

The Suffering God and Its Relevance to the Understanding of Human Suffering in Jürgen Moltmann's Theology

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Abstract—This paper explores Jürgen Moltmann's *The Crucified God*, focusing on his concept of a suffering God and its relevance to the understanding of suffering in the world. Moltmann argues that the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, understood as a Trinitarian event, provides a response to the problem of suffering in the world. Through a dialectical theological method, Moltmann suggests that God's omnipotence is revealed in the impotency of the crucified one, and that the Son's abandonment by the Father confirms their unity to act in response to the world's suffering. Human suffering has been assumed and transformed by God, and through the event of the cross, all those who suffer can participate in the fullness of life in the Trinity. Moltmann's theology suggests that God identifies with those who suffer, and the resurrection provides the possibility of justification for those who follow Christ's invitation to obedience.

Keywords—Suffering, Crucifixion, Trinitarian, Moltmann's Theology.

I. INTRODUCTION

CONTEMPORARY life exposes numerous forms of suffering such as oppression, injustice, exploitation, violation of human rights, sickness, and death. This poses a major challenge for Christianity as it questions how theology can speak of an all-powerful and all-loving God when there are so many human tragedies that cannot be consoled. Christians continue to struggle with the reality that not everything is good with humanity. Despite this, Christianity holds the belief that God is present in the world. For two thousand years, Christianity has proclaimed and witnessed to Christ's triumph over evil powers through his crucifixion and resurrection, which is the central tenet of God's redemptive action. Christianity will only remain relevant if it addresses the questions arising in people's everyday lives, including the mystery of suffering. Therefore, Christians must look to Jesus, who was sent by God, for answers to these perplexing questions.

A genuine Christian response to suffering can only be derived from a theology that takes into account Jesus' experience of persecution, rejection, and crucifixion. His life, ministry, and especially his cry of abandonment from the Calvary offer a convincing response to the problem of suffering that goes beyond abstract theological speculation. Christianity proclaims that God entered into the suffering of creation in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and ultimately, it is believed that

only the shame and mystery of the crucified God can resolve the problem of human suffering.

A. Statement of the Problem

This paper will try to explore the concept of the Suffering God in Jürgen Moltmann's theology, particularly in his book, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* and examine its relevance to the problem of human suffering.

Specifically, it will seek to answer the following questions:

1. What is the background and context of Jürgen Moltmann's *The Crucified God*?
2. Why is God a Suffering God in Moltmann's theology?
3. How is the concept of the Suffering God relevant to the problem and understanding of human suffering?

B. Significance of the Study

Jürgen Moltmann's book, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* is highly regarded as one of the most important works that explore the concept of a God who experiences suffering. Many scholars have discussed [16] and debated the ideas presented in this book, including Elizabeth A. Johnson [17], who praises Moltmann for his eloquent depiction of a God who suffers on the cross and thus identifies with the suffering of the entire world.

This paper is significant because it assesses the idea of the suffering God in *The Crucified God* and its relevance to the problem of human suffering. The focus of the analysis is on how Moltmann argues that the crucifixion of Jesus was a Trinitarian event, involving all three persons of the Godhead in bearing the suffering of the world. The paper aims to demonstrate that Moltmann's contribution to the theological discussion on divine suffering is connected to his doctrine of the Trinity and has implications for understanding human suffering in the world.

C. Scope and Limitations

The limitation of this study is that its focus is confined to the notion of the suffering God and its implication to the understanding of human suffering in the world. Consequently, Moltmann's work as a whole is not discussed. For the purpose of this paper, only Moltmann's *The Crucified God* along with some references to his and other works is explored. Also, the study does not deal profoundly with the theology of the

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impassibility or passibility of God. The paper will sharply focus on the theology of the suffering of God with respect to this author.

D. Methodology

To examine Moltmann's contributions to the theology of the suffering God, this paper provides an overview of his life, theological context, and methodology. It then analyzes the theology presented in *The Crucified God*, with a focus on Moltmann's ideas about the suffering God and his theology of the cross. The primary objective is to explore the significance of these ideas in addressing the central question of the relationship between God and human suffering.

II. JURGEN MOLTSMANN IN PERSPECTIVE: BIOGRAPHY, CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

Every human being is a being-in-context so that his or her identity and importance is drawn from the context in which he or she finds himself or herself. This is true of Jürgen Moltmann whose theological drive and contributions are greatly linked to the question of how it is likely to talk about God in a post-Nazi world. Moltmann himself answers that "as Germans we do this in awareness of Auschwitz" [1] precisely because, for him, "[t]heology is never concerned with the actual existence of a God. It is interested only in the rule of this God in heaven and on earth" [2]. And because of this when human beings experience the absence of God's rule, it causes them to question the very existence of God, for if God does in fact exist, then God's rule ought not be absent on earth.

