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**Christian Spirituality of Eschatological Hoping  
(Promissiology): Towards a Theological Hermeneutics of  
Human Anticipation and the Quest for Meaning in Suffering**

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### Introduction and Paradigm Shift

The article probes into the theological dimension of Christian hope.<sup>2</sup> In order to differentiate hope from merely an affect or a positive attitude based on future speculation (future as *futurum*) or wishful optimism, an *eschatologia crucis*—hope and future as theologically founded by the interplay between the cross and resurrection of Christ—is proposed as the guarantee for our future hope (future as *adventus*).<sup>3</sup> The fulfilled promises of God as displayed in the faithfulness of *Jahwê* (the *promissio*-character of hope) and not *fortigenetics* (merely positive psychic and mental energy; inner strengths) determines the character of the Christian hope. Hope is then described as new state of being and mindset in order to instill meaning in suffering. The Christian hope correlates with an attitude of joy and gratitude in the present that is fueled by the anticipation of the coming of Christ as expressed in the notion of the New Testament’s understanding of *Parousia*: the future as *adventus*.

Christian hope does not by-pass the inhumane suffering of human beings in the present. It wrestles with the theodicy question, namely, how to link the justice, grace, and goodness of God to evil, destruction, and the frailty of life. Instead of the notion of the impassibility of God, or positivistic explanations that probes speculatively into the possible causes for human suffering, Christian hope is based on the *passio Dei*: the compassion of God as expressed in the suffering of the Son of God (a *theologia crucis*). God suffers with us, on our behalf. Thus, the choice is to link the theological founding of hope to theopachitic theology: God suffers with us (God as the co-suffering God). In this respect Jürgen Moltmann’s theology of hope makes a substantial contribution towards a hermeneutical approach that tries not to *explain* suffering (explanatory model) but to *understand* suffering as a challenge to reach out (the service of

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<sup>2</sup> “Promissiology” refers to the notion of divine promises that promote a trustful and sustainable future connected to the faithfulness of *Jahwê* and to all the fulfilled promises as illustrated and realised in the gospel narratives of the cross of Christ (*theologia crucis*) and resurrection (*theologia resurrectionis*).

<sup>3</sup> Latin is used in order to step into the tradition of the early Christian Church and to help forward Christian theological categories with grammar and research paradigms that distinguish Christian theology from other disciplines and sciences. It is hoped to stimulate the interdisciplinary discourse. Distinctions are needed so that it becomes clear that Christian theology refers to a religious background and written tradition that differs from other sciences. For example, pastoral caregiving is a theological science and not merely psychology covered with a Christian caster sugar.

*diakonia*) to suffering human beings and to demonstrate God's compassionate being with human brokenness by means of pastoral caregiving.<sup>4</sup> In this regard, pastoral hermeneutics illustrates the image of a "vulnerable God." With reference to the place of God-images in a pastoral hermeneutics of suffering, a paradigm shift from the immutability of God towards the *derelictio* of God (the vulnerable power of God as exposed in total forsakenness) is proposed.

The article deals with the following basic research question: wherein resides the unique, spiritual, and theological character of Christian hoping in pastoral caregiving?

The basic presupposition is that hope is a many-layered concept. Hope operates in a systemic and relational dynamic of several interacting dimensions.

1. **Corporate Dimension** is the most basic dimension within the act of hoping and related to human health, well-being, including the physical and neurological conditions of the human body. Ill health diminishes hope. Well-being enhances health and contributes to a positive disposition.
2. **Psychic Dimension** includes personal wishes, ideas, dreams, and expectations that envision human flourishing and better life conditions.
3. **Social Dimension** of hope refers to the quality of human relationships and social interaction. The social dimension includes public issues and the quest for human rights. It promotes human dignity.
4. **Structural Dimension** implied in Hope refers to communication systems, technology, and general human development.
5. **Environmental Dimension** of hope is built on preservation and conservation measurements that safeguard a sustainable earth (green hoping).
6. **Existential Dimension** of hope includes the phenomenon of anticipation and the striving for a better future and a sense of happiness and need-satisfaction. It includes the philosophical dimension of wisdom thinking and ideas that bring about change and future orientation.
7. **Spiritual Dimension** of hope deals with the transcendent dimension of life as connected to the quest for meaning in suffering (theodicy question) and the religious perspectives that link belief systems and God-images to a sense of courage and trust that can face human vulnerability, frailty, helplessness, despair, anxiety, and death.

Therefore, the article views hope as a systemic and networking phenomenon. Hope should promote human wholeness (spiritual

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<sup>4</sup> References will be made in the original languages (mostly German texts) because translations cannot represent the precise meaning. Due to difficult nuances, the German will be given, either in brackets or in footnotes, in order to enhance clarity for those who know the languages.

humanism) (Louw, 2016, pp. 483–566). The main focus will be on the character of Christian hope and its connection to a theology of hope.

In order to clarify the complexity of a Christian interpretation of hope and a hermeneutics of sustainable hoping and a meaningful future-life orientation, the following paradigm shift is most needed:

The paradigm shift: from inner strength and positive thinking (fortigenetics) (psychic dimension) to positive being and compassionate trusting (parrhesia: spiritual dimension).

There is a huge difference between hope and wishful thinking, between the anticipation of the future in terms of an eschatological understanding of life and the manipulation of the future in terms of optimistic speculation and aggressive planning as often projected by information technology and the social media (Castells, 2004, p. 181).

Christian hope is not the opposite of a pessimistic life view. Hope deals with the painful reality of suffering and should be understood as an ontological category. Christian hope points in the direction of a new state of mind and being (ontic dimension<sup>5</sup>), thus the proposed paradigm shift is from hope as a principle (philosophy of hope) and hope as an affective positive mode (psychology of hope) to hope as a new identity and mode of being—the Christian spirituality of hope. This shift is of paramount importance in terms of constructive approaches regarding processes of stigmatisation and discrimination within the current HIV & AIDS discourse (Van Dyk, 2005, pp. 92–94) and the quest for new prevention strategies in the present in order to deal with “future hope.”

In the light of the above, this article poses the following critically important theological questions:

- What differentiates the Christian spiritual understanding of hope from wishful thinking, speculative optimism, and merely a psychology of hope?
- Why is the anticipation of the future in a theological understanding of hope, not futuristic imagination (*futurum*), but the certainty of ontological trust (*adventus*)?

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<sup>5</sup> “Ontic” and “ontology” refer to “being” and one’s existence in the world.

- Is hope merely a philosophical principle derived from cosmic developments (Ernst Bloch, 1959) or an indication of a total new creation (*novum*), way and mode of being and existence?

The argument will be that a Christian spiritual understanding of hope implies more than a positive attitude. It differs from, for example, current developments in psychology with the emphasis on fortigenetics.<sup>6</sup>

Fortology represents a movement away from pathology and towards constructive enforcement and encouragement. Strümpfer, for example, points out the importance of *fortigenesis* in adult life (2006, pp. 11–36). Fortigenesis (*fortis* = strong) refers to a strength perspective, which relates human wellness to the positive components in human behaviour. This approach concentrates on those components in human wellness that create strength, courage, and a positive approach to life demands.

The background to a “science of strength” is to be found in the meaning dimension of life. Interpersonal flourishing and subjective well-being are closely related to one another. Research applications in the field of positive organisational behaviour are developing as part of the paradigm of fortology. Both *psychofortology* and *positive psychology* support the development of human strengths and their role in motivation and constructive performance.

