

Suffering for Change: Jürgen Moltmann's Concept of Divine Suffering as an Impetus for
Social Responsibility

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Jürgen Moltmann's work consistently espouses a theology concerned with suffering. Of particular interest to this paper is Moltmann's development of specifically divine suffering-the suffering of God. Moltmann spends a great deal of time on the issue in several of his works, most notably in *The Crucified God*, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, and *God in Creation*. Despite Moltmann's emphasis on reality as it exists and the hope God provides in this world, he is critiqued because of his lack of a social ethic. This paper argues, through ideas of Trinity and kenosis, that Moltmann's work does indeed elicit social responsibility through his concept of divine suffering.

I. MOLTMANN'S ETHICAL VALUE

The potentially abstruse nature of theology sometimes precludes meaningful ethical meditation. Put in the words of a close friend of mine, theology can neglect the question of “what is the cash value?” What does this *mean* for my life as a Christian? These praxiological considerations are paramount in all theological discussions, because without them the crucial connection between “belief” and discipleship is severed.¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, “For faith is only real where there is obedience, never without it, and faith only becomes faith in the act of obedience.”² The move from intellectual assent to practice is a critical one.

James Gustafson submits Jürgen Moltmann's work to such a test and finds Moltmann wanting. Gustafson says of Moltmann in *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective*,

I invite the reader to see how far he or she would get making a choice about induced abortion, about issues of justice and liberty in the establishment of monetary and fiscal policies, about how to conduct modern warfare (if warfare can be justified at all) in light of this theology and ethics.³

Gustafson clearly wants moral precepts to take from Moltmann's work—precepts that Moltmann does not provide. Furthermore, Moltmann's attempt to locate ethics within the eschatological realm (and through the eschatological God) causes serious problems for Gustafson. He says, “Things are not immutable; they can be changed. God, the future, makes possible hope and courage. That, I believe, is all Moltmann can tell us.”⁴

¹ This thesis is written from a confessional perspective—I assume discipleship, and the ethics within, is of concern to the people of faith.

² Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York : SCM Press, 1959), 64.

³ Gustafson, James, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective*, vol. 1 (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1981), 48.

Gustafson makes the same mistake of which he accuses Moltmann. Whereas Moltmann might be faulted for an overly theoretical approach to ethical discourse, one which Gustafson rightly points out lacks particular apodictic “thou shalt nots,” Gustafson makes a similar mistake in going to the opposite extreme and asserting that Moltmann’s theology possesses no ethical value.⁵ Gustafson states, “Even Moltmann’s essay on ‘Hope and Planning’ becomes another occasion for elaborating a theology of history and of hope, and functions more to counsel an attitude than to provide the basis for moral reflection about what plans might be in accord with Christian hope.”⁶

Gustafson’s critique of Moltmann does not take into account other works and facets of Moltmann’s thought that could provide useful ethical insight. It is the contention of this paper that Jürgen Moltmann’s concept of divine suffering possesses social implications for the Christian community through emphasis on and identification with the “other.” This thesis is not so much a refutation of Gustafson’s particular argument as much as it is a constructive attempt to illumine ethical possibilities within one aspect of Moltmann’s work. Furthermore, this paper is not an apologetic for or against divine passability; it is an exploration of what social thought comes out of Moltmann’s understanding of divine passability.⁷

⁴ Gustafson, *Theocentric*, 48.

⁵ To be fair to Gustafson, his books were written (1974 and 1981) before the latter part of Moltmann’s career, a period when he wrote *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (1981), *God and Creation* (1985), and *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (1996). Therefore, he is an early progenitor of the idea that Moltmann’s theology is devoid of ethical import, but not the most recent.

⁶ Gustafson, James, *Theology and Christian Ethics* (Philadelphia : Pilgrim Press, 1974), 187.

⁷ For an excellent work and bibliography dealing with divine passability, see Marcel Sarot’s *God, Passability, and Corporeality* (The Netherlands: Kok Pharos Publishing, 1992).

