

MOLTMANN'S THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS AND THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

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## ABSTRACT

It is the purpose of this study to examine Moltmann's theology of the cross and its consequences for a doctrine of God. That is, it will serve to follow Moltmann in his attempt to develop an understanding of God that is founded upon the event of Christ's crucifixion. Under the general concept of a doctrine of God, three principal themes emerge from the theology of the cross: the dialectical revelation of God, the suffering of God and the doctrine of the Trinity. This study is a restructuring of Moltmann's argument that attempts to examine each of these themes in light of the theology of the cross and one that strives to demonstrate their logical interconnectedness in Moltmann's thought. In other words, it aims to establish that, for Moltmann, a thoroughgoing theology of the cross recognizes the revelation of God as revelation in the dialectic of the cross, acknowledges the suffering of God in the dialectic of the cross, and perceives that the suffering of the cross reveals God as Trinity. In summary statement, God is revealed as Trinity in the dialectic of suffering of the cross. In addition, the development of these three themes is supplemented by an examination of three contrary themes of which Moltmann is critical: dialectical revelation and

the analogical understanding of God, the suffering of God and the impassibility of God, and the doctrine of the Trinity and monotheism.

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## INTRODUCTION

Jürgen Moltmann's The Crucified God is an attempt to develop a theology of the cross and to examine its consequences for Christian theology as a whole; as the subtitle states, it is an examination of "The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology." Of the various themes that are developed by Moltmann in this work, one stands out as being of particular interest for this paper: it is the connection between the theology of the cross and the doctrine of God. This issue is taken up in chapter 6 where Moltmann proposes to "develop the consequences of this theology of the crucified Christ for the concept of God."<sup>1</sup>

It is the purpose of this study to examine Moltmann's theology of the cross and its consequences for a doctrine of God. This paper will follow Moltmann in his attempt "to understand God's being from the death of Jesus," and to follow him in his attempt to answer the question, "What does the cross of Jesus mean for God himself?"<sup>2</sup> Thus

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<sup>1</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 Ltd., 1974), p. 200.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 201.

it will provide a critical examination of Moltmann's theology of the cross as a methodology for a doctrine of God, and a critical examination of the attributes of God that are perceived through that theology of the cross.

Within this discussion of the theology of the cross and the doctrine of God, two other related themes emerge: they are the theology of the cross as a dialectic principle of knowledge and the questions of suffering and theodicy. When, under the examination of Moltmann's theology of the cross, we consider these two themes along with the issue of the doctrine of God, we then arrive at three themes upon which this paper will be structured. That is, the theology of the cross will be considered as a dialectic principle of knowledge; it will be considered as it addresses the question of suffering and theodicy; and it will be examined for its consequences for a doctrine of God.

Lest these three themes appear to be arbitrarily chosen from the outset, we should now briefly consider the interrelatedness of them all. To examine the theology of the cross as a dialectic principle of knowledge is to examine it as a methodology for knowledge of God. Referring to this dialectic principle, Moltmann writes as follows:

Applied to Christian theology, this means that God is only revealed [and known] as 'God' in his opposite: godlessness and abandonment by God. In concrete terms, God is revealed in the cross of Christ who was abandoned by God.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

The point here is simply to say that when the dialectic principle of knowledge in general is applied to Christian theology, by means of the theology of the cross, then it becomes a dialectic principle for a specific type of knowledge--knowledge of God.

As is evident from the preceding quotation, the dialectic in the theology of the cross resides in the fact that God is revealed in the cross of Christ and in Christ's experience of godlessness and abandonment by God. This is where the connection between the dialectic of the cross and suffering becomes evident. Moltmann writes that "the knowledge of the cross is the knowledge of God in the suffering caused to him by dehumanized man."<sup>4</sup> If this knowledge is a dialectical knowledge of God, then it is a dialectical knowledge insofar as God is revealed and known in suffering.

Finally, it can be seen that, for Moltmann, suffering and the doctrine of God are intimately connected themes.

God and suffering belong together, just as in this life the cry for God and the suffering experienced in pain belong together. The question about God and the question about suffering are a joint, a common question.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>5</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1981), p. 49.

Therefore, for Moltmann, in order to answer the question about God and in order to come to a doctrine of God, one must also answer the question about suffering. This is evident from the observation that where he sets out to develop a theology of the cross, The Crucified God, he is inevitably led to address the question of God;<sup>6</sup> and where he sets out to develop a doctrine of God, The Trinity and The Kingdom of God, he begins with a discussion of both human and divine suffering.<sup>7</sup> The issues of human and divine suffering and theodicy are essential to any attempt to formulate a doctrine of God.

Thus the stated goal of this study may be reformulated as follows: first, to examine the theology of the cross as a dialectical principle for knowledge of God; second, to consider Moltmann's treatment of the question of suffering in light of the theology of the cross, and to consider its impact on his doctrine of God; third, to examine the conclusions for a doctrine of God that follow from the dialectic of suffering in Moltmann's theology of the cross. These three themes will form the basis for the three chapters of this study.

In order to examine these issues, two principal

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<sup>6</sup>See Crucified God, chapter 6, "The Crucified God".

<sup>7</sup>See Trinity, chapter 2, "The Passion of God".

sources will be consulted. The Crucified God is Moltmann's most thorough treatment of the theology of the cross and the related issues of dialectic, suffering and the doctrine of God. The Trinity and the Kingdom of God is a valuable source for its discussion of suffering and God. While other works will be consulted, these two emerge as the principal ones. Chapter I will also include a discussion of the relation between Moltmann's theology of the cross and his theology of hope.

## CHAPTER I

### THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS AS DIALECTICAL EPISTEMOLOGY

As previously stated, the purpose of this chapter is to examine the theology of the cross as a dialectical principle for knowledge of God. Here we shall be concerned with questions such as the following. What does Moltmann mean by "dialectical principle"? What constitutes the dialectic of the theology of the cross--in what sense can it be said to be dialectical? How is it that this principle of knowledge brings a person to knowledge of God and how does this principle compare with other theories of knowledge? But before addressing these questions we shall first discuss the relation between the theology of the cross and Christian theology as a whole, and then the relation between Moltmann's theology of the cross and his theology of hope.

#### 1. Theology of the Cross as the Centre of all Theology

Moltmann defines the theology of the cross simply as "a Christian theology which sees its problem and its task in knowing God in the crucified Christ."<sup>1</sup> From the beginning then, he sees the central aspects of the theology of the

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<sup>1</sup>Crucified God, p. 68.

cross as revelation and knowledge of God. A theology of the cross sees its task as that of knowing God; and in addressing this task it focuses upon the revelation of God in the cross of Christ. In this Moltmann sees himself as following Luther's theology of the cross:

Whereas in the late Middle Ages the theology of the cross was an expression of the mysticism of suffering, Luther uses it strictly as a new principle of theological epistemology. For him the cross is not a symbol for the path of suffering that leads to fellowship with God, a reversal of the way of works that are well-pleasing to God; rather, as the cross of the outcast and forsaken Christ it is the visible revelation of God's being for man in the reality of his world.<sup>2</sup>

Thus it can be said that Moltmann emphasizes the cross as "the revelation of God's being" and the theology of the cross as a "principle of theological epistemology" that looks to the cross in order to know God.

But this is not to say that Moltmann limits the significance of the theology of the cross to the doctrine of God. Although revelation and knowledge are its principal emphases, it is not limited to one aspect of theology.

Theologia crucis is not a single chapter in theology, but the key signature for all Christian theology. It is a completely distinctive kind of theology. It is the point from which all theological statements which seek to be Christian are viewed.<sup>3</sup>

Or as he writes elsewhere, "the death of Jesus on the cross

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 207f.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 72.

is the centre of all Christian theology...[and] the entry to its problems and answers on earth."<sup>4</sup> As the "key signature" and "centre" of all theology, the theology of the cross is the starting point for the treatment of all problems facing the church. Therefore, in The Crucified God, Moltmann develops the consequences of his theology of the cross, not only for the concept of God, but also "for anthropology and for a critical theory of church and society."<sup>5</sup>

But for Moltmann the concept of God remains the most critical issue. It is not only the central focus of the theology of the cross, but also the fundamental question facing the church.

Behind the political and social crisis of the church, behind the growing crisis over the credibility of its public declarations and its institutional form, there lurks the christological question: Who really is Christ for us today? With this christological crisis we have already entered into the political crisis of the church. And rooted in the christological question about Jesus is ultimately the question about God.<sup>6</sup>

The question about God, of all theological questions, is that which must be addressed first. If the challenge for the church demands revolutionary answers for the crises of the present, then still the question about God must first be

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 204.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 200.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 201.



addressed. For "without a revolution in the concept of God, there is no revolutionary theology."<sup>7</sup> And returning to the theology of the cross, Moltmann poses these questions: "How can the 'death of Jesus' be a statement about God? Does that not amount to a revolution in the concept of God?"<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Theology of the Cross and Theology of Hope

At this point it would seem to be an obvious question to ask how this theology of the cross stands in relation to Moltmann's earlier emphasis, the theology of hope. Theology of Hope, published in 1964, was a "theological treatment of the philosophy of hope on the basis of the Christian faith's own presuppositions and perspectives."<sup>9</sup> Writing Christian theology in the light of Ernst Bloch's philosophy of hope, Moltmann could say the following:

Christianity is completely and entirely and utterly hope--a looking forward and a forward direction; hope is not just an appendix. So Christianity inevitably means a new setting forth and a transformation of the present. Eschatology...is not just one of Christianity's many doctrines. It is quite simply the medium of the Christian faith, the keynote, the daybreak colours of a new expected day which bathe

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<sup>7</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, The Experiment Hope, trans. M. Douglas Meeks (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 83.

<sup>8</sup>Crucified God, p. 201.

<sup>9</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, Experiences of God, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1980), p. 11.

everything in their light.<sup>10</sup>

What, then, is the connection between this theology of hope and the theology of the cross, between a forward looking theology and one that looks back to the cross, between the keynote of the Christian faith and the centre of all Christian theology? Is there a fundamental connection or has Moltmann changed direction with his emphasis upon the theology of the cross?

Moltmann himself maintains that the theology of the cross has always been the guiding principle of his theological work.

Since I first studied theology, I have been concerned with the theology of the cross. This may not have been so clear to those who liked Theology of Hope, which I published in 1964, as it was to its critics; yet I believe that it has been the guiding light of my theological thought.<sup>11</sup>

In fact, Theology of Hope "was itself worked out as an eschatologia crucis."<sup>12</sup> How is it, then, that these two theologies are connected? In The Crucified God, Moltmann explains that the two are complements or opposite sides of the same coin.

The theology of the cross is none other than the reverse side of the Christian theology of hope, if the starting point of the latter lies in the resurrection of the crucified Christ....Theology

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Crucified God, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

of Hope began with the resurrection of the crucified Christ, and I am now turning to look at the cross of the risen Christ.<sup>13</sup>

Thus the connection between the theology of the cross and the theology of hope is to be found in the connection between their respective points of reference: cross and resurrection. But here Moltmann cautions against an understanding that would separate these two events and make them into "a sequence of facts": "it is one event and one person."<sup>14</sup> The connection between the theology of the cross and the theology of hope is the connection between cross and resurrection: they are two aspects of the same event. "Thus the centre [of theology] is occupied...by the resurrection of the crucified Christ, which qualifies his death as something that has happened for us, and the cross of the risen Christ, which reveals and makes accessible to those who are dying his resurrection from the dead."<sup>15</sup> In this sense it can be said that theology of the cross and theology of hope embrace and imply each other, and together form the centre of theology.

Thus Moltmann cannot agree with his critics who suggest that The Crucified God is a step back from Theology of Hope. "For me...this is not a step back from the

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 204.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

trumpets of Easter to the lamentations of Good Friday."<sup>16</sup>  
 And yet he does indicate "something of a new departure."<sup>17</sup>  
 Although each is simply the reverse side of the other,  
 moving from hope to the cross does constitute a change in  
 direction. He explains this change as follows:

Moving away from Ernest Bloch's philosophy of hope, I now turn to the questions of 'negative dialectic' and the 'critical theory' of T. W. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, together with the experiences and insights of early dialectical theology and existentialist philosophy. Unless it apprehends the pain of the negative, Christian hope cannot be realistic and liberating. In no sense does this theology of the cross 'go back step by step'; it is intended to make the theology of hope more concrete.<sup>18</sup>

It is his intention to move away from philosophy of hope and to bring "a more profound dimension to the theology of hope"<sup>19</sup> from the reverse side. This new departure is the theology of the cross in the form of a critical and dialectical theology. But Moltmann also sees another aspect of the new direction that was taken. It concerns the concept of God:

For me, the work on this theology of the cross meant a surprizing turning-point. Having asked in many different ways what the cross of Christ means for the church, for theology, for discipleship,

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>17</sup>Walter Holden Capps, Hope Against Hope: Moltmann to Merton in One Decade (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), p. 137.

<sup>18</sup>Crucified God, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

for culture and society, I now found myself faced with the reverse question: what does Christ's cross really mean for God himself?<sup>20</sup>

In conclusion we can say that Moltmann's point of departure in writing The Crucified God was not simply the theology of the cross. For the theology of the cross was a concern of his earliest studies and of his theology of hope. The point of departure was the theology of the cross as a dialectical principle for knowledge of God. It is to this issue that we now turn.

### 3. The Theology of the Cross as Dialectical Epistemology

#### (i) The principle of analogy and the dialectic principle.

Moltmann begins his discussion of the theology of the cross as revelation in contradiction by contrasting two general epistemological principles: the analogical principle and the dialectical principle. The analogical principle, says Moltmann, stems from the Aristotelian principle of society.

The generally accepted principle of society was 'like seeks after like', as Aristotle puts it in the Nicomachean Ethics. Things which are like or similar understand each other on the basis of what they have in common, and affirm each other.<sup>21</sup>

When applied to epistemology, this principle becomes "the Platonic principle, 'like is known only by like'".<sup>22</sup>

Under the principle of analogical epistemology "the process

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<sup>20</sup>Experiences of God, p. 15.

<sup>21</sup>Crucified God, p. 26.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

of knowing takes place under the guidance of analogy, and in these circumstances is always recognition."<sup>23</sup> In contrast to this theory, he then considers the dialectic principle of knowledge:

This principle derives from medicine, going back to Hippocrates, and states that contraria contrariis curantur, or, in Schelling's words: 'Every being can be revealed only in its opposite. Love only in hatred, unity only in conflict.'<sup>24</sup>

The opposition is one of "like is known only by like" and "every being can be revealed only in its opposite".

Moltmann does not provide a thorough evaluation of these two general theories, for his interest lies in their specific applications to the knowledge of God. Nonetheless he does make this observation concerning the analogical principle:

If likeness is taken in the strict sense, knowing is a matter of anamnesis within a closed circle. If it is extended to similarities in what differs, the process of knowing can become an open circle of learning, in which new apprehensions are made and progress is possible.<sup>25</sup>

In other words, a strict application of the theory of analogy restricts the horizon of knowledge to those objects which are like the knowing subject. It is therefore a closed circle, and one that can be opened only if the possibility of knowing that which is different is

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

introduced. Therefore, Moltmann concludes that the analogical principle is insufficient on its own. "This analogical principle of knowledge is one-sided if it is not supplemented by the dialectic principle of knowledge."<sup>26</sup> What then do these considerations say concerning knowledge of God?

(ii) Revelation in contradiction and the theology of the cross. Focusing his discussion of the two epistemological principles upon the question of the knowledge of God, Moltmann finds the analogical principle again to be insufficient.

If the principle of likeness is applied strictly, God is only known by God. But if like is known only by like in this way, then revelation in something else which is not God, and in what is alien and not of God, is in fact impossible. Here God can only rule over what is similar, over other gods, but not over men and animals. If like is known only by like, then the Son of God would have had to remain in heaven, because he would be unrecognizable by anything earthly.<sup>27</sup>

If likeness alone provides the means for coming to knowledge, then there can be no exchange of knowledge between God and man.

To this point, the case has not yet been made for divine revelation according to the dialectical principle of knowledge--it is merely said that a strict application of

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., pp. 26f.

analogy will not result in knowledge of God. But in the cross of Christ Moltmann recognizes the revelation of God, and this theology of the cross must be seen as revelation in dialectic. Concerning the dialectic principle of knowledge, he writes:

Applied to Christian theology, this means that God is only revealed as 'God' in his opposite: godlessness and abandonment by God. In concrete terms, God is revealed in the cross of Christ who was abandoned by God....The epistemological principle of the theology of the cross can only be this dialectic principle: the deity of God is revealed in the paradox of the cross.<sup>28</sup>

The theology of the cross follows the dialectical principle because it is revelation in the opposite and revelation in paradox.

This is not to say that the principle of analogy is completely rejected; rather, the dialectical principle, as the starting point, makes knowledge by analogy possible.

The dialectical principle of 'revelation in the opposite' does not replace the analogical principle of 'like is known by like', but alone makes it possible. In so far as God is revealed in his opposite, he can be known by the godless and those who are abandoned by God, and it is this knowledge which brings them into correspondence with God and, as I John 3.2 says, enables them even to have the hope of being like God. But the basis and starting point of analogy is this dialectic. Without revelation in the opposite the contradictions cannot be brought into correspondence.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, Moltmann's position may be summarized as follows:

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., pp. 27f.