In a spirituality of hope the emphasis is on *parrhesia*—Greek for “bold speech”—which is forwarded as the New Testament’s equivalent of Paul Tillich’s “courage to be,” as the embodiment of a theology of the cross and a theology of the resurrection.<sup>7</sup>

The equivalent in Scripture for fortigenesis is the *parrhesia*, i.e., a courage that is not a human quality but a quality that emanates from God and Christ (1 Thess. 2:2<sup>8</sup>), which is a stance and ontic position in Christ due to the eschatological reality as founded by the cross and resurrection of Christ. *Parrhesia*—*boldness* is a pneumatic function and part of the fruit of the Spirit. Due to the indwelling presence of

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<sup>6</sup> The differentiation between the psychic dimension and the spiritual dimension does not mean that a psychology of hope and a theology of hope are two opposing, dualistic categories. In a hermeneutical approach they are in fact complementary and supplementary.

<sup>7</sup> See Strong’s #3954 & 3955, where *parrhesia* is “to be frank in utterance, or confident in spirit.” See Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University, 2000; 1st 1952).

<sup>8</sup> *Parrhesia* appears 31 times in the N.T., plus 8 more times in a bolder form as in 2 Thess. 2:2.

the spirit in our bodily existence (ensouled embodiment), inhabitation theology is about the charismatic reality of the fruits of the Spirit of God within the realm of our daily existence and life experiences. This inhabitational presence creates a “spiritual noetics” of understanding and interpreting life events (wisdom, *sapientia*). Pneumatology then becomes the concrete embodiment and exhibition of an *eschatologia crucis* (eschatology of the cross), i.e., the theological foundation of the Christian hope and ontic guarantee of certainty within the realm of eschatological hope.

This hope refers to the theological dimension of trust. It should be sustainable in order to deal with two existential realities, namely human vulnerability and the unpredictability of life events. Thus, the plea and argument is for a “theological sustainability” residing in the *passio Dei* (divine suffering as identification with human pain and fear) and not in the *passio hominem* (human suffering within painful emotions).

**A. Eschatological Dimension in a Theology of Hopeful Suffering:  
*Eschatologia Crucis* (Significance of the Cross from the  
Perspective of Hope & Future)**

According to Moltmann (1995, p. 12; Louw 2016, pp. 318–338), a Christian eschatology should not be reduced to apocalyptic solutions regarding the end of creation. The primary theme and formula of an eschatology is not “the end” but “the essence” (the new beginning) of everything. It is about the new creation through which all beings received a new quality: the dawn of a radically new life (resurrection)—hence the reason for hope.<sup>9</sup> Christian hope is an ontic reality that opens up new avenues for—and new ways of—*being*. This ontic reality is closely connected to a theology of the cross and the interconnectedness between God and the Messianic suffering on the cross.

Moltmann’s theology of the cross is based on the premise that, if the suffering on the cross is, in fact, a Messianic suffering, then God Himself is involved in the suffering. To Moltmann, this means that the Christian faith stands or falls by the confession of the crucified

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<sup>9</sup> Eschatology and hope are essentially about a new ontic stance. Hope is a new mode of being. Hence Moltmann’s remark (1995, 12): “In the resurrection of Christ, the beginning of the whole of the cosmos is already comprised in *the end* (the victory over all forms of destruction and death).”

One—on the admission of God in the crucified Christ. Moltmann joins Luther in saying even more emphatically: God was crucified. Hence the notion of the crucified God.

By this premise, Moltmann breaks away from Aristotle's metaphysical theistic view of God as being immovable, apathetic, and unchanging (the immutability of God). A theology of the cross means a radical change in Western Christianity's concept of God. The God-concept inspired by the Greeks is one of apathy, with immutability as a static-ontic category. In contrast, a theology of the cross is a "pathetic theology" in which God's *pathos* is emphasized, not his *apatheia*.<sup>10</sup> It is in *pathos* that God reveals Himself in such a way that He becomes involved in loving solidarity with human suffering. An apathetic God moulds a human being into a *homo apatheticus*; a pathetic God moulds a human being into a *homo sympatheticus*. God is *with* us—Immanuel.

#### **B. Trinity Reformulated within the Paradigmatic Framework of a Hermeneutics of Suffering (Divine Forsakenness)**

Moltmann's attempt to design a theology of the cross should be assessed in terms of his basic intention: to reframe our traditional understanding of a Triune God as merely a metaphysical speculation. The Trinity should, therefore, be redefined in terms of the most essential component of, and element in, suffering: *derelectio* (rejection, forsakenness, and loneliness). In order to deal with the dialectics of both life and death, triumph and defeat, hope and despair, the Trinity should not be described and understood in isolation of the cross (death) from the resurrection (life). This basic theological assumption implies a radical change in existing God-images in the vocabulary of Christian thinking and systematic reflection.

With an attempt to establish an *eschatologia crucis*, the following theological indicators should be considered:

- An *eschatologia crucis* portrays God's faithfulness and steadfast love and grace in terms of the resurrection: the living God

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<sup>10</sup> Moltmann, 1972a, 256: Apathy is in fact a metaphysical category stemming from Platonic philosophy. "Seit Plato und Aristoteles wird die metaphysische und ethische Vollkommenheit Gottes mit *apatheia* beschrieben."

who raises the dead (the notion of the covenantal and living God) and conquered all forms of evil and destructive death.

- In terms of the cross, an *eschatologia crucis* portrays the suffering God in solidarity with human being's pain and misery (the notion of the compassionate God) in order to instil a sustainable hope that transcends the barriers of meaningless despair.

Moltmann's argument is that in Jesus' resurrection God is the *God in action*; in the crucifixion, He is the *God in passion*. The latter is not a static God, but a dynamic God, who is actively involved in the God-forsaken cry of Christ on the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus' cry from the cross (*dereliction*, forsakenness) outlines a Trinitarian theology of the cross. This cry defines God's "how?" in suffering.

Several critical Trinitarian questions arise:

- Does suffering only affect the Son?
- Are the Father and the Spirit involved in suffering as well?
- How far can a theology of the cross explain the "how?" of God's involvement in suffering?

The theological understanding of the link between God and suffering is important for both the theodicy question as well as for the question for the "certainty of our future hope." How "sustainable" is the Christian hope?

In his book *Menschwerdung Gottes*, Hans Küng (1970, pp. 660–631) pays particular attention to this question. He sees this as a challenge to dogmatic orthodoxy. The incarnation already challenges the concept of an apathetic God. Küng, therefore, bases his theory of the suffering God on the incarnation which involves a dynamic *Selbstentäußerung* (self-condescension, self-abandonment) of the Logos. The latter must not be interpreted as an *apotheosis* of the flesh, but as an *ensarkosis* of the Logos (enfleshment): God is not "static," but "pathetic" in the events surrounding the incarnation. Küng views God's suffering as a consequence of the fact that the God-Logos, as subject of the incarnation, is also intimately involved in the Son's suffering. We can thus speak of the death and suffering of the God-Logos.



Hans Küng emphasizes God's identification with suffering but insists that suffering does not define or constitute God. Küng views the cross as a demonstration of God's solidarity with a suffering humanity: his love expressed as co-suffering.<sup>11</sup>

In *Christ Sein*, Küng (1978, p. 529) asserts that God's suffering is not merely an affect (emotion), but an existential event; i.e., God is *there for others* who suffer (*Dasein für*; God being there for others, with them). The cross does not display (as in the case of Moltmann's theology of the cross) a dialectic between God and God, in which God is pitted against God in an inner-trinitarian event of suffering on the cross. To Küng, God *in Christ* experiences suffering *indirectly*, not directly. This implies not a frightening, theocratic God "from above," but a human-friendly co-suffering God, "with" us here "below."

Herebert Mühlen (1969, p. 16) is also reluctant to go too far in answering the question: "Did God Himself suffer?" However, he rejects the Platonic interpretation that God did not suffer. God's mutability is a category of identity that presupposes the Trinity which should be interpreted in terms of personal categories. Hence the notion of a dynamic I-you relationship, the divine Being is actually a very dynamic entity which represents a relational event in which God's love gives something of Him-self away (*Weggabe*). This giving away describes a loving act, manifested in the cross as a way in which God places his very Being at stake for the purpose of salvation (*Dahingabe* = giving away towards; surrender and delivery). God's suffering is restricted to this "giving away towards" and is not completely identical to the suffering of the Son. Mühlen does not want to go beyond a *Dahingabe*. God Himself does not utter the God-forsaken call from the cross. In the debate between the Father and Son, God stands close by, but nothing more.