Before we attempt a sketch of Moltmann's understanding of divine suffering, one question to be answered is the relationship between the divine/human moral imperative. In other words, what I intend to address is the question of "how analogical is the ethical relationship between God and humankind?" It would be easy to assert that as God is, humanity should be, but such an assertion grossly oversimplifies the quandary. Due to the radical disconnect between God and humanity, any understanding of divine attributes as ethical motivations must necessarily be Trinitarian. Stanley J. Grenz observes that in the gospel of Luke, the divine *kabod* (glory) of God could be seen in the person of Jesus.⁸ The author of the fourth gospel likewise considers the presence of Jesus to be synonymous with the presence of God. Grenz says, "Hence, according to John, Jesus Christ is the glory of God incarnate (e.g., John 1:14), so that seeing the Son is tantamount to seeing the Father (John 14:9) who sent him (John 12:45)."⁹ For Grenz, Jesus is the physical representation of God to humankind. Paul Ramsey similarly claims that to the extent that humanity strives towards the embodiment of the *imago dei*, to that same extent humanity looks like Jesus in his care of the neighbor. Since Jesus is the fullest revelation of the divine image, any conception of the *imago dei* as development posits Jesus as that prototype.¹⁰ Consequently, Jesus serves as the perfect bridge between the nature of God and the social ethics of humanity. Jesus is revealed as the embodiment of God and the basis for Christian social responsibility.¹¹

⁸ Grenz, Stanley, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville : Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 207.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ramsey, Paul, *Basic Christian Ethics* (Louisville : Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 259.

The problem of divine imitation as an impetus for social concern still has several cracks. One major issue is the degree to which contemporary Christianity can base anything on the actual person of Jesus. First of all, as biblical scholars and theologians have wrestled with since the 19th century, the “historical” Jesus is notoriously hard to pin down. For the purposes of this paper, we will assume that the canonical depiction of Jesus is the normative representation. The second concern is voiced most prominently by the late Notre Dame theologian John Howard Yoder. In his *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster* Yoder says,

That the concept of imitation is not applied by the New Testament at some of those points where Franciscan and romantic devotion has tried most piously to apply it, is all the more demonstration of how fundamental the thought of participation in the suffering of Christ is when the New Testament church sees it as guiding and explaining her attitude to the powers of the world. Only at one point, only on one subject-but then consistently, universally-is Jesus our example: in his cross.¹²

The question applicable for us as well as Yoder is whether or not Jesus is our imitative key, and if so, how we express that imitation. My thesis argues that Yoder is indeed right, but in a different way than he conceives. Disciples imitate Jesus and thus God not only in Jesus’ suffering, but God’s as well. For Moltmann’s God, Yoder is right: “It is not, like sickness or catastrophe, an inexplicable, unpredictable suffering; it is the end of a path *freely chosen after counting the cost*,” (emphasis mine).¹³ God freely suffers, though differently than Jesus, after counting the cost of relationship with humanity.

¹¹ Moltmann adds one more criteria for representing the *imago dei*: it can only be lived in community. He says, “Likeness to God cannot be lived in isolation. It can be lived only in human community,” (Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 222).

¹² Yoder, John Howard, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster* (Grand Rapids : William B. Eerdmans, 1972), 97.

¹³ Ibid.

II. JÜRGEN MOLTMANN'S UNDERSTANDING OF DIVINE SUFFERING

The christological emphasis provided by Yoder sets the stage for Moltmann's Trinitarian conception of divine suffering. For Moltmann, the suffering Christ is the Christ for us (to borrow Dietrich Bonhoeffer's terminology). The ultimate goal of God's suffering is for the purpose of suffering *with*.¹⁴ Bonhoeffer's concept of the *pro me* Christ examines the Christ who relates to and suffers with us. As such it serves as a useful tool for understanding Moltmann's conception of God's desire for humanity. Bonhoeffer says,

Christ is Christ, not just for himself, but in relation to me. His being Christ is his being for me, *pro me*. This being *pro me* is not to be understood as an effect emanating from him, nor as an accident; but it is to be understood as the essence, the being of the person himself. The core of the person himself is the *pro me*.¹⁵

This *pro me* structure is insinuated in Moltmann's insistence on God's identification with humanity. For Moltmann, however, the *pro me* structure is not limited to Jesus. Rather, God exhibits the *pro me* structure as well. Moltmann says, "It may therefore be said that the Father delivers up his Son on the cross in order to be the Father of those who are delivered up."¹⁶ Through this statement Moltmann indicates that God displays a similar disposition towards humanity as Bonhoeffer's Christ. God cares for humanity to the point of voluntary suffering on behalf of humanity in order to foster relationship. Both the first and second persons of the Trinity share this self-sacrificial *pro me* structure. Not only does God desire identification with humanity, but God pays an enormous price for the

¹⁴ Moltmann, Jürgen, *The Crucified God* (Minneapolis : Fortress Press, 1974), ix.

