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## The Certainty of Future Hope in Moltmann's Theology as a Means for Enduring Suffering

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### Introduction

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- B. Our Future is in the Future of Christ Jesus
- C. God's Identification with Suffering in the Sufferings of the Cross
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This is the way that the world ends,  
This is the way that the world ends,  
This is the way that the world ends,  
Not with a bang, but a whimper.

T. S. Eliot, "The Hollow Men"

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done ...

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, Forever, amen.

Lord's Prayer

As it was in the beginning,  
is now, and ever shall be,  
world without end. Amen.

*Gloria Patri*

### Introduction

The last lines of T. S. Eliot's poem "The Hollow Men" highlight the depth of human despair in late-modernity, as philosophical nihilism disallows any form of transcendent hope. The end of the world is depicted not as a glorious moment of triumph over evil, in which the advent of the kingdom of God manifests in time and

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<sup>1</sup> His books

<sup>2</sup> School

space, but as a whimpering death coming after a life of unendurable suffering. The poem's allusion to the character of Kurtz in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, noted in the opening epitaph "Mistah Kurtz—he dead," is one of moral darkness and human despair, resulting in meaningless death. Darkness is offered as the only hope.

Eliot's poem stands in stark contrast to Christian hope. The earliest of Christian prayers look forward to the hope of God's redemption and vindication of righteousness against evil. The Lord's Prayer anticipates the coming of the Father's kingdom in which God will reign throughout eternity. The righteousness of the divine reign touches the very heart of the Christian faith. Likewise, the Gloria Patria speaks of the enduring faithfulness of God, who sustains creation and seeks its redemption from sin and death, who in sovereign freedom reaches out in gracious love and enables humanity and all creation to endure suffering in order to ultimately overcome it. The quintessential questions facing the world today are: Does life have meaning in the face of suffering and death? Can we hope for a future in God? Modernity's nihilism and the Christian hope are the contexts in which Jürgen Moltmann articulates his theology. For Moltmann, the future advent of God is promised in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the hope for the world-to-come.

"A divine promise is the promise of a future which God is going to bring about," states Moltmann. "When God promises something he is bound to keep his promise, for his own sake and the sake of his glory."<sup>3</sup> In his initial publication of *Theology of Hope*, Moltmann establishes eschatological hope as the basis for all theological discourse. In an oft quoted but crucial statement, Moltmann says that "Christianity is eschatology, is hope forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present. The eschatological is not one element of Christianity, but it is the medium of Christian faith as such...."<sup>4</sup> All too often eschatology is placed at the end of dogmatics as an appendage to theology, and viewed as either futuristic and therefore prone to speculation, or as epiphanically present, and therefore

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<sup>3</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *In the End – The Beginning: The Life of Hope*, trans. Margaret Kohl, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. James W. Leitch (London: SCM Press, 1967), 16

collapses into the structures of the world and susceptible to the powers of this world. For Moltmann, however, eschatology is not to be understood as *futurum* as that which can be extrapolated from present conditions and projected into what will be, nor is it to be understood as the eternal inbreaking from transcendence at any and every moment in time, nor the apocalyptic destruction of creation from which God will re-create the world in order to make it the abode for a faithful remnant. Rather, eschatology is hope in God's future, the future of the Father's Son, the crucified and risen Christ, coming to us from the future advent of God, who gathers up all creation into divine glory. In other words, the certainty of the future is not a certainty in our own human endeavors, but certainty in God's future, already present by God's Spirit in the promise of the resurrection of the crucified Christ, through whom the coming God binds us to the Trinitarian life, but it is a future that is not yet here. Our hope lies in the coming of the kingdom of Christ, in which creation will be transfigured, and thus creating anticipatory hope that transforms the present, while the cross of Christ Jesus is the point of God's identity with the suffering of humanity, and indeed the cosmic orders of creation, which long for the condemnation of the powers of godlessness and godforsakenness, in order to overcome all sin and death.

But is Moltmann's theology not too optimistic, too hopeful in its willingness to envision a world transformed by revolutionary spirit? What about those who suffer and endure suffering? Where *Theology of Hope* was perhaps influenced by the *Zeitgeist* ("spirit of the day") of the 1960s, an era when baby-boomers challenged the authoritarian structures of post war Europe, *The Crucified God* represents Moltmann's attempts to come to terms with the meaning of the cross. Where *Theology of Hope* established eschatological hope as the hope for the world, *The Crucified God* asks what does this hope cost? Hope, concludes Moltmann, is found in the suffering of the crucified One, whose future now becomes our future, in whom we are engrafted into the Trinitarian life of God. The suffering of the cross, the event through which the only begotten Son suffers torture and death, and worse rejection by the Father as godforsaken, is the point of God's identification with our suffering and the suffering of all creation. Suffering is taken up into the very being of God, who in love

chooses to be vulnerable to creation, and thus suffers with us and for us. For Moltmann, the key to enduring present suffering, while hoping for the kingdom to come, is found in Christ Jesus, the crucified and risen Lord, who in his messianic identity was, and is, and is to come.