In *Theologie des Schmerzes Gottes*, the Japanese theologian Kazoh Kitamori takes up the notion of a suffering God, but describes His unique suffering as God's grief, which he views as a dialectic between wrath and love. God overcomes his wrath towards sin through his love for humankind. God's grief is wrath conquered by love. Through loving human beings (who are actually unlovable),

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<sup>11</sup> Küng, 1978, 530: Against an apathetic God "one can revolt, however over against a pathetic, compassionate God, one can surrender and start to trust."

God contradicts the fundamental justice which is part of his inner nature. This contradiction is the origin of his inner grief and self-abnegation. God's grief is a negative expression of his love that does the impossible. In the cross, wrath battles with love, all within the same God. The fact that the Father allows the Son to die expresses this grief.<sup>12</sup>

God hides Himself in the Person of the Son and goes through death without Himself being annihilated. God, Himself, does not die. He dies in the Person of the Son and remains in the events of the cross—"I am that I am," and thus, immutable. This is possible in the sense that God dies in the person of the Son but remains alive in the person of the Father (Kitamori, 1972, p. 113). Because God lives in the Person of the Father, the death of God's Son can be described as God's grief: i.e., God's love which conquers his wrath. Therefore, God's grief is not the result of sin that wounds Him to the heart. Sin elicits God's wrath. God's grief is unloosed when He looks upon us as the object of his wrath, but nevertheless directs his love to us (1972, p. 114).

Moltmann's theology of the cross goes further than Küng's view of God's dynamic co-suffering and his indirect suffering. Moltmann also goes further than Mühlen's personal *Dahingabe* and Kitamori's grief of God. For Moltmann, God's suffering on the cross is not merely a revelation of God's compassion, involvement, or grief, but is an inter-Trinitarian event that becomes a constituent element in God's very Being.<sup>13</sup> Immanent Trinity (the inner relationship of the Triune God) and economic Trinity (the function of the Trinity in terms of our salvation) are replaced by a staurological Trinity within which immanence and economy alternate compatibly.<sup>14</sup> The economic Trinity does not merely reveal the immanent Trinity, but reflects back to the immanent Trinity and initiates suffering in God. The grief and suffering of the cross determines and even defines the inner Being of the Triune God from eternity to eternity (Moltmann 1980, p. 177).

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<sup>12</sup> Kitamori, 1972, 44: "The God of the gospels suffers painful grief in the mode of fatherly love; the act of letting his Son dying our place."

<sup>13</sup> On this point, Moltmann's theology of the cross should be assessed against the background of Hegel's dialectic philosophy.

<sup>14</sup> Moltmann, 1980, 176ff, explores this concept in his *Trinität und Reich Gottes*. The economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and vice versa.

Via the cross, the immanent Trinity participates in the eschatology. The economic Trinity will complete itself in an immanent Trinity as displayed in the eventual kingdom of glory (God all in all). In the meantime, the economic Trinity defines the immanent Trinity as a dynamic entity of suffering: i.e., God's pathos.

Moltmann's Trinitarian theology of the cross is construed by Christ's cry: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Forsakenness (*derelictio*) becomes the primary issue for a hermeneutics of the cross (staurology) which tries to reframe the God-metaphors in terms of suffering. Moltmann makes use of the method of dialectic in order to develop his Trinitarian formula. God could only be understood properly as a suffering God if forsakenness is applicable to his very Being? Only the God who can be recognized in the face of the crucified One is the true God. This is a God who is truly there in the real abyss and anguish of history, in the God-forsakenness of the God-less. In Jesus' cry to God, "My God, my God," not only is Jesus under threat, but also God the Father. Because, if God the Father forsakes Jesus, this forsakenness means that God hands over His Son, thereby forsaking Himself too—generating "my God, why have you forsaken Yourself?" (*'mein Gott, warum hast du Dich verlassen?'*).<sup>15</sup> The forsakenness of the cry when dying must be seen as happening between Jesus (the Son) and God (the Father); thus, it is an event taking place between God and God *within* God.<sup>16</sup>

Moltmann believes that we cannot say patripassionistic that the Father suffered and died. The Son's suffering differs from the Father's suffering. Jesus' death cannot simply be understood theopaschitic, as God's death (1972, p. 230). It can only be understood intertrinitarily as a patricompassianism. The death on the cross is a Trinitarian event between God and God: the suffering of the Father as the One who suffers forsakenness while forsaking his Son by giving Him over and away (*hingebendes Verlassen*), and the suffering of the Son as the One who suffers forsakenness, because of

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<sup>15</sup> Moltmann, 1972, 144.

<sup>16</sup> Moltmann, 1972, 144: Forsakenness becomes a divine event within the very being of God despite the fact that the suffering of the Father differs from the suffering of the Son: "Die Verlassenheit am Kreuz, die den Sohn vom Vater trennt ist ein Geschehen in Gott selbst, ist stasis in Gott—'Gott gegen Gott.'"

the very fact that He has been forsaken by the Father through this act of being given over and away (*verlassende Hingeben*).

The events of the cross exist within God's Divine Being. It occurs within God as a dialectic event between Father and Son.

Jesus suffers God-forsakenness; the Father suffers too as a result of this God-forsakenness. The Father's suffering is not unto death, but is a compassionate suffering arising from his love (patricompassianism). *Deus crucifixus* means that in the crucified Son, the Father humiliated Himself by means of a death cry—by God-forsakenness. The crucifixion is, thus, an event between God and God, not between a forsaken human being and a silent God. From a Trinitarian perspective, a theology of the cross thus means a dynamic, inter-Trinitarian event between a Father who gives over and away (*hingebende Vater*) and the forsaken Christ. The forsaken Son (*verlassenen Sohn*) is within the powerful act of being given away (*Hingabe*); i.e., the Holy Spirit who justifies the ungodly and fills the forsaken with love. The Holy Spirit is thus an ongoing, future-revealing and liberating agent of the interaction between the Father and the Son.<sup>17</sup>

Moltmann's theology of the cross is a radical theology. God is not only at work in suffering and history: suffering and history are also in God and occur within Him. God not only reveals his compassion; in the suffering, God identifies with the suffering (God's pathos). At the same time, this identification is also a definition of the Being of God, Himself.<sup>18</sup> And exactly this divine mode of suffering constitutes the Christian hope to the ontic event of the new creation: our new being as a mode and condition of hope is the guarantee for the certainty of our future, not as *futurum* (speculation), but as *adventus* (founded expectation). Theologically speaking, the Christian hope is related to passionate humanity and compassionate divinity.

The value of Moltmann's theology of the cross resides in the fact that he indicates how God, through the suffering of the Son, timely

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<sup>17</sup> See Moltmann, 1980, 140, for a discussion of the question whether the Holy Spirit can be seen as a power or as a person. It depends on the working of the Spirit as to "whether the Holy Spirit is seen dynamically, as a Person. For Moltmann, the Holy Spirit is the subject in so far as the acts of the Father and the Son are concerned. The Holy Spirit is a subject as far as He is the *verherrlichende Gott* (the God who glorifies) and the *vereinigende Gott* (the God who unifies). The Holy Spirit, as subject, is, thus, concerned with the glorification and unification of the Father and the Son."

<sup>18</sup> Moltmann, 1972, 179: "God is therefore identified and defined by the suffering of God the Son."

identifies Himself with the suffering of humankind. In this, Moltmann shares the theopaschitic views of Barth, Küng, Mühlen, and Kitamori.