¹⁵ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, *Christ the Center* (New York : HarperSanFrancisco, 1960), 47.

¹⁶ Moltmann, *Crucified*, 243.

role. In so doing, Moltmann indicates that both God and Jesus share in the suffering of identification with the world, albeit differently.¹⁷

The aforementioned distinction between the suffering of God and Christ serves as an excellent introduction to Moltmann's understanding of divine suffering. Divine suffering for Moltmann is most importantly Trinitarian.¹⁸ Without Trinitarian perspective on the issue of divine suffering, Moltmann warns, "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."¹⁹ The distinction between the suffering Son and the transcendent Father seems to disallow a first Trinitarian person who authentically loves Jesus or the rest of creation.²⁰ In light of this tension, Moltmann proposes moving the starting point for an understanding of the suffering Christ away from a Hellenistic conception of divine apathy towards a vision of the "passionate God." In proposing such a move, Moltmann centers his starting point around an essentially loving God, rather than an indifferent God.

¹⁷ Moltmann, *Crucified*, 243. Moltmann is very clear that God and Jesus do not suffer identically. To assert such a claim would place Moltmann squarely within the patripassianism camp. Moltmann says, "On the cross, the Son suffers death, abandoned by the Father. But the Father suffers the death of the Son, and with it his own abandonment of the Son. The suffering of the Father is not identical with the sufferings of the Son, but corresponds to it," (Moltmann, *God as Father?*, 54). Such a distinction between the suffering of the two Trinitarian persons is necessary in order to preserve authentic difference between the two. If not properly delineated, the two persons become modes rather than persons (Christie-Murray, 40).

¹⁸ Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (Minneapolis : Fortress Press, 1981), 22.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ This argument is oft-criticized by opponents of divine passability as being too emotive in nature. It stems from seeing God in an overly anthropomorphic manner. According to this line of argument, humanity imposes human rationality upon a God who operates according to an entirely different "set of rules." Both sides of this point can easily be caricatured. On the one side is the hyper-emotional person who cannot seem to release God from human contingencies and schemas, and on the other side stands the cold-hearted "wholly Other" theologian who would actually worship a tyrannical God just because He/She bears the title of "God." Thomas G. Weinandy represents the opposition to divine passability in *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame : University of Notre Dame Press, 2000).

Moltmann says, “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.”²¹ Since Christian theology is centered around the claim that “God is love,” for Moltmann, beginning his theology of divine suffering with the concept of passion makes more sense than starting from divine impassability.²² Understanding God as a God of love usually begins and ends with Jesus. Rarely is God, the first Trinitarian person, recognized as wholly loving without any reference to the Christ event. Atonement theories romanticizing the death of Jesus actively contribute to this bias.²³ Moltmann’s introduction with the passion of God rather than the apathy of God disarms this bias from the outset. The sufferings of both God and Jesus acknowledge the “horror” of the cross and embrace it.²⁴

Second, Moltmann understands divine suffering, revealed through the cross event, to be the ground for all of Christian theology. Moltmann interprets the Markan depiction of Jesus’ death as the altar upon which Christian theology is sacrificed upon. The “cry of dereliction” that Jesus offers to God serves as either the pinnacle of worldly godlessness or the foundation of Christian theology.²⁵ Obviously Moltmann chooses the latter interpretation. For Moltmann, the critical nature of the cross for theology cannot be

²¹ Moltmann, *Trinity*, 22-23.

²² To his credit, Moltmann does discuss the need the early church fathers had for a doctrine of divine impassability. He cites two primary reasons for the development of the doctrine. First, it separated divine experience from human experience. Whereas frailty and death plagued humanity, God was supposed to be above such inconveniences. Secondly, Moltmann credits the fathers with positing a God who, because he existed above worldly experience, could impart the divine life to his followers (Moltmann, *Trinity*, 23).