#### **A. The Problem of Eschatology and the Coming of God**

At the beginning of *The Coming of God*, Moltmann perceives the problem of contemporary eschatology to be a problem between time and eternity. On the one hand, casting the eschatological within the continuum of time creates a tension between the present and the future, which is usually resolved at one point of the continuum or the other. The millenarian tradition, for instance, uses Scripture as a prophetic source for interpreting world history which will culminate in visions of utopian futures. This emphasis on the futuristic in millenarian and prophetic eschatologies has had the unfortunate result of ceding the present to the powers of the world, with little to no transformative force. Consequently, millenarian eschatologies cannot speak to suffering other than to say that the elect will one day escape it.<sup>5</sup> The work of Albert Schweiter and Johannes Weiss bring to the fore the apocalyptic, which expects the cataclysmic end of all history in the inbreaking of transcendence. The kingdom of God is not equated with moral or historical development as was the case in modernism's commitment to progress. Yet both Schweiter and Weiss end up rejecting Jesus' eschatological view, instead arguing that history will continue and the world will become progressively better and thereby abolishing eschatology from time altogether.<sup>6</sup> The theology of Oscar Cullman attempts to mediate between past/present and future poles by using the concept of salvation-history, but interprets time chronologically. Cullmann argues that the kingdom is already but not yet present, and therefore proposes a middle time established by Christ between past and future. Once again, however, Moltmann argues that conceiving eschatology in this fashion abolishes eschatology from time.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 7

<sup>6</sup> *Coming of God*, 7-10

<sup>7</sup> *The Coming of God*, 7-13.

On the other hand, eschatological doctrines which focus on the present, collapse eternity into the now. Karl Barth and Rudolph Bultmann's theologies of crisis interpret eschatology as the inbreaking of eternity into the present, calling individuals to a decision of faith. One can see this also, argues Moltmann, in the epiphanic religions of the ancient Near East, which confuses the announcement of the divine promise of what is yet to come with the "image of an 'epiphanic God' who breaks into human experience from a transcendent realm that stands apart from history."<sup>8</sup> Eternal presence is confused with divine promise, which announces the as yet unrealized future. The realization of eschatology in the present can also, I would add, be seen in the realized eschatology of C.H. Dodd. For Barth, the eschatological moment is a moment of eternity in time that overcomes all time. The end is not the experience of future history, because the eschaton is the inbreaking of the eternal moment at any and all particular time. There is no future in God because as an eternal being beyond time God has neither past nor future. But if eschatology is eternity and not the end of time, the future collapses into the present. There is no future per se, only the epiphanic now. The same is true for Rudolph Bultmann. Bultmann embarked on an existentialist project that emphasized the epiphanic nature of faith in an eschatological moment of personal decision. He attempted to "demythologize" the apocalyptic language of Scripture of its superstitious and outdated cosmological notions, to argue that all attempts to find essentialist claims are futile. Instead, Bultmann argued that when confronted by the divine in our human existence we are faced with an eschatological decision of faith. World history is no longer important. Rather, one's encounter with Christ is the most important event in history, in "my history," because it is an eschatological event that enables the individual to live authentically. Yet in Bultmann's eschatology the future is also collapsed into the present, so that judgment and resurrection occur in the present life of the believer, as neither past nor future. However, Moltmann argues that Bultmann's existential now as an eschatological moment is no eschatology at all, but what the church has historically called

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<sup>8</sup> A. J. Conyers, *God, Hope and History: Jürgen Moltmann and the Christian Concept of History* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988), 5-6.

mysticism.<sup>9</sup> The existentialist philosophy undergirding Bultmann's theology also has the problem of anthropocentric subjectivity, i.e., the emphasis on the individual over against the social and cosmological order.