"the theology of the cross must begin with contradiction and cannot be built upon premature correspondences."<sup>30</sup>

Knowledge of God must begin with the contradiction of dialectical revelation, and this revelation is to be found in the theology of the cross.

(iii) Dialectic and faith. Lest these observations concerning the theology of the cross be considered the result of philosophical investigations into epistemological theory alone, it must be made clear that Moltmann's real starting point for revelation in contradiction is the experience of faith. It is interesting to note that the section that we have examined, "Revelation in Contradiction and Dialectic Knowledge", is placed within the chapter entitled "The Identity and Relevance of Faith". The recognition of revelation in contradiction is a recognition that comes by faith.

The person who experiences faith at the foot of the cross first recognizes that God is involved in Christ's passion.

When the passion of Christ becomes present to us through word and sacrament, faith is wakened in us--the Christian faith in God. The person who believes owes his freedom to Christ's representation. He believes in God for Christ's sake. God himself is involved in the history of Christ's passion. If this were not so, no

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

redeeming activity could radiate from Christ's death.<sup>31</sup>

For faith to be awakened the redemptive quality of Christ's death must be perceived, and there would be no redemption if God was not involved in this passion. Here faith that is awakened by the message of the cross simply makes an association between God and the passion of Christ. But when faith moves beyond this initial association and perceives God's being in the crucified Christ, then it finds that the knowledge of God that is gained at the cross is not analogical but dialectical:

In the crucified Christ, abandoned by God and cursed, faith can find no equivalents of this kind which provide it with an indirect, analogical knowledge of God, but encounters the very contrary. In the crucified Christ the contrary is found on several levels: in the contrary to the God who has revealed his will in the law and is in practice known in the works of the law. For Jesus was sentenced to death by the law as a blasphemer. Faith finds in him the contrary to, and liberation from, the so-called gods, who are venerated in the political theology of political religions. For Jesus died, whether rightly or wrongly, a political death as a rebel, on the cross. Finally, faith finds in him the contrary to a God who reveals himself indirectly in the creation and in history. For Jesus died abandoned by God. But if this is the point at which faith comes into being, this means first of all that Christian theology...must become a critical theory of God.<sup>32</sup>

A theology that is based on the experience of faith in the crucified Christ must be a theology of the cross. And based

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<sup>31</sup>Trinity, p. 21.

<sup>32</sup>Crucified God, pp. 68f.

as it is on the recognition of contradiction in revelation, this "theology of the cross...can only be polemical, dialectical, antithetical and critical."<sup>33</sup>

(iv) The meaning of dialectic. If we ask the question, "What does Moltmann mean by dialectic?", some insight may be gained by observing the various terms and concepts that are used in connection with dialectic. Dialectical knowledge involves contradiction, for the theology of the cross speaks of "Revelation in Contradiction and Dialectic Knowledge."<sup>34</sup> The dialectical principle is also "revelation in the opposite",<sup>35</sup> or revelation in a contrary.<sup>36</sup> Likewise it is antithetical and critical.<sup>37</sup> Finally, the dialectical principle is said to involve paradox.<sup>38</sup> The theology of the cross, therefore, may be said to be dialectical inasmuch as it is contradictory, oppositive, antithetical, critical, and paradoxical. But this in itself is a rather unrefined statement, and requires further clarification. For we must ask, wherein does the dialectic or the antithesis or the paradox of the theology

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

of the cross lie? Of what is it contradictory or critical?

We will begin this investigation into the meaning of dialectic by addressing a criticism of Moltmann's position. Referring to the statement that God is revealed only in his opposite, Richard Bauckham writes:

If it should mean that God is the opposite of that which reveals him, it is difficult to understand how revelation can ever take place at all. To take only one of the examples of Schelling which are cited by Moltmann: how can love be revealed only in hate? The example is appropriate, because Moltmann believes, that God is 'himself love in his entire Being.' The expression that love is revealed only in hate cannot mean that hate is a revelation of the love of God. It must mean that love is revealed only in the context of hate.<sup>39</sup>

The argument of this criticism can be drawn from Moltmann's own writings and restated in this way. (1) God is revealed only in his opposite.<sup>40</sup> (2) Since God is love,<sup>41</sup> and the opposite of love is hatred, then the opposite of God is hatred. (3) Therefore, God is revealed in hatred. For Bauckham, this strict following of Moltmann's argument leads to a nonsensical statement: God or the love of God is revealed only in hatred. Therefore he suggests that it would be more accurate and more reasonable to say that "love

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<sup>39</sup>Richard Bauckham, "Moltmanns Eschatologie des Kreuzes", quoted in John J. O'Donnell, Trinity and Temporality: The Christian Doctrine of God in the Light of Process Theology and the Theology of Hope (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 115.

<sup>40</sup>Crucified God, p. 27.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 244.

is revealed only in the context of hate." Is this evidence of "an inconsistent epistemology" or "a lack of precision" in Moltmann's argument?<sup>42</sup> Would it be more accurate to say that God is revealed "in the context" of his opposite? Or is Moltmann's position more accurately represented by the phrase "in his opposite"? If so, then what does this revelation oppose or contradict?

In answering these questions we must first point out that the opposition of love and hatred is not the dialectic that Moltmann himself addresses. Although the statement that the love of God is revealed in hatred is the logical conclusion of one possible line of reasoning, it is not one that Moltmann pursues. When he quotes Schelling, regarding love and hatred, he is appealing to a general theory of epistemology. But when he applies this general theory to Christian theology he states specifically the poles of the dialectic: God and godlessness or abandonment by God.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, the conclusion that the dialectic of the cross is the revelation of love in hatred may not be ascribed to Moltmann, for it is not a conclusion that follows necessarily from his argument and it is not a conclusion that he chooses.

But what of the dialectic of God and godlessness?

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<sup>42</sup>O'Donnell, Trinity and Temporality, p. 115.

<sup>43</sup>Crucified God, p. 27.

What does this revelation oppose? Of what is it contradictory? The first thing that must be said is that the theology of the cross contradicts man's image of God and opposes man's attempt to become like God. This is a major emphasis of Moltmann's understanding of the contradiction of the theology of the cross. Soon after introducing the dialectic principle of the cross, he brings the subject to bear on man's attempt at self-deification: "one must become godless oneself and abandon every kind of self-deification or likeness to God, in order to recognize the God who reveals himself in the crucified Christ."<sup>44</sup> This attempt at self-deification must be abandoned because the image of God that man seeks after is the contrary of and contradicted by the God of the cross. In this Moltmann is following Luther. Summarizing Luther's theology of the cross, he states:

In revealing himself in the crucified Christ he contradicts the God-man who exalts himself, shatters his hybris, kills his gods and brings back to him his despised and abandoned humanness....God reveals himself in the contradiction and the protest of Christ's passion to be against all that is exalted and beautiful and good, all that the dehumanized man seeks for himself and therefore perverts.<sup>45</sup>

Or as Moltmann writes elsewhere: "The knowledge of the cross is the knowledge of God...in the contrary of

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 212.

everything which dehumanized man seeks and tries to attain as the deity in him."<sup>46</sup> It is in this sense that the theology of the cross is also said to be critical. "This criticism is directed from the crucified Christ to man in his attempt to know God, and destroys the concern which guides him to knowledge."<sup>47</sup> The theology of the cross is a dialectic theology because this revelation of God in the godforsakenness of Christ on the cross opposes all that man expects and seeks in God. In order for man to come to knowledge of God, he must become, not God-like, but godless, so that he might recognize the God who reveals himself in godlessness. This aspect of the dialectic addresses and opposes man as knowing subject in pursuit of knowledge of God.

But what is to be said concerning dialectic as it relates to God himself? Does this revelation also contradict God? That is, is the dialectic also to be found between God in himself and God revealed? In this case we are concerned with that aspect of the dialectic that addresses God as the one who reveals himself. Moltmann addresses this issue in the following passage:

Ecce deus! Behold God on the cross! Thus God's incarnation 'even unto the death on the cross' is not in the last resort a matter of concealment;

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

this is his utter humiliation, in which he is completely with himself and completely with the other, the man who is dehumanized. Humiliation to the point of death on the cross corresponds to God's nature in the contradiction of abandonment. When the crucified Jesus is called the 'image of the invisible God', the meaning is that this is God, and God is like this. God is not greater than he is in this humiliation. God is not more glorious than he is in this self-surrender. God is not more powerful than he is in this helplessness. God is not more divine than he is in this humanity.<sup>48</sup>

The first thing to note is that Moltmann does not speak of a contradiction between God and his revelation, or between God in himself and God revealed. Just the opposite, it is said that in the revelation of the cross God is "completely with himself." Of the crucified Jesus it is said: "this is God, and God is like this." Therefore, in the cross of Christ there is no "matter of concealment," as may be the case with a dialectic between God hidden and God revealed. Moltmann emphasizes the unity of God in his being and God as he is revealed in the cross. "Here God has not just acted externally, in his unattainable glory and eternity. Here he has acted in himself."<sup>49</sup>

But with this emphasis upon the unity of God in himself and God revealed, Moltmann does not abandon his emphasis upon dialectical revelation or revelation in contradiction. Reviewing this same passage we find that, in

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.



the cross of Christ, God is not only "completely with himself," but also "completely with the other." Here the dialectic of the cross is a dialectic in God. Moltmann writes: "Humiliation to the point of death on the cross corresponds to God's nature in the contradiction of abandonment." We can rephrase this to say that the contradiction of abandonment, as expressed and revealed in the cross, is in God's nature. Thus Moltmann speaks of "contradiction in God"<sup>50</sup> or of God "as dialectical event."<sup>51</sup> With Moltmann, the dialectic of revelation in the cross is not a dialectic between God in himself and his revelation; it is a dialectic that is taken up into God. The cross of Christ is a dialectical revelation because the God who is revealed in the cross exists in contradiction.

The issue of dialectic in God requires further investigation, but at present it must be postponed. In this chapter it has been our intention to show that the theology of the cross is said to be dialectic because it reveals God as "a dialectical event." The issues of contradiction, dialectic and self-differentiation in God will be taken up in chapter III, where we will consider Moltmann's doctrine of the Trinity.

Let us, in conclusion, return to the criticisms of

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<sup>50</sup>Trinity, p. 40.

<sup>51</sup>Crucified God, p. 255.

Moltmann's position that were raised by Bauckham and O'Donnell. We have seen that the dialectic of the cross is understood, by Moltmann, to be a dialectic between God revealed in the cross and man's image of God, and, secondly, to be a dialectic within God. Would it be better to say, as Bauckham proposes, that God is revealed "in the context of" godlessness? Aside from the value of this proposal as a criticism of Schelling, we must say that the addition of the phrase "in the context of" does not accurately represent Moltmann's position, and in fact distorts it. If the dialectic of the cross is to be found only in the opposition between God and the context of his revelation, then the dialectic is removed from God. For Moltmann, the dialectic is to be found within God himself. Such is the case also with O'Donnell's suggestion of an inconsistent epistemology. He writes:

On the one hand, for example, Moltmann is fond of quoting 2 Tim 2:13, 'God remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself. On the other hand, he can quote Schelling with approval, '"Every being can be revealed only in its opposite. Love only in hatred, unity only in conflict.'" Applied to Christian theology, this means that God is only revealed as "God" in his opposite: godlessness and abandonment by God.' Do we have here an inconsistent epistemology?<sup>52</sup>

It is not an inconsistent epistemology if it is understood that revelation in godlessness is a revelation of God's nature. On the cross God remains faithful to himself and is

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<sup>52</sup>O'Donnell, Trinity and Temporality, pp. 114f.

completely with himself for "death on the cross corresponds to God's nature in the contradiction of abandonment."<sup>53</sup>

(v) Dialectic and suffering. Before bringing this chapter to an end, it is important to highlight the connection between dialectic and suffering in Moltmann's thought. For the dialectic of the cross is essentially a dialectic of suffering. As evidence of this we point to the fact that when Moltmann speaks of God revealed in the cross, he speaks of "God in the suffering and dying Christ."<sup>54</sup> Therefore, "the knowledge of the cross [which is a dialectical knowledge] is the knowledge of God in the suffering caused to him by dehumanized man."<sup>55</sup> Or in terms of revelation, "God reveals himself in the contradiction and the protest of Christ's passion."<sup>56</sup> The event of the cross is a dialectic of suffering because to die and to be abandoned by God is to suffer.

It is this concept of suffering, its consequences for a doctrine of God and its relation to the issue of theodicy, that will be the focus of the next chapter.

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<sup>53</sup>Crucified God, p. 205.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 212.

CHAPTER II  
ANALOGICAL DOCTRINES OF GOD AND THE QUESTIONS OF  
SUFFERING AND THEODICY

As previously stated, the purpose of this chapter is to consider Moltmann's treatment of the question of suffering in light of the theology of the cross, and to consider its impact on his doctrine of God. This chapter will form an extension of the previous one, for the issues of suffering and theodicy arise in the context of Moltmann's criticism of the analogical approaches to God and his support for a dialectical understanding of God. Therefore, our investigations into the concept of suffering will include a further discussion of the opposition between analogical and dialectical knowledge of God. And this will bring us to a consideration of the implications that Moltmann's concept of suffering has for his doctrine of God.

1. Theism as an Analogical Epistemology

In this section we are concerned to extend our examination of the principle of analogy by asking two questions: What kinds of theology does Moltmann have in mind when he speaks of an analogical approach to God? And what principles of knowledge inspire this epistemological approach? These questions will prepare us for a deeper

understanding of the opposition between analogy and dialectic, especially concerning the issue of suffering.

When Moltmann looks for a concrete example of the analogical method, he begins by appealing to Luther's criticism of natural theology.

The epistemological course which he criticizes is the course of natural theology following the Sentences of Peter Lombard....According to Luther's Thesis 19 [The Heidelberg Disputation], this method begins from the works of God--ea quae facta sunt--and draws conclusions from the effects to the cause, from the works to the one who performs them, and thus by means of a process of induction arrives back at the indirect knowledge of the invisible nature of God: his power, Godhead, wisdom and righteousness.<sup>1</sup>

According to Moltmann, this method, which moves from the effects to the cause, is based upon an "analogy of being" or a presupposition of correspondence between God and nature.

Here, first of all, is old Stoic tradition: (a) the cosmos is permeated by the divine Logos and its rationality corresponds to that of the divine being itself; (b) the seed of wisdom is innate in all men. Man comes to know the rationality of the cosmos with the aid of his innate ideas, his reason (like is known only by like), and in this way he achieves a life in accordance with his nature. But if nature (physis) corresponds to God and is itself divine, then by a life in accord with nature and reason, man achieves a life in accord with God. The Christian theological formulation used by Lombard breaks away from Stoic pantheism and pan-rationalism by introducing the difference between the Creator and the creature, but it bridges this difference between the creation and the Creator by means of the analogia entis.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Crucified God, pp. 208f.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 209.

Besides Lombard, this is also said to be the method of

Thomas Aquinas:

According to Thomas Aquinas, the starting point of the five ways of this knowledge of God is the perception of motion, of effect, of contingent being, of finite being, of ordered being. The method is that of logical inference. The ontological presupposition for this inference is the ontic connection between motion and mover, between effect and cause, between the contingent and the necessary, the finite and the infinite, between ordered being and the one who gives it rational order. There must be a community of being between effect and cause, etc., as otherwise logical inference would be impossible. There must be a reality accessible in experience and perception, which is at the same time related to God and corresponds to him, otherwise there would be no knowledge of God immediately accessible to every man.<sup>3</sup>

In all of these cases the presupposition is "that everything that corresponds to God."<sup>4</sup> Whether it is a correspondence between the cosmos and the divine Logos, or an analogia entis between creation and Creator, or a community of being between effect and cause, the world is understood as a reflection of God: "The reality of the world that can be experienced and known is like a mirror in which God's divinity, God's power, God's wisdom and God's righteousness can indirectly be known."<sup>5</sup> And based upon this presupposition, knowledge of God is acquired by means of a process of induction or the method of logical

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

inference. "Metaphysical theology makes use of logical inference from ea quae facta sunt to the invisible properties of God..., and in this way arrives at the intelligible perception of infinite being which it calls 'God.'"<sup>6</sup>

For Moltmann, this analogical concept of God is not restricted to the medieval theologies criticized by Luther. It is a widely disseminated concept that he generally refers to as "the theistic concept of God", "the metaphysical concept of God", or "the God of the pagans and the philosophers."<sup>7</sup> And beyond the realm of philosophy, the analogical approach has taken up a place in Christian thought. Beginning with the influence of Greek philosophy on the patristic period, "Christian theology has adopted this concept of God from philosophical theology down to the present day."<sup>8</sup> Thus, in entering into "the confrontation between the theology of the cross and the philosophical theism of indirect knowledge of God from the world,"<sup>9</sup> Moltmann is challenging not only some of the greatest contributors to Christian theology but also much of what Christian theology has had to say about God.

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 219.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 214f.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 214.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

## 2. Criticism of Theism: The Suffering of God

As we have seen, the analogical approach presupposes a correspondence between God and the world, and then seeks to infer a concept of God from the reality of the world. In doing so, this approach opens itself to two options, according to what the reality of the world is understood to be. If the world is understood as cosmos, "a created, accomplished world, set in motion, ordered and regulated,"<sup>10</sup> then the analogical approach is that of theism. If, on the other hand, the world is perceived as "an unjust and absurd world of triumphant evil and suffering without reason and without end,"<sup>11</sup> then the analogical approach results in atheism. Atheism, which is in itself a criticism of theism, will be considered in the next section. At present we will focus upon the theistic concept of God.