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

The following biography and issues serve as an introduction to the extent to which historical and contextual issues have combined to influence Moltmann's theology and, in particular, that of *The Crucified God*. In short, this paper "...needs to examine the inner developments in the life of this man to be able to understand the elementary decisions and impressions which govern his work. So the key question is: what are the key experiences which have given this life its unique direction?" [3].

A. Biography and Issues

As a young man, Moltmann was deeply affected by World War II and the events that followed. The experiences he went through during the war and as a prisoner of war in British and European camps are discussed in the first chapter of his book, *The Source of Life: The Holy Spirit and the Theology of Life* [4]. These events had a significant impact on him and influenced his future life and work. In July 1943, Moltmann was stationed in central Hamburg, serving in an anti-aircraft battery during the Royal Air Force's Operation Gomorrah. The

eastern part of the city was under siege, and in one week alone, around eighty thousand people lost their lives due to aerial bombardment. During one of the raids by allied bombers, the battery where Moltmann was stationed was directly hit. This incident was a defining moment of devastation for the young German soldier. "The friend standing next to me at the firing predictor was torn to pieces by the bomb that left me unscathed. That night I cried out to God for the first time. "My God, where are you?" And the question "Why am I not dead too?" has haunted me ever since. Why are you alive? What gives your life meaning? Life is good, but to be a survivor is hard. One has to bear the weight of grief. It was probably on that night that my theology began, for I came from a secular family and knew nothing of faith" [4, p.2].

During the year 1945, Moltmann discovered that he was among a small group of German soldiers who were defeated by Allied tanks during a battle in Holland, resulting in his capture by Allied forces. Afterward, he was detained in various prison facilities across Europe until he was eventually moved to a Scottish internment camp. It was in this particular camp that Moltmann experienced his second transformative event:

"And then came what was for me the worst of all. In September 1945, in Camp 22 in Scotland, we were confronted with pictures of Belsen and Auschwitz. They were pinned up in our huts, without comment. Some people thought it was just propaganda. Others set the piles of bodies which they saw over against Dresden. But slowly and inexorably the truth filtered into our awareness, and we saw ourselves mirrored in the eyes of the Nazi victims. Was this what we had fought for? Had my generation, as the last, been driven to our deaths so that the concentration camp murderers could go on killing, and Hitler could live a few months longer? Some people were so appalled that they didn't want to go back to Germany ever again... The depression over the wartime destruction and a captivity without apparent end was exacerbated by a feeling of profound shame at having to share in this disgrace. That was undoubtedly the hardest thing, a stranglehold that choked us" [4, p.5].

Amidst the intense emotional distress, Moltmann was given a Bible by an army chaplain, which provided him with solace and comfort through the reading of Lamentations. He was eventually drawn to the Passion narratives, specifically Christ's crucifixion, which led to a deep understanding and connection with Jesus' cry of feeling abandoned by God: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" This verse played a pivotal role in shaping Moltmann's faith and theology. Although he doesn't describe his conversion in the traditional sense, Moltmann acknowledges that there was a moment when he realized that Christ had chosen him, as documented in Mark 15:34 [4, p.5].

As a young man, Moltmann experienced one more significant event that helped shape his beliefs. He was transferred to Camp Norton in 1946, where most of the prisoners believed they would be re-educated to create a better Germany. However, the camp turned out to be an unexpected

act of reconciliation, where the prisoners were given the chance to study theology under the guidance of distinguished biblical and theological scholars. In the summer of 1947, some of the prisoners, including Moltmann, were invited to attend the first-ever International Student Christian Movement conference. Moltmann considers this event to have completely transformed his life:

“We came there still wearing our wartime uniforms. And we came with fear and trembling. What were we to say about the war crimes, and the mass murders in the concentration camps? But we were welcomed as brothers in Christ... In the night my eyes sometimes filled with tears. Then a group of Dutch students came and asked to speak to us officially. Again I was frightened, for I had fought in Holland, in the battle for Arnhem bridge. The Dutch students told us that Christ was the bridge on which they could cross to us, and that without Christ they would not be talking to us at all. They told of the Gestapo terror, the loss of their Jewish friends, and the destruction of their homes. We too could step on to this bridge which Christ had built from them to us, and could confess the guilt of our people and ask for reconciliation. At the end we all embraced. For me that was an hour of liberation. I was able to breathe again, felt like a human being once more, and returned cheerfully to the camp behind the barbed wire. The question of how long the captivity was going to last no longer bothered me” [4, p.6].

Muller-Fahrenholz [5], who summarizes Moltmann's imprisonment and subsequent liberation as a culminating event, emphasizes that its significance has not been lost. Moltmann acknowledges that while his experiences in the prisoner of war camps initially caused him to question his certainties, he ultimately found hope through Christianity. This hope prevented him from succumbing to spiritual and psychological despair, and enabled him to persevere. Moltmann's theology is thus rooted in the pursuit of truth and meaning in the face of life's most profound questions. It emerged from his experience of confronting death in the depths of despair, rather than from a peaceful or unwavering sense of God's presence. As he explains, “It does not arise out of the peaceful and cheerful awareness of an unshakeable certainty in God but out of the abysmal experience of the remoteness of God” [5].