Alternatively, Moltmann proposes an eschatology that is neither conceived in the *chronos* of linear time, nor in terms of the simultaneous presence of eternity in temporal time, but as the God who is coming. Moltmann reads the Apocalypse of John correctly in that God's reign is not described as the God who was, and is and is to be, but the God who was, and is and is to come.<sup>10</sup> "God's future is not that he will be as he was and is, but that he is on the move and coming towards the world. God's Being is not in his coming, not in his becoming. If it were in his becoming, then it would also be in his passing away."<sup>11</sup>

*The God of hope is himself the coming God....* This future is his power in time. His eternity is not timeless simultaneity; it is the power of his future over every historical time. It is therefore logical that it was not only God himself who was experienced as 'the Coming One', but that the conveyers of hope who communicate his coming and prepare men and women for his parousia should also be given this title: the Messiah, the Son of man, and Wisdom.<sup>12</sup>

The future that is hoped for is indeed the future of God coming to us. Yet the concept of the future needs to be unpacked. The German word *Zukunft* is used by Moltmann to convey the future of what has already come and the present of what is still to come. On the one hand, when translated into Latin as *adventus*, *Zukunft* means the arrival or coming of that which is new. "Parousia – advent – future – means as it does in the Old Testament, the unique and then final coming of God and a world which is in total correspondence to him –

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<sup>9</sup> *Coming of God*, 13-22.

<sup>10</sup> Robby Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series, 30 (Dorset, UK: Deo Publishing, 2006), 144. Throughout the Book of Revelation God is described as the one who was, and is, and is to come, until 11:17 at which point God has come and the eschaton is being described from a cosmological perspective.

<sup>11</sup> *Coming of God*, 23.

<sup>12</sup> *Coming of God*, 24.

their coming to the godless and godforsaken. Understood in this sense, the future does not simply emerge from the present, either as a postulate or a result; the present springs from a future which one must be expectant of in transience.”<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, *Zukunft* does not mean *futurum* when this conveys the sense of that which will arise in the “becoming of being.” The future is not a function of latent tendencies in history, which create possibilities that can be actualized, but future possibilities emerge as the coming kingdom inspires human creativity as anticipation for that which is to come: “the hope of faith must become a source of creative and inventive imagination in the service of love, and must release anticipatory thought that asks about the present possibility of [one’s] here becoming better, more just, freer, and more humane.”<sup>14</sup> Eschatology is not defined by current experiences in the present which are then used to project what the future might look like. In this case the future is a function of socio-scientific discovery and extrapolation, but in such a system nothing new can occur. It is a closed system. A closed system sees the future as a result of the process of becoming, the mutation and development of what already exists in the present.<sup>15</sup> If the future is understood only as *futurum*, i.e., the potentiality of becoming from what is present, then the future offers no hope but embraces only remembrances of the past.<sup>16</sup> However, the actualization of possibilities in history are not determined by causality, but by “tendency, impulse, inclination, trend, specific leanings toward something which can become real in certain historical constellations.”<sup>17</sup> “The present has no future in the sense of *Futur* unless it is the present of the *Zukunft*. But if it is the present of a larger *Zukunft* it forms the basis for a future in the sense of *Future*.”<sup>18</sup>

However, if the future is understood as *adventus* or *parousia*, i.e., that which is coming, then hope is in the expectation of the

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<sup>13</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Future of Creation: Collected Essays*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1979), 29.

<sup>14</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Religion, Revolution and the Future*, trans. Margaret Kohl (San Francisco: Fortress Press, 1979), 121.

<sup>15</sup> *Future of Creation*, 30.

<sup>16</sup> *Coming of God*, 25.

<sup>17</sup> *Theology of Hope*, 243.

<sup>18</sup> *Future of Creation*, 30.

Messiah. Parousia never refers to the past presence of Christ in his incarnation, or the present presence of Christ through the Spirit, but only to the coming presence of Christ in glory.<sup>19</sup> Yet to speak of a “coming again” or a “second coming” is inaccurate as this would imply the temporal absence of God in the present, denying the inaugural event of the incarnation. However, a transcendental concept of time sees the future as the necessary condition of time, as God’s power in time and the source of all time, thereby defining “the past as past-future and the present as present-future and the future time as future-future” so that transcendent future “throws open the time of history, qualifying historical time as time determined by the future.”<sup>20</sup>

Finally, as implied above, the future advent must include the *novuum*, meaning “the eschatological openness to the future” from the historical plane as the new future created by God. Like advent and parousia, the *novuum* does not emerge from within history but makes history obsolete. Yet the *novuum* “casts back analogies of history” in the sense that it renews what is past, but with more than what was originally conceived. Thus images of the new covenant and the New Jerusalem contain the sense of their historical meaning of the old covenant and the historical Jerusalem, but advances forward with hope for the new.<sup>21</sup> Creation too is not a closed system following the law of entropy, but an open one in which the *novuum* is greater than its idyllic beginning.<sup>22</sup> In the end, however, the future is found only in the coming of Christ Jesus, who makes all things new and transforms the present by his coming. “But if Jesus is ‘coming’,” says Moltmann, “then he steps each day out of his future into the present and each present has to open itself up to his arrival. ‘Jesus is coming’ means a future that is present without ceasing to be future. That can only mean a future that is not *futurum*, that is, something that is ‘not yet’, but at times will be and at times will be ‘no more’. It is the *Advent*, that which ‘comes to us’ from God.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Coming of God*, 26-27.