The most significant criticism that Moltmann brings to bear on the theistic concept of God concerns the suffering of God. It is his view that the confrontation between dialectical and analogical knowledge of God, or between a theology of the cross and theistic or metaphysical theology, is essentially a confrontation between God as suffering and God as impassible. In this section we will contrast the two types of theology, theology of the cross

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 219.



and theism, by addressing the following questions: How does the analogical method of theism lead to the doctrine of the apathy of God? And on what basis does the theology of the cross criticize this axiom with its principle of the suffering of God?

(i) Theism and the impassibility of God. According to Moltmann, the concept of God that is postulated by means of the analogical approach is conceived of for the benefit of man, and not for the sake of God. Concerning Aquinas's cosmological arguments for the existence of God, he writes:

He calls 'God' that which must be conceived of as the first, the all-embracing, the origin and the principle, if the finite world is to be conceived of as a unity. That is, he conceives of a last, first, absolute, unconditioned and final principle for the sake of the concept of the world as a whole. God is then not thought of for his own sake but for the sake of something else, for the sake of finite being. The heuristic interest is that of 'securing' God in and for finite being.<sup>12</sup>

Or as he writes concerning metaphysical theology, "it conceives of divine being in its qualitative superiority over finite and threatened being for the very sake of this finite being."<sup>13</sup> The analogical approach to knowledge of God always begins with creation, nature or man, and attempts to arrive at a concept of God by arguing back from the finite to the infinite. But in doing so it is simply trying to

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 211.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 219.

secure God for finite being. That is, it attempts to secure for man the possibility of infinity against the threat of finitude. The implication is that this approach bases its concept of God on what man needs or lacks, and not on what God has revealed of himself.

This becomes clearer when the issue of suffering is considered.

For metaphysics, the nature of divine being is determined by its unity and indivisibility, its lack of beginning and end, its immovability and immutability. As the nature of divine being is conceived of for the sake of finite being, it must embrace all the determinations of finite being and exclude those determinations which are directed against being. Otherwise finite being could not find a support and stay against the threatening nothingness of death, suffering and chaos in the divine being. Death, suffering and mortality must therefore be excluded from the divine being.<sup>14</sup>

The argument of the analogical approach for the impassibility of God may be summarized as follows. Since the image of the Creator is reflected in his creation, knowledge of the divine being may be acquired by a process of induction that begins with creation. Since creation, as cosmos, reflects God's order and goodness, "his absolute causality, his power and his wisdom,"<sup>15</sup> analogical theism conceives of God as qualitatively superior to man and the world, and it conceives of God as embracing that which supports man and as exclusive of all that which threatens

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 214.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 219.

man. Since man is threatened by suffering and death, it conceives of God as impassible, "apathetic", and beyond suffering and death.

Theism's axiom of the apathy of God has also been adopted by Christian theology. For example, patristic theology adhered to this principle of apathy with the following line of reasoning:

1. It was his essential incapacity for suffering that distinguished God from man and other non-divine beings, all of whom are alike subjected to suffering, as well as to transience and death.

2. If God gives man salvation by giving him a share in his eternal life, then this salvation also confers immortality, non-transience, and hence impassibility too. Apathy is therefore the essence of the divine nature and the purest manifestation of human salvation in fellowship with God.<sup>16</sup>

Beyond the Fathers of the Church, the apathetic concept of God has been carried on by Aquinas,<sup>17</sup> and by Schleiermacher,<sup>18</sup> and is the prevailing understanding of God today. "Christian theology has adopted this concept of God from philosophical theology down to the present day, because in practice down to the present day Christian faith has taken into itself the religious need of finite, threatened and mortal man for security in a higher

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<sup>16</sup>Trinity, p. 23.

<sup>17</sup>Crucified God, pp. 210f.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 214.

omnipotence and authority."<sup>19</sup>

(ii) The confrontation between theism and theology of the cross: the pride of man. If we are to ask on what grounds does the theology of the cross oppose this position of theism, then we will find that the basis of its criticism of theism is grounded in the meaning of dialectic that is inherent to a theology of the cross: that is, the criticism that the theology of the cross brings to bear on theism is an extension of its contradiction of man's representation of God and man's attempt to become like God, and an extension of the contradiction within God as suffering.<sup>20</sup> We will first focus upon the criticism of man's pride and his attempt at self-deification; in the next section we will focus upon the suffering of God.

In the first chapter we saw that the theology of the cross can be said to be dialectical inasmuch as it contradicts man's attempt at self-deification and opposes all that man expects and seeks in God. According to Moltmann, this attempt to become like God is the work of theism which conceives of God for the sake of finite being and strives to secure God for finite being. Concerning the analogical knowledge of natural theology, he writes:

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>See above pp. 21-27.

Natural knowledge of God is potentially open to men, but in fact they misuse it in the interest of their self-exaltation and their self-divinization. Just as man misuses his works to justify himself, to conceal his anxiety from God and from himself, so too he misuses the knowledge of God to serve his hybris. In this situation, this knowledge of God is useless; it merely does him damage, because it 'puffs him up' and gives him illusions about his true situation.<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, knowledge of "God in the cross of Christ is a crucifying form of knowledge, because it shatters everything to which a man can hold and on which he can build, both his works and his knowledge of reality, and precisely in so doing sets him free."<sup>22</sup>

Theism nurtures man's hubris, his attempt to secure God for himself, and the theology of the cross is the shattering of and the liberation from this pride. But Moltmann speaks of the liberating work of the theology of the cross in yet another sense which further illustrates the opposition between the theology of the cross and theism. Writing about the kind of faith that perceives God in the death of Christ on the cross, i.e. a theology of the cross, he writes:

Christian faith effects liberation from the childish projections of human needs for the riches of God; liberation from human impotence for the omnipotence of God; from human helplessness for the omnipotence of God; from human helplessness for the responsibility of God. It brings

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<sup>21</sup>Crucified God, p. 211.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 212.

liberation from the divinized father-figures by which men seek to sustain their childhood.<sup>23</sup>

Theism, which defines God in terms of what man lacks, may lead to a concept of God which is simply the projection of human impotence; the theology of the cross, which finds the power of God revealed in weakness, is the liberation from this impotence.

Finally, the opposition between these two theologies, as understood from the perspective of man's attempt at self-exaltation, is an opposition that concerns the desire for success.

The theologian of glory, and that is the 'natural man', who is incurably religious (Berdyayev), hates the cross and passion. He seeks works and success and therefore regards the knowledge of an almighty God who is always at work as being glorious and uplifting.<sup>24</sup>

The God of theism is not only a projection of man's impotence, but is also a projection of man's desire for success, resulting in a God of success. Here again, for Moltmann, the opposition between the theology of the cross and theism is clear: "The crucified God contradicts the God of success and his idol-worshippers."<sup>25</sup>

The love of success that is nurtured by a theology of glory has important consequences for the doctrine of God.

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>25</sup>Experiment Hope, p. 71.

Moltmann writes: "Religious desire for praise and might and self-affirmation are blind to suffering--their own and that of others--because they are in love with success."<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, the God of glory and success cannot suffer.

Likewise, the God of theism, the projection of human suffering for divine impassibility, cannot suffer. And

again, the God of theism, conceived of for the sake of suffering humanity, must be beyond suffering. All of this is, in effect, an indirect criticism of theism's position.

For the axiom that God cannot suffer is essentially no more than the projection of finite man's desire for eternal security and the projection of man's desire for success; it is a concept of God conceived of for the sake of man's hubris.

(iii) The confrontation between theism and the theology of the cross: the suffering of God. This brings us to the heart of Moltmann's position: the suffering of God. In Chapter I we saw that the theology of the cross is a dialectic of suffering, and that God reveals himself in the suffering of Christ on the cross.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, we saw that the real starting point for a theology of the cross is the experience of faith.<sup>28</sup> Thus, in order to answer the

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<sup>26</sup>Crucified God, p. 213.

<sup>27</sup>See above p. 27.

<sup>28</sup>See above pp. 17-19.

question of God's suffering, Moltmann appeals to the experience of Christian faith.

Moltmann's argument begins with the observation that faith in God is awakened by the event of Christ's suffering on the cross.

When the passion of Christ becomes present to us through word and sacrament, faith is wakened in us--the Christian faith in God. The person who believes owes his freedom to Christ's representation. He believes in God for Christ's sake. God himself is involved in the history of Christ's passion. If this were not so, no redeeming activity could radiate from Christ's death.<sup>29</sup>

The event of the cross awakens Christian faith in God. And the person who experiences this faith therefore associates God with the suffering of Christ, for God is believed to be involved in this suffering. This association between faith and suffering and God is evident in the way that Moltmann defines faith:

The word 'passion', in the double sense in which we use it, is well suited to express the central truth of Christian faith. Christian faith lives from the suffering of a great passion and is itself the passion for life which is prepared for suffering.<sup>30</sup>

Faith is given life from the event of the cross, which is an

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<sup>29</sup>Trinity, p. 21.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., pp. 22f. Moltmann's conviction of the essential relation between faith in God and suffering is undoubtedly grounded in his own personal experience in a prisoner-of-war camp where "the experience of misery and forsakenness and daily humiliation gradually built up into an experience of God." Experiences of God, p. 7.



event of suffering. And because this faith is faith in God, both God and suffering are experienced by faith.

But this recognition by faith of God's involvement in the passion of Christ can be expressed simply by the statement that God is revealed in Christ's passion. So Moltmann inquires further by asking:

But how is God himself involved in the history of Christ's passion? How can Christian faith understand Christ's passion as being the revelation of God, if the deity cannot suffer? Does God simply allow Christ to suffer for us? Or does God himself suffer in Christ on our behalf?<sup>31</sup>

Thus, the question of God's apathy or passion is raised within the context of Christian faith. And here Moltmann in effect changes the question to ask: Is the axiom of the apathy of God consistent with the testimony of faith? He answers:

If God is incapable of suffering, then--if we are to be consistent--Christ's passion can only be viewed as a human tragedy. For the person who can only see Christ's passion as the suffering of the good man from Nazareth, God is inevitably bound to become the cold, silent and unloved heavenly power. But that would be the end of the Christian faith. This means that Christian theology is essentially compelled to perceive God himself in the passion of Christ, and to discover the passion of Christ in God.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Trinity, pp. 21f.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 22. See also Crucified God, p. 215: "So Christian theology cannot seek to understand the death of Jesus on the presupposition of that metaphysical or moral concept of God. If this presupposition holds, the death of Jesus cannot be understood at all in theological terms. Rather, faith must take an opposite course and 'understand God's Godness from the event of this death.'"

In other words, to begin with the presupposition of God's apathy is to remove God from the event of the cross, or, as he writes elsewhere, it is to evacuate the cross of deity. "If this concept of God is applied to Christ's death on the cross, the cross must be 'evacuated' of deity, for by definition God cannot suffer and die."<sup>33</sup> And to remove God from the cross would be the end of Christian faith. "Christian theology must think of God's being in suffering and dying and finally in the death of Jesus, if it is not to surrender itself and lose its identity."<sup>34</sup> Thus, for Moltmann, there are only two mutually exclusive and opposing options: either theism and its axiom of divine impassibility, or Christian faith in the suffering of God:

God cannot suffer, God cannot die, says theism, in order to bring suffering, mortal being under his protection. God suffered in the suffering of Jesus, God died on the cross of Christ, says Christian faith, so that we might live and rise again in his future.<sup>35</sup>

Therefore, "it would seem more consistent if we ceased to make the axiom of God's apathy our starting point, and started instead from the axiom of God's passion."<sup>36</sup>

Since there are only two options, and because they are contradictory, the Christian tradition of holding to

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<sup>33</sup>Crucified God, p. 214.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>36</sup>Trinity, p. 22.

both axioms is itself contradictory.

Most theologians have simultaneously maintained the passion of Christ, God's Son, and the deity's essential incapacity for suffering--even though it was at the price of having to talk paradoxically about 'the sufferings of the God who cannot suffer'. But in doing this they have simply added together Greek philosophy's 'apathy' axiom and the central statements of the gospel. The contradiction remains--and remains unsatisfactory.<sup>37</sup>

(The contradiction remains, for even "down to the present day Christian theology has failed to develop a consistent <sup>related</sup> Christian concept of God," because it continues to hold to with the axiom of God's incapacity for suffering.<sup>38</sup> Only when this principle is given up will the Christian concept of God be consistent with "the central statements of the gospel" and with the witness of faith.

(iv) God is love and the suffering of God. Moltmann rejects theism's apathy axiom first because it contradicts the experience of faith. But it is also to be rejected because of a logical limitation:

The logical limitation of this line of argument is that it only perceives a single alternative: either essential incapacity for suffering, or a fateful subjection to suffering. But there is a third form of suffering: active suffering--the voluntary laying oneself open to another and allowing oneself to be intimately affected by him; that is to say, the suffering of passionate love.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

Theism has made the mistake of considering only one alternative to passive suffering: that of incapacity for suffering. Moltmann agrees that God is not subject to passive suffering, but he wants to consider also the possibility of active suffering.

God does not suffer out of deficiency of being, like created beings. To this extent he is 'apathetic'. But he suffers from the love which is the superabundance and overflowing of his being. In so far he is 'pathetic'.<sup>40</sup>

And this active suffering, this overflowing of God's being, is the suffering of love.

Moltmann's attempt "to develop a doctrine of theopathy,"<sup>41</sup> a doctrine of God's suffering, begins with the appeal to the experience of faith. But he soon moves on to focus upon the relationship between love and suffering. Several theologians and theologies are cited in support of this doctrine of theopathy: the Jewish doctrine of the Shekinah, the Anglican theology of C. E. Rolt, the Spanish mysticism of Miguel de Unamuno, and the Russian-Orthodox philosophy of religion of Berdyaev, among others.<sup>42</sup> But the single most important concept in this development, a concept that is treated in some form by all of the above, is the concept of love. It is said: God must suffer because he is love. What is the logic behind this assertion?

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 25. See also Crucified God, p. 230.

<sup>42</sup>See Trinity, pp. 25-47.

The first step in Moltmann's argument is acknowledgement of the biblical principle that God is love. "The theology of the divine passion is founded on the biblical tenet, 'God is love' (I John 4.16)."<sup>43</sup> Moltmann explains this statement in this way:

'God is love.' In other words, God does not just love as he is angry, chooses or rejects. He is love, that is, he exists in love. He constitutes his existence in the event of his love.<sup>44</sup>

This is his foundational principle, a biblical principle that is widely accepted in Christian theology: God exists in love.

The critical step in Moltmann's argument is the assertion that love must be open to and capable of suffering. "The more one loves,...the more vulnerable one becomes"<sup>45</sup>--and vulnerability simply means an openness to suffering. Put in other words: "Love makes a person capable of suffering."<sup>46</sup> This understanding of love and suffering is based upon a definition of love as "the acceptance of the other without regard to one's own well-being":

If love is the acceptance of the other without

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<sup>43</sup>Trinity, p. 57.

<sup>44</sup>Crucified God, p. 244.

<sup>45</sup>Experiment Hope, p. 82. See also Crucified God, p. 253: "The more one loves, the more one is open and becomes receptive to happiness and sorrow. Therefore the one who loves becomes vulnerable, can be hurt and disappointed."

<sup>46</sup>Trinity, p. 32.

regard to one's own well-being, then it contains within itself the possibility of sharing in suffering and freedom to suffer as a result of the otherness of the other....The one who is capable of love is also capable of suffering, for he also opens himself to the suffering which is involved in love, and yet remains superior to it by virtue of his love.<sup>47</sup>

This is active suffering--the suffering that one wills to take on in the act of loving another. In this sense, love implies suffering.

The logical implication of these two statements, that God is love and that love implies suffering, is that God is capable of suffering.

Were God incapable of suffering in any respect, and therefore in an absolute sense, then he would also be incapable of love....Incapability of suffering in this sense would contradict the fundamental Christian assertion that God is love.<sup>48</sup>

Since 'God is love' is a fundamental Christian assertion, so also is the assertion that God suffers.

Although it may appear as bare logic, the argument of love and suffering reveals the barrenness of theism's God as it also reveals the living hope of the God who is known by faith in the cross of Christ.

A God who cannot suffer cannot love either. A God who cannot love is a dead God.<sup>49</sup>

The God of theism is a dead God. "The God of theism is

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<sup>47</sup>Crucified God, p. 230.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Trinity, p. 38.

poor. He cannot love nor can he suffer."<sup>50</sup> And "for a man who is aware of the riches of his own nature in his love, his suffering, his protest and his freedom, such a God is not a necessary and supreme being, but a highly dispensable and superfluous being."<sup>51</sup> Opposing this God of theism, the God of the cross exists in love and through this love suffers for the life of man.

God suffers, God allows himself to be crucified and is crucified, and in this consummates his unconditional love that is so full of hope....By the secular cross on Golgotha, understood as open vulnerability and as the love of God for loveless and unloved, dehumanized men, God's being and God's life is open to true man.<sup>52</sup>

Thus the opposition between theism and the theology of the cross: the God of theism, who cannot suffer, is contradicted by the experience of faith, by which the suffering God of the cross is known. The God of theism, who cannot love, is a dead God, superfluous and dispensable; the God of the cross, through the suffering of love, opens his life to the life of man.