B. Context and Issues

In addition to his personal experiences, Moltmann's theology has been shaped by the shared experiences of his family and ethnic community. His theology has been influenced by his upbringing with a disabled brother, as well as by the collective experience of the German people. Therefore, Moltmann's theology is intertwined with the collective experience of the German people, in addition to his own personal journey.

“My biography was shaped, interrupted and radically changed, in a very painful way, by the collective biography of the German people in the last years of the Second World War and by a lengthy imprisonment after it. The ‘individual approach’ of my faith and thought and therefore also of “my theology” is embedded in the

collective experiences of guilt and suffering in my generation” [6].

Understanding Moltmann's theology requires taking into account his personal and contextual experiences. For Moltmann, theology is not a neutral or objective discipline, but a personal and existential one that is shaped by his own sufferings and understandings. The most significant experience for Moltmann was the realization that God can be present even in situations of Godforsakeness. This led him to the conclusion that the central question for theology is not how to talk about God, but how to not talk about God in the wake of the atrocities of Auschwitz [7].

Moltmann believes that theology after Auschwitz must acknowledge the significance of the Holocaust and the presence of God in the midst of such suffering. He argues that it would be impossible to conduct theology after Auschwitz without recognizing that God was present in the suffering of those who were martyred and murdered. Moltmann emphasizes the importance of praying the shema Israel and the Lord's prayer in Auschwitz itself, as any other response would be considered blasphemy [8].

It is clear that Moltmann's theological insights are heavily influenced by his context, and there are two reasons for this. Firstly, his work is closely connected to the social and political turmoil of post-World War II Germany. Secondly, his theology is intentionally political and requires consideration of the political implications of his ideas. Moltmann does not separate academic theology from real-life concerns, and this is evident in his critique of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity for neglecting spiritual gifts. Therefore, to fully understand Moltmann's theological contributions, it is necessary to take into account his contextual and political influences.

Since this paper is concerned with an analysis of Moltmann's Suffering God in his theology and God's relationship to human suffering as this is to be found in *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, it is helpful to understand the influence that Moltmann's experiences during and following World War II have had upon this work in particular. His own description of the book, *The Crucified God* is that it “is written from the time for the time, and is thus to be understood as contextual theology, set within the conflict of contemporary life.” [10] As with his theology in general, so it is the questions of life that have risen to the theological engagement of *The Crucified God*.

Aside its impact from his theology, it remains to be shown how Moltmann's life's experiences have also shaped his theological methodology, specifically that of *The Crucified God*.

C. Theological Method

Throughout his academic career, Moltmann has been committed to avoiding the temptation of creating a “theological immunity strategy” that would protect his ideas from any internal or external contradictions in both theory and life [9]. Moltmann rejected the idea of creating a theological system that would provide a defense against all contradictions in life and theory, as it would result in a withdrawal from life into a rigid

and inflexible fortress of ideas. Instead, he sought to articulate his understanding of God and God's work of revelation and redemption in a way that prioritized discovery over logical consistency. Moltmann emphasized the importance of dialogue and listening over dictation, and believed that truth should be found through open and free discussion within the community of believers, rather than through dogmatic adherence to a set of beliefs.

Therefore, Moltmann's approach to theology allows for innovation and experimentation, as it is driven by an imagination for the Kingdom of God in the world and for the world in the Kingdom of God. This results in a theology that does not conform to modernist or fundamentalist ideologies but rather looks toward the future of God and life. One of the pivotal moments in Moltmann's theological development was his reading of the passion of Christ, specifically Jesus' cry of negligence from the cross. This cry, which expressed his confusion, frustration, and outrage at feeling abandoned by God, became the central insight of *The Crucified God*.

Moltmann's analysis of the crucifixion and the apparent separation between the Father and the Son is based on a principle of dialectical epistemology, which involves recognizing unlike things rather than using an analogical principle of recognizing like things. He argues that revelation in the opposite creates the possibility of the analogical principle, but a theology of the cross based on this principle can only lead to a *theologia gloriae*. Moltmann believes that a dialectical methodology is essential to show the relevance of the cross to a suffering world. Through the impotency of the crucified one, the omnipotent God is revealed, and the love and provision of the Father are known through his resurrection of the one who was abandoned. By identifying with all those who are victims of violence and abandonment, the Son's experience of godlessness and godforsakenness brings them into correspondence with God. For Moltmann, this dialectical knowledge of God in his opposite is what brings heaven down to earth for those abandoned by God and opens heaven to the godless [10].

