child-abuse so that one has to question whether Moltmann’s God is anything other than God the executioner<sup>24</sup>.

Feminist theologians hold that these images could only arise out of a theology thoroughly indebted to its patriarchal foundationalism. For Rita Brock (1989:42), for example,

... patriarchy is the encompassing social system that sanctions child abuse. Theologically, the patriarchal family has been and continues to be a cornerstone for christological doctrines, especially in father-son imagery and in the unquestioned acceptance of benign paternalism as the norm for divine power.

Not only does the Father stand accused of cosmic child abuse and sadism, but a central feature of the feminist critique of *The Crucified God* is that it inevitably produces a form of Christianised masochism (Sölle 1975:9-32). Indeed, Freske (2000:94) argues that Moltmann has produced a “glorification of suffering” with the unfortunate implication that if “you believe that acceptance of suffering gives life,

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<sup>24</sup> Sölle’s claim is repeated by John Macquarrie (1980:6) who argues that, within *The Crucified God*, the “ghost of God the executioner is still lurking on the fringes.”

then your resources for confronting perpetrators of violence and abuse will be numbed” (Brown and Parker 1989:18).

According to these authors, the scripture records that throughout his life Jesus actively spoke against those who perpetuated injustice (e.g., Mt 21:12f), so that Moltmann’s concentration upon the cross to the exclusion of Jesus’ life serves to diminish the prophetic role of Jesus. This means that what Jesus did throughout his life to alleviate and overcome suffering is subordinated to what Jesus as Saviour effects upon the cross, so that, in Moltmann’s scheme of things, his humanity becomes subservient to his divinity and the efficaciousness of redemption is firmly locked into the events of the crucifixion and resurrection. This in turn serves to attribute the redemptive role to suffering as such.

By confusing ‘suffering with’ with action that does something about evil instead of asserting that testifying for life is what sustains justice, the suffering God theologies continue in a new form the traditional piety that sanctions suffering as imitation of the holy one. Because God suffers and God is good, we are good if we suffer. If we are not suffering, we are not good. To be like God is to take the pain of all. In this form of piety, pain becomes attractive – the more we suffer the more we can believe we approach God. By interpreting Jesus’ suffering as a sign that chosen suffering is salvific the Suffering God theology baptizes violence done by people resistant to grace and abundant life, and uses Jesus’ death to invite people to be open to all of life. This theology is offensive because it suggests that acceptance of pain is tantamount to love and is the foundation of social action (Brown and Parker 1989:19).

Nancy Victorin-Vangerud (1997:100) adds that Moltmann’s view of reconciliation is dominated by an emphasis upon vertical rather than horizontal reconciliation<sup>25</sup>. That is, Jesus’ crucifixion, in Moltmann’s thought, has effected reconciliation between God and humans, but fails to address the need for reconciliation between victims and perpetrators of violence. She claims that a focus

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<sup>25</sup> It should be noted that Victorin-Vangerud’s article interacts with Moltmann’s *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (1992) in the first instance. Nevertheless, her comments are worthy of inclusion because they are just as applicable to the theology presented in *The Crucified God*.

upon “a once-and-for-all eschatological reconciliation beyond history deters attention from the unrealised needs for reconciliation in the present” (Victorin-Vangerud 1997:101). Accordingly, she argues that what is missing from “Moltmann’s model is the direct confrontation, struggle and transformation between estranged people” (Victorin-Vangerud 1997:100).

Feminist critiques of *The Crucified God* hinge upon the perception that it is the Father who gives up, who betrays, who abandons the Son at the cross while it is the Son who is given up, who is betrayed, and who is abandoned. These criticisms, however, are countered by Moltmann’s (1974b:241-246) argument for the *active* as opposed to *passive* suffering of both the Father and the Son, in his attempt to move away from the tradition’s understanding of God as apathic. Indeed, Moltmann (1974b:243f) answers some of these criticisms within *The Crucified God* itself when he accentuates the perichoretic nature of the trinitarian wills – the Father never operates independently of the Son or the Spirit. Rather, the mutuality of divine will-to-mission coalesce in the Father’s will-to-send and the Son’s will-to-go – the Father’s *sending* being constituted by the Son’s *going* and vice versa. The unity of the will-to-act within God is impervious to the suggestion that the Father abandoned the Son to death *as an act of an authoritarian and abusive figure* simply because the divine will is governed by a principle of mutuality of surrender. The Son surrenders himself to injustice, abandonment and death while the Father surrenders the Son to the godlessness and godforsakenness of Calvary’s cross.