### 3. Atheism and the Question of Theodicy

"The theology of God's passion which we have described presupposes the theodicy question as the universal background to its understanding and as its particular point

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<sup>50</sup>Crucified God, p. 253.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 223.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., pp. 248f.

of relevance."<sup>53</sup> Here Moltmann shifts his focus from the suffering of God to the suffering of humanity, and from theism to atheism's question of theodicy. This shift in focus is, for Moltmann, a logical extension of the previous discussion, for the concept of God and the issue of his suffering and the human experience of suffering are interrelated.

God and suffering belong together, just as in this life the cry for God and the suffering experienced in pain belong together. The question about God and the question about suffering are a joint, a common question.<sup>54</sup>

Thus human suffering is said to be the background to the question of God and his suffering, for it gives rise to this question; and the experience of human suffering is also that which brings relevance to the question of God, for a concept of God must speak to the human cry for help, or vindication, or a more just order if it is to be relevant. Likewise, atheism's focus upon the suffering of man has something to say about the God of theism, for atheism's question of theodicy opposes theism's apathetic God. It has been said that theodicy is the motivating force behind Moltmann's "reformulation of theism."<sup>55</sup> But it would be more

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<sup>53</sup>Trinity, p. 47.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>55</sup>G. Clarke Chapman, Jr., "Hope and the ethics of formation: Moltmann as an interpreter of Bonhoeffer", Studies in Religion XII (1983), p. 457.



accurate to represent Moltmann as saying that atheism criticizes and brings about the end of theism. With atheism's question of suffering and theodicy "the theism of the almighty and kindly God comes to an end."<sup>56</sup> This section will consider the issues of man's suffering, theodicy and atheism in order to further the discussion of God's suffering and the conflict between theism and the theology of the cross.

(i) Atheism and the suffering of man: the criticism of theism. Although theism and atheism are often viewed as diametrically opposed positions concerning the question of God, Moltmann finds a common ground between them. We have seen that theism follows a principle of analogy in coming to a concept of God. It begins with the presupposition that there is a community of being between creation and the Creator, and then argues for a concept of God by means of the method of logical inference. According to Moltmann, atheism challenges theism on the basis of its presupposition, but it does not challenge, and in fact makes use of, theism's method of argument:

Metaphysical atheism, too, takes the world as a mirror of the deity. But in the broken mirror of an unjust and absurd world of triumphant evil and suffering without reason and without end it does not see the countenance of a God, but only the grimace of absurdity and nothingness. Atheism, too, draws a conclusion from the existence of the

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<sup>56</sup>Trinity, p. 48.

finite world as it is to its cause and its destiny. But there it finds no good and righteous God, but a capricious demon, a blind destiny, a damning law or an annihilating nothingness.<sup>57</sup>

Atheism is therefore called "the brother of theism," because it "makes use of logical inference" and, like theism, it understands the world as the reflection of a higher being.<sup>58</sup>

But this in itself is a criticism of theism, for, even though they both follow the same analogical principle, atheism arrives at a radically different conclusion. They arrive at different conclusions because of the presuppositions on which each bases its logical argument: that is, they differ from each other according to how the reality of the world is understood. Theism understands the world as a cosmos, regulated, ordered and meaningful; atheism understands the world as meaningless, unjust and absurd. According to Moltmann, each position is as justified as the other.

If one argues back from the state of the world and the fact of its existence to cause, ground and principle, one can just as well speak of 'God' as of the devil, of being as of nothingness, of the meaning of the world as of absurdity....With just as much justification as that with which theism speaks of God, the highest, best, righteous being,

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<sup>57</sup>Crucified God, pp. 219f.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 221: "Here atheism demonstrates itself to be the brother of theism. It too makes use of logical inference. It too sees the world as the mirror of another, higher being."

it [atheism] speaks of the nothingness which manifests itself in all the annihilating experiences of suffering and evil. It is the inescapable antithesis of theism.<sup>59</sup>

Theism's method of argument allows for and in fact provokes its antithesis.<sup>60</sup> This is an important criticism of the analogical approach to God.

But the most important criticism brought by atheism against theism concerns the suffering of man. Atheism begins with the fact of suffering and then confronts the God of theism with the injustice of this suffering world.

It is in suffering that the whole human question about God arises; for incomprehensible suffering calls the God of men and women in question. The suffering of a single innocent child is an irrefutable rebuttal of the notion of the almighty and kindly God in heaven. For a God who lets the innocent suffer and who permits senseless death is not worthy to be called God at all.<sup>61</sup>

Taking atheism's accusation seriously, Moltmann believes this to be the end of the God of theism: "suffering is the rock of atheism, for it is on this rock that every theism runs aground which lives from the illusion of 'an unscathed world'".<sup>62</sup> Theism fails not only because it holds to the axiom of the apathy of God, but also because it fails to take account of the suffering of man.

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>Trinity, p. 47.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 48.

The experience of suffering gives rise to the question of theodicy: Si Deus justus--unde malum--If God is just--whence evil? Based as it is in the concrete experience of pain and death, "it is not really a question at all, in the sense of something we can ask or not ask, like other questions." It is not optional, but forces itself upon us. "It is the open wound of life in this world."<sup>63</sup> Theism's answer to this pressing question merely evades the issue:

Cosmological theism answers this...question with a justification of this world as God's world. In so doing it passes over the history of suffering of this world.<sup>64</sup>

Theism has no answer. On the other hand, atheism answers its own question by saying there is no God:

'The only excuse for God would be for him not to exist.' Here the non-existence of God is made into an excuse for him in view of an unsuccessful creation. That is atheism as a theodicy.<sup>65</sup>

The argument of atheism says that because the experience of innocent suffering cannot be denied, the existence of a just and righteous God must be denied.

(ii) Criticism of atheism. Moltmann acknowledges as valid the argument that atheism brings against theism. Inasmuch as theism's concept of God does not acknowledge human

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>64</sup>Crucified God, p. 225.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

suffering, it is superfluous, irrelevant and dispensable. Inasmuch as it passes over "the open wound of life", it is apart from life in this world. Therefore, Moltmann speaks of the recognition of man's suffering and helplessness, his protest against injustice, as the truth of atheism.<sup>66</sup> But this is not to say that atheism is beyond criticism. It is right in raising the question about human suffering and the question of God; but it also fails, like theism, to address adequately the question of suffering and God.

This criticism of atheism is based upon the observation that atheism is dependent upon its brother. If one understands atheism as a protest against theism, as a protest, in light of man's suffering, against the God of theism, or as "metaphysical rebellion",<sup>67</sup> then atheism has need of this God:

But if metaphysical theism disappears, can protest atheism still remain alive? For its protest against injustice and death, does not it need an authority to accuse, because it makes this authority responsible for the state of affairs? And can it make this authority responsible if it has not previously declared it to be behind the way in which the world is and exists?<sup>68</sup>

In short, atheism requires an authority to protest against. But it faces this problem: the God against which it rebels is also the God that it eliminates. The God from which it

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 223.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 221.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

derives its existence, as the object of its protest, is abolished. The question of theodicy that atheism raises must itself be eliminated if the answer is given that there is no God. For how can there be a question of theodicy if there is no God?

But the experience of suffering and the question of theodicy remain, and atheism, having abandoned God, is still left with the problem of suffering. And atheism must still be judged according to its solution to this problem. It has shown, by raising the question of suffering, that theism is insufficient for the suffering person. It must answer its own question. According to Moltmann, atheism's answer, that God does not exist, is as inadequate as theism's answer:

The atheism for which this world is all there is, runs aground on the rock of suffering too. For even the abolition of God does not explain suffering and does not assuage pain. The person who cries out in pain over suffering has his own dignity, which no atheism can rob him of. The story of Job makes this evident too. His atheistic wife's advice, 'Curse God and die' (Job 2.9), does not reach the soul of the righteous man at all. He rejects it from the outset. Since that time no atheism can fall below Job's level. Beneath this level there is no atheism that deserves to be taken seriously; there is merely triviality.<sup>69</sup>

This kind of atheism is trivial because it does not speak to the pain of the one who suffers. It merely abolishes God in an attempt to excuse him. But this is simply to pass over the real issue and to avoid the question of suffering.

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<sup>69</sup>Trinity, p. 48.

Thus, atheism is as guilty as theism. "There is no theistic answer to the question of suffering and injustice, but far less is there any atheistic possibility of avoiding this question and being content with the world."<sup>70</sup>

(iii) The theology of the cross: the suffering of God and the suffering of man. Moltmann is thus led to find a path between the extremes of theism and atheism. One cannot pass over the question of human suffering, as does theism, but neither can one accept atheism's answer to this question by simply abolishing God. One must acknowledge and face up to suffering, but at the same time one must continue to hope and long for God.

Why must one hold to both suffering and a desire for God? According to Moltmann, the experience of suffering and the experience of hope in God are intimately connected experiences of human life.

If it were not for their desire for life, the living would not suffer. If there were no love of justice, there would be no rebellion against innocent suffering. If there were no 'longing for the Wholly Other', we should come to terms with the here and now, and accept the absence of what does not exist. If there were no God, the world as it is would be all right. It is only the desire, the passion, the thirst for God which turns suffering into conscious pain and turns the consciousness of pain into a protest against suffering.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>Crucified God, p. 224.

<sup>71</sup>Trinity, p. 48.

A person becomes conscious of the injustice and horror of suffering only when the thirst for righteousness or God leads to the protest against suffering. Up until then, suffering is simply a fact of existence. But suffering becomes conscious of itself, recognizes that things might be otherwise, and recognizes that what is is unjust only by recognizing what otherwise might be, what is just, by means of a longing for God. Atheism, as we have seen, removes God from the theodicy question and thereby silences the question. But theodicy must embrace both acknowledgement of suffering and the longing for righteousness that turns suffering into a protest against injustice. This is what Moltmann calls "the dialectic of theodicy's open question: if suffering calls in question the notion of a just and kindly God, then conversely the longing for justice and goodness calls suffering in question and makes it conscious pain."<sup>72</sup>

Moltmann's attempt to address theodicy by means of a middle position between theism and atheism, the "dialectic of theodicy", is based upon the protest atheism of Max Horkheimer. Here Moltmann distinguishes between traditional atheism and protest atheism. Whereas traditional atheism is satisfied with abolishing God, protest atheism continues to long for righteousness and justice. Its position is

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 49. See also Crucified God, p. 225.



summed up in Horkheimer's remark: "The longing that the murderer should not triumph over his innocent victim."<sup>73</sup> Horkheimer's position is atheistic for it does not allow for any positive statements about God, and God remains unspeakable. But it distinguishes itself from traditional atheism by longing "for the wholly other", which is "the longing for the righteousness of God in the world."<sup>74</sup> Moltmann summarizes this position as follows:

In Horkheimer we find a protesting faith which takes us beyond the crude opposition of theism and atheism. 'In view of the suffering in this world, in view of the injustice, it is impossible to believe the dogma of the existence of an omnipotent and all-gracious God,' he says against optimistic theism. In view of the suffering in this world, in view of the injustice, however, it is also impossible not to hope for truth and righteousness and that which provides them. That must be said on the other side. For radical criticism of the here and now is impossible without a desire for the wholly other. Without the idea of truth and that which provides it, there is no knowledge of its opposite, the forsakenness of men.<sup>75</sup>

True theodicy both rejects the almighty and kindly God of theism and continues to hope for the justice of God.

Granting the necessity of theodicy's two sides, its dialectic, we must still ask if the position of Moltmann and protest atheism in fact answers the problem of theodicy. Does it come any closer than traditional atheism to a

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<sup>73</sup>Crucified God, p. 223.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 224.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., pp. 224f.

solution to the problem of suffering? Moltmann answers frankly that his position does not answer the question for there is no answer to theodicy:

No one can answer the theodicy question in this world, and no one can get rid of it. Life in this world means living with this open question, and seeking the future in which the desire for God will be fulfilled, suffering will be overcome, and what has been lost will be restored.<sup>76</sup>

One must go on living without an answer to this question because the dialectic of theodicy, the dialectic of hope and suffering, is an unresolvable fact of life in this world. Moltmann expresses this dialectic in terms of love and suffering:

The one who suffers is not just angry and furious and full of protest against his fate. He suffers because he lives, and he is alive because he loves....But the more one loves, the more one is open and becomes receptive to happiness and sorrow. Therefore the one who loves becomes vulnerable, can be hurt and disappointed. This may be called the dialectic of human life: we live because and in so far as we love--and we suffer and die because and in so far as we love. In this way we experience life and death in love....Love makes life so lively and death so deadly. Conversely, it also makes life deadly and death lively. The problem of its existence is sustaining this dialectic: how can one continue to love despite grief, disappointment and death?<sup>77</sup>

Whether it is called hope, longing, faith, or love,

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<sup>76</sup>Trinity, p. 49.

<sup>77</sup>Crucified God, pp. 252f.

Moltmann's point is that the despair of suffering does not stand alone in human life.<sup>78</sup> One despairs of suffering and death because of the love of life, the hope for justice and the longing for righteousness. This dialectic of life is a given fact, and one which cannot be resolved. It is rather a question of finding the faith to continue to live with this dialectic, "the open wound of life". Thus the "task of faith and theology [is] to make it possible for us to survive, to go on living, with this open wound."<sup>79</sup> Traditional theism and atheism fail, not because they are unable to resolve the question, but because neither position gives adequate recognition to both aspects of this dialectic, nor do they live and encourage life within its tension. Neither theism's "slickly explanatory answer" nor atheism's attempt "to soften the question down" is adequate,

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<sup>78</sup>In other words, the atheistic protester displays a longing for some hope or ideal that accompanies his suffering and makes it into a protest. It is of course possible that the atheist will despair of suffering and injustice without any sustained hope. But in this case the recognition of complete nothingness and total despair can lead only to suicide. But suicide simply "removes the protester himself from the game and resolves the contradiction by putting the contradictor to one side." Crucified God, p. 223. But for the person who is not led to suicide, Moltmann asks: "But what keeps Ivan Karamazov's protest alive? What keeps alive the protester himself, when he wants to hand back his ticket to 'such a world?'" Ibid. Moltmann's answer is that any expression of atheism that does not choose suicide, but keeps the protest alive, is sustained by a hope or longing for some kind of meaning, justice, or righteousness.

<sup>79</sup>Trinity, p. 49.

for "the more a person believes, the more deeply he experiences pain over the suffering in the world, and the more passionately he asks about God and the new creation."<sup>80</sup>

But Moltmann does not stop with this dialectic of life. Theodicy's dialectic of man's suffering and man's hope is not his final word. If the task of theology is to encourage hope in the face of suffering, to encourage life with its suffering, then such a theology must be a theology of the cross that draws its faith from the suffering God of the cross. For the theology of the cross is simply faith and hope in the suffering of God: "God suffered in the suffering of Jesus, God died on the cross of Christ, says Christian faith, so that we might live and rise again in his future."<sup>81</sup> This is the point at which Moltmann distinguishes himself from protest atheism. Protest atheism, "the pure longing that the murderer shall not triumph over his victim," is "a true and worthy human attitude, but it is hard to sustain without becoming bitter or superficial."<sup>82</sup> Moltmann respects the honesty with which protest atheism faces up to the experience of suffering, and he applauds the hope and longing that it embodies in the face of suffering. But he also wonders, it

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid.

<sup>81</sup>Crucified God, p. 216.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 253.

seems, how such hope will be sustained. For Moltmann, "the only way past protest atheism is through a theology of the cross which understands God as the suffering God in the suffering of Christ";<sup>83</sup> that is, it is only in the theology of the cross that one finds the hope to endure suffering.

The faith which springs from the God event on the cross does not give a theistic answer to the question of suffering, why it must be as it is, nor is it ossified into a mere gesture of protest, but leads sorely tried, despairing love back to its origin. 'Whoever abides in love abides in God and God in him' (I John 4.17). Where we suffer because we love, God suffers in us. Where he has suffered the death of Jesus and in so doing has shown the force of his love, men also find the power to continue to love, to sustain that which annihilates them and to 'endure what is dead' (Hegel).<sup>84</sup>

In the God of the cross, whose love is revealed in suffering, the believer finds the strength to love life with its suffering. In the suffering God, discovered by faith, the believer finds the strength to maintain faith in the face of suffering. Not simply "righteousness" or "the wholly other", the believer finds courage in the crucified God, who "is known as the human God in the crucified Son of Man."<sup>85</sup>

In this chapter we have examined the confrontation between the analogical and the dialectical doctrines of God.

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<sup>83</sup>Ibid., p. 227.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 254.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., p. 227.

Theism's concept of God holds to the apathetic axiom; the theology of the cross recognizes, by faith, the suffering love of God. For Moltmann, Christian theology, if it is to be consistent, must acknowledge the witness of faith and must claim its own principle that God is love by holding to the principle of God's suffering. The analogical principle has been criticized also because it leads to one-sided concepts of God. In the case of theism it leads to a concept of God that ignores the suffering of man; in the case of atheism it leads to a concept of God as demon or nothingness, a concept that abandons man's hope for righteousness and his love of life. The theology of the cross, however, speaks of both suffering and hope. The dialectic of the cross speaks to the dialectic of life. For man's love of life is sustained, in the face of a life of suffering, by the event of the cross, in which the love and suffering of God are revealed. We now turn to examine the consequences that the doctrine of God's suffering has for an understanding of God's being.