Without doubt, there is a link between God and suffering. God's suffering is indeed revealed in the grace and love (compassion) of the God who "loved the world so much that He gave His only Son" (John 3:16). Compassion and dynamic grace become a message of Godly pathos, especially when the father sees the prodigal son, is moved to compassion, runs towards him, embraces and kisses him (Luke 15:20). The father is described as a compassionate person, who *grieves* for his lost son in the depths of his inner being, thus disregarding Middle Eastern protocol when he runs to greet his returning son. Romans 8:32 is full of pathos: "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all." God's anger over sin is not merciless punishment, but wounded love. He punishes sin because, in terms of his compassion, He hates sin.

However, it becomes a burning theological question whether such a theological construction of the cross really represents the salvific meaning of God's intervention, identification, and involvement. Indeed, one must admit that in some or other way God suffered on the cross—a mystical element—hence the notion of the suffering God.

On the other hand, to establish a theology of the cross in terms of a Hegelian dialectic (God against God; death as a constitutive component within God's inner Trinitarian Being) could become very speculative. Note the following Hegelian construction:

Thesis: The Father forsakes the Son (thesis);

Antithesis: The Son has been forsaken and experiences forsakenness;

Synthesis: The ongoing work of the Spirit facilitates the message of God's identification with the forsakenness of suffering humankind is constantly being proclaimed.

The above philosophical construction is in danger of becoming an artificial and rational construction *without* reckoning enough with the mystical-spiritual dimension of the cross—the inter-Trinitarian dialogue. Nevertheless, Moltmann's systematic and philosophical construction helps us to link hope in suffering to the divine component of compassion.

According to Kreck, the distinction between Father and Son is overshadowed in Moltmann's theology of the cross by an inter-

Trinitarian unity. This distinction is threatened by a monophysitic tendency: suffering functions as a unifying unit which dominates our understanding of God to such an extent that the richness of the different ways in which the Triune God operates becomes dominated by one main theme—God’s passion.<sup>19</sup>

Patricompassionism has the following direct consequence: the negative, the death, the suffering, and the rejection are becoming constituent components and ingredients of God. Miskotte regards the statement “the suffering and death are in God” as grave indeed, and thus become constitutive elements of the inner Being of God.<sup>20</sup> God’s solidarity with suffering and his identification with suffering could lead to the conclusion that access to Him is no longer via guilt, conversion, and faith; but, rather, access to Him has already been achieved through suffering.

On the other hand, one cannot avoid the difficult question: How does suffering affect the Being of God? In one way or another, the theme of a “suffering God” has consequences for our understanding of God and the unique character of an ontology of hope as an expression of a theology of hope. Indeed, suffering touches the very heart of God-images.

Fretheim (1984, p. 106) acknowledges the importance of an understanding of God in terms of vulnerability. Hence, the notion of a divine lament in the Old Testament. The human cry becomes God’s cry. God takes up the human cry and makes it his own.

Fretheim (1984, p. 108) arranges the variety of texts and the language associated with the divine suffering according to a threefold schema in conjunction with the reasons for God’s suffering.

- God suffers because of the people’s rejection of Him as Lord.
- God suffers with the suffering people.
- God suffers for people.

According to Fretheim (1984, p. 123), God is revealed in the Old Testament, not as one who remains coolly unaffected by people’s rejection, but as One who is deeply wounded by a broken

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<sup>19</sup> Kreck, 1977, 290: The notion of God on the cross does not necessarily imply the cross within the very being of God himself. There should be a distinction between subject and predicate.

<sup>20</sup> Miskotte, 1973, 42: This construction of Moltmann sounds more like pan-entheism than pantheism.

relationship—rejection by Israel. Our understanding of God always remains metaphorical. Therefore, the theme, “a suffering God,” must not lead to a speculation or the construction of a philosophical ontology about God. Suffering is, rather, a metaphor to say in symbolic language that Israel’s world and experience have been internalized by God. He has absorbed his people’s rejection and affliction. However, one must still reckon with the fact that God’s grief does not entail being emotionally overwhelmed or embittered by Israel’s barrage of rejection. “Through it all, God’s faithfulness and gracious purposes remain constant and undiminished” (Fretheim 1984, p. 111). God’s salvific will does not waver; His steadfast love endures forever (1984, p. 124).

The “suffering God” indicates that He does not look at suffering extraneously, but from within: God is internally related to the suffering of his people. Jeremiah 31:20 and Isaiah 63:15 are excellent examples of the expression of divine compassion.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, suffering puts the very Being of God at stake. Therefore, Fretheim (1984: 148) asks the following question: What did suffering mean to God? In some way it meant the expending of God’s life, expressed primarily in the image of weariness. Even in Old Testament sacrifices it may be said that God gave of Himself to make forgiveness possible. God’s life was expended for the sake of sinners’ lives. One can even speak of divine humiliation: God immersed Himself in the depths of Israel’s troubles in order to make deliverance possible. In a sense, God subjects Himself to a humiliating situation for the purpose of salvation. He does precisely this to prove his faithfulness. Therefore, faithfulness and compassion become two key concepts for an understanding of the metaphorical meaning of the notion of “the suffering God.”

In a theological debate regarding the function of a theology of the cross (*theologia crucis*), two dynamic perspectives should always be considered and held together: (1) the salvific meaning of God’s identification with our suffering, as well as (2) the demonstrative and convincing effect of his identification, namely, to prove his

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<sup>21</sup> Jeremiah 31:20, “Is not Ephraim my dear son, the child in whom I delight? Though I often speak against him, I still remember him. Therefore, my heart yearns for him.”

Isaiah 63:15, “Look down from heaven and see, from your lofty throne, holy and glorious. Where are your zeal and your might? Your tenderness and compassion are withheld from us.”

faithfulness. “God in our suffering” becomes a pastoral metaphor for consolation, certainty, and hope.

The message of God’s faithfulness is inextricably linked to the transformative reality of the cross and to the victorious event of the resurrection. Being “saved in hope” makes us more than conquerors. Particularly during times of suffering the church calls out loudly: *maranatha*. In calling for the coming of the Son of God (future as *adventus*), the sufferer asks “When?” This victory that refers to the salvific reality is confessed by faith as an eschatological reality. It expresses the yearning for God’s kingdom to break through in all its fullness.

When will this victory finally breakthrough in its complete form? A meaningful reply to this question points towards those events which provide final proof of God’s power over death: the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The resurrection, which eliminates the sting of death, points back to the *perfectum* of the cross and forward to the *promissio* of the *parousia*. *Perfektum* and *promissio* are two elements of the eschatological reality. These are the new acts of God’s salvation which introduces the “end times” as a qualitatively new creation and point forward to the *eschaton* as an act of God’s final and decisive kingdom rule. In its doxological form, the *eschaton* refers to the *shalom* and wholeness of humankind and creation: The God-all-in-all perspective of 1 Corinthians 15 (pan-entheism). The history of salvation is concerned with unlocking the perspective of the *eschaton*. It concerns itself in the act of salvation with eschatological events, with God’s new deeds at the turn of time, in the last days, in the revelation of the great mystery.

On the cross Christ fulfilled God’s promises. As our substitute, He cancelled the guilt of sin and broke the curse by which God condemned humankind to death and transience. A new covenant is made possible by the blood of the Mediator. This victory becomes a high priestly reality. The fact that this high priestly act of the Mediator is indeed a victory, and that the Word of the Cross is the Gospel, the victory finds its final expression in the resurrection as an act of God and an action of Christ. The resurrection triumphs over the



despair of death and replaces it with a victorious faith.<sup>22</sup> The victory of the resurrection becomes a kingly reality within this history, with consequences for the whole of creation and the healing of humankind.

**C. Towards a Theology of the Resurrection (*Theologia Resurrectionis*): Divine Dimension of Salvific Hope and Illustration of the Faithfulness of a Living God**

As symbol, the cross is often a more powerful symbol in Christian liturgy than the open grave. In many Christian denominations the emphasis is more on human sinfulness, confession of sins and absolution, than on hopeful empowerment and enhancement of human dignity.