Moltmann's belief that the crucified Christ is the crucial standard of theology is the fundamental concept presented in *The Crucified God*. This work was developed after Moltmann's contemplation of his own experience of feeling abandoned by God and the seeming lack of God's presence in the world. He argues that the centrality of the crucified Christ either marks the end of all Christian theology or marks the start of a unique Christian theology. The book's aim is to confront the experience of God's absence by presenting a comprehensive theology of the cross.

III. THE SUFFERING GOD IN JURGEN MOLTMANN'S THEOLOGY

A. *Divine Suffering and the Problem of God*

Moltmann's theology is grounded in two fundamental themes, the first being God as the source of hope, and the second being God as a suffering God who shares in human suffering. These themes can be traced back to Moltmann's

experiences as a prisoner of war from 1945 to 1948, which he has stated had a profound impact on his life and thought.

Moltmann reflects that his first encounter with the question of God was during the catastrophic bombing of his hometown of Hamburg in July 1943, where he survived the destruction. Later, when the atrocities committed by the Germans at Auschwitz and Maidanek were exposed, Moltmann was confronted with the question of how one can live with such horrors [7, p.8]. Deeply influential in Moltmann's understanding of theology was his sense of involvement in the suffering and guilt of the German nation. As already said, such an experience led him to see theology from an ethical and political perspective.

Moltmann's book, *The Crucified God*, presents a God who experiences suffering on the cross and thereby shows solidarity with the suffering world. He argues that two options for understanding God are inadequate. The first option is to say that God is incapable of suffering, which leads to a conception of God as indifferent to the suffering in the world. Moltmann argues that this view has had a greater impact on the development of the doctrine of God than the history of Christ's passion. Moltmann also criticizes the adoption of Greek philosophical concepts of a God who cannot suffer by the early church, which created difficulties in Christology that modern theology has attempted to address.

Moltmann rejects the idea of a God who is metaphysically and ethically perfect and therefore incapable of suffering, which is called *apatheia*. He argues that if this concept of God is applied to the crucifixion of Christ, then the significance of the cross would be diminished because God cannot suffer and die. This view reduces God to a mere cause and denies the reality of God's suffering, which is an essential aspect of God's nature. Moltmann believes that a God who is truly God must be capable of experiencing suffering [10, p.267]. Moltmann further says, "Friendship occurs where love is offered in return. But in friendship with God there is no room for love" [10, p.267]. Moltmann argues that according to classical theism, the Godhead is seen as perfect and self-sufficient, and therefore has no need for humanity or its emotions. This means that God does not need friends and will not save individuals, as he is already complete. This view holds that God does not have emotions like anger, hate, or envy, but according to Moltmann, it also means that he lacks love, compassion, and mercy. This apathetic view of God sees him as unchanging, impassive, and self-sufficient, while the world is constantly changing and dependent. This ideal of *apatheia* was taken up by ancient Judaism and Christianity, with some seeking to go beyond it and see it as the goal of perfection [10, p.269].

In summary, *apatheia* represents humanity's ascent into the divine realm of the Logos, which implies freedom and superiority to the world in correspondence with the perfect freedom of God. However, it is not appropriate to say that God suffers without any choice in the matter, as this would make God subservient to pain. This view is limited to human, finite ways of suffering, which we cannot escape due to our creatureliness. Rejecting both options, Moltmann asserts that a

God who cannot suffer is lacking.

“A God who cannot suffer is poorer than any human.

For a God who is incapable of suffering is a being that cannot be involved. Suffering and injustice do not affect him. And because he is so completely insensitive, he cannot be affected or shaken by anything. He cannot weep for he has no tears. But the one who cannot suffer cannot love either. So he is also a loveless being” [10, p.222].

Moltmann combines several ideas discussed earlier, including the notion that love requires the lover to share in the sufferings of the beloved. He proposes a third option, which is that God, out of love, freely chooses to be affected by what affects others, so that human sin and suffering influence the divine being. Moltmann argues that such a God suffers not because of a weakness in the divine nature, but out of the fullness of divine love. He contends that if God could not suffer in this way, then God would not be love. This relationship between God and suffering is personal for Moltmann, who has been shaped by his experience of the horrors of the concentration camps and his cry for justice for the victims and a path to redemption for the perpetrators.

B. The Passion of Jesus Christ Crucified

Moltmann starts his exploration of the nature of God in *The Crucified God* by emphasizing the importance of the passion of Christ, which he sees as the heart of Christian belief. He looks at the question of God's nature through the lens of Jesus Christ, particularly his final words on the cross: “My God, why have you forsaken me?” [10, p.x]

Moltmann believes that Jesus' cry on the cross, “My God, why have you forsaken me?” is a significant aspect of Christian theology, as it is the starting point for any attempt to provide theological meaning to Jesus' death. However, Moltmann argues that some Christian theologians fail to accept the suffering that Jesus experienced from God, and instead, they are like Job's friends who failed to understand Job's suffering. Moltmann sees a contradiction between the Sonship of God and Jesus' forsakenness by God that cannot be resolved by reducing the divine Sonship or ignoring the forsakenness. Even the words of Psalm 22, which Jesus recites, do not solve the conflict since the psalm ends with a prayer of thanksgiving for rescue from deadly peril, which did not happen on Golgotha. In some early manuscripts of Mark's Gospel, the cry is intensified to express Jesus' sense of shame and being cursed by God [10, p.166].