#### 4: Issues Pertaining to Metaphysics

Moltmann has also been criticised on account of the metaphysics that underlie his trinitarian discussions in *The Crucified God*. The most significant of these criticisms suggest that his theology of divine suffering inevitably leads toward tritheism and the eternalisation of suffering.

In the first instance John O'Donnell (1982:165) asks, “[i]s this doctrine thritheistic?” The question derives from a perception that Moltmann’s trinitarian theology is so focussed upon the operation of the divine persons *as subjects* (who are united perichoretically) that their ontological unity is seriously compromised. John Thompson (1994:51), indeed, argues that Moltmann’s work suffers from “a serious lack of an ontological dimension to his trinitarian formulations.”

George Hunsinger (1973a:278) advances a similar criticism in suggesting that “Moltmann’s theology is an attempt to move from a theology of being to a theology of act, from static categories and spatial metaphors to dynamic categories and temporal metaphors.” What has taken place, according to Hunsinger, is that the very unity of the Father and Son is constituted in *act*. This results in the act of abandonment being nothing other than a separation of being, which is overcome by the life-giving action of the Spirit. Because the divine unity exists in the actions of the trinitarian subjects, and the abandonment of the Son is the result of an act of both Father and Son, then not only is the *person* of the Son separated from the person of the Father, but the *being* of Father and Son is also separated by that act. Hunsinger (1973a:278) concludes that this scheme leads inevitably to tritheism – “*three* Gods, separate in being, yet united in intention. The unity of the Trinity seems to be volitional, but not ontological.”

A second criticism has to do with the incorporation of suffering into the divine being. *The Crucified God* presents the reader with the view that God's trinitarian being is constituted by a dialectic that exists between the divine love and will to redeem, and the godlessness, godforsakenness and death of the Son (Bauckham 1987:107f). The result of this dialectic is that suffering is taken up into the divine being through the experience of both the Father and the Son, since both suffer – albeit differentially. The danger inherent in such a move – a danger alluded to in the feminist critique of Moltmann's work considered earlier – is that by incorporating suffering into the divine being, suffering itself is glorified and eternalised. It is for this reason that Edward Schillebeeckx “rejects the possibility of incorporating suffering into the being of God” (Murphy 1988:157), concluding that it is not possible to

... follow Jürgen Moltmann in solving the problem of suffering by eternalising suffering in God, in the opinion that in the last resort that gives suffering some splendour (Schillebeeckx 1980:780).

Against these criticisms, it is crucial that Moltmann's intention be rightly understood. His goal in *The Crucified God* is to argue that the suffering of all of creation has been redeemed, because suffering itself has been transmogrified through the resurrection and thereby incorporated into the life of God. It has been taken into God through the Son's experience of rejection, abandonment and death on the cross, and through the Father's experience of grief at the death of the Son. But, and this is central to Moltmann's dialectical argument, the suffering and death that is taken into God is not the same suffering and death that led Jesus to the cross precisely because the one who suffered death on the cross is none other than *the resurrected one*. And, the resurrection heralds “the annihilation of the power of death” (Moltmann

1974b:170) for the suffering of Christ is the power of God and the death of Christ is God's potentiality (Moltmann 1974b:215). Suffering and death are, in consequence, permanently changed. Helen Bergin (1986:208) comments:

It is important to remember that when Moltmann uses the words "eternalising suffering" he is speaking of a God that is victorious over the evil, especially over the evil of Jesus' death, and thus he can speak of this conquered evil becoming a part of the divine being. It is the glorified suffering that is in God, not a suffering that is destructive or threatening.

Many of the criticisms of *The Crucified God* presented above have been addressed by Moltmann himself in subsequent works, and by other scholars and theologians. However, not all of the issues have been resolved to the satisfaction of the majority of writers, nor have some of the issues requiring further investigation been satisfactorily addressed. This leaves open a number of avenues for further research as indicated toward the end of the conclusions provided in the next chapter.

# Conclusion

This study sought to examine the theology of the cross in Jürgen Moltmann's seminal work, *The Crucified God*, a volume that has been described as one of the most important contributions to recent Christian theology (Macquarrie 1980:6). Specifically, the essay sought to determine what Moltmann had to say regarding the nature of the relationship between God and suffering.