### CHAPTER III

#### A DIALECTICAL DOCTRINE OF GOD: THE TRINITY

It is the purpose of this chapter, as stated previously, to consider the consequences of Moltmann's theology of the cross for his doctrine of God. We have seen in the first two chapters that the theology of the cross speaks of dialectical epistemology and the suffering of God. The intention of this chapter may therefore be restated as follows: to examine the conclusions for a doctrine of God that follow from the dialectic of suffering in Moltmann's theology of the cross.

In examining the theological implications of the theology of the cross, two principal themes emerge: God as Trinity and the dialectical history of God. O'Donnell speaks of the importance of Trinity and history, in Moltmann's thought, in the following passage:

It is Moltmann's conviction that an adequately developed theology of the cross leads to a trinitarian theology....It is important to note here at the outset that history plays a crucial role in this development....The Christian account of God has its origins in an historical event, more precisely in the event of the cross.... Moltmann contends that when this history is adequately interpreted--and that means theologically interpreted--it is seen to be nothing less than the history of God himself. And in this historical event God shows himself to be the trinitarian God, i.e. this history is itself

the event involving Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup>

The doctrine of the Trinity emerges from the historical event of the cross; and this event of the cross is the beginning of the history of God, which is the history of the Trinity. Thus it can be said that, for Moltmann, the concepts of Trinity and the history of God follow from the theology of the cross. These two themes will form the principal foci of this chapter.

Caught up with these two themes is the principle of dialectic, which, for Moltmann, continues to be the principle by which man comes to an understanding of God and that by which God reveals himself. The dialectical principle of the cross can be said to be the principle of understanding both the Trinity and the history of God. The doctrine of the Trinity issues from the dialectical relationship between Jesus and his Father as witnessed in the event of the cross. And Moltmann's concept of the history of God is the development of that dialectical relationship through time. Our discussion of the principal themes of the Trinity and the history of God will therefore also include a consideration of the contrast between the principles of dialectic and analogy. For the doctrine of the Trinity, that issues from a dialectical understanding of the cross, stands in contrast to analogical monotheism. And the

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<sup>1</sup>O'Donnell, Trinity and Temporality, pp. 111f.



dialectical history of God, or history in God, stands in contrast to the analogical understanding of God in history. Having introduced these themes, we will now explore their development in light of the theology of the cross. Our first task shall be to examine the doctrine of the Trinity as a consequence of the theology of the cross and in contrast to Christian monotheism.

### 1. Theology of the Cross and the Doctrine of the Trinity

According to Moltmann, the doctrine of the Trinity has not carried any special significance in the history of Western Christian thought. Despite the fact that the traditional trinitarian formula continues to be recited in creeds, liturgies and prayers, trinitarian thinking has not had a significant influence upon Western theology. As evidence of this, Moltmann makes the observation that the Christian doctrines of incarnation, grace, creation, eschatology, faith and ethics are most often expressed in monotheistic terms, with no reference to the Trinity. It appears to be sufficient to use the simple concept of God and "no trinitarian differentiation in God seems to be necessary."<sup>2</sup> Thus Moltmann refers to "the religious conceptions of many Christians" as "no more than a weakly Christianized monotheism."<sup>3</sup> It is referred to as

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<sup>2</sup>Crucified God, p. 236.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

Christian monotheism because the religious conceptions that are espoused would not have to change in the event that the doctrine of the Trinity was done away with. For many Christians, the doctrine of the Trinity is "a speculation for theological specialists, which has nothing to do with real life."<sup>4</sup> It is against the background of this dearth of understanding of the Trinity that Moltmann endeavours to uncover the practical and theological significance of this doctrine by relating it to a true theology of the cross.

In this section we will follow Moltmann's discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity, especially as it relates to the theology of the cross. The first part will examine the development of "Christian monotheism" and its relation to the analogical thinking of theism. The second part will examine the theology of the cross as a basis for the doctrine of the Trinity.

(i) Christian monotheism and the simple concept of God. Our first question is to ask, "From what source or influence did Christian theology draw its monotheistic tendencies?" This question presupposes, as does Moltmann, that the Christian gospel proclaims a trinitarian God, and it therefore asks about the origin of monotheistic thinking in Christianity.

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<sup>4</sup>Trinity, p. 1. For further discussion of the plight of trinitarian thinking in the West, see Crucified God, pp. 236f., and Trinity, pp. 1f.

The first point in answer to this question is that Moltmann does not refer to the Bible as an important source of monotheism. Although at times he acknowledges a "biblical monotheism", for the most part he ascribes Christianity's monotheistic theology to the influence of Greek philosophy and to the rise of what was described in Chapter II as theism.<sup>5</sup> When speaking of the biblical understanding of God, he uses the concept of "unity", which is to be distinguished from the monism of Greek philosophy. For example, he writes:

The axioms of philosophical monotheism--apatheia and monas--are not applicable to the Jewish experience of God. What then, however, is the deeper meaning of the Jewish confession of the One, Only God? In the historical experience of God,...the Shema meant 'to confess God's unity--the Jew calls it: to unify God.'<sup>6</sup>

According to Moltmann, biblical references to God as One or the only God "express the unity which God is" and must "be distinguished from the monas of numerical unity as the

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<sup>5</sup>Moltmann does not give an extended discussion of the Bible as a source of monotheistic theology. The statement that he acknowledges some biblical basis for monotheism is taken from the following statement: "Christian philosophy early tried to combine biblical monotheism with the philosophical monotheism of the Aristotelian school." Jürgen Moltmann, "The Cross and Civil Religion", trans. Chr. Kaiser Verlag and Matthias-Grunewald-Verlag, in Religion and Political Society, ed. The Institute of Christian Thought (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1974), p. 24.

<sup>6</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, Jewish Monotheism and Christian Trinitarian Doctrine: A Dialogue by Pinches Lapidé and Jürgen Moltmann, trans. Leonard Swidler (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), p. 51.

foundation of all mathematical concepts."<sup>7</sup> The concept of "the unity which God is" will be discussed in the next section under the trinitarian theology of the cross. At present we will inquire as to "the monas of numerical unity" and the influence of philosophical monotheism upon Christian thought.

Reviewing the Western tradition, Moltmann finds two principal expressions of monotheistic thought, one characteristic of the ancient and medieval worlds and the other a product of the modern world. They are: God as supreme substance and God as absolute subject. The first understanding of God, a product of the Greek world, was adopted by Christianity during the patristic period and found its greatest expression in Thomas Aquinas and his cosmological proofs for the existence of God. As discussed in Chapter II, it presupposes that the world, as an ordered cosmos, reflects the nature of the divine being. And based on this correspondence it employs the method of logical inference to argue from the reality of the world to the invisible properties of God. Based as it is upon the same presuppositions and logical method, the argument for the nature of God as monistic parallels the argument for the "apathy" of God.<sup>8</sup> Moltmann explains the monistic argument in this way:

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>8</sup>See above pp. 28-36.

The divine nature...is one, necessary, immovable, infinite, unconditional, immortal and impassible. What is divine is defined by certain characteristics of the finite cosmos, and these are marked by negation. That is the via negativa. Because the Divine is one, it is the origin and measure of the Many in the cosmos.<sup>9</sup>

God as numerical unity is reflected in the numerical unity of the cosmos: "one God, one logos and nomos, one cosmos."<sup>10</sup> And God as one stands in contrast to the multiplicity within the cosmos. As we have seen, Moltmann does not take issue with the analogical method of argument. Its argument is stringent. But its presupposition, that the whole of reality is to be understood as an ordered cosmos that reflects the nature of God, is suspect. In fact, the change in the "view of reality as a whole",<sup>11</sup> from ancient to modern times, has given rise to the supplanting of this analogical understanding of God, "God as supreme substance", by the understanding of "God as absolute subject".

Moltmann understands this change in the understanding of God as rooted in a shift in the perspective of reality from a cosmological perspective to an anthropological perspective. For the modern world, under the influence of Descartes, "reality is no longer understood as the divine cosmos," but rather "the centre of this world and its point

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<sup>9</sup>Trinity, p. 11.

<sup>10</sup>"The Cross and Civil Religion", p. 24.

<sup>11</sup>Trinity, p. 12.

of reference is the human subject."<sup>12</sup> But though the presupposition has changed, man continues to look for an understanding of God as reflected in that which is understood to be reality. The mirror of God is no longer to be found in the cosmos but rather in human subjectivity:

If man can no longer understand himself in the light of the world and its cohesions, but has to comprehend the world and its cohesions in the light of his own plans for its domination, then it would seem the obvious course for him to look for the mirror in which knowledge of God is to be found in his own subjectivity....The proof of God drawn from the world gives way to the proof of God drawn from existence, from the soul, from the immediate self-consciousness.<sup>13</sup>

The means of coming to knowledge of God is thus to be found in the personal subject: "God is not to be found in the explicable world of things; he has to be sought for in the experienceable world of the individual self."<sup>14</sup> And God is found to be the archetype of man: "the archetype of the

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 13. For an explanation of this transition, see ibid.: "The method of the cosmological proofs of God rests on the premise that there is an ordered cosmos. The perceiving person finds himself existing in this order as a living being endowed with soul and spirit. The 'house of being' is his worldly home. This thinking in terms of being was superseded by the rise of modern, European subjectivity. Once man makes himself the subject of his own world by the process of knowing it, conquering it and shaping it, the conception of the world as cosmos is destroyed. Descartes split the world into res cogitans and res extensa; and this modern dichotomization has made the ontological order of being obsolete, and the monarchy of the highest substance obsolete at the same time."

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

free, reasonable, sovereign person, who has complete disposal over himself."<sup>15</sup> God is therefore "absolute personality", "the personal God", or "the absolute subject".

Although Moltmann does criticize the presuppositions, arguments and conclusions of these two positions,<sup>16</sup> his main argument against them is that their monotheistic emphasis challenges and supplants the doctrine of the Trinity. Even though both views of God have attempted to incorporate the doctrine of the Trinity, or to unify the three Persons under the concept of the One God, they inevitably lead to the destruction of the concept of Trinity. For example, such is the case with the concept of God as supreme substance:

The result is that the first unity forces out the second. Consequently, not only is there undue stress on the unity of the triune God, but there is also a reduction of the tri-unity to the One God. The representation of the trinitarian

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid. See also ibid.: "The more, therefore, man experiences himself as subject--even if finite subject--over against the world of objects he has subjected, the more he recognizes in God, not the supreme substance of the world, but the infinite, perfect and absolute subject, namely the archetype of himself. God is for him no longer the ground of the world, but the ground of the soul. He is sought, not as the secret of the world, but as the secret of his own soul."

<sup>16</sup>For a criticism of philosophical monotheism and Aquinas' cosmological proofs of God, see Trinity, p. 12. For a discussion of political monotheism, a variation of philosophical monotheism, see "Religion and Political Society", pp. 24-27. For a criticism of moral monotheism, a variation of "God as absolute subject"--the personification of moral energy, see Trinity, pp. 6f.

Persons in a homogeneous divine substance, presupposed and recognizable from the cosmos, leads unintentionally but inescapably to the disintegration of the doctrine of the Trinity in abstract monotheism.<sup>17</sup>

This is also true of the understanding of God as absolute subject:

Here the problems for the doctrine of the Trinity resemble those we discovered in the earlier Trinity of substance: the unity of the absolute subject is stressed to such a degree that the trinitarian Persons disintegrate into mere aspects of the one subject. But the special Christian tradition and proclamation cannot be conceived of within the concept of the absolute subject. To represent the trinitarian Persons in the one, identical divine subject leads unintentionally but inescapably to the reduction of the doctrine of the Trinity to monotheism.<sup>18</sup>

As Moltmann has written: "Christianity is not 'radically monotheistic' (H. Richard Niebuhr). Christianity is trinitarian."<sup>19</sup> Therefore, any concept of God that gives emphasis to a monotheistic understanding and dissolves the Trinity into a simple concept of God is not consistent with Christian faith. It is for this reason that the analogical concepts of God as supreme substance and absolute subject must be rejected.

But in order for one to re-establish the doctrine of the Trinity as the Christian understanding of God, it is not sufficient simply to analyse and reject the tendencies

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<sup>17</sup>Trinity, p. 17.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>19</sup>"Religion and Political Society", p. 26.



towards monotheism. One must also ask how the Christian conception of Trinity failed so that it was superseded by monotheism. What is it about trinitarian thinking that allows it to be dissolved into a simple concept of God? According to Moltmann, the doctrine of the Trinity has been rendered superfluous, mere speculative theology and secondary to the concept of the one God, because in the distinction between God for us and God in himself this doctrine has been assigned to the mystery of God in himself which is to be adored, and has been set apart from the practical importance of God for us. A brief historical survey will help to explain this point. The beginnings of such a distinction can be found in the theology of the Cappadocian fathers. Although the Trinity was central to their theology, their theology "made a distinction between the 'immanent Trinity' and the 'Trinity in the economy of salvation', and thus distinguished in its own way between the inner being of God and salvation history, as between original and copy, idea and manifestation."<sup>20</sup> But the most significant contribution to the understanding of the Trinity as mere speculation was made by Thomas Aquinas. He set the course for Western theology by making the distinction with two separate tractates: De Deo uno and De Deo triuno. Unity, understood as numerical simplicity, was

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<sup>20</sup>Crucified God, pp. 239f.

thereby given precedence over a trinitarian understanding.

First of all comes the proof and the assurance that there is a God and that God is one. Only after that is the doctrine of the triune God developed....The divine being is one, immovable, impassible, and so forth. The specifically Christian doctrine of God can change nothing about all this, even though it has to talk about the triune God and the sufferings of the Son of God on the cross.<sup>21</sup>

Following the distinction made by the Cappadocians between immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity, Luther and Melanchthon spoke of "God in himself" and "God for us". Here a contrast was drawn between God in his majesty, who is not open to the understanding of man, and God veiled in flesh, or God revealed to humankind. And thereby a distinction was also drawn between theoretical or speculative theology (God in himself) and practical theology (God for us). But this distinction led to the relegation of the Trinity to speculative theology because the Trinity was not considered to be part of the economy of salvation, God for us.<sup>22</sup> Finally, Moltmann points to the contributions of Kant and Schleiermacher. With Kant's emphasis upon moral practice, the Trinity was considered to be no part of true

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<sup>21</sup>Trinity, p. 17. See also Crucified God, p. 239.

<sup>22</sup>Crucified God, p. 237: "The transition among the Reformers from pure theological considerations to a critical theory of theological practice for faith in fact led to a surrender of the doctrine of the Trinity, because in the tradition of the early church the doctrine of the Trinity had its place in the praise and vision of God, and not in the economy of salvation."

religion because it had no practical consequences.<sup>23</sup>

Schleiermacher held Christianity to be a "monotheistic mode of belief" and gave the Trinity only secondary importance because the Trinity cannot be testified to by "immediate self-consciousness" and cannot be verified from personal experience.<sup>24</sup>

It is not the case that all of these writers condemned the doctrine of the Trinity. Moltmann's point is simply that they all contributed in one way or another to two tendencies in Christian trinitarian thinking. The first was to give priority to the "oneness" of God and to give the trinitarian doctrine a secondary and inferior position. The second was to exclude this doctrine from the history of salvation and from the practical consequences of "God for us", and to restrict it to the speculative realm of the mystery of "God in himself". But it is because of these tendencies that the doctrine of the Trinity has been abandoned in favour of the unity of God and has come to be considered "as no more than theological speculation with no relevance for life."<sup>25</sup> To this situation Moltmann proposes a trinitarian theology of the cross--not a philosophical speculation concerning the mystery of the

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<sup>23</sup>See Crucified God, p. 238 and Trinity, pp. 6f.

<sup>24</sup>See Crucified God, p. 238 and Trinity, pp. 2f.

<sup>25</sup>Crucified God, p. 237.

Trinity, but rather a theology that asks "how God is to be understood in the event of the cross of Christ."<sup>26</sup>

We cannot say of God who he is of himself and in himself; we can only say who he is for us in the history of Christ which reaches us in our history. Nor can we achieve it in the forms of modern thought which are so related to experience and practice. Or can we make something practical and relevant to Christian self-understanding out of the way in which God acts towards God? In that case we would have to give up the distinction made in the early church and in tradition between the 'God in himself' and the 'God for us', or between 'God in his majesty' and 'God veiled in the flesh of Christ', as Luther and Melancthon put it. We would have to find the relationship of God to God in the reality of the event of the cross and therefore in our reality, and consider it there. In practice that would amount to a 'complete reshaping of the doctrine of the Trinity', because in that case the nature of God would have to be the human history of Christ and not a divine 'nature' separate from man.<sup>27</sup>

Before moving on to examine Moltmann's trinitarian theology of the cross, it is important to consider one more aspect of Christian monotheism. This concerns its understanding of the cross in terms of the doctrine of the two natures. Moltmann's attempt to develop a practical doctrine of the Trinity is grounded in the theology of the cross. This suggests that he is disputing not only Western Christianity's treatment of trinitarian thought but also its understanding of the cross of Christ. This raises the question: What is it about theism's understanding of the

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 238.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., pp. 238f.

cross that has barred the way to a trinitarian theology of the cross?