Moltmann believes that Jesus' cry of abandonment is the crux of his understanding of the suffering God. He argues that this cry is either the end of all religions and a truly Christian theology or the beginning of a liberation theology. Moltmann emphasizes that a truly Christian theology should place Jesus' experience of God on the cross at the center of all notions of God. The paradox of the theology of the cross, in Moltmann's view, is the idea that the “God in God-forsakenness” of Jesus is an act of love. He sees this as a radical transformation in the concept of God.

“Within the Christian message of the cross of Christ, something new and strange has entered the metaphysical

world. For this faith must understand the deity of God from the event of the suffering and death of the Son of God and thus bring about a fundamental change in the orders of being of metaphysical thought and the value tables of religious feeling” [10, p.204].

Moltmann argues that the early church's Christology did not address Jesus' experience of abandonment, leading to a doctrine resembling Docetism, which denied Jesus' humanity. This made it difficult to reconcile the idea of God as immortal and incapable of suffering with humanity's mortality and capacity for suffering. The doctrine of the two natures in Christ reconciled this, but Jesus' abandonment on the cross challenged this union. This led the early church to question whether Christ's suffering could be attributed to God.

Moltmann presents three arguments to address the issues raised about the compatibility of Christ's suffering with the nature of God. Firstly, he argues that while the Nicene Creed correctly rejected the Arian heresy of a changeable God, it should not be taken as an absolute statement. Rather, it should be understood as a simile to say that God is not changeable in the same way as creatures are changeable, but this does not mean that God is not affected by that which is not of God [10, p.229]. In regards to the first argument, Moltmann argues that God's unchangeability is not absolute but rather a simile. While God does not change like humans do, it does not mean that God is not affected by things outside of God. The second argument challenges the traditional view that only Jesus' human nature suffered on the cross, while Moltmann asserts that love necessarily brings vulnerability and suffering. If one were to reject the idea of a suffering God, then they would also have to reject the notion that God loves. The third argument challenges the traditional understanding of redemption, which is based on negative concepts such as unchangeableness, immortality, and incorruptibility. Moltmann argues that humanity must move beyond these general distinctions and delve into the unique relationships between God and humanity, and God and the world.

Moltmann argues that when theology fails to understand the cross of Christ as the unique revelation of the suffering God, the church is faced with two interrelated crises: the crisis of identity and the crisis of relevance. These crises are referred to as the identity-involvement dilemma. According to Moltmann, a theology of the cross can provide a new identity for Christian theology, one that encompasses both the crucified Christ and an identification with the godless through praxis. Christian identity involves two related aspects: identifying with the crucified Christ by accepting the proclamation that in him God has identified himself with the godless, and identifying with those who are abandoned by God and to whom one also belongs [10, p.2].

Moltmann believes that the crucified Christ is the inner criterion of all theology and of every church claiming to be Christian, which is beyond external political, ideological, and psychological criticism. Furthermore, Moltmann acknowledges that the inclusion of the poor and oppressed churches brings a new sociological characteristic that was not present in the past.

To address this new factor, contemporary theology of the cross should focus on the liberation of humanity and its new relationship with societal demons, rather than personal salvation. This radical orientation of theology and the church is not an abstract theology of the cross and suffering but a theology of the crucified Christ. He explains:

“Christian theology must be theology of the cross, if it is to be identified as Christian theology through Christ. But the theology of the cross is a critical and liberating theology of God and man. Christian life is a form of practice which consists in following the crucified Christ, and it changes both humanity itself and the circumstances in which they live. To this extent, a theology of the cross is a practical theory” [10, p.25].

Moltmann argues that if one looks at the crucifixion of Jesus in light of the doctrine of the two natures, the belief that Christ has both a divine and human nature, then the idea that God is essentially incapable of suffering, a belief derived from Plato's philosophy, creates an intellectual obstacle to understanding the suffering of Christ. This is because a God who is capable of suffering like all other creatures cannot be considered as truly God according to this Platonic view.

Moltmann's interpretation of Luther's theology of the cross focuses on finding God in the forsakenness of Christ on the cross. However, Moltmann believes that Luther's Christology lacked a developed doctrine of the Trinity. Luther's Christology centered on the incarnation and the theology of the cross, but did not fully consider Trinitarian concepts. Moltmann critiques Luther for not fully understanding the triune God. While Luther distinguished between the divine nature and the second person of the Trinity, he did not fully explore the relationship between the suffering and dying Son and the Father and the Spirit [10, p.235]. Thus, in *The Crucified God*, Moltmann develops a theology of the cross in the sense of Luther's *theologia crucis*, but does so in an explicitly Trinitarian way. That is, Moltmann raised the question not only of what happened on the cross in relation to our salvation, but also, of what happened between Christ and God.