²³ Moltmann, *Crucified*, 33.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, x.

overstated. He says, “Today the church and theology must turn to the crucified Christ in order to show the world the freedom he offers. This is essential if they wish to become what they assert they are: the church of Christ, and Christian theology.”²⁶ In this crucified Christ the world does not see a replication of its own suffering. Instead, it sees an entirely different form of suffering, one based upon voluntary submission to the violence of the world. In so doing Jesus was not advocating passivity, but disarming action.²⁷ Moltmann says, “Jesus did not suffer passively from the world in which he lived, but incited it against himself by his message and the life he lived.”²⁸ This incitement of suffering sets the Trinitarian experience of suffering apart from earthly suffering. Conditions of finite existence, such as natural disasters, early death, and human evil are not analogous with divine pain and suffering.²⁹ Only those who suffer on behalf of the liberating word of God may count Christ as a co-sufferer.

Identifiably “Christian” theology is founded upon this co-suffering of the Christ event for two reasons. First, through the cross event, and consequently the suffering of Christ, Christianity is delineated from all other religions.³⁰ Only Christians worship a failed savior. Moltmann notes, “Jesus clearly died with every expression of the most profound horror. How can this be explained? The comparison with Socrates, and with Stoic and Christian martyrs shows that there is something special here about the death of

²⁶ Moltmann, *Crucified*, 1.

²⁷ I am fully aware of the feminist critique raised against those who would argue for passivity as any sort of virtue or God-like action. Traci C. West argues this point in a provocative article on Reinhold Niebuhr, where she asserts that, in contradiction with Niebuhr, the fundamental human sin is not primarily self-assertion. West argues that for women, self-negation may be the chief human sin (see bibliography, Traci C. West, *Constructing Ethics*).

²⁸ Moltmann, *Crucified*, 51.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

Jesus.”³¹ Christians worship a figure who died the most horrific death, not only because of the nature of Roman crucifixion (thousands were crucified that way), but because his mission was seemingly in vain. Judging by Markan materials, Jesus’ cry of dereliction was a cry of abandonment rather than triumph. Jesus’ abandonment on the cross leads not to the heroic death of Greek tragic heroes, but to the humiliation of failure. In this context describing Jesus as the “unsuccessful Christ,” makes sense. Christian theology is founded on the cross for another reason. The crucifixion and suffering of Jesus serves as the lens through which all Christian statements and perceptions must be made.³² The cross enables recognition of the resurrection of the crucified Christ, the future hope in the crucified Christ, and the contemporary emphasis on the other through the crucified Christ.³³

Divine suffering is important for Christian theology to the extent to which it reveals the very nature of God. Up to this point we have established that Moltmann begins with a passionate God rather than an apathetic God, the suffering of the divine Christ serves as the lens for all Christian theology (including the doctrine of God), and that Jesus is portrayed as the unsuccessful Christ. From this, the logical conclusion seems to be that through the Christ event Christian theology can make serious claims about the very nature of God. Moltmann agrees, saying,

Humiliation to the point of death on a 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

³¹ Moltmann, *Crucified*, 146.

³² *Ibid.*, 204.

³³ *Ibid.*, 205.

self-surrender. God is not more powerful than he is in this helplessness. God is not more divine than he is in this humanity.³⁴

The cross reveals that suffering is indeed a part of the divine life. As Moltmann noted above, God is not greater than the self-surrender, human-ness, and helplessness displayed in the cross event. Consequently, the cross event serves as a window into not just the experience of Christ on the cross, but of God himself/herself. After recognizing the normative nature of the cross event for Christian theology, Moltmann illustrates that humanity can know God most fully through divine suffering.³⁵ The sufferings of Jesus serve as a premiere “window” into the divine life.

Moltmann draws on a plethora of resources in the construction of his theology. For his ideas of divine passability, Moltmann owes a great deal to the work of Abraham Heschel, who wrote extensively about the “pathos” of God.³⁶ Key for Moltmann’s argument for passability is the concept of “Shekinah.” In order to comprehend Moltmann’s appropriation of Shekinah, however, we must first understand from where Moltmann takes the idea. Here Heschel’s God of pathos fits nicely. Moltmann says,

On the ground of the Jewish experience of God, Heschel developed a bipolar theology of the covenant. God is in himself free and not subject to any destiny; yet through his pathos God has at the same time committed himself in his covenant. He is the God of gods; and at the same time for his little people of Israel he is the God of the covenant. He reigns in heaven; and at the same time dwells with the humble and meek.³⁷

³⁴ Moltmann, *Crucified*, 205.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Jaeger, John. “Abraham Heschel and the Theology of Jürgen Moltmann.” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 24, Summer (1997), 167.