According to Moltmann, there is an essential connection between the monotheism of philosophical theism and the Christian doctrine of the two natures in Christ. Theism draws a fundamental distinction between the divine and the human: God is "incorruptible, unchangeable, indivisible, incapable of suffering and immortal"; human nature is "transitory, changeable, divisible, capable of suffering and mortal."<sup>28</sup> And the doctrine of the two natures in Christ is based upon this fundamental distinction: Jesus was fully divine and fully human. But the connection between theism and the two natures goes beyond this initial relatedness. For when addressing the event of the cross, theism required this two nature interpretation in order to maintain its fundamental distinction between the divine and the human. "The theistic concept of God according to which God cannot die, and the hope for salvation, according to which man is to be immortal, made it impossible to regard Jesus as really being God and at the same time as being forsaken by God."<sup>29</sup> Putting this statement in the affirmative: theism understands the event of the cross as a divine event (Jesus was divine), in order to maintain the basis for the

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 228.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

hope of salvation; and theism understands the event of the cross as a human event (Jesus was human), in order to maintain the concept of divine impassibility. Thus it can be said that the doctrine of the two natures serves philosophical theism by conceiving of the union of these two natures and by interpreting the cross in such a way that the axiom of "divine apathy" is maintained. But this in turn leads to a further development in the doctrine of the two natures, according to which Christ suffered "in the flesh", in his humanity, and not according to his divine nature.<sup>30</sup> "The doctrine of two natures must understand the event of the cross statically as a reciprocal relationship between two qualitatively different natures, the divine nature which is incapable of suffering and the human nature which is capable of suffering."<sup>31</sup>

Thus the doctrine of the two natures can be said to bar the way to a trinitarian theology of the cross, and is criticized by Moltmann, in the following ways. First, this doctrine is based upon and presupposes the simple concept of God, God as indivisible.

If one can only use the simple concept of God from the doctrine of two natures, as tradition shows, one will always be inclined to restrict it to the person of the Father who abandons and accepts Jesus, delivers him and raises him up, and in

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<sup>30</sup>See ibid., pp. 228f.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 245. See also Jewish Monotheism, p. 63.

so doing will 'evacuate' the cross of deity.<sup>32</sup> This simple concept removes God from the cross, and therefore prevents a trinitarian understanding of the cross. Second, the doctrine of two natures is based upon the theistic axiom of "divine apathy" and leads to the position that Jesus suffered, not in his divine nature, but according to the flesh. As we have seen, the axiom of "divine apathy" also evacuates the cross of deity.<sup>33</sup> Finally, to understand the cross within the framework of the two natures is to emphasize a dialectic between the human and the divine. For Moltmann, a trinitarian theology of the cross must go beyond this distinction and emphasize the relationship between the human and the divine on the cross, as well as the relationship within God, between the Son, the Father and the Spirit.

It [Christology] cannot seek to maintain only a dialectical relationship between the divine being and human being, leaving each of these unaffected; in its own way the divine being must encompass the human being and vice versa. That means that it must understand the event of the cross in God's being in both trinitarian and personal terms. In contrast to the traditional doctrine of the two natures in the person of Christ, it must begin from the totality of the person of Christ and understand the relationship of the death of the Son to the Father and the Spirit.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Crucified God, pp. 244f.

<sup>33</sup>See above pp. 41f.

<sup>34</sup>Crucified God, pp. 205f. See also ibid., p. 231: "If we are to speak seriously of salvation in

A theology of the cross, on the other hand, does not presuppose a simple concept of God, but looks for the self-revelation of God in the cross. It does not presuppose the impassibility of God, but rather asks how God's being can be understood from the sufferings and death of Jesus. It does not emphasize the distinction between humanity and divinity, but looks for the relationship between God and humanity and between God and God, as evidenced in the cross of Christ. We will now turn to an examination of Moltmann's attempt to formulate the doctrine of the Trinity based on this theology of the cross.

(ii) A trinitarian theology of the cross. The theology of the cross is not the only basis for a trinitarian understanding of God and Moltmann draws upon arguments other than those that are presented by the event of the cross. This is evident, for example, in his dialogue with Pinchas Lapide, where he attempts to "trace the Christian doctrine of the Trinity back to its Hebraic and Jewish roots and develop it in harmony with the Jewish experience of God."<sup>35</sup> He also provides an argument that connects the confession that "God is love" with the doctrine of the

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<sup>34</sup>(Cont'd) fellowship with God, we must go beyond the general distinctions between God and the world, or God and man, and penetrate the special relationships between God and the world and God and man in the history of Christ."

<sup>35</sup>Jewish Monotheism, p. 46. See also Trinity, pp. 25-30.



Trinity: "Love is the self-communication of the good...[and] every self-communication presupposes the capacity for self-differentiation."<sup>36</sup> But it is clear that for Moltmann the essential basis for the doctrine of the Trinity is the theology of the cross.<sup>37</sup> In fact he equates them, emphasizing their fundamental connection: "the theology of the cross must be the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of the Trinity must be the theology of the cross."<sup>38</sup> By this equating of the two, he is simply pointing out that each requires the other. "The cross stands at the heart of the trinitarian being of God"<sup>39</sup> and "trinitarian thought [is] necessary for the complete perception of the cross of Christ."<sup>40</sup> Thus Moltmann speaks of a "christological doctrine of the Trinity" and the "trinitarian theology of the cross."<sup>41</sup>

On what basis does the theology of the cross lead to

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<sup>36</sup>Trinity, p. 57. See also Trinity, pp. 57-59, and Jewish Monotheism, p. 55.

<sup>37</sup>See, for example, Crucified God, pp. 240f.: "The perception of the trinitarian concept of God is the cross of Jesus....The theological concept for the perception of the crucified Christ is the doctrine of the Trinity. The material principle of the doctrine of the Trinity is the cross of Christ. The formal principle of knowledge of the cross is the doctrine of the Trinity."

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 241.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 207.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 245.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 235.

the doctrine of the Trinity? Or how is it that the cross is understood as a trinitarian event? The first step toward such an interpretation of the cross is that all theistic presuppositions must be given up. "A trinitarian theology of the cross no longer interprets the event of the cross in the framework or in the name of a metaphysical or moral concept of God which has already been presupposed--we have shown that this does not do justice to the cross, but evacuates it of meaning."<sup>42</sup> Moltmann's point is that the presuppositions of philosophical theism, especially the axioms of divine indivisibility and impassibility, do not issue from the witness of the event of the cross but are preconceived and brought to bear on an interpretation of the cross. If one begins with these presuppositions then the revelation of the cross is distorted for the cross is evacuated of both meaning and deity.

But when these preconceptions are put aside then the trinitarian relationship becomes evident in the cross. "If one begins by leaving on one side any concept of God which is already presupposed and taken from metaphysics, one must speak of the one whom Jesus called 'Father' and in respect of whom he understood himself as 'the Son.'"<sup>43</sup> The witness of the cross speaks not simply of God but of the

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 245.

Father and the Son. Drawing upon the writings of St. Paul, Moltmann shows that both the Father and the Son experience the suffering and abandonment of the cross:

If Paul speaks emphatically of God's 'own Son', the not-sparing and abandoning also involves the Father himself. In the forsakenness of the Son the Father also forsakes himself. In the surrender of the Son the Father also surrenders himself, though not in the same way. For Jesus suffers dying in forsakenness....But the Father who abandons him and delivers him up suffers the death of the Son in the infinite grief of love. We cannot therefore say here in patripassian terms that the Father also suffered and died. The suffering and dying of the Son, forsaken by the Father, is a different kind of suffering from the suffering of the Father in the death of the Son. Nor can the death of Jesus be understood in theopaschite terms as the 'death of God'. To understand what happened between Jesus and his God and Father on the cross, it is necessary to talk in trinitarian terms. The Son suffers dying, the Father suffers the death of the Son. The grief of the Father here is just as important as the death of the Son. The Fatherlessness of the Son is matched by the Sonlessness of the Father, and if God has constituted himself as the Father of Jesus Christ, then he also suffers the death of his Fatherhood in the death of the Son. Unless this were so, the doctrine of the Trinity would still have a monotheistic background.<sup>44</sup>

Relating this to the two previous chapters we can say the following. The suffering by which God reveals himself in the dialectic of the cross is the suffering of both the Father and the Son. The suffering through which God offers his love for the life of humankind is the suffering of both the Father and the Son. The person of faith, who experiences God in the suffering of the cross, perceives the

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 243.

suffering of both the Father and the Son. Two kinds of suffering are present. But both issue from love: "The Son suffers in his love being forsaken by the Father as he dies. The Father suffers in his love the grief of the death of the Son."<sup>45</sup> Moltmann points out that the scriptural witness to the event of the cross is not one-sided but always speaks of a relationship between the Son and the Father in which both suffer with the suffering of love and both participate in the "giving" and the "delivering up". Examples such as the following are cited:

(Rom. 8.31f.) 'If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?'

(Gal. 2.20) '...the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.'<sup>46</sup>

And in order to comprehend this event involving the Father and the Son, one must speak in trinitarian terms.

Trinitarian terms are necessary because the cross speaks not only of two separate persons but also of their unity. Faith perceives in the suffering of the cross not only the separation and distinction between Son and Father but also their community and unity of purpose. The Father delivered up his Son to the cross, and the Son delivered up himself to the will of the Father. "In the cross, Father

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 245.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., pp. 242f.

and Son are most deeply separated in forsakenness and at the same time are most inwardly one in their surrender."<sup>47</sup>

Thus it can be said that in the abandonment and contradiction of the cross both a deep division and a fundamental unity existed between Father and Son.

Once the relational aspect of the cross is acknowledged, the interpretation of the cross in terms of the simple concept of God displays its inadequacy:

If one wanted to present the event within the framework of the doctrine of two natures, one could only use the simple concept of God (esse simplex). In that case one would have to say: what happened on the cross was an event between God and God. It was a deep division in God himself, in so far as God abandoned God and contradicted himself, and at the same time a unity in himself. In that case one would have to put the formula in a paradoxical way: God died the death of the godless on the cross and yet did not die. God is dead and yet is not dead.<sup>48</sup>

The simple concept of God does not do justice to the event of the cross, and if it is used to explain the interrelationship, the division and the unity that is evident in the cross then it leads to paradoxical statements. Only the concept of Trinity can adequately explain in theological terms what happened on the cross, and the crucifixion of Christ is therefore the real basis for the doctrine of the Trinity.

When one considers the significance of the death of Jesus for God himself, one must enter into the

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 244.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

inner-trinitarian tensions and relationships of God and speak of the Father, the Son and the Spirit. But if that is the case, it is inappropriate to talk simply of 'God' in connection with the Christ event. When one uses the phrase 'God in Christ', does it refer only to the Father, who abandons him and gives him up, or does it also refer to the Son who is abandoned and forsaken? The more one understands the whole event of the cross as an event of God, the more any simple concept of God falls apart. In epistemological terms it takes so to speak trinitarian form. One moves from the exterior of the mystery which is called 'God' to the interior, which is trinitarian. This is the 'revolution in the concept of God' which is manifested by the crucified Christ.<sup>49</sup>

And it is this connection between Trinity and the crucified Christ that removes the doctrine of the Trinity from the realm of speculation and brings it within the experience of faith. For the doctrine of the Trinity, as "nothing other than a shorter version of the passion narrative of Christ in

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 204. By saying that a simple concept of God falls apart, is Moltmann advocating that the term "God" be abandoned? He addresses this issue in the following passage: "What sense does it make to talk of 'God'? I think that the unity of the dialectical history of Father and Son and Spirit in the cross on Golgotha, full of tension as it is, can be described so to speak retrospectively as 'God'. In that case, a trinitarian theology of the cross no longer interprets the event of the cross in the framework or in the name of a metaphysical or moral concept of God which has already been presupposed...but develops from this history what is to be understood by 'God'. Anyone who speaks of God in Christian terms must tell of the history of Jesus as a history between the Son and the Father....The New Testament made a very neat distinction in Christian prayer between the Son and the Father. We ought to take that up, and ought not to speak of 'God' in such an undifferentiated way, thus opening up the way to atheism." Ibid., p. 247. Moltmann defends and continues to use the simple term "God", but only if by "God" is understood the unity of the trinitarian relationships as revealed in the history of the cross.

its significance for the eschatological freedom of faith and the life of oppressed nature,"<sup>50</sup> concerns the self-revelation of God to man in the cross and the history of salvation in community with God.

To this point the basis for a trinitarian understanding of God has been found in the relationship of the Father and the Son. What then is the place of the Spirit in the trinitarian theology of the cross? If our understanding of God is to be based upon the relationship of Son and Father in the event of the cross then why does Moltmann speak of trinity and how is the Spirit to be understood in the event of the cross? It is not my intention to examine Moltmann's fully developed doctrine of the Spirit as a member of the Trinity.<sup>51</sup> We are here concerned simply to understand the place of the Spirit in the trinitarian theology of the cross. Moltmann speaks of

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 246.

<sup>51</sup>For a more fully developed doctrine of the Spirit, see The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: concerning the question of whether the Spirit should be understood as "an energy of God the Father and the Son, or as a divine person like the Father and the Son," see pp. 125f.; concerning the question of whether the Spirit is a divine subject or person, the question of duality vs. Trinity, the question of the origin of the Spirit and his relationship to the Father and the Son, see pp. 168-170; concerning the question of the relationship of the Son and the Spirit, the filioque controversy, and the question of the independence of the Spirit, see pp. 178-187. See also Jürgen Moltmann, The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1977).

the role of the Spirit, as the one who unites the Father and the Son in their separation, in the following passage:

On the cross the Father and the Son are so deeply separated that their relationship breaks off. Jesus died 'without God'--godlessly. Yet on the cross the Father and the Son are at the same time so much one that they represent a single surrendering movement. 'He who has seen the Son has seen the Father.' The Epistle to the Hebrews expresses this by saying that Christ offered himself to God 'through the Spirit' (9.14). The surrender through the Father and the offering of the Son take place 'through the Spirit'. The Holy Spirit is therefore the link in the separation. He is the link joining the bond between the Father and the Son, with their separation.<sup>52</sup>

Thus the trinitarian relationship as revealed in the cross is summarized as follows:

- The Father gives up his own Son to death in its most absolute sense, for us.
- The Son gives himself up, for us.
- The common sacrifice of the Father and the Son comes about through the Holy Spirit, who joins and unites the Son in his forsakenness with the Father.<sup>53</sup>

The work of the Spirit is therefore one of uniting. In the surrender of the cross, Father and Son are one, and it is through the Spirit that they are united in purpose, will and surrender. Concluding this section, we will now turn to the question of unity and the Trinity.

According to Moltmann, the Western tradition, especially following Aquinas, has always started with the

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<sup>52</sup>Trinity, p. 82.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 83.



concept of unity and has then gone on to speak of trinity. Moltmann, on the other hand, chooses to begin with the doctrine of Trinity, from which emerges the concept of unity.<sup>54</sup> The difference is important. For, as we have seen, to begin with the concept of unity leads to a monism, numerical unity, which takes precedence over and swallows up the concept of trinity. In the latter approach, however, unity speaks of the union of the three persons in their interrelationships:

The unity of the divine tri-unity lies in the union of the Father, the Son and the Spirit, not in their numerical unity. It lies in their fellowship, not in the identity of a single subject.<sup>55</sup>

It is this concept of unity, as union in relationship and fellowship, that has led Moltmann to formulate "a social doctrine of the Trinity," as opposed "to the trinity of substance and to the trinity of subject."<sup>56</sup> The social doctrine of the Trinity includes three basic concepts: person, relation, and unity or community:

Once we have perceived the divine persons in their mutual relationships, we must ask about the unity of the Tri-une God. Does the unity of the persons lie in the common divine nature they possess? Does their unity lie in the one divine Lordship they execute? These possibilities are introduced into the Trinity from outside and are not

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

conceptions of unity that emerge out of the Trinity itself. When the three persons exist in the power of their relationships with one another, for each other and in each other, then they themselves shape their own unique unity, namely, as a tri-unity....That is to say, the divine community is shaped by the mutual relationships of the divine persons themselves.<sup>57</sup>

Beginning with the concept of the three persons, as witnessed to by the event of the cross, unity and community emerge from the relationships of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

For Moltmann, this does not conclude the story of the Trinity. For the Trinity's unity of relationship is not a closed relationship but one that is open to humankind. The triune relationship is not only self-contained. Concerning the social doctrine of the Trinity, Moltmann writes: "we understand the scriptures as the testimony to the history of the Trinity's relations of fellowship, which are open to men and women, and open to the world."<sup>58</sup> We will now turn to examine the dynamic quality of the trinitarian relationship: the Trinity as open to change and as open to the life of the world.

## 2. The History of God and the Dialectical Doctrine of God

Moltmann's position concerning the consequences of a

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<sup>57</sup>Jurgen Moltmann, Humanity in God (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1983), p. 98. (Italics mine) See also Trinity, pp. 174-176.

<sup>58</sup>Trinity, p. 19.

theology of the cross for the doctrine of God may be summarized at this point with one statement: God reveals himself as Trinity in the dialectic of suffering of the cross. But what follows from this trinitarian theology of the cross? What does the trinitarian theology of the cross say further about God's being and about his relationship with the world? These questions will be answered with reference to two concepts: the history of God and God as dialectical being.