On the basis of Moltmann's understanding that the crucifixion of Jesus is a trinitarian event in which all three members of the Godhead participate, *The Crucified God* provides a contemporary response to the theological problem, which according to Moltmann, poses the most profound challenge to the Christian church's identity and relevance: the presence of evil in the world and the suffering of the innocent both of which, seemingly, contradict Christian theology's traditional assertion that God is omnipotent and omnibenevolent.

Moltmann's foundational move in response to the theodicy question and the problem of suffering was to invoke and utilise a dialectical theological method – the understanding of revelation occurring in its opposite – thus providing a basis from which to argue that the cross of Christ has profound relevance for a suffering world. For if, according to dialectical theology, God is made known in that which stands in opposition to God, then the omnipotent God is revealed in the impotency of the crucified one, while the apparent abandonment of the Son by the Father confirms the unity of both Father and Son's will-to-act in response to the world's suffering made fully manifest in the resurrection of the abandoned/suffering Son of God (Moltmann 1974b:28).

Through his adoption of a theological dialectic, Moltmann's point is not so much that the cross reveals God's will-to-save as that the crucifixion of the Son of God is the revelation of *who* God is so that Moltmann (1974b:200-207) argues for a revolution in Christian theology's explication of the doctrine of God based upon the scriptural record of Jesus' passion, since the "person who wants to say *who God is* must ... tell the passion story of Christ as the story of God" (Moltmann 1974a:16 emphasis added). For only "when we are clear as to what happened on the cross between Jesus and his God can it be clear who this God is for us and for our experience" (Moltmann 1972a:282). Hence central to Moltmann's inquiry was the role that the cross plays as the key to God's relation to the suffering of the world as focussed in the question: "Does an impassible God keep silent in heaven untouched by the suffering and death of his child on Golgotha, or does God himself suffer these pains and this death?" (Moltmann 1997a:18).

Moltmann insists, by way of answer, that the crucifixion of Christ *is* the primary locus of the revelation not only of *what* God has done, but also of *who* God is. And, as such, the cross of Jesus can only be interpreted by a theology that is sufficiently incarnational because, according to Moltmann (1974b:203-207, 151f, 244f), the crucifixion is an event between God and God. Indeed, in Moltmann's (1974b:203-207) view, this God-event is nothing other than an event within the life of the Trinity itself through which both the Father and the Son experience suffering in the process of redeeming creation.

Not only has suffering been experienced by God, argues Moltmann (1974b:254), but through the crucifixion of the Son of God, suffering and death have been taken into God. Utilising the dialectic of cross and resurrection, Moltmann

(1974b:277) argues that human suffering has been assumed and transformed through its assumption into the very being of God, with the consequence that there is now nothing that can exclude those who live in communion with Christ from participating in the fullness of life of the trinitarian God. For Moltmann, the Son's experience of abandonment to godlessness and godforsakenness, in the event of his crucifixion, provides the grounds for God's identification with all of those who suffer, while his resurrection from the dead provides the possibility of justification for all those who follow his invitation to obedience.

As a result, human suffering has been engaged, defeated, and finally redeemed through the willed, active suffering of a God who does not stand removed from the sufferings of creation but embraces the full horror of history's countless acts of inhumanity and suffering in the event of the cross (Moltmann 1974b:277). In consequence, there is "no suffering [that] can separate us from our fellowship with God who suffers with us" (Moltmann 1993b:25).

Suffering, therefore, cannot be said to be meaningless insofar as God himself has engaged suffering and given it meaning in the person of Jesus. Indeed, in terms of God's engagement in the suffering of the world, scripture's description of Jesus as the image of the invisible God points precisely to the depths of divine involvement in the mystery of suffering insofar as, according to Moltmann (1974b:205), it means, when applied to the cross, nothing less than:

... *this* is God, and God is like *this*. God is not greater than he is in this humiliation. God is not more glorious than he is in this self-surrender. God is not more powerful than he is in this helplessness. God is not more divine than he is in this humanity.

Moltmann (1974b:214) arrives at such a conclusion through his dismissal of the metaphysical emphases of traditional theism in favour of the biblical revelation of a relational God who is passionately involved in redeeming his people from the suffering of alienation. This involved commencing his theological inquiry from a fundamentally different starting point to that of traditional Christian theism (Moltmann 1974b:245).

Yet Moltmann's invitation to Christian theology to re-consider its doctrine of God, and to revisit theopaschitism in an attempt to do justice to the whole question of the relationship of God to the suffering of creation has met with substantial and sustained criticism. *The Crucified God's* most significant claim – that the cross is a trinitarian event in which all three persons of the Godhead suffer – is firmly disputed by many scholars and theologians in its contradiction of traditional theism's assertion of God's essential aseity and impassibility.