³⁷ Moltmann, *Trinity*, 27.

From Heschel Moltmann adopts the idea that God did not create humanity as *homo apatheticus* but *homo sympatheticus*.³⁸ This *homo sympatheticus* anthropology indicates that God's people love, envy, and suffer as God does.³⁹ Heschel's Shekinah, according to Moltmann, makes three claims. First, that God indwells the nation of Israel. Second, that God condescends in his experience with humanity. Finally, Heschel ascribes future hope of the glory of God to the Shekinah.⁴⁰ Moltmann asserts that these three statements stem from the self-humiliation of God. At every juncture of Jewish history-creation, patriarchs, the Exodus-God voluntary undergoes a greater contraction. God relinquishes might in order to demonstrate greatness. Moltmann says, "The Almighty humiliates himself to the end of the world. He is high and lifted up-and looks upon the lowly. He reigns in heaven-and dwells with widows and orphans."⁴¹ According to this understanding of Shekinah, God actually experiences the travail of the oppressed Hebrews in Egypt, the joy of the giving of the law, and the pain of the exiled Israelites. The tension of divine suffering is alleviated, in this strand of Jewish mysticism, by the future hope of God restoring "all in all."⁴² For those familiar with Moltmann's work, it is not difficult to ascertain why he draws much from Heschel's theology. First of all, they share a concern with the present sufferings of the world. As Jaeger observes, both Heschel and Moltmann, ". . . wrote in light of the Holocaust, wrote of God's suffering, took biblical authority seriously,

³⁸ Moltmann, *Trinity*, 26.

³⁹ Such language is active within the church even today. Contemporary authors laud the state where what "angers" God angers us. Furthermore, it should be noted that whereas Heschel does speak at length about "suffering with," he delineates between divine and human experience as Moltmann does.

⁴⁰ Moltmann, *Trinity*, 28.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 29.

promoted social activism, and utilized dialectical thinking.”⁴³ Secondly, both of these writers posit that there is something wrong with the very fabric of the human-divine relationship (beyond orthodox claims of human sin).⁴⁴ Thirdly, Heschel develops his theology around the future hope of complete restoration. This emphasis resonates with Moltmann’s own predilection for eschatology.⁴⁵ Finally, Moltmann identifies with Heschel’s work due to Heschel’s belief that the aforementioned rift between God and humanity is mended by a voluntarily suffering God.

III. TRINITY AS A KEY TO RELATIONALITY

Our attention now turns to the question introduced at the beginning of this argument-what is the “cash value” of Moltmann’s theology of divine suffering? Why should Moltmann’s work have bearing on the life of discipleship? There are two major Moltmannian contributions that lead back towards an emphasis on the “other” in society.⁴⁶ The first of these is the emphasis on the Trinitarian nature of divine suffering. The second is the kenotic nature of divine suffering. These two facets of Moltmann’s work on divine passability consistently make praxiological demands on the life of faith.

⁴³ Jaeger, “Heschel,” 167-168.

⁴⁴ One common critique of Moltmann arises at this point. If Moltmann believes there to be a significant tear in the unity of God himself, then God himself must be “saved.” In other words, some authors contend that all Moltmann has done is create a God who needs a savior of his own.

⁴⁵ For Moltmann’s extensive treatments of eschatology, see Moltmann, Jürgen, *Theology of Hope and The Coming of God*.

⁴⁶ The “other” designates not just the neighbor mentioned by Jesus, but the invisible members of society. Those who are marginalized, oppressed, or are not members of the elite are all of special interest to both Moltmann and this paper. Broadly conceived, the “other” is the “thou” of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s I-Thou relationship. It is anyone outside of the immediate “I” (which is therefore everyone).