(i) Trinitarian theology of the cross and the history of God. Following Hegel, Moltmann emphasizes the concept of the "history of God". This concept, for Moltmann, is fundamentally related to and follows from the trinitarian theology of the cross. The doctrine of the Trinity alone "makes it possible to understand the cross as the history of God," and "for eschatological faith, the trinitarian God-event on the cross becomes the history of God."<sup>59</sup>

What then is meant by the "history of God", and what aspects of the trinitarian theology of the cross does this concept reveal? It will be seen that the history of God reveals God as open to change, open to humanity, and open to the future.

First, the trinitarian event of the cross reveals the history of God inasmuch as it reveals change within the trinitarian relationships. If the event of the cross is

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<sup>59</sup>Crucified God. pp. 254f.

understood as a trinitarian event in which the three persons constitute themselves in their relations with one another, then it must also be understood that the cross is a witness to changes in the trinitarian relationships. In delivering up and surrendering, in separating and uniting, and in the act of suffering love, the relationships of the divine persons change and develop. Thus the event of the cross is called the history of God because it reveals "the life of God within the Trinity" or "a living history".<sup>60</sup>

The Persons do not merely 'exist' in their relations; they also realize themselves in one another by virtue of self-surrendering love. This brings a third term into the doctrine of the Trinity, in addition to the concept of person and the concept of relation; and this makes it possible to perceive the living changes in the trinitarian relations and the Persons which come about through the revelation, the self-emptying and the glorification of the triune God. We have termed it the history of God, which takes place in the Trinity itself, and have in this sense talked about God's passion for his Other, about God's self-limitation, about God's pain, and also about God's joy and his eternal bliss in the final glorification. Only when we are capable of thinking of Persons, relations, and changes in the relations together does the idea of the Trinity lose its usual static, rigid quality. Then not only does the eternal life of the triune God become conceivable; its eternal vitality becomes conceivable too.<sup>61</sup>

The event of the cross tells of the trinitarian relationships and of changes in the relationships between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And this history of God speaks

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., pp. 246 and 265.

<sup>61</sup>Trinity, p. 174.

of the dynamic and living quality of the triune God. God is not static being but a community of three persons that lives and moves and acts out of suffering love. The Trinity is not idle speculation but eternally vital, alive and changing.

The concept of the history of God once again brings Moltmann into opposition with the theistic concept of God. According to theism, God is impassible, immutable, immovable and unchanging. And the doctrine of the two natures, which evolved from within monotheistic theology, "must understand the event of the cross statically."<sup>62</sup> In opposition to these positions, Moltmann sees the dynamic and living event of the cross as the central attestation to movement and change within God. His logical argument against immutability is the same as the one employed against the axiom of impassibility.<sup>63</sup> It is true that God is not subject to change as humankind and the world are subject to change, but this does not lead to the logical conclusion that God is absolutely unchangeable. Of his own free will, God is able to change himself and to submit himself to be changed by others. If one differentiates between passive and active change then it can be said that, although he does not suffer change passively, God is able to act in love to

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<sup>62</sup>Crucified God, p. 245.

<sup>63</sup>See above pp. 43f.

change himself and to be changed.<sup>64</sup>

Second, the trinitarian event of the cross reveals the history of God inasmuch as it reveals that the Trinity is open to the life of humanity and that the Trinity takes into itself and envelops all human history. Moltmann explains this point in the following passage:

If one describes the life of God within the Trinity as the 'history of God' (Hegel), this history of God contains within itself the whole abyss of godforsakenness, absolute death and the non-God....Because this death took place in the history between Father and Son on the cross on Golgotha, there proceeds from it the spirit of life, love and election to salvation. The concrete 'history of God' in the death of Jesus on the cross on Golgotha therefore contains within itself all the depths and abysses of human history and therefore can be understood as the history of history. All human history, however much it may be determined by guilt and death, is taken up into this 'history of God', i.e. into the Trinity, and integrated into the future of the 'history of God'. There is no suffering which in this history of God is not God's suffering; no death which has not been God's death in the history of Golgotha. Therefore there is no life, no fortune and no joy

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<sup>64</sup>See Crucified God, p. 229: "Nicaea rightly said against Arius: God is not changeable. But that statement is not absolute; it is only a simile. God is not changeable as creatures are changeable. However, the conclusion should not be drawn from this that God is unchangeable in every respect, for this negative definition merely says that God is under no constraint from that which is not of God. The negation of changeableness by which a general distinction is drawn between God and man must not lead to the conclusion that he is intrinsically unchangeable. If God is not passively changeable by other things like other creatures, this does not mean that he is not free to change himself, or even free to allow himself to be changed by others of his own free will....Thus the relative definition of his unchangeableness does not lead to the assertion of his absolute and intrinsic unchangeableness."

which have not been integrated by his history into eternal life, the eternal joy of God. To think of 'God in history' always leads to theism and to atheism. To think of 'history in God' leads beyond that, into new creation and theopoiesis. To 'think of history in God' however, first means to understand humanity in the suffering and dying of Christ, and that means all humanity, with its dilemmas and its despairs.<sup>65</sup>

In analyzing this passage, there are three significant issues to be addressed. First, the history of God takes up into itself all of human history. In the event of the cross, God has experienced abandonment, forsakenness, separation, suffering, death and the non-God; in the event of the cross, God has acted with suffering love; and proceeding from the event of the cross, God has experienced reconciliation, reunion, joy and new life. There is therefore no part of human history and experience which is not a part of the trinitarian history of God. In following Moltmann's argument, let us concentrate upon the concept of suffering. If human history is the history of suffering and the history of God also includes the history of suffering, then the two histories, human and divine, are integrated. At this point it is helpful to recall the discussion of suffering and theodicy that was presented in Chapter II.<sup>66</sup> The human experience of suffering is not an isolated and random experience but is rooted in the nature

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid., pp. 246f.

<sup>66</sup>See above pp. 49-52.

of created reality:

It has its roots in the limitations of created reality itself. If creation-in-the-beginning is open for the history of good and evil, then that initial creation is also a creation capable of suffering, and capable of producing suffering.<sup>67</sup>

And the question that suffering gives rise to, theodicy's open question, is not an optional question but the mark of life in this world, "the open wound of life".<sup>68</sup> Thus, "life in this world means living with this open question, and seeking the future in which the desire for God will be fulfilled, suffering will be overcome, and what has been lost will be restored."<sup>69</sup> Human history may therefore be called the history of suffering. But the history of God is also a history of suffering, for this history is grounded upon the sufferings of the Father and the Son as revealed in the cross of Christ. Thus these two histories, the human and the divine, belong to each other:

The universal significance of the crucified Christ on Golgotha is only really comprehended through the theodicy question. The history of Christ's sufferings belongs to the history of the sufferings of mankind, by virtue of the passionate

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<sup>67</sup>Trinity, p. 51.

<sup>68</sup>See, for example, ibid., p. 49: "It [theodicy's open question] is not really a question at all, in the sense of something we can ask or not ask, like other questions. It is the open wound of life in this world. It is the real task of faith and theology to make it possible for us to survive, to go on living, with this open wound."

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 49.



love which Christ manifests and reveals.<sup>70</sup>

Moltmann therefore rejects the term "God in history", with its understanding of God as a qualitatively different and separate being who interjects into human history on isolated occasions and then retreats into himself. Rather, the event of the cross must be understood as "history in God"--a history which contains and is integrated with all of human suffering.

The second issue to be addressed in this passage is that the history of God speaks of humanity in God. If the history of God contains human history then God contains the human. If one is to understand this history of God as containing all of human history then it is necessary to move beyond the radical separation of the human and the divine and to understand humanity in God. Theism and atheism, as we have seen, think of the human and the divine as two qualitatively different natures and think of God at man's expense or man at God's expense.<sup>71</sup> That is, what is true of the nature of the one cannot be true of the nature of the other: e.g. suffering. But "with a trinitarian theology of the cross faith escapes the dispute between and the alternative of theism and atheism: God is not only other-worldly but also this-worldly; he is not only God, but

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>71</sup>Crucified God, pp. 249-251.

also man."<sup>72</sup> This is simply a thoroughgoing and complete understanding of the doctrine of the incarnation.

There can be no theology of the incarnation which does not become a theology of the cross. 'As soon as you say incarnation, you say cross.'<sup>73</sup>

And if the cross is the self-revelation of God then the incarnation equally reveals the nature of God. Thus Moltmann speaks of "the human, crucified God",<sup>74</sup> for the theology of the cross "is a confession of faith which recognizes God's humanity in the dehumanized Christ on the cross."<sup>75</sup>

Our third point from this passage is only the opposite side of the second point. Not only does the history of God contain the human but also any person is therefore able to enter the history of God. Concerning the experience of suffering love, Moltmann writes:

Anyone who enters into love, and through love experiences inextricable suffering and the fatality of death, enters into the history of the human God, for his forsakenness is lifted away from him in the forsakenness of Christ, and in this way he can continue to love, need not look

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 242. See also ibid., p. 231: "If we are to speak seriously of salvation in fellowship with God, we must go beyond the general distinctions between God and the world, or God and man, and penetrate the special relationships between God and the world and God and man in the history of Christ."

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 241.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 205.

away from the negative and from death, but can sustain death.<sup>76</sup>

The history of God not only includes but is also open to the life of all persons. And this is the concrete relevance and the infinite importance of the trinitarian theology of the cross. How is humanity to face the theodicy question, the open wound of life? How is humanity to sustain hope and faith and love in the face of unjustified suffering and death? Only by entering into the history of God in which love and suffering are taken up into the love and suffering of Christ and into the life of the Trinity. This human opportunity to enter into the life of the Trinity also says something about God and the necessity of the cross. God has taken up human history into his own history, he has become human and he has opened himself to man for the other, for humankind.<sup>77</sup> "God does not suffer out of deficiency of being."<sup>78</sup> Neither does he change and become human out of deficiency of being. The history of God is the history of divine love reaching out and surrendering itself for humankind. "He [God] humbles himself and takes upon himself the eternal death of the godless and the godforsaken, so that all the godless and the godforsaken can experience

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<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 254.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 238: "We cannot say of God who he is of himself and in himself; we can only say who he is for us in the history of Christ which reaches us in our history."

<sup>78</sup>Trinity, p. 23.

communion with him."<sup>79</sup> Inasmuch as the history of God is the history of human history, the history of the human God and the history of man's salvation, it is said that the history of God is open to humankind. "By the secular cross on Golgotha, understood as open vulnerability and as the love of God for loveless and unloved dehumanized men, God's being and God's life is open to true man."<sup>80</sup>

Finally, the trinitarian event of the cross reveals the history of God inasmuch as it reveals that the Trinity is open to the future. That is to say, the event of the cross is not a complete history in itself but is the beginning of this history of God which continues into the future:

The relationships in the Trinity between Father and Son are not fixed in static terms once and for all, but are a living history. This history of God or this history in God begins with the sending and delivering up of the Son, continues with his resurrection and the transference of the rule of God to him, and only ends when the Son hands over this rule to the Father. The delivering up on the cross is the central point of this history in God, not its conclusion....The cross does not bring an end to the trinitarian history in God between the Father and the Son in the Spirit as eschatological history, but rather opens it up.<sup>81</sup>

The changes and developments within the trinitarian relationships that were witnessed in the event of the cross

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<sup>79</sup>Crucified God, p. 276.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 249.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 265.

do not end with the cross. They continue into the future. Thus it is said that the Trinity "is open to the future" and "opens up the future."<sup>82</sup> And this openness to the future is an openness for man--"for the whole of forsaken humanity."<sup>83</sup> The concepts of openness to change and openness to and for humanity are thus summarized by the concept of openness to the future--i.e. eschatology: "the Trinity is no self-contained group in heaven, but an eschatological process open for men on earth, which stems from the cross of Christ."<sup>84</sup> By "eschatological process" it is simply meant that the history of God moves towards that point in the history of all history at which the salvation of humanity and the world will be complete.

The Trinity, understood as an event for history, therefore presses towards eschatological consummation, so that the 'Trinity may be all in all', or put more simply, so that 'love may be all in all', so that life may triumph over death and righteousness over the hells of the negative and of all force.<sup>85</sup>

It is at this point that the dimension of hope most clearly presents itself in the trinitarian theology of the cross. The theology of the cross differentiates itself from traditional theism by acknowledging the suffering of God, and

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<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 255.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 249.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., p. 255.

Moltmann, in developing a trinitarian theology of the cross, has emphasized suffering in God. But this concept of suffering has not been emphasized to the exclusion of hope. The theology of the cross also differentiates itself from traditional atheism by acknowledging hope in God. Suffering and hope must go hand in hand. For the theology of the cross, which emphasizes the suffering of God, also acknowledges, by virtue of that suffering, the history of God that gives rise to and sustains hope for eschatological consummation and the triumph of life over death.

If we understand God in this way [the trinitarian history of God], we can understand our own history, the history of suffering and the history of hope, in the history of God. Beyond theistic submissiveness and atheistic protest this is the history of life, because it is the history of love.<sup>86</sup>

(ii) Trinitarian theology of the cross and God as

dialectical being. It is the purpose of this final section to draw together these three chapters and to show the inter-relatedness of the concepts of dialectic, suffering and the trinitarian history of God within the trinitarian theology of the cross. The concept of suffering and its place within the trinitarian theology of the cross do not require further explanation. For as we have seen, a theology of the cross perceives the dialectical revelation of God in the suffering

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<sup>86</sup>Ibid., p. 256.

of the cross; it recognizes the suffering love of God in the suffering of Christ; and it finds that the trinitarian history of God stems from the suffering of the Father and the Son in the event of the cross. This summation will therefore focus upon the connection between dialectic and the trinitarian history of God.

In Chapter I we saw that the theology of the cross follows the dialectical principle of knowledge, as opposed to the analogical. That is, the theology of the cross finds that God reveals himself and is known in the dialectic of the cross:

This means that God is only revealed as 'God' in his opposite: godlessness and abandonment by God. In concrete terms, God is revealed in the cross of Christ who was abandoned by God.<sup>87</sup>

The dialectic or opposition is between God and godlessness, abandonment by God or his opposite--non-God. But when Moltmann develops this theology of the cross into the trinitarian history of God the concept of dialectic is not left behind:

If one describes the life of God within the Trinity as the 'history of God' (Hegel), this history of God contains within itself the whole abyss of godforsakenness, absolute death and the non-God. 'Nemo contra Deum nisi Deus ipse.'<sup>88</sup>

The trinitarian history of God is dialectical inasmuch as it

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., p. 246.

contains both God and non-God. Thus Moltmann speaks of "the dialectical history of Father and Son and Spirit"<sup>89</sup> and of "the Trinity as a dialectical event, indeed as the event of the cross and then as eschatologically open history."<sup>90</sup> The dialectical theology of the cross understands God as Trinity and the trinitarian theology of the cross perceives dialectic within the history of God.

But this connection between dialectic and the trinitarian history of God can be taken yet further. In Chapter I the following question of J. J. O'Donnell was raised:<sup>91</sup> Moltmann adheres both to the statement that "God remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself" and to the statement that "God is only revealed as 'God' in his opposite"--does this show an inconsistency in Moltmann's epistemology? At that time I suggested that it is not inconsistent if it is understood that dialectical revelation is a revelation of God's nature. After having considered the issues of God's suffering, Trinity and the history of God we are now better able to give a conclusive answer to this question. Our conclusion must be that the nature of God is dialectical. When Moltmann says that the life of God is the life of the Trinity, and the life of the Trinity is the history of God,

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<sup>89</sup>Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., p. 255.

<sup>91</sup>See above pp. 26f. and O'Donnell, Trinity and Temporality, pp. 114f.



and the history of God contains the abyss of godforsakenness then he is saying that the life of God is dialectical.<sup>92</sup> Or as he writes elsewhere: "humiliation to the point of death on the cross corresponds to God's nature in the contradiction of abandonment."<sup>93</sup> God is true to himself in his revelation for revelation in the dialectic of the cross corresponds to the dialectic within God's nature. The dialectical revelation of the cross is truly a self-revelation for the life of God is dialectical.

God's self-humiliation is completed and perfected in the passion and death of Jesus the Son. Here too an indwelling significance is perceptible: God does not merely enter into the finitude of men and women; he enters into the situation of their sin and God-forsakenness as well. He does not merely enter into this situation; he also accepts and adopts it himself, making it part of his own eternal life.<sup>94</sup>

A trinitarian theology of the cross perceives God in the negative element and therefore the negative element in God, and in this dialectical way is panentheistic. For in the hidden mode of humiliation to the point of the cross, all being and all that annihilates has already been taken up in God and God begins to become "all in all". To recognize God in the cross of Christ, conversely, means to recognize the cross, inextricable suffering, death and hopeless rejection in God.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup>Crucified God, p. 246.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>94</sup>Trinity, p. 119.

<sup>95</sup>Crucified God, p. 277.

## CONCLUSION

It has been the purpose of this study to examine Moltmann's theology of the cross and its consequences for a doctrine of God. In doing so we have seen that, for Moltmann, a thoroughgoing and consistent theology of the cross must lead to the understanding of God as Trinity. Daniel L. Migliore makes this comment regarding Moltmann's treatment of the theology of the cross and the doctrine of the Trinity:

According to Moltmann, the theology of the cross and the development of the doctrine of the Trinity are the two traditions in Christian theology which have taken account of the cross in thinking and speaking of God. Moltmann's most innovative and provocative proposal is to fuse these two traditions into an interpretive unity.<sup>1</sup>

The "interpretive unity" of these two traditions is summed up in Moltmann's phrase "the trinitarian theology of the cross."