Moltmann found that what is manifested in the cross is God's suffering, a passionate love for his lost creatures, a suffering prepared to sacrifice. This sacrifice must be interpreted in Trinitarian terms, “as an event concerned with a relationship between persons in which these persons constitute themselves in their relationship with each other” [10, p.245]. Moltmann then strongly emphasizes the necessity of the Trinitarian understanding of God as the proper way to understand the significance of the death of Jesus for God.

C. Christological Doctrine of the Trinity and Eschatology

Moltmann builds upon Luther's theology of the cross to develop a Christological doctrine of the Trinity, which focuses on the abandonment of Jesus by God the Father on the cross. He argues that this abandonment is the most significant theological reality of the event of the cross and shapes how a theology of the cross must speak of God's suffering in the Trinitarian act of Christ's death. For Moltmann, the idea of God as Trinity is revealed in the crucifixion, where the humiliated

and crucified Jesus is seen as the image of the invisible God. Thus, in the midst of human suffering, God's greatness is most evident. Moltmann argues that God and Jesus are bound together in the cross, and the movements of the Spirit from the Father to humanity make liberation possible. On the cross, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are distinct in their relationships, yet conjoined in these distinctions.

“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 insofar as God abandoned God and contradicted himself, and at the same time a unity in God, insofar as God was at one with God and corresponded to 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 did not die. God is dead and yet is not dead. One can only use the simple concept of God from the doctrine of two natures. one will always be inclined to restrict it to the person of the Father who abandoned and accepts Jesus, delivers him and raises him up, and in so doing will ‘evacuate’ the cross of deity” [10, pp.244-245].

Moltmann here argues that Jesus' death should not be seen as the death of God but rather as death within the context of God. He argues that the death of God cannot be considered the starting point of Christian theology, even though there is some truth to the idea. Instead, the starting point is the death on the cross within the framework of God and God in Jesus' death. Thus, in order to understand about the human and the crucified God, according to Moltmann, one must think of God in Trinitarian terms with the event of the cross in mind. To understand what happened between Jesus and his God and Father on the cross, it is necessary to talk in Trinitarian terms. He says, “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 theology of the cross must be the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of the Trinity must be the theology of the cross, because otherwise the human, crucified God cannot be fully perceived. In other words, on the cross, the Son suffers death; but the Father suffers the death of his Son” [10, p.256].

Moltmann's belief that the cry of abandonment on the cross has a significant meaning within the Trinity is crucial for understanding his view of divine suffering. Moltmann argues that a Trinitarian theology of the cross differs from all philosophical and monotheistic views of God by not interpreting the cross through a metaphysical or moral concept of God. Instead, the focus should be on telling the story of Jesus as a history between the Son and the Father. Additionally, Moltmann highlights the strong unity of will between Jesus and his God, which is evident even in their profound separation on the cross. Moltmann holds that it is through the Spirit that such community and separation between Jesus and his God can go together:

“In the cross, Father and Son are most deeply separated in forsakenness and at the same time are most inwardly one in their surrender. What proceeds from this event between Father and Son is the Spirit which justifies the

Godless, fills the forsaken with love and even brings the dead to life, since even the fact that they are dead cannot exclude them from this event of the cross; the death in God also includes them" [10, p.256].

Moltmann's belief in the personal nature of the Trinity leads him to sometimes refer to it as the Social Trinity, which he sees as an eternal community of love. He argues that this communal vision of God supports human cooperation, equality, and community. For Moltmann, God is not just another nature or authority figure, but an event that is best approached through prayer that is done in this event, via the Son to the Father in the Spirit. Moltmann's theology is also highly eschatological, with the Trinity being viewed through a theology of the cross as essentially the history of God, which is open to the future and opens up the future. Humanity is taken up into this divine history and participates in the suffering of God, as well as in joy and hope, through prayer, hope, and action. By understanding God in this way, we can also understand our own history as a part of the history of God, which is ultimately the history of love. Moltmann concludes his argument with an eschatological interpretation of the Trinity:

"If one conceives of the Trinity as an event of love in the suffering and the death of Jesus - and that is something which faith must do - then 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. 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" [10, p.252].

Moltmann believes that God not only exercises power, but also experiences suffering. The death of Jesus, the Son, is not the death of God, but the beginning of an event in which the life-giving spirit of love emerges from the death of the Son and the grief of the Father. Moltmann argues that the concept of God gradually became idolatrous through a historical process that gave God the attributes of a king. This process led to the emergence of three main lines of thought that form the origin of theistic philosophy and theology. These lines include God depicted as an imperial ruler, God depicted as a personification of moral energy, and God depicted as the final principle of philosophy [11]. The result is a God who does not have relationship with humanity. Theism moves humanity away from God and alienates God from the possibility of loving, caring, and experiencing joy. Thus, any so-called Christianity which focuses solely on the idea of God and removes the suffering of God abandons Jesus on the cross. It is indispensable for the liberated believer to dispense with the inhuman God, a God without Jesus, for the sake of the cross. Here Christian atheism' is in the right. But at the same time God is creator. With God as Creator, humanity cannot posture itself as God, since humanity will always have a power above it. In Moltmann's view this is positive because such a posture, if deeply understood, will diminish the proud anthropocentric understanding of God and the world.