These criticisms notwithstanding, the value of Moltmann's legacy, born out of a desire to achieve greater relevancy for Christian theology's statements about the presence of evil and innocent suffering in the world, remains in his attempt to reinstate the crucifixion of Jesus as the central and foundational criterion of Christian theology. In this respect, Lyle Dabney (2000:148) remarks that while Moltmann "may not have all the right answers, ... he has something more important, *the right questions*" (emphasis added).

The strength of *The Crucified God* lies in the fact that it "recognises the need to describe God as receptive and suffering as well as active [so that] ... Moltmann's

way of theology has the merit of breadth of vision and continued openness to dialogue and discussion” (Campbell 2001)<sup>26</sup>.

Moltmann (1987:viii) himself has claimed that his theological writings, of which *The Crucified God* is but one volume, are not an attempt to say all that there is to say about any one topic but that they are rather to be seen as contributions to theological discussion. It is in that sense that Moltmann’s theology is profoundly dialogical.

Inasmuch as Moltmann invites his readers to engage in a process of theological discussion, the opportunity is taken here to suggest some ways in which his contribution in *The Crucified God* might be developed and extended.

### Avenues for Further Research

Among potential avenues for further research and investigation Lyle Dabney<sup>27</sup> (cited in Moltmann 1991b:xvii) and Nancy Victorin-Vangerud (1997:passim) have argued that *The Crucified God* presents an inadequately developed pneumatology.

One of the ways in which *The Crucified God*’s pneumatology is considered to be deficient is in the way in which Moltmann’s treatment of the third person of the

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<sup>26</sup> This article was accessed in an electronic format and, therefore, individual page breaks and numbers throughout the article were unavailable. As a consequence, in-text citation of this work does not include page numbers. However, complete bibliographical data relating to the print version of the article was available and has been included, in full, in the bibliography.

<sup>27</sup> D Lyle Dabney completed his doctoral dissertation under the supervision of Jürgen Moltmann. Dabney’s dissertation, *Die Kenosis des Geistes: Kontinuität zwischen Schöpfung und Erlösung im Werk des Heiligen Geistes*, was recently published in German (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1997) however it is yet to be made available in an English translation.

trine God leads to a de-personalisation of the Holy Spirit. While the personhood of the Father and the Son is accentuated in Moltmann's incarnational soteriology, the Holy Spirit appears to be reduced to not much more than an impersonal force acting between Father and Son. Moltmann's (1974b:245, 277) assertion that the Spirit issues forth from the combined experience of grief of the Father and Son equivalently reduces the Spirit to the Father and Son's combined will-to-act, or, alternatively, the grieving love that is shared between Father and Son.

Without diminishing the importance of what Moltmann has said about the nature of divine suffering and its relation to the suffering of creation in *The Crucified God*, it is important that his project be brought to completion. Moltmann's (1974b:205) claim that the crucifixion of Jesus is an event within the life of the trinitarian God remains to be developed into a fully trinitarian theology where the co-equality of each of the divine persons is adequately demonstrated and maintained. The presence, participation and personhood of *each* of the divine persons at the crucifixion is demanded not only by a trinitarian theology of the cross, but also by a theology which claims that all of the acts of God are trinitarian: from creation, through redemption, to the eschatological climax of all things.

Nevertheless, Moltmann's contribution to Christian theology in *The Crucified God* – the exploration of the reality of suffering in the created order and what God has done about it – can never be reduced to being merely yet another piece of academic theology. *The Crucified God* is a treatment of the cross that portrays a God who bears full identification with the suffering of creation and of the innocent, with those who are abused and desecrated by the corruption and inhumane horrors endemic to human history. Not only has this God identified with those who suffer,

but, according to Moltmann, the trinitarian God who suffers at the cross of Jesus has also provided the means by which those victims of innocent suffering might be redeemed and restored to wholeness. And this because it is possible, in the light of Moltmann's contribution, to claim that God assumes Our Cries in His Cry for

... anyone who cries out to God in this suffering echoes the death-cry of the dying Christ, the Son of God (Moltmann 1974b:252).

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<sup>28</sup> The English translation of this work transliterates the umlaut in the spelling of the author's family name: hence Sölle becomes Soelle. It has been decided to include the umlaut in the spelling of the author's name despite the fact that it is spelt 'differently' on the published item.

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