Hendrikus Berkhof (1973, p. 332) attributes the diminished role of spiritual empowerment as accredited to the resurrection in many confessions, to the fact that Western sobriety ensured that the resurrection, as a central tenet of salvation, nevertheless always stood in the shadow of the cross. Resurrection becomes a kind of aftermath. It does not feature as a central legitimation of the divine dimension of salvation, namely that Christ did not die as a martyr but as a mediator. This diminution of the resurrection also is concomitant with the way in which Western theology concentrated on the works of Christ, in contrast to the Eastern Church's focus on the person of Christ.

Lekkerkerker (1966, p. 134) believes that the Eastern Church saw Christ's suffering and death more in terms of a victory over the powers of evil and could, thus, sense the triumph of the resurrection. In its doctrine of atonement, the Western church concentrated more upon the juridical and forensic dimensions of the cross as liberation for the sinner. Another factor which could have contributed towards an under emphasis on the resurrection is the so-called process of secularization and technological development. Within a very rationalistic and positivistic model it seems that there is little scope for a gospel of resurrection.

De Jong (1967, p. 71) refers to the role of the historical-critical model, the intellectual emphasis of which left little scope for the miracle of the resurrection. The *Formgeschichte* also relativized the

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<sup>22</sup> Berkhof, 1973, 324: The resurrection of Christ is the most fundamental, convincing, and final event in the history of salvation: "Daarom. mag de opstanding van Jezus het beslissende heilsgebeuren heten."

gospel of resurrection. Although the new approach followed by the German theologians Käsemann, Fuchs, Bornkamp, and Ebeling made it conceivable that more historical facts were concealed in the interpretation of the message of resurrection than had hitherto been admitted, for many the resurrection still remains more a truth about the cross and a legitimization of the proclamation of the Gospel, rather than a fact that is linked to the open grave.

From a traditional and doctrinal perspective, it would appear as if the doctrines of soteriology and the incarnation headed the theological agendas of the different councils. After the Arian controversy and the emphasis placed on the Divinity of Christ by the Council of Nicaea, the resurrection tended no longer to be in the forefront of theological discussion. The resurrection frequently had to serve as a final proof of the Divinity of Christ. Ultimately, the resurrection became a necessary consequence of the cross, within the successive phases of humiliation and exaltation. According to Gesche (1973, pp. 275–324), the resurrection played the role of an additional legitimizing factor. The resurrection served as proof either of the mission of Christ, of the truth of the Scriptures, of the Divinity of Christ, or of the effectiveness of Jesus' work of salvation.

Goppelt (1980, p. 56), in his theology for the New Testament, argued that the message of the resurrection forms the heart and core of New Testament theology. From the perspective of the resurrection, the existing situation of the early church could be analysed in view of its transformation and its focus on the future. The resurrection message forms the basis of New Testament theology. In view of the central role of hope in theology, Guthrie (1981, p. 389) asserts, "The reality of the resurrection is, therefore, an indispensable basis for Christian hope in the future." According to him, the resurrection is not only important for the theme of hope, but it also has a Christological significance. It focuses particularly on Christ's person and work.<sup>23</sup> For Guthrie, faith in the resurrection provides the necessary continuity for the notion that Jesus is truly God and truly human. As an act of God, the resurrection also has implications for traditional God-images. The

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<sup>23</sup> Guthrie, 1981, 390: "The major significance of the resurrection is the contribution it makes to our understanding of the person and work of Christ."

message of the resurrection is also decisive for the preaching of the Gospel.<sup>24</sup>

A number of other authors are also conscious of the important role which the resurrection plays in theology. Jonker (1983) believes that the resurrection plays an important role in the panorama of God's salvific deeds. In the gospel of salvation, the message of the risen Christ stands alongside the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Redemption is an eschatological reality and has a victorious perspective.<sup>25</sup>

Berkouwer (1961, p. 246) regards Paul's ministry as a symbol of a resurrection hope. He considers the resurrection as fundamental for the eschatological perspective of the Gospel.<sup>26</sup> A distinction needs to be made between the resurrection as a salvific reality and the resurrection as a future reality where the mortal will be clothed with immortality. The latter forms part of the former, so that both become determining factors in the dynamic of Christian hope.

The resurrection plays a major role in Karl Barth's work (1953, p. 329ff). He views the resurrection as an act of God. While the cross is the judgement of grace, the resurrection is the grace of the judgement. Any human achievement falls away in the resurrection. Barth regards the resurrection as being so important that he describes the act of resurrection as an act of salvation from which everything else needs to be understood; it is a unique, absolute revelation (*überhaupt*) (1953, p. 332). Barth stresses the resurrection in such a way that God the Father becomes the complete subject of the resurrection. It is exclusively a work of God, without any co-operation from the Son. The resurrection is thus not a consequence of Jesus' death on the cross, but as a sovereign act of God the resurrection indicates God's gracious compassion and trustworthiness (Barth 1953, p. 335).

Barth states that the *theologia resurrectionis* is an independent, new work of God, which confirms the validity of Christ's suffering. The cross and the resurrection is one historical act in which God

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<sup>24</sup> Guthrie, 1981, 460: "It makes greater sense to regard the resurrection narratives as providing the link between the historical events of the passion and the apostolic proclamation of the meaning of Christ's death, than to suppose that the interpretation was entirely the church's own construction."

<sup>25</sup> Jonker, 1983, 139: "En deze overwinning maakt nu juist de kern uit van het opstandingsgeloof der eerste Christenen." Victory is the core message of the resurrection.

<sup>26</sup> Berkouwer, 1961, 231: Without the perspective of the resurrection, the whole of life is exposed to the overwhelming powers of destruction and death. Resurrection constitutes a certainty that guarantees a hopeful future.

proclaims and finally confirms his “Yes” of reconciliation to the sinful world. The cross and resurrection form such an indivisible unity within the history of salvation that only one form of theological reasoning can be derived from the uniqueness of the cross and the historicity of the resurrection: forward from the resurrection, not backwards from the *parousia*. The time in which the community lives is always determined qualitatively from the resurrection as *parousia* that is focused on Jesus, the eschaton: the One who has already come and the One who is coming.

Resurrection and suffering are two themes that cannot exist separately. In *A Theology of Auschwitz*, Simon (1967) does not regard the resurrection as an easy way out of suffering and pain, but that the resurrection incorporates them into a new perspective on life. Resurrection faith does not retreat from the reality of suffering but confirms the tragedy of suffering, and at the same time summons human beings to a mode of resilience and constructive engagement.<sup>27</sup> Resurrection moulds being into the paradox of acceptance and resistance.

In Jürgen Moltmann’s theology of hope (1966), the resurrection plays a crucial role in revealing the meaning and gospel of the cross. Within Moltmann’s *eschatologia crucis*, the cross is not limited to Christ’s reconciliatory work, but becomes a symbol for the *eschaton* of Christ: the resurrection from the perspective of salvific anticipation and victory. The resurrection opens up a future perspective in such a way that the resurrection obtains an eschatological primacy over the cross. Eschatology, derived from the resurrection, reveals the hope principle embedded in the cross. Hope is actually resurrection hope (Moltmann).

To an extent following Moltmann’s view, Schütz (1963, p. 351) considers the resurrection to be the most original ontic event in life (*Urereignis*) which forms the basis and norm of all discussion about the future. Heinrich Ott (1958, p. 18) believes the Easter events ensure that the message of Jesus’ resurrection became the foundation and source of Christian eschatology and hope.

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<sup>27</sup> Simon, 1967, 101: “Resurrection is not the easy way out, but the validation of the tragic itself.”