IV. THE CONCEPT OF THE SUFFERING GOD AND ITS RELEVANCE TO THE PROBLEM AND UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN SUFFERING

A. The Relationship of a Suffering God to the Suffering of the World

It is mentioned earlier that God's response toward suffering is the most important consideration in determining our own response to pain and suffering in the world. The premise is that we come to know the identification of God with the crucified Christ and the downtrodden only in the midst of experiencing pains and hurt in the world [12].

Moltmann argues that God's suffering is manifested when God embraces those who are marginalized. This means that people can encounter the suffering God of the cross through God's suffering in the world. Moltmann also suggests that God requires the collaboration of human beings to fulfill God's redemptive history that began with the creation. Therefore, a different perception of God can lead to a different attitude towards others. In the story of Job, the friends defended a different idea of God than the one that Job trusted, although there was only one God in the story. Jesus' teachings emphasized the rejection of the God of retribution and the affirmation of God as a compassionate Abba. Jesus' death resulted from a historical conflict between him and his opponents, which arose from their varying understandings of God. However, this does not preclude the biblical testimony that Jesus "died for us," and that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world."

The question of suffering and the question of God are considered to be inseparable. This paper shows that the experience of suffering tends to change one's perception of God. For the believer, the experience of suffering becomes a critical question about God. The question of God's relationship with the suffering of this world will continue to be an unshakable theme in our lives. Particularly in this paper, we focus on the concept of the suffering God, a notion which reflects the understanding of each human being's suffering from a theological perspective. In a nutshell, thinking and speaking about a suffering God is directly connected to the question of how a suffering God relates to the suffering of the world. Our identification with a suffering God is directly connected to the question of how we relate to each other's suffering.

In addition, the issue of suffering raises the problem of theodicy for believers, which is how to reconcile the existence of a God who is both all-powerful and all-loving with the existence of suffering. The fundamental challenge of theodicy is to defend the idea of a compassionate and omnipotent God in the face of our suffering. According to Stanley Hauerwas, the only way to address the pain of children dying from leukemia is to demonstrate a belief in God and in the interconnectedness of humanity, as this is the only response we can offer to the problem of the death of children [13]. As a result of this thought, the calling then is to remain with the oppressed and the disadvantaged. In other words, others' pain is also ours; another's death is not radically different from ours. We should

put ourselves beside others and bear others' pain with them and embrace them. We need to shift our attention always from heaven to those who are suffering here. Wherever people suffer, Christ stands with them. It is possible to help bear the burden. We can strive to change the social conditions under which people experience suffering. We can change ourselves and learn through suffering. To accept the suffering of Jesus means sharing in God's suffering with all of God's creatures [14].

B. The Concept of Suffering God and Its Application to Human Suffering

It is important to note that in *The Crucified God*, Moltmann intentionally shuns the use of traditional soteriological language which asserts that Jesus died a virtuous man in the place of the unrighteous. For him, the only answer to questions of suffering and the redemption of suffering is to be found within the actions of the Trinitarian God who redeems dehumanized humanity by entering into the suffering of humanity. Refusing to remain distant from the suffering of creation, as dictated by the theistic conception of a closed circle of perfect being in heaven, God became flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth and entered in to the suffering of all creation. This means, as noted earlier, that all soteriological questions must be given an adequate basis and contextualization within statements encompassing the event of the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

Moltmann's theology in *The Crucified God* is chiefly concerned to provide a theological response to the problem of suffering by providing an explication of who it is that acts in the crucifixion of Jesus so that we might gain a greater understanding of what has taken place there. The Crucified God, therefore, presents a theology of God's action at the cross, which is nothing other than a demonstration, for all of creation, of the conformity of will to act on its behalf that exists between persons of the Trinity. The crucifixion of Jesus is the event in which God the Father delivers the Son over to death as an atonement for the sins of the world (Rom 3:25). It is also the climax of God the Son's will to act in obedience to the will of the Father (Mt 26:39). And the Spirit's presence is guaranteed by the mutual self-giving of both Father and Son for what proceeds from this event between Father and Son is the Spirit which justifies the godless, fills the forsaken with love and even brings the dead alive.

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

the burden of our guilt.