This paper has already addressed to some extent the nature of Moltmann's Trinitarian theology. What has not been discussed is how that Trinitarian emphasis on divine suffering leads back to the world. Catherine Mowry LaCugna notes the dramatic impact the doctrine of the Trinity may have on human relationships. She says of the doctrine, ". . . (it) secures for Christian theology a basis for a theology of God that is inherently related to every facet of human life."⁴⁷ Mark S. Medley concurs when he says, "The doctrine of the Trinity, therefore, speaks not only of the essentially relational character of God but also of the relational structure of human existence and the interdependent quality of the universe."⁴⁸ As Moltmann uses Jesus as the model of both human approaches to God and true humanity, so the Trinity can be utilized as a model of sociality.⁴⁹ LaCugna says, "Indeed, trinitarian theology is par excellence a theology of relationship: God to us, we to God, we to each other."⁵⁰ This holds true even when divine suffering is included within the life of the Trinity. In other words, divine suffering in the Trinitarian life draws the disciple to ponder this-worldly implications of that suffering. Admittedly, there are problems with equating the life of Jesus and the life of the Trinity with fallen human existence. First and foremost is the problem of ontological difference. Humanity does not possess the divine nature necessary to actualize the life of Jesus in individual people, and for this same reason the Trinity cannot be fully actualized within human relationships. Consequently, to say that the Trinity serves as the paradigmatic "I-

⁴⁷ LaCugna, Catherine Mowry, *God With Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York : HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), 250.

⁴⁸ Medley, Mark, *Imago Trinitatis: Toward a Relational Understanding of Becoming Human* (New York : University Press of America, 2002), 41.

⁴⁹ Moltmann, Jürgen, *God in Creation* (Minneapolis : Fortress Press, 1985), 241.

⁵⁰ LaCugna, *God*, 243.

Thou” relationship can only speak to social action through general precepts. Those precepts, however, can still bear meaning for Christian discipleship.

There are three primary ways through which the Trinity can inform human relationships in an imitative sense. First of all, there is the concept of perichoresis. Secondly, there is the mutual identity-making nature of the Trinitarian relationships. Finally, the approach to “otherness” within the Trinity is important for discussions of the Trinity as the supreme example of relational existence. Divine suffering further colors how one interprets these ideas for earthly communal life. The perichoretic nature of the Trinitarian life is the first way in which the doctrine of the Trinity can affect human interaction. Moltmann articulates the idea of perichoresis,

An eternal life process takes place in the triune God through the exchange of energies. The Father exists in the Son, the Son in the Father, and both of them in the Spirit, just as the Spirit exists in both the Father and the Son. By virtue of their eternal love they live in one another to such an extent, and dwell in one another to such an extent, that they are one. It is a process of most perfect and intense empathy.⁵¹

The perichoretic nature of the inter-Trinitarian life means that while the persons of the Trinity are individual, they are also a communal entity. There is an inherent social element in the Trinitarian doctrine. Moltmann notes that the perichoretic relation of the Trinity destroys the tendency to subordinate one Trinitarian person to another.⁵² Thus, the egalitarian, perichoretic relationship of the Trinity, if the Trinity is considered to be the superlative communal relationality, bears directly on human to human relations. The community of faith cannot afford to care only for themselves as individuals, if modeling the Trinitarian life. The mutual concern of perichoresis refuses that option. Moltmann

⁵¹ Moltmann, *Trinity*, 175.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 176.

says, “Human beings are the *imago trinitatis* and only correspond to the Triune God when they are united with one another.”⁵³ Instead, human communities must see its fundamental unit as “being-in-relation” rather than individuals seeking community as a “benefit.”⁵⁴ The perichoretic nature of the Trinity calls the community of faith to an approximation of that voluntary mutual indwelling. The divine suffering present in the Trinitarian life makes this earthly perichoresis all the more meaningful, since it necessitates radical cost.

The mutual indwelling of perichoresis means that the persons draw from one another their eternal identities.⁵⁵ The Trinitarian persons realize their identities from one another in an “eternal circulation” of love, glory, and self-sacrifice.⁵⁶ Moltmann does not specifically address Augustine’s observation that the Trinitarian persons are identified by their relations to one another (God is “Father” because of his relationship to Jesus), but asserts that, “Here the three Persons are equal; they live and are manifested in one another and through one another.”⁵⁷ At different points in scripture, Moltmann observes, each of the divine persons are referenced as being fundamentally “glorious.”⁵⁸ In this

⁵³ Moltmann, *Creation*, 216.