**D. Zig Zag Pattern of Hope within the Paradox of  
Frailty/Weakness/Sinfulness and Quest for Meaningful  
Living: Wherefore God?**

The cosmic fact of life is that life is frail and human beings are constantly being exposed to the reality of frailty, vulnerability, and the unpredictability of life events without any direct causative factor or explanation. Wisdom in Hebrew thinking has to deal constantly with the factuality of weakness, powerlessness, and helplessness. Meaninglessness is a kind of existential phenomenon. To probe for a rational explanation is essentially fatal. Not even God or the fact of human failure and sinfulness could be introduced as a reasonable explanation for loss, destruction, dying, and death.

The Old Testament perspective on suffering makes a positivistic causal explanation of suffering unacceptable. To use the notion of the fall as a reasonable explanation for human frailty and weakness is to introduce a mechanistic paradigm of cause-and-effect that delivers life to fate and an extreme fatalism and pessimistic worldview. The Old Testament's life view is neither pessimistic nor optimistic. It is about sheer realism within the kaleidoscope of often paradoxical life experiences, wavering between courage and despair.

Sinfulness, disobedience, punishment, wrath, grace, forgiveness, and reconciliation weave a networking dynamic of interactional happenstances and responses that should be interpreted as the realism of life: as existential events subjected to pain, illness, fraud, disappointment, anxiety, and despair. In fact, the narratives in the Bible oscillate between these existential experiences as hermeneutical accounts on human failure; humans attempt to bounce back; stories about the engagement of God within graceful, divine interventions instil hope, courage, faith, and trust.

The challenge is: not to explain life in terms of a causative positivism (rational and reasonable answers and explanations) but to inspire and empower faithful people to face life in terms of the "courage to be." The challenge is to summon believers to respond with boldness—*parrhesia*—with hope and meaningful anticipation of renewal, healing, wholeness, and to display God's grace and compassion within the parameters of obedience and lawful direction.

According to the Old Testament, God punishes sin. Suffering, therefore, as part of the broken reality is associated with

admonishment and punishment. Suffering as such is not evil and sinful. However, suffering reveals, *inter alia*, the factuality of disobedience, unbelief, failure, the making of wrong choices, and the destructive impact of evil on the meaning and destiny of life. This does not mean that one has to investigate every incident of personal suffering in search of a specific sin as an explanation of that particular situation of suffering. One has not to try to decipher behind life events the so called “punishment and wrath of God.” It only means that suffering makes one sensitive to self-examination and the possibility of guilt. Should sufferers become aware of a personal sin, or some other irresponsible transgression which has a bearing on their suffering, then it is their task to repent and to confess their sin.

Coping with suffering, especially in the Old Testament, is often linked to the process of confession of sins and repentance. However, the intention was not to explain suffering and to reveal a rational explication. Suffering’s function was to reveal suffering as a relational issue within a covenantal as well as therapeutic paradigm: to bring about change and to foster spiritual growth.

In the Old Testament, suffering is discussed with ambivalence. On the one hand, God is involved in suffering; on the other, the person is held responsible for their own suffering. Human guilt and divine wrath cannot be separated (Ps. 78:21–22, 106:40; 2 Kings 17:18–20; 1 Sam 12:9; Jdg. 2:14). This link between guilt and wrath must be seen against the background of the Old Testament image of God and the cultural world view. For the Israelites, their world was an integrated whole, in which they felt secure. They were supported by their faith in a personal God. The framework of the covenant created a sense of security. Linked to the covenant were God’s blessings (life-force/vitality, communal life, productivity, material prosperity), as well as the curse (isolation from the covenantal community, equivalent to death and humiliation). The covenant’s character of promise-in-fulfilment created a frame of reference in which suffering could be interpreted. The believer could always count on God’s faithfulness. In this way, evil and disaster could be linked to God in terms of his divine grace and loving care.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> See Jer. 18:8, “And if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned.” Jer. 18:11, “Now therefore say to the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem, ‘This is what the Lord says: Look! I am preparing a disaster for you and devising a plan [Footnote continued on next page ... ]”

Isaiah prefaced his declaration that the Lord created disaster with an objective fact: God’s salvific acts of faithfulness and covenantal grace. On this fact, Israel’s faith either stood or fell. God identified Himself as “I am the Lord, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God.” The God “behind” disaster is always Yahweh in his grace and compassion. Disaster exists within the context of divine salvation, punishment within divine grace, and wrath within divine love.

The relationship between wrath and love does not lead to a diminution of wrath as a result of love. Both wrath and love are two interconnected aspects of God’s revelation: they are modes of the encounter between God and humankind. Both exist within the unity of the Person of God, in an inseparable relationship with one another. The motive underlying his wrath always remains God’s mercy towards the preservation of the sinner. God’s heart is involved in the suffering in which He is at work, which reveals his compassion.<sup>29</sup> Suffering in the Old Testament thus needs to be interpreted against the background of the unique covenantal relationship between Yahweh and Israel. Breaking the covenant implied isolation and estrangement which can result in suffering and eventually place the covenant people under a curse.<sup>30</sup>

What makes the interpretation of meaning in suffering so difficult is that, throughout the Bible, reference is made to the principle of evil. Concomitant to the involvement of God in suffering, there is also the power of evil (Job 1:6–12).<sup>31</sup> God’s involvement in suffering is clearly not evil. God’s involvement implies wrath and punishment in order to bring about the sinner’s salvation and preservation; its purpose is life to the glory of God; salvation as the transformation and conversion of the sinner; care, healing, transformation in opposition to the powers of annihilation and chaos. The involvement of evil implies

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against you. So turn from your evil ways, each one of you, and reform your ways and your actions.” Isa. 45:7, “I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things.”

<sup>29</sup> Ridderbos, 1966, 390: It “refers to the fact that dealing with difficult threats in life, does not imply to introduce a kind of abstract principle of predestination as explanatory cause for what befalls one. More fundamental is the connection faith and grace.”

<sup>30</sup> Thus, Gerstenberger wrote in *Leiden*: “disobedience to God’s will leads inevitable to different kinds of suffering” (Gerstenberger & Schrage, 1977, p. 60).

<sup>31</sup> In Gerstenberger & Schrage, 1977, 64–65, Gerstenberge points out that human beings are often their own cause for painful suffering.

a disturbance of the covenantal relationship resulting in disintegration, annihilation, unbelief, and spiritual death.

According to the Bible, finding meaning cannot be sought along the lines of determinism or indeterminism, but rather within the paradoxical zig zag realism of a covenantal relationship of grace and obedience within the awareness of human frailty and failure, even despite the threat of death. Within the dynamics of this relationship, the providence question no longer becomes an abstract dogma and doctrine, but a faith issue, which takes seriously God's righteousness as its point of departure. His omnipotence thus becomes a pastoral category instead of a fatalistic and deterministic category of violent force.

Scripture does not offer a logical explanation to suffering. A logical answer, in any event, offers very little consolation. It provides only a temporary quieting of our rational thinking. God does not give solutions to our logical "Why?" But in the midst of our questions, He inserts the "*therefore*" of the cross and the exclamation mark of the resurrection. God does not provide a solution, but redemption—His Son, Jesus Christ. Through this action, God reveals His trustworthiness. A search for the interpretation of meaning in suffering should start with the presupposition of God's faithfulness, otherwise it is doomed to despair and anxiety right from the start.

God's presence in suffering, by virtue of his mediatory and vicarious suffering, raises a new question. The most important question in suffering is not, in the first instance, "Why?" Because of God's compassion and faithfulness, the believer should rather learn to ask the question, "Wherefore God? For what purpose?" For the believer, the question mark behind "For what purpose?" is actually an exclamation mark which challenges the believer to face suffering, rather than to avoid or become resigned to suffering. The exclamation mark sets an invitation before the believer to seek an opportunity to praise God in suffering and, in the manner in which they suffer, to demonstrate something of the trustworthiness of God's presence with the sufferer and His pathos in suffering. In this way the believer no longer views God's will as an explanatory principle, but as an accompanying and empowering principle. Suffering, as such, is not seen as God's will. His will is rather manifested in that which can happen during suffering in the sufferer's heart, aptitude, and attitude.