Moltmann further argues that the Father does not stand totally unmoved by the events of the crucifixion of his Son either. Moltmann is insistent that the Father actively and willingly participates in the suffering inherent in the crucifixion, though in a differentiated form to that which the Son experiences. While the Son suffers and dies on the cross, the Father suffers with him, but not in the same way for the Son suffers dying, the Father suffers the death of the Son. The grief of the Father here is just as important as the death of the Son. Just as the death is first encountered in an experiential sense, not in our own deaths, but in the death of a beloved, Moltmann explains, "we do not experience death in ourselves but in those we love." The crucifixion, with the suffering it involved, is therefore "something that took place between God and God. The abandonment on the cross which separates the Son from the Father is something which takes place in God himself" [15]. In this way, the question of human suffering posed at the beginning of this paper is answered by Moltmann's assertion that the problem of suffering can be summed up by saying that suffering is overcome by suffering, and wounds are healed by wounds because Christ's suffering is not exclusive, but rather inclusive suffering. In other words, our suffering is included in his suffering.

C. Following the Paschal Path: Identifying with Christ

In view of the foregoing discussions, Moltmann maintains that the one who follows Jesus has identity with the crucified Christ because of the intensity of Christ's suffering on his or her behalf. This is so because for the crucified Christ has experienced the godforsakenness inherent in the experience of anyone who perceives that God has abandoned them. Moltmann writes, "Anyone who cries out to God in their suffering echoes the death-cry of the dying Christ, the Son of God." In Moltmann's view, therefore, God's redeeming love has ensured that the bitterness of all human loneliness and rejection has been taken into God's being through the experience of the crucified Christ. Indeed, Christ's death is the death of death and the negation of all negation. In the cross of the crucified Son, God is vulnerable, he takes suffering and death upon himself in order to heal, to liberate, and to impart his eternal life. Thus, for Moltmann God's redeeming love borders upon the incomprehensible for it is the crucified God who provides the possibility of love, the possibility for living with the terror of history, and for living with guilt and sorrow. These possibilities exist because all have been taken up into God through the experience of the crucified Jesus.

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

the godless and godforsaken. Jesus willingly humbles himself and assumes the everlasting demise of those who reject God and feel abandoned, enabling everyone in that state to partake in a profound connection with him

However, simply to remain with Christ's identification with the suffering of the godless and godforsaken does not in and of itself explain how that suffering is redeemed. Here Moltmann's theological method comes into its own in his understanding of the cross and resurrection in their dialectical interrelationship. The essence of salvation theology lies not in the cross alone, but in the figure of Jesus who was both crucified and resurrected. The theological perspective of The Crucified God places equal emphasis on the resurrection of Christ after his crucifixion, which gives meaning to his death for humanity, as well as on the cross of the risen Christ, which unveils and grants access to his victorious triumph over death for those who are in a state of spiritual decline. Therefore, in the resurrection Christians behold the crucified one and in the crucifixion they behold the resurrected one. Within the perspective of Moltmann's dialectic, the sins and suffering of the entire creation have been dealt with in the cross of the resurrected one precisely because as crucified he is the one to whom resurrection glory belongs.

V. CONCLUSION

This paper sought to explore the concept of Suffering God in Jürgen Moltmann's *The Crucified God*, a monumental work that has been described as one of the most important contributions to contemporary Christian theology. Specifically, the paper sought to delve in what Moltmann had to say concerning the bearing of a suffering God to the understanding of suffering in the world.

From Moltmann's understanding that the crucifixion of Jesus is a Trinitarian event in which all persons of the one Godhead participate, The Crucified God provides a present day response to the pressing theologico-pastoral problem, which Moltmann himself says, poses the most profound challenge to Christianity's identity and relevance: the presence of suffering in the world of which apparently contradicting to Christian theology's traditional assertion that God is omnipotent.

In response to the question of the problem of suffering, Moltmann's reply is to employ a dialectical theological method which provides a foundation from which to argue that the cross of Jesus Christ has profound relevance for a suffering world. According to this theology, for if God is made known in that which stands in opposition to God, then the omnipotent God is revealed in the impotency of the crucified one, while the apparent abandonment of the Son by the Father confirms the unity of both Father and Son's will to act in response to the world's suffering made fully manifest in the resurrection of the suffering Son of God.

Through the crucifixion of the Son of God, suffering has not been only experienced by God, but suffering and death have been taken into God. Moltmann argues that human suffering has been assumed and transformed through its assumption into the very being of God, with the consequence that there is now nothing that can exclude those who live in communion with

Christ from participating in the fullness of life of the Trinity. For Moltmann, Jesus' experience of abandonment to godlessness and godforsakenness, in the event of crucifixion, provides the grounds for God's identification with all of those who suffer, while his resurrection from the dead provides the possibility of justification for all those who follow his invitation to obedience.

Therefore, human suffering, according to Moltmann, has been beaten and redeemed through the willed, active suffering of a God who does veer away from the sufferings of human beings and creation but embraces the history's myriad acts of inhumanity and suffering in the event of the cross. Indeed, there is no suffering that can separate us from our fellowship with God who suffers with us.

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