⁵⁴ In some American church contexts, “community” is a benefit, not the state of the soul. Members make statements about “having community” or a church possessing “good community.” This approach commodifies community into something gained, rather than as the fundamental, ontological basis for personhood. LaCugna identifies God as the ultimate “being-in-relation,” and to some extent this “being-in-relation” is descriptive of the human existence. This statement harkens back to my earlier argument that God is *pro me* just as Bonhoeffer’s Christ is *pro me*.

⁵⁵ Moltmann, *Trinity*, 175.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

way, through voluntary love and self-giving, the Trinitarian persons glorify one another in eternity. Moltmann indicates this identity-making facet of Trinitarian relationship, “The Persons of the Trinity make one another shine through that glory, mutually and together. They grow into perfect form through one another and awake to perfected beauty in one another.”⁵⁹ The voluntary self-giving of the Trinity serves as another model for Christian discipleship. The emphasis on self-giving, even with significant cost, finds its genesis in the Trinitarian life. Through imitation of this self-giving people understand their identity as people redeemed *for* one another. This argument is furthered by the presence of voluntaristic co-suffering within the Trinitarian life. Moltmann states, “This is the fundamental idea of the whole Anglican theology of God’s suffering: the cross on Golgotha has revealed the eternal heart of the Trinity.”⁶⁰ Moltmann lauds C.E. Rolt’s work on the idea of Trinitarian passability, saying that because the Trinity’s nature is sacrificial, the only thing God could sacrifice for humanity was himself. Furthermore, this sacrifice is characteristic of all of God’s work.⁶¹ These quotes identify God, in Moltmann’s view, as a sacrificial God, as part of a sacrificial Trinity, to be emulated by a sacrificial people who find their identities in relationship.

The final way in which the Trinity informs social thinking comes in the form of the “other.” Through the aforementioned perichoresis and the identity-making nature of the Trinitarian relations, there is no such “other” in the Trinitarian life. If the “other” is the faceless and invisible non-entity, then “otherness” stands diametrically opposed the Trinitarian recognition of one another. Moltmann says, “The freedom of faith therefore

⁵⁹ Moltmann, *Trinity*, 176.

⁶⁰ Moltmann, *Trinity*, 31.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

urges men on towards liberating actions, because it makes them painfully aware of suffering in situations of exploitation, oppression, alienation and captivity.”⁶² Just as there is no oppression or repression within the Trinitarian life, these two political options are unavailable for the Christian. Christian discipleship can only be built upon identity-recognizing, self-sacrificial love.⁶³ Moltmann illustrates the new situation in political terms,

If this crucified man has been raised from the dead and exalted to be the Christ of God, then what public opinion holds to be lowliest, what the state has determined to be disgraceful, is changed into what is supreme. In that case, the glory of God does not shine on the crowns of the mighty, but on the face of the crucified Christ. The authority of God is then no longer represented directly by those in high positions, the powerful and the rich, but by the outcast Son of Man, who died between two wretches.⁶⁴

Moltmann’s point is well-taken; illumined in the light of the Trinitarian life is the voluntary rejection of power in favor of humility. This “otherness” is now the favored position under God’s humble lordship. In light of this reversal, the actions of the disciple must be turned to those without power and prestige.

I have argued that the Trinity is *the* superlative example of community, and that Moltmann asserts the presence of voluntary co-suffering within the Trinitarian life. The result of this logic suggests that voluntary suffering is normative for the disciple of Jesus. If Moltmann is correct, and the Trinitarian members suffer for one another in love, then human communities must be willing to do the same for one another. Moltmann argues

⁶² Moltmann, *Crucified*, 317.

⁶³ My claims for Christian discipleship are not built upon claims of contemporary reality. In other words, this paper is not built upon the sand of an utopian, idealistic worldview. I am not advocating that this can or cannot ever be fully realized, but it still serves as the basis for meaningful Christian discipleship. The application of an “impossible ethic” is another paper. I am arguing simply that Moltmann ethically *matters*.

⁶⁴ Moltmann, *Crucified*, 327.

that human beings partake in the *imago Trinitatis* in respect to their relationality; I argue specifically that disciples partake in this image through enduring suffering on behalf of others.⁶⁵ To the extent that my thesis is correct, that Moltmann's