The core of the question of finding meaning in suffering is not in what happens *to* us, but what can happen *in* and *through* us. Pastoral care needs to help supplicants to discover how to suffer; it attempts to build a new disposition towards suffering as well as a new perspective on suffering. Suffering becomes a task and a calling through which one embodies God's presence and comfort—his identification with our suffering in Christ and through his Spirit. What interests God is our reaction to that which befalls us (Aggebo 1959, p. 265). The challenge and opportunity of suffering lies in answering the question: “To what purpose is God using suffering in the life of the believer?” The sufferer has to make the following choice in faith between fate and God:

- Either fate rules—then there is only a last zero point in creation to which no person can pray and appeal. You can only shout, scream, and curse. In fate, a person cannot say “Thou” to fate.
- Or God rules—the other possibility is that God is there; his compassion and grace are in control (Köberle 1970, p. 25).

With God, suffering can be processed in the form of a complaint or a lament; yes, even as an accusation. A complaint indicates that the complainant expects something from the person against whom the complaint is lodged. In suffering a complaint is expressed in the mode of hope. Knowing the “suffering God” yields real hope!

**E. Spiritual Framework of Meaning: Realm of the Fulfilled Promises of God as Indication of Divine Faithfulness (Promisiology & Promisio-therapy)**

The question regarding meaning in suffering is about the purpose and direction of one's life. Meaning, as the totality of answers to all questions, does not exist as such. Meaning is about the purpose of human life and its movement within a particular direction, within a specific relation.<sup>32</sup> Theologically speaking, discovery of true meaning can take place only within a living relationship with God and in a loving relationship with fellow-human beings. For this to take place, the believer needs the security that is outlined in God's covenantal promises and the eschatological reality of salvation that is evidenced

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<sup>32</sup> Gollwitzer, 1974, 20 and 28: Meaningful living is embedded within the dynamic of relational interaction and the service of sacrificial love.

in the cross and the resurrection. Then the believer will come to know that God, Himself, is not as such the meaning of life. God is more than the totality of meaning. Meaning, rather, is the discovery of a God whom one can trust and who can bring meaning to life due to actual involvement and engagement with those existential realities which threaten humans in the very core of their being.

The fact that God's faithfulness to his covenant promises provides the direction for the "For what purpose?" question, means that the processing of meaning is focused on a God who identifies with our suffering and understands our most basic existential needs: our anxiety for death; our helplessness and hopelessness due to doubt and despair; and our guilt and need for liberation. The purposefulness of the Christian faith within the eschatological horizon of meaning outlines the telic dimension of Scripture. "Telic" is derived from the Greek *teleion*, which implies purposefulness, and is used in Scripture in connection with direction and maturity of faith. Telic implies that a mature faith is directed by values and norms that bring a sense of purpose to existence and which unlock a future which is not dependent solely on human achievement but on God's faithfulness. Such believers are able to integrate suffering as a task and calling through which they can grow towards maturity. "Maturity" implies an overcoming of inflexibility, rigidity, and resignation which enables the internalization of suffering. Furthermore, maturity entails the dynamics of anticipation, prospective action, and openness towards the future.

The dynamics of a mature faith imply more than a dialectical approach towards suffering. The danger of such a model is that suffering, in one way or another, becomes a necessary presupposition for the discovery of meaning. Suffering can even be seen as a necessary prerequisite for access to God. It can also happen that suffering becomes a prerequisite for the revelation of grace and the discovery of God's love. Ultimately, suffering becomes a constitutive factor for God's presence and, in the light of a dynamic God-image, is seen as an antithetical factor in God's very Being. Dialectics, as the process of negation of the negative, remains linked, almost like a Siamese twin, to anxiety and death. Despite the value of dialectics in theology, hope is more than a dialectic entity which exists as the anti-

pole of doubt and despair. Hope is a category *sui generis*; it exists due to God's fulfilled promises, despite nothingness and death.

In order to discover meaning in suffering, the theology of pastoral care needs to make use of a dialogical model. God then is seen as an acting God who, in terms of his faithfulness, is always present. As a result of his act of salvation, the believer learns to recognize God's mode in suffering: forgiveness, compassion, and loving kindness. His presence calls us humans, through his Word, to respond within the dynamics of a God-human encounter and continual process of dialogue and communication. Dialogue and encounter within covenantal communication demand faith and obedience on the part of human beings.

There is room within this dialogical mode for the doxological paradox of the "already not yet," despite ambiguity and ambivalence. Precisely this paradox creates space for a process of discovering meaning which expresses itself in the praise and worship of the Lord. A dialogical model is, essentially, a promissiological model within a teleologically directed eschatology. Within the promissiological structure of the dialogical covenant model, the challenge of suffering becomes a meaningful opportunity with therapeutic value for a person in crisis. Therefore, one can conclude that meaning and significance is not "something" or an "achievement." It is rather a relationship and a process within the parameters of faithfulness and hope.

Viktor Frankl was convinced that suffering could be meaningful. He believed that values play a decisive role in the process of dealing with suffering and the discovery of meaning. People possess the ability to adjust themselves to suffering and to take responsibility for their suffering.<sup>33</sup> This is why Frankl's logotherapy makes use of the technique of value identification and goal formulation.

In his logotherapy, Frankl (1969; 1977) distinguishes between an anthropology which views a human being as *homo faber*, committed to the success ethic and threatened by the factor of failure, and an anthropology which views a human being as *homo patiens*. While *homo faber* operates within an achievement ethic, *homo patiens* is prepared to bear testimony in suffering to those values that give life a particular direction. A sufferer should not ask, "What, to me, is the

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<sup>33</sup> See Böschmeyer, 1977, 105ff, for a discussion of this aspect of Frankl's thought.

meaning of suffering?” but rather, “What meaning can I give to suffering?” Suffering becomes an invitation to create meaning.

According to Frankl, the highest form of finding meaning can take place in suffering because love is an aspect of human existence. Love, as commitment, means that one can create distance between realizing one’s own values in order to respond in a responsible manner to other and higher values. The capacity to distance oneself from one’s innate values is already a form of suffering, which can extend one’s disposition far beyond one’s own selfish ideals. With a devoted and committed will to find meaning, the person discovers in suffering the answer to the challenging question: Why?

Frankl’s logotherapy places the emphasis on finding meaning in suffering through love in the light of internalized values. The Gospel’s promissio-therapy—the compassionate healing and empowering effect of God’s fulfilled promises—goes even further. Our task in suffering is not only to impart meaning. To impart meaning presupposes receiving meaning. In order to discover meaning, a person must have an empowering source from which one receives meaning. If meaning is not received from some other source, then dispensing meaning becomes a wearying task which is dependent solely on one’s own potential. Ultimately, one is easily exposed to the possible threat of futility.

The phenomenon of suffering, as such, is meaningless and can become a painful experience; therefore, one should not speak of the “meaning *of* suffering.” In the process of attempting to discover meaning, suffering can only become meaningful in the sense of imparting meaning. Hence, it is better to speak of discovering “meaning *in* suffering.” The solution to the questions “Why?” and “For what purpose?” is, therefore, not a clear-cut answer, but a process and task which challenges one’s basic attitude, value system, belief, and philosophy in life. Suffering becomes meaningful within the process of acceptance and taking responsibility. In the light of Christ’s vicarious suffering and his high-priestly compassion (God’s pathos), a person can discover and impart meaning in suffering. Meaning does not follow automatically. Wishful thinking is pointless in suffering. People can reject the offer of meaning through an

attitude of doubt and scepticism, or they can accept the challenge by making a purposeful decision.<sup>34</sup>

On the one hand, the fellowship with Christ brings the death of the sinner in the cross of Christ (*mortificatio*), and on the other, life emanates from fellowship with the risen Christ (*vivificatio*). This participation-in-Christ initiates a process of anticipation that places the believer's existence within the eschatological tension between the already and the not yet. This is the tension of resurrection life lived within the limitations of the eschatological condition. In Victor Frankl's terms, we can speak of the "noöynamics" of hope, whereby the believer remains teleologically orientated towards the future (the *parousia* of Christ) and the dawning of God's doxological kingdom.