In examining this trinitarian theology of the cross I have presented the development of Moltmann's argument with reference to three key concepts: dialectic, suffering and Trinity. In answer to our original question, "What does a

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<sup>1</sup>Daniel L. Migliore, "A Review of Moltmann's The Crucified God", Theology Today, XXXII (1975), p. 99.

theology of the cross say about God?", this development may be summarized as follows:

1. According to the theology of the cross, God reveals himself and is known through the dialectic of the event of the cross.
2. In the dialectic of the cross, God reveals himself as the suffering God.
3. In the suffering of the cross, God reveals himself as Trinity.
4. In the trinitarian event of the cross, which is the beginning of the trinitarian history of God, God reveals his nature as dialectical.

Underlying the development of these three themes, we have also examined three contrary themes in Christian thought of which Moltmann is critical. In each case he proposes his theology of the cross in opposition to a contrary position:

1. The dialectic of the cross vs. analogical theism.
2. The suffering God of the cross vs. the apathetic God of theism.
3. The trinitarian God of the cross vs. monotheism.

Against analogical monotheism (and analogical atheism) and its understanding of God as impassible and immutable, Moltmann appeals to the crucified God: the God who reveals himself as Trinity in the dialectic of suffering of the cross.

I will now briefly comment on some of the main issues that Moltmann has raised by means of some personal reflections.

Dialectic and Analogy. The strength of Moltmann's "revelation in dialectic" is that this understanding of divine revelation is based upon the central theme of the gospels, the passion and cross of Christ. His line of questioning may be presented in this way: If the cross of Christ is the beginning of Christian faith in God, then what is its significance for our understanding of revelation? What does it say about God's self-revelation? This is an attempt to understand divine revelation while making sense of the cross; it is an attempt to integrate God's self-disclosure with that event that gives rise to Christian faith. In providing an answer to his question, Moltmann displays a determined honesty--he does not retreat from where his line of questioning leads. Far from minimizing or avoiding the horror and suffering of the cross, he has squarely faced the severity of this event while giving it a central place in the doctrine of revelation. God reveals himself in the godlessness, suffering and abandonment of the cross. This is revelation in dialectic--God revealed in godlessness.

Is such a theology as this not baffling? irrational? nonsense? It must be remembered that it is not Moltmann's primary intention to present a philosophically palatable understanding of revelation. It is his intention to come to a reasonable understanding of revelation in light of the witness of the cross. The argument that God's nature

is revealed in the goodness of his creation may be a more manageable argument, but, according to Moltmann, it accords with neither the witness of the cross nor the experience of human suffering. To begin the doctrine of revelation with the crucifixion of Christ requires from the outset more than pure logic for it presupposes the experience of faith in the crucified Christ. This is not to require that the intellectual faculty be sacrificed, but to acknowledge the truth claims of a human experience which is not purely rational--namely faith. The challenge for Moltmann is to adequately express the mystery of the revelation of the cross as discovered by faith. But given the presupposition of Christian faith and the mystery of the cross, I must say that Moltmann succeeds in presenting a doctrine of revelation that remains true to the witness of the cross and he succeeds in giving it a reasonable explanation.

It is not Moltmann's intention to emphasize a dialectical epistemology to the exclusion of the analogical. In his own words, "the dialectical principle...does not replace the analogical principle..., but alone makes it possible."<sup>2</sup> "The basis and starting point of analogy is this dialectic."<sup>3</sup> What he opposes is the use of analogy

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<sup>2</sup>Crucified God, p. 27.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

without a dialectical starting point, "premature correspondences,"<sup>4</sup> or natural theology's presupposition of correspondence. One must begin with the recognition of the self-revelation of God in the godlessness of the cross. Only after this revelation in contradiction is acknowledged is an analogical knowledge of God possible. God became human (dialectic) so that humanity might come to know God (analogy). God reveals himself in godlessness (dialectic) so that the godless may know God (analogy).<sup>5</sup>

But does he in fact remain true to his intention to employ the dialectical as a starting point and basis for an analogical understanding of God? Migliore writes: "While he wants to make room for the use of analogy within the 'negative dialectic' of the theology of the cross, it is not clear just how this works."<sup>6</sup> The use of dialectic as a starting point is obvious in Moltmann's work, but does it develop into an analogical understanding of the relationship

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>See, for example, ibid., pp. 27f.: "In so far as God is revealed in his opposite, he can be known by the godless and those who are abandoned by God, and it is this knowledge which brings them into correspondence with God."

<sup>6</sup>Migliore, "A Review of Moltmann's The Crucified God", p. 104. See also William L. Hendricks, "A Review of Moltmann's The Crucified God", Southwestern Journal of Theology, XVIII (1975), p. 99: "Moltmann's epistemology operates on the principle of a negative dialectic from which he builds to the positive function of analogy. My observation is that the negative dialectic is demonstrated more clearly than the analogical principle."

between God and humanity? It is my opinion that Moltmann's thought does develop analogically. Although the use of analogy might be made more explicit, the dialectical theology of the cross does bring about correspondence between the life of humanity and the life of God. I cite as an example the following passage on love and suffering:

This may be called the dialectic of human life: we live because and in so far as we love--and we suffer and die because and in so far as we love. In this way we experience life and death in love....The problem of...existence is sustaining this dialectic: how can one continue to love despite grief, disappointment and death?...The faith which springs from the God event on the cross...leads sorely tried, despairing love back to its origin....Where we suffer because we love, God suffers in us. Where he has suffered the death of Jesus and in so doing has shown the force of his love, men also find the power to continue to love, to sustain that which annihilates them and to "endure what is dead".<sup>7</sup>

According to Moltmann there is correspondence between the dialectic of human life and the dialectic of God's self-revelation on the cross. There is analogy between the suffering love of human life and the suffering love of God in the event of the cross. The human experiences of love and suffering, and hope in the face of death are mirrored in the dialectical event of the cross. "Where we suffer because we love, God suffers in us." Where persons suffer because they love (the dialectic of human life), God may be revealed, for in his love God suffered the death of Jesus (the dialectic of the cross).

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<sup>7</sup>Crucified God, p. 253.

The God of Suffering and the Apathetic God. As with the issue of epistemology and revelation, when Moltmann addresses the question of the suffering or impassibility of God, he again looks to the cross of Christ. If the event of Christ's suffering on the cross is the beginning of Christian faith in God, then what does this say about God himself? His answer, that the Christian God is a God of suffering, is, for Moltmann, the only truly Christian response to this question.) For to hold to the axiom of divine impassibility is simply to be inconsistent with the profession of faith that perceives the involvement of God in the death of Jesus. (If God is beyond suffering, then how can the cross be understood as a divine event for the salvation of humanity?) How can the event of the cross be understood as God for us, for others? I find Moltmann's position to be consistent with the faith perception of the cross; and, given the presupposition of Christian faith, I find his argument to be persuasive.

The greatest problem facing his position concerns the question of God's freedom: 'Whether Moltmann's powerful emphasis on the vulnerability and passion of God is consistent with the theme of divine freedom characteristic of Reformed theology and impressively restated in the Theology of Hope.'<sup>8</sup> That is, does suffering not contradict the

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<sup>8</sup>Migliore, "A Review of Moltmann's The Crucified God", p. 104.



freedom that God is? But here Moltmann shows suffering and freedom to be essentially related:

For him God's suffering is by no means a matter of necessity or fate but the most profound expression of his freedom. God suffers not because he is forced to suffer but because he freely wills to reach out in costly love towards his creatures.<sup>9</sup>

The suffering of God, rather than challenging divine freedom, issues from the freedom of God. In the same way, the suffering of God is related to his love. God's love is the source of his suffering--he suffers death on the cross because of his love for humanity. Suffering, in fact, becomes a part of the definition of love: "love is the acceptance of the other without regard to one's own well-being..., [and] contains within itself the possibility of sharing in suffering and [the] freedom to suffer as a result of the otherness of the other."<sup>10</sup> Moltmann does not treat the suffering of God in isolation. By relating the suffering of God to freedom and love, it is seen to be a voluntary suffering of God's love for humanity.

This conviction that God suffers is further developed and gains relevance and force when it is related to the question of theodicy. The attraction of Moltmann's argument is that it is made intensely relevant and practical in that it is brought to bear on the abiding question of

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Crucified God, p. 230.

theodicy. Inasmuch as the suffering of God is made relevant to the theodicy question, it is made relevant to a question which is not speculative but critical, not theoretical but practical, not answerable but open, and not optional but of life.<sup>11</sup> Objections concerning relevance have been raised:

God is to be found where there is suffering, brokenness, and godforsaken men. This leaves the reader with the question of what God will mean to the man who does not feel suffering and godforsaken.<sup>12</sup>

But this is to miss Moltmann's point. The dialectic of the theodicy question, the question of God and suffering, is not limited to a few. It is characteristic of human life; it is the dialectic of human life. Or as Moltmann expresses it: "It is the open wound of life in this world."<sup>13</sup>

But what of his answer to theodicy? He begins by exposing the inadequacies of one-sided solutions. The theistic tendency to hold to a just and righteous God without facing up to the theodicy question is rejected on the grounds that it ignores human suffering. The atheistic solution of abolishing God is rejected on the grounds that it does nothing to address the question of unjust suffering that atheism has raised. In both cases his judgement

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<sup>11</sup>Trinity, p. 49.

<sup>12</sup>Lyndell P. Worthen, Jr., "A Review of Moltmann's The Crucified God", Southwestern Journal of Theology, XVIII (1975), p. 98.

<sup>13</sup>Trinity, p. 49.

is sound. Moltmann's own response, a middle way between these two extremes, asserts that the theodicy question cannot be answered in this world. But only with the recognition of the suffering God of the cross and of the presence of God in human suffering is one able to live with this question--to find life within death and hope in the face of suffering. While this answer will not satisfy those who demand a final solution now, it is insightful in its criticism of one-sided solutions, realistic in its recognition of the ambiguity of the problem, and frank in its admission that the question cannot be silenced. Finally, Moltmann's attempt to present the cross of the risen Christ as the paradigm for the dialectic of human life and as the source of hope in the face of suffering expresses, I believe, what it means to live by faith in this world.

Trinity and Monotheism. Consistent with his stated program, Moltmann seeks to ground the understanding of God as Trinity upon the theology of the cross. As Migliore writes, it is "Moltmann's most innovative and provocative proposal...to fuse these two traditions into an interpretive unity."<sup>14</sup> That is, he proposes that the cross is an interpretive basis for an understanding of the Trinity, and vice-versa. The

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<sup>14</sup>Migliore, "A Review of Moltmann's The Crucified God", p. 99.

question that I raise is this: Is there a sufficient basis in the event of the cross for a trinitarian understanding of God? That there is a basis for an understanding of God as the relationship between Son and Father is not my point of issue. Moltmann's analysis of the crucifixion as an event that took place between Jesus and the one whom he called Father is insightful and well documented. But what about the Spirit? Does it not seem that Moltmann's discussion emphasizes, as is required by the biblical account, the Father-Son relationship, but that the place of the Spirit is simply added on? "Moltmann does provide a fine account of the loving, suffering relationship between Father and Son,...[but] the material on the area of the Holy Spirit is decidedly thin."<sup>15</sup> It would be rash to suggest that Moltmann's "work is binitarian."<sup>16</sup> The question is not whether he is trinitarian--many of his works, including The Crucified God, focus upon the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity. But it is reasonable to ask of a "trinitarian theology of the cross" if the cross is in fact a sufficient basis for a doctrine of the Spirit. Moltmann makes a significant contribution by presenting the relationship of Father and Son in the event of the cross as

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<sup>15</sup>G. M. Newlands, "A Review of Moltmann's The Crucified God", Theology, LXXVIII (1975), p. 149.

<sup>16</sup>Hendricks, "A Review of Moltmann's The Crucified God", p. 99.

a solid starting point for trinitarian theology. But can it truly be called a "trinitarian theology of the cross" if there is not equal support for the place of the Spirit?

In the dialogue between trinitarian and monotheistic thinking, Moltmann seeks to give precedence to the Trinity by beginning with a trinitarian theology of the cross. His criticisms of Western theology are, first, that it has adopted the Greek understanding of God--"the monas of numerical unity as the foundation of all mathematical concepts"<sup>17</sup>--and, second, that it has consistently given precedence to this simple concept of God and has treated the Trinity only secondarily. As a result, the doctrine of the Trinity has inevitably fallen into the background and become superfluous. Moltmann asserts that any talk of God must begin not with the presupposition of simplicity, but with the self-revelation of the triune God in the cross of Christ.

In his attack on the simple concept of God, Moltmann's greatest opponent is the monotheism of Greek philosophy which has been adopted by Christian theology. It is the influence of Greek philosophy of which he is most critical. But what about a biblically based monotheism? Moltmann has little to say in The Crucified God about the case for a biblical monotheism, and this may be considered a

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<sup>17</sup>Jewish Monotheism, p. 64.

shortcoming of his argument for a trinitarian theology of the cross. How does this trinitarian theology accord with what may be interpreted as monotheistic statements in the Old and New Testaments? This question may be answered by looking to other works by Moltmann. In his dialogue with Pinchas Lapide he suggests that biblical references to God as One or the only God "express the unity which God is" and must "be distinguished from the monas of numerical unity as the foundation of all mathematical concepts."<sup>18</sup> For Moltmann, the tension between trinitarian thinking and monotheism is to be resolved in this way: the unity of Father, Son and Spirit is not to be found in numerical unity, but in their union, community and fellowship.<sup>19</sup> I find his proposals to be helpful in working towards a resolution of the tensions between trinitarian and monotheistic understandings of God. But it would be interesting to find the subject of biblical monotheism treated more thoroughly within the development of the trinitarian theology of the cross--and I think that the scope of Moltmann's argument and subject matter warrants it.

I have two comments to make on the overall thrust of Moltmann's theology of the cross. First, his work is

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>See, for example, Trinity, p. 95.

important because it attempts to build an understanding of God on that event which is central to the Christian faith--the passion and death of Jesus. Throughout he pursues the question: If the cross is the beginning of Christian faith in God, then what does the death of Jesus say about God? Does it not seem appropriate, even necessary, that a question as central as the nature and revelation of God should be addressed with respect to that event which has always formed and continues to form a central focus of the Christian faith?

Second, this theology is attractive and provocative because its understanding of God is dynamic rather than static. Throughout Moltmann's discussion the contrast is one of a living, dying, dynamic divinity versus the ossifying idealization of static attributes. Not an apathetic God but a God who freely chooses the way of suffering love; not an immovable God but a God who is moved by love; not an immutable God but a God who effects change; not an indivisible God, a divine monas, but a dynamic unity of three persons. Why should we find such a God so attractive? Is it that we of the modern age are simply fascinated by change? I suggest that the attraction of Moltmann's theology is that only a God of love, a God of change, a God who comes to meet humanity at the point of suffering and despair and the point of hope is of any practical consequence to the life of humanity.

Finally, I would like to raise, as a question for further discussion and consideration, the issue of authority in Moltmann's work. In developing a theology of the cross, what is authoritative for Moltmann? One reviewer of The Crucified God makes this comment:

The place of Scripture is difficult to determine....The limits of what is authoritative for Christian understanding are not set out. Although Scripture seems to underlie everything, much of his work is simply a polemic against various philosophies.<sup>20</sup>

On the contrary, I find that the limits of what is authoritative for Moltmann are clear. In order to establish the dialectical revelation of God, the suffering of God and the doctrine of the Trinity, he always appeals to the event of the cross as recorded and witnessed to by the biblical authors. After all it is his intention to develop a theology of the cross. His interpretation of that event may be questioned but not the fact that the biblical record of the crucifixion is his starting point. But we should dig further and ask why Moltmann gives the cross this central significance. Why is the cross, for Moltmann, "the key signature for all Christian theology"?<sup>21</sup> Put simply, the cross is for him the centre of all theology because it is this event that gives rise to Christian faith. The

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<sup>20</sup>Worthen, "A Review of Moltmann's The Crucified God", p. 98.

<sup>21</sup>Crucified God, p. 72.



"central truth of Christian faith" is that it "lives from the suffering of a great passion."<sup>22</sup> The cross of Christ "is the point at which faith comes into being."<sup>23</sup> Thus when developing his theology of the cross, Moltmann appeals not only to the cross but also to the witness of faith.<sup>24</sup> Theology that is not in accordance with the biblical record of Christ's death and the experience of faith at the foot of the cross is inadequate theology. Thus we may say that Moltmann's standard for judging theology is the cross of Jesus and the experience of faith that arises from that event--or the cross of Jesus as perceived in the experience of faith. This gives rise to the following questions: How does Moltmann define faith? By recognizing the testimony of faith for a theology of the cross, is he relying principally on a subjective experience? What is the relationship between faith and reason? If faith is a personal experience then what protects the believer from illusion? These questions do not fall within the scope of this study, but the examination of the theology of the cross does give rise to questions concerning Moltmann's understanding of faith.

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<sup>22</sup>Trinity, pp. 22f.

<sup>23</sup>Crucified God, p. 69.

<sup>24</sup>For example, concerning faith's perception of revelation in dialectic, see Crucified God, pp. 68f.; concerning faith's perception of the suffering of God, see ibid., p. 216 and Trinity, p. 21; concerning faith's experience of the love of God, see Crucified God, p. 214; concerning faith in the crucified Jesus and in the triune God, see ibid., p. 236.

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