<sup>20</sup> *Coming of God*, 26.

<sup>21</sup> *Coming of God*, 28.

<sup>22</sup> *Future of Creation*, 118.

<sup>23</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, Foreword, in Peter Althouse, *Spirit of the Last Days: Pentecostal Eschatology in Conversation with Jürgen Moltmann*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series, 25 (London: T & T Clark, 2003), viii.



## **B. Our Future is in the Future of Christ Jesus**

According to Moltmann, our future is in *the* future of the crucified and risen Lord, whose death and resurrection form the double movement of God's solidarity with the suffering of life, and the anticipation of the resurrection of the dead and transformation of all creation. The resurrection and the cross are critical as both events and concepts for Christian hope in the midst of suffering, the resurrection providing the foundation for eschatological hope and the cross the point of God's identification with creaturely and indeed cosmological suffering. I will address the resurrection first and then move to Moltmann's theology of cross as the way of suffering which overcomes all suffering, though both the resurrection and the cross are integrately bound together.

The resurrection is the proleptic event of the advent of God, which brings hope for the indwelling presence of God. Thus Moltmann declares, "'Christian eschatology does not speak of the future as such. It sets out from a definite reality in history and announces the future of that reality, its possibilities and its power over the future. [Rather] Christian eschatology speaks of Jesus Christ and *his* future. It recognizes the reality of the raising of Jesus and proclaims the future of the risen Lord.'"<sup>24</sup> Eschatology, according to Moltmann, is neither utopian nor apocalyptic apart from its Christological foundation, in the hope of the coming of the crucified and risen Christ.<sup>25</sup> Hope for the future is found in Christ's resurrection which "has set in motion, an eschatologically determined process in history, whose goal is an annihilation of death in the victory of the life of the resurrected, and which ends in the righteousness in which God receives in all things his due and the creature therefore finds its salvation."<sup>26</sup>

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is thus a foretaste for the eschatological resurrection of all. The resurrection is a symbol of the coming future of Jesus Christ, who is in movement, is on his way,

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<sup>24</sup> *Theology of Hope*, 17.

<sup>25</sup> *Coming of God*, 194.

<sup>26</sup> *Theology of Hope*, 163.

mediating the eschaton to the present.<sup>27</sup> According to Moltmann, however, eschatology is personal, social or historical, cosmic and divine in scope, and the resurrection is the integrating symbol binding these together. Employing the image of “eternal life,” personal eschatology probes the individual’s life after death. Eschewing platonic philosophies which insist that the individual’s ultimate destiny is the ascent of the soul into the heavens, leaving the body behind, Moltmann argues that the resurrection of the dead is the hope of humanity. “The immortality of the soul is an opinion – the resurrection of the dead is a hope. The first is a trust in something immortal in the human being, the second is a trust in the God who calls into being the things that are not, and makes the dead alive.”<sup>28</sup> Yet the hope for the resurrection of the dead is contingent and draws its strength from the resurrection of Jesus Christ, whose death and subsequent raising draws life into the eternal. Thus the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not a historical event per se, but an eschatological one. “The process of the resurrection of the dead has begun in him, is continued in ‘the Spirit, the giver of life’, and will be completed in the raising of those who are his, and of all the dead.”<sup>29</sup> The resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is a past event, is also a future hope anticipating the resurrection of the dead and is presently mediated in the people of God through the life-giving Spirit.

Yet the future of the individual is not the fullness of hope. Human beings are more than individual subjectivities, but are created as social creatures. The “kingdom of God” thus becomes an image for historical eschatology. “There is eternal life only in God’s kingdom. No one possesses, or is given, eternal life for him or herself alone, without fellowship with other people, and without community with the whole creation. So *the kingdom of God* is a more integral symbol of the eschatological hope than eternal life.”<sup>30</sup> Once again, the resurrection of Christ not only vindicates him as the messianic Son of God, but as the ruler over all the nations and kingdoms of this

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<sup>27</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1990), xiii.

<sup>28</sup> *Coming of God*, 65.

<sup>29</sup> *Coming of God*, 69; *Way of Jesus Christ*, 74-75; Jürgen Moltmann, *Jesus Christ for Today’s World*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 80.

<sup>30</sup> *Coming of God*, 131.

world.<sup>31</sup> Social eschatology does not see the end of history as the goal of history created by historical and political strivings, because this often involves seizures of power over peoples, nations and the earth itself. But the resurrection is integral to historical eschatology as well. He says that the Christological proclamation of the “‘resurrection from the dead’ embodied the eschatological endorsement of his anticipation of the kingdom of God, because the resurrection of the dead was the symbol under which the end of history was imagined.”<sup>32</sup> The eschatological resurrection of the dead, which is guaranteed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, is the point intersecting the end of history and of time, and the beginning of eternity.<sup>33</sup> Yet this intersection cannot be thought of chronologically, as a linear progression leading from Christ resurrection to the end of history and then the start of the kingdom, but must be understood as aeonic time:<sup>34</sup> the kingdom of this world is being enfolded by the kingdom of the Lord as God is coming to greet us, and therefore we can rightly say that we are in the last days, which have begun in the event of the cross. History will come to an end, but in this ending the kingdom of God has begun. “This eschaton means a change in the transcendental conditions of time. With the coming of God’s glory, future time ends and eternal time begins.”<sup>35</sup>

Cosmic eschatology, which has as its image the new creation, probes the question of the future of the earth and indeed the whole universe. Beginning with *God in Creation*, in which Moltmann explores the world’s openness to history and the future, and continuing with *The Way of Jesus Christ*, which probes the implications of a cosmic Christology, and in *Spirit of Life*, which investigates the immanence of the Spirit for the sustaining of creation,<sup>36</sup> Moltmann argues that resurrection hope is not solely for

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<sup>31</sup> Moltmann is cautious about the terminology of “rule” because it leaves open what kind of rule. With the myriad seizure of power one witnesses in history, we have become cautious of “divine rule. Rather, we need to know “how” God rules. Is it a “lordship” of masters or of brothers and friends? Thus Moltmann prefers the terminology of kingdom, despite its implicit geographical, national and patriarchal connotations. *Jesus Christ for Today’s World*, 8-9.

<sup>32</sup> *Way of Jesus Christ*, 235.

<sup>33</sup> *Way of Jesus Christ*, 239.

<sup>34</sup> *Way of Jesus Christ*, 330-31.

<sup>35</sup> *Coming of God*, 26.

<sup>36</sup> *Coming of God*, 261.

human beings and the historical-social systems that define their interrelationships, but has eschatological import for the cosmic order. “Christian eschatology must be broadened out into cosmic eschatology, for otherwise it becomes a Gnostic doctrine of redemption, and is bound to teach, no longer the redemption of the world but a redemption from the world, no longer the redemption of the body but a deliverance of the soul from the body.”<sup>37</sup> As the apostle Paul says the Spirit groans for the redemption of creation, which can only be realized through the resurrection of Christ. “Christ is the first-born among many brethren – Christ is the first-born of the new humanity – Christ is the first-born of the whole creation... Jesus is the head of the reconciled cosmos: the body of Christ is the crucified and raised body of Jesus – the body of Christ is the church – the body of Christ is the whole cosmos.”<sup>38</sup> Resurrection and creation are linked in the sense that it is the God of creation out of nothing who is the God that raises Christ from the dead and who brings about the resurrection in the eschaton, so that in creation we already see a foreshadow of resurrection hope, the first-born of creation, which brings about the renewal of creation.<sup>39</sup> The resurrection of Christ Jesus unambiguously brings forth the transformation of the world, not some other world that is the abode of the faithful to which the faithful seek escape, but this world that has been deemed good by the Creator. As such, the consequence of cosmic eschatology is that human beings are commissioned to be good stewards of creation and protest all forms of ecological abuse by the powers and principalities of darkness. Therefore Moltmann’s political theology which stemmed from the social-historical eschatology, now takes on cosmological dimensions focused in creation care as an outcome of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, divine eschatology is for the glorification of God, when God will be “all in all.” Divine eschatology is not to be thought of as divine becoming, as is the case with process theology, or even

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<sup>37</sup> *Coming of God*, 259.

<sup>38</sup> *Way of Jesus Christ*, 275.

<sup>39</sup> *Way of Jesus Christ*, 241.

<sup>40</sup> Much of Moltmann’s writings on political theology has been collected and published in Jürgen Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1997).

the theology of Karl Barth,<sup>41</sup> but is a Trinitarian dynamic. Moltmann agrees with John Calvin that the purpose of creation and the goal of humanity is the glorification of God. Divine glorification is for no other purpose than God's good pleasure, and is echoed in human self-expressions, for no other purpose than the joy of the Lord. Yet Moltmann probes further to ask what does this mean for God in God's Self? He rejects Hegel's notion that world history is taken up into divine history, because it starts in a presupposition of a divine monad dialectically interacting with creation, but also because a theology of the cross resists any attempt to absorb into a theological concept. Moltmann rejects Whitehead's notion of process, which insists that as God creates the world so too the world affects God. The problem is that numerous world events are more likely to bring God's wrath or grief. Moltmann appreciates the insights of Jewish theology, which sees created beings as co-workers with God to bring about greater glorification, but this presupposes a self restriction on God's part from which human freedom comes. Thus the promise of redemption is not only for the world but for God as well, who is present in the sanctification of his Name, mediated in creation through God's Shekinah presence. In the end, however, divine glory occurs in the Trinitarian movement of God. God's triunity is not static but dynamic, moving to glorification and including creation in the Trinitarian movement. "In view of the cosmic dimensions of this divine eschatology of the mutual glorification of the Father and the Son and the Spirit, it will even be permissible to say the mutual relationships of the Trinity are so wide open that in them the whole world can find a wide space, and redemption, and its own glorification."<sup>42</sup> It is here we begin to see the truth pronounced in the Gloria Patria, that the world without end is a world taken up into the everlasting presence of God, in which the glorification of creation in all its dimensions is for the glorification of God, when God will be all in all.

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<sup>41</sup> See Colin E. Gunton, *Becoming and Being: The Doctrine of God in Charles Hartshorne and Karl Barth*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: SCM Press, 2001).

<sup>42</sup> *Coming of God*, 335; 328-335.

### C. God's Identification with Suffering in the Sufferings of the Cross

Eschatological hope is made possible by the paschal sufferings of the cross, through which Jesus Christ offers himself up for the atonement of sin. The apocalyptic sufferings of the cross are part of God's identification and solidarity with all suffering. Yet the cross is not displaced from God but affects the Trinitarian being of God. The event of the cross is the subject Moltmann takes up in *The Crucified God*, in which the sufferings of the cross are embraced by a God of love.

The problem of suffering is not merely an intellectual abstraction for Moltmann, but comes out of real personal, existential and physical suffering in his own life. As a young man, Moltmann experienced the horrors of violence as a German soldier in World War II. He witnessed friends die horribly, yet was himself spared. How does one confront the despair and nihilism of untold death? Captured and later taken to Scotland as a POW, Moltmann was given a Bible and was exposed to the gospel. He writes of being struck by the paschal narrative, when Jesus uttered from the cross, "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Moltmann relates, "I began to understand the Christ who was assailed by God and suffered from God, because I felt that he understood me. That gave me courage to live."<sup>43</sup> Thus the impetus for writing *The Crucified God* was rooted in his own personal struggles to come to grips with suffering in the context of divine compassion. *The Crucified God* "was part of my personal 'wrestling with God,' my suffering under the godforsakenness of the victim and suffering."<sup>44</sup> Moltmann's question was not Hume's, how can an all-powerful God allow suffering, but Moltmann asked how did the suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross, the Son of the living God, affect the triune relationships?

For Moltmann, the means for enduring and overcoming suffering can be found in the passion of Christ. Jesus' personal sufferings on the way to the cross, also include the sufferings of the apostles persecuted for proclaiming the gospel (and by extension all

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<sup>43</sup> Moltmann, *In the End*, 35; also Jürgen Moltmann, *A Broad Place: An Autobiography*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 13-35.

<sup>44</sup> Jürgen Moltmann and Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *Passion for God: Theology in Two Voices* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 69.70.

those who suffer in proclamation), the suffering of Israel and her prophets, and the sufferings of the whole creation groaning for its redemption. The sufferings of Christ “have universal dimensions, because they belong within the apocalyptic setting of the time in which a term is set for all things. But the apocalyptic sufferings of ‘this present time’ are gathered up into ‘the sufferings of Christ’ on Golgatha. Jesus suffers them in solidarity with others, and vicariously for many, and proleptically for the whole suffering creation.”<sup>45</sup> Christ sufferings then have apocalyptic significance in the sense that they anticipate the universal suffering of the death-pangs of this world that is coming to an end, intersecting with the coming of the new creation. Through Christ’s vicarious sufferings, creation itself is liberated through its transformation, so that this world is transfigured into the new creation. Thus “...the opposition that Jesus experienced and the suffering and death he endured is apocalyptically interpreted as summing up and anticipation of the end-time suffering in which ‘this world’ will reach its end and the ‘new world’ will be born.”<sup>46</sup> Through Christ’s sufferings to the point of death, he brings about the proleptic conditions that overcome sin and death and therefore liberates all creation from its groaning. “But if he has suffered vicariously what threatens everyone, then through his representation he liberates everyone from this threat, and throws open to them the future of the new creation. He did not suffer the sufferings of the end-time simply as a private person from Galilee, or merely as Israel’s messiah, or solely as the Son of man of the nations. He also suffered as the head and Wisdom of the whole creation, and died for the new creation of all things.”<sup>47</sup>

Hence, Jesus’ paschal sufferings are the point of God’s identity with the suffering of creatures and the place of Christ’s solidarity with the suffering of life. God’s apocalyptic judgment of the godforsakenness of the world, in which Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, is made godforsaken for us, is the point at which sin and death are negated. In the cross God stands in identity with suffering creation in order to overcome suffering and death. But the cross is more in that

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<sup>45</sup> *Way of Jesus Christ*, 152.

<sup>46</sup> *Way of Jesus Christ*, 154.

<sup>47</sup> *Way of Jesus Christ*, 155.

it affects the triune relations in God. The abandonment on the cross is not the death of God, but God taking up death into the divine being. Moltmann states:

The abandonment on the cross which separates the Son from the Father is something which takes place within God himself; it is *stasis* within God – ‘God against God’ – particularly if we are to maintain that Jesus bore witness to and lived out the truth of God. We must not allow ourselves to overlook the ‘emnity’ between God and God by failing to take seriously either the rejection of Jesus by God, the gospel of God which he lived out, or his last cry to God upon the cross.<sup>48</sup>

What does it mean though to say the cross affects the triune God? In order for the atoning sacrifice to be meaningful, Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God took into himself the totality of sin. He who was without sin was made sin, but in doing so becomes abhorrent to the holy God. The pain of the cross is that Jesus Christ was abandoned by the Father, a greater pain than any physical suffering, in which the Son was made Fatherless. The abandonment of the cross is the completion of the kenosis of Christ Jesus, who not only descended from glory to take on human flesh (Phil.2.6-9) but was the abandoned of God.

Yet how does this abandonment of the Son affect God? Can God be affected by the suffering of the cross? At issue for Moltmann are the related concepts of impassibility and its correlates of theopaschitism and patripassism. Also at issue, I would add, is the suggestion of Nestorianism. Impassibility argues that God in his perfection cannot change, otherwise God is not God. Therefore God neither experiences the passion of the cross or passion at all. To say however that God’s perfection is untouched by the suffering of the cross risks Nestorianism in that it suggests the human and divine union in Christ is separated in the cross. According to Moltmann, however, the doctrine of impassibility is a Greek metaphysical intrusion into Judaic-Christian theology. The God of Abraham, Issac

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<sup>48</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1974), 151-52.



and Jacob is a passionate God, who loves creation and grieves for creation in its suffering. God's experience of suffering does not emanate from an inner lack or compulsion however, but is the very nature of God – love. To love is to open one's self to vulnerability. If one is not vulnerable in the relationship of love then one does not truly love. The risk of love is to experience pain, grief, suffering of and for the other, in identification and solidarity with the beloved. The abandonment of the cross then is the ultimate expression of divine love, because the Father willingly abandons his beloved Son in infinite grief, and the Son willingly offers himself in love unto abandonment, because God so loved the world. In the cross, the intimate communion of perichoretic relationship is disrupted, not in an ontological separation of triune persons but in an existential separation. This is not a passive suffering of pain inflicted on an unwilling God, but an active suffering of a God who in sovereign freedom chooses to suffer in love for creation.<sup>49</sup> Likewise, the cross does not call us to passive resignation as a form of mystical spirituality, but calls us to active resistance. Consequently the cross is a seditious political resistance against the totalitarian repression of the Roman empire initially, and against any form of oppression or dehumanization in the world.<sup>50</sup>

#### **D. Implications of Divine Suffering**

The passion of Christ is experienced by the Son as abandonment by the Father, and by the Father as giving up the Son to godforsakenness, thereby bringing as infinite grief. In the event of the cross, the means for enduring suffering is found in Christ's solidarity with us. "His [Christ's] suffering doesn't rob the suffering of these others of its dignity. He is among them as their brother, as a sign that God shares in our suffering and takes our pain on himself. Among all the un-numbered and un-named tortured men and women, that 'Suffering Servant of God' is always to be found. They are his companions in his suffering, because he has become their companion in theirs. The tortured Christ looks at us with eyes of tortured men and

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<sup>49</sup> *Crucified God*, 242-246.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas Hughson, Introduction of Jürgen Moltmann, "The Cross and Civil Religion," in *Religion and Political Society* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1974), 11-13.

women.”<sup>51</sup> Yet enduring suffering is not merely a passive acceptance but calls for our active resistance to the powers and principalities of this world.

Throughout his career, Moltmann’s theology has been thoroughly political as he seeks to instill liberation from social, political, economic and ecological forms of oppression, taking his bearing from the Golden Rule in which love for God is lived out in love for neighbor. As Moltmann argues, “The freedom of faith is lived out in political freedom. The freedom of faith therefore urges men [and women] on towards liberating actions, because it makes them painfully aware of suffering in situations of exploitation, oppression, alienation and captivity.”<sup>52</sup> Moltmann sides with liberation theology to argue for the “preferential option for the poor,” because in the suffering of the cross Christ too sides with the poor, the weak, the suffering and the marginalized.<sup>53</sup> God is present where injustices occur in that God identifies and stands in solidarity with the victims of violence and oppression. “What is done to the poor and helpless is indirectly done to [God] too.”<sup>54</sup> Yet while a theology of liberation is exceedingly important in fulfilling the expectations of the kingdom of God in this world, it is limited in scope. God’s reconciliation must also extend to the perpetrators of violence and oppression, otherwise the community of this world remains fractured. The perpetrators too must be liberated from the injustices of oppression which they have committed, otherwise there can be no peace or reconciliation. For Moltmann, their liberation can come only through the expiation of the atonement. “Guilt [of the perpetrator] without the experience of atonement leads to the repression of guilt, to the compounding of injustice, and to the compulsion to repeat the unjust act. Unless his guilt is forgiven the guilty person cannot live. But there is no forgiveness of guilt without atonement, just as there

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<sup>51</sup> *Jesus Christ for Today’s World*, 65.

<sup>52</sup> *Crucified God*, 317.

<sup>53</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 129-131; Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 2000), 217; *God for a Secular World*, 62-64.

<sup>54</sup> *In the End*, 63.

can be no reconciliation without the restoration of justice.”<sup>55</sup> Making the perpetrator a “scapegoat” only exasperates the problem and cannot create a reconciled and restored family of God. “The forgiveness of guilt for the perpetrators is no more than their precondition for their rebirth to true life.”<sup>56</sup>

Moltmann’s political theology also extends to creation as both a condemnation of ecological abuse and expectation of its cosmic transformation into the new creation. Drawing on the biblical story of creation, Moltmann argues that the epitome of creation is not the anthropocentric focus of the creation of humanity, but the Sabbath day as the crown of creation. The image therefore shifts from human dominance of creation (which is a modernist misreading of the biblical story), to the “shalom” of creation which brings the peace of God. The Sabbath day anticipates the eternal Sabbath of the new creation, in which God will fully indwell creation through the Spirit’s “shekinah” and God will be fully glorified.<sup>57</sup> Once again, the importance of God’s creation calls us to treat creation with respect, for we are only entrusted with what is God’s and do not have independent rights over it. Ecological abuse in whatever form is the suffering of creation groaning for redemption, and a violation of God’s trust.

Certainty in the future as the means to endure suffering hinges on the redemptive events of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The resurrection of Christ is the first fruits of the eschatological advent of God in personal, social, cosmic and divine dimensions. In the cross Christ embraces suffering in order to identify and stand in solidarity with humanity and the entire cosmos. In the apocalyptic event of the cross and resurrection, God has prepared a means to overcome all suffering, as creation in its entirety is embraced by God’s eternal rest. Thus the vision and anticipation of the coming of God calls us to participate in the work of God. Moltmann therefore argues, “In the vicious circle of force God’s presence is experienced as liberation for human dignity and responsibility. In the vicious circle

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<sup>55</sup> *Spirit of Life*, 133; also see Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 22-23.

<sup>56</sup> *In the End*, 74.

<sup>57</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1985), 287-288; 294-295.

of alienation his presence is experienced in the experience of human identity and recognition. In the vicious circle of destruction of nature God is present in joy in existence and in peace between man and nature. In the vicious circle of meaninglessness and godforsakenness, finally, he comes forward in the figure of the crucified Christ, who communicates courage to be.”<sup>58</sup> The hope for humanity is not found in the whimper of nihilistic despair as depicted in Eliot’s “The Hollow Men,” but rather in a “world without end,” which will ultimately bring God the fullness of glory.



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<sup>58</sup> *Crucified God*, 337-338.