Hope prevents rigidity, and brings a teleological orientation which, in turn, can initiate a new process of transcendence and anticipation in a person's faith. The goal or intention of pastoral care to those who are suffering is to encourage hope in a future which, in principle, is already realized—and accessible to faith but which also refers to a process of ultimate completion and fulfilment. The God of the paraclete is the God of hope through the Holy Spirit. As Paul said in Romans 15:5, "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Jesus Christ." So, in suffering our hope "becomes even stronger through the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:13).

In conclusion, we can say that an *eschatologis crucis* constitutes a founded and enduring hope that safeguards a future. It operates from the perspective of the resurrection and anticipates a promised future.<sup>35</sup> Hope as *promissio*-instigated action into the future. Hope creates endurance and longsuffering; it challenges one to live fully, even in the midst of terminal illness.

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<sup>34</sup> Küng, 1978, 527: The challenge for human beings is to respond and to make fundamental decisions regarding meaning, "Wohl aber ein freibleibendes Sinn-Angebot: Der Mensch hat zu entscheiden."

<sup>35</sup> Thurneysen, 1964, 13, confirms that true pastoral caregiving is in essence hope care and determined by Christian eschatology: "Alle echte Seelsorge ist als solche Seelsorge der Hoffnung, sie hat eschatologischen Charakter oder sie ist keine Seelsorge."

The root of the Hebrew word for hope has the connotation of an interrelated web of meaningful connections.<sup>36</sup> It is the vibrating string of God's grace, stretched taut by the resonance of his promises that undergirds the believer during suffering. The bowstrings are taught, and the arrow is directed towards a goal! It is this vivid hope that orientates one towards the web of a meaningful future.

While hope undergirds life, the following question surfaces: How is this resurrection life expressed in people's relationships and in their concrete situations of their daily experience in the present? The certainty of Christian hope emanates in thanksgiving; it reflects and presents the festivity of grace. The embodiment of hope in human existence is the existential condition of a joyful life in celebration and gratitude.

According to Barth, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, which edifies and builds up the community. Barth calls the power of the Holy Spirit the Life principle of the Christian church (1953, p. 167). In reality, the joyous life of Christian hope is thus an ecclesial matter which determines the character of the community of believers. Therefore, everything that the community does ought to be done liturgically with joy and festivity.<sup>37</sup>

In a culture which is committed to avoiding suffering, Paul's word in Colossians 1:24 sounds strange: "Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you." The idea that suffering should not be avoided and resisted, but can also be accepted, certainly does sound strange to contemporary humans who, driven by their obsession with success, are determined to eliminate all forms of suffering. In a culture that detests wrinkles and blemishes, suffering is a hampering factor. Our contemporary society demands that all opposition, conflict, and tension disappear and be replaced by relaxation, ease, and progress.

Van Ruler is convinced that joy is an essential part of the biblical message.<sup>38</sup> In "*Ik geloof*" ("I believe"), Van Ruler asserts that joy about God's grace and salvation is the highest form of expression of

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<sup>36</sup> Haller, 1969, 9: Hope is like the sail of a boat, giving direction and speed despite a stormy sea: "Das hebraische Wort '*kiwwah*' stammt dies einer Wurzel 'kw,' die den gespannten Faden im Spinnnetz bezeichnet oder das gespannte Seil, den "Stang" an dem man sich helfen kann oder der etwas festhält."

<sup>37</sup> Barth, 1953, 167: The whole communal existence, its liturgies and sacraments, displays the festivity of celebration and glorification.

<sup>38</sup> Van Ruler, 1971, 120: Joy is much closer to the heart of God than love.

Christian existence. Christian faith is geared towards the enjoyment of God.

The biblical concept for “feast” is directly related to God’s salvific acts in the history of his covenant people. When Israel commemorated God’s salvific acts in its festivals, such as the pascha and mazzot feast, it was doing more than merely performing a drama for the Israelites. It was not only God’s acts of salvation which summoned Israel to commemorate—the feast was not just a commemorative feast—but through the celebrations, the believers actually share in the reality of God’s salvific acts. The festival allowed the Israelites to share in Yahweh’s living and creative salvific works; it helped them to return to their everyday life with the knowledge: God has overcome the surrounding destructive powers. In the *pascha*, the Israelites obtained a portion of Yahweh’s victorious and liberating Exodus power; this empowered them for their daily life. The feast became a deposit for a glorious future, so that the present reality could be transcended in a victorious way.<sup>39</sup>

In the feast, the everyday experience was interrupted by the salvific experience of the past, thereby opening up a new future. Life was carried onwards and forwards by the feast. God’s faithfulness towards his covenantal promises awakened an attitude of joy and gratitude. In Scripture, happiness is linked to God’s salvific acts, through which his victory is clearly revealed. Joy emanates from the knowledge that the alienation which separates humans from themselves, from God, and from their fellow humans has been eliminated through God’s salvific work.

The value of this festival joy for pastoral care lies in the way that caregivers orientate the believer towards the Lord’s vivid presence. The sacraments of communion and baptism are particularly important here. Through the commemoration of the Eucharist, believers are empowered to face the threat of chaos and death.

Joy is not about cheap optimism or a *theologia gloriae*. Within Israel’s faith, the realized salvific reality was linked to the sacrificial and atonement ritual. The festival confronted Israel radically with guilt and sin. The theme of sin forms the core of the atonement ritual

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<sup>39</sup> Otto and Schramm, 1977, 35: Festivity and liturgical events open up a horizon of spiritual joy and entertainment in the presence of God.

within Israel's cult in linking them with the reality of reconciliation. In the same way, the Eucharist urges people towards self-examination and confession. In the New Testament the festive joy is determined by the high-priestly suffering of Christ. In Him, "joy" means sin and death overcome by grace (Otto & Schramm 1977, p. 130).

In New Testament terms, joy refers to the celebration of Christ's death and in the Eucharist. In the celebration of Holy Communion, believers' actual fellowship with the crucified and risen Lord is once more affirmed. Actual participation in this victory motivates believers to live their daily life victoriously.

The resurrection makes us "excited" in the present: resurrection hope contributes to resistance in the present. Resurrection hope instils a new kind of "spiritual fortigenetics": patience as courageous resistance of unjust suffering. There is a moment in hopeful joy and joyous hope wherein one transcends reality, without actually forsaking the reality. It is characteristic of the *homo festivus* that it recalls the past, without betraying the present. At the same time, joy is a creative moment which surpasses the present towards new possibilities. The not-yet in joy is not euphoria, which ousts the painfulness of reality, but the creative vitality of a faith that resists inhumane forms of human suffering and embraces pain in hope.

### Conclusion

In a nutshell: The certainty of our future hope is theologically linked to an *eschatologia crucis* that constitutes hope as a founded guarantee and ontological state of being. The certainty does not reside in mere fortigenetics (positive effects and constructive behaviour), but in God's faithfulness as demonstrated by a *theologia resurrectionis*. Due to the event of the *parousia*, our future in Christian hoping is about *adventus*. *Derelictio* (divine forsakenness) as a divine event and compassion as an expression of God's pathos, constitute a mode of enduring faithfulness that is not fuelled by either pessimism or optimism, nor by masochism, but by *promissio* (the future of divine fulfilled promises) and God's faithfulness, the guarantee for our future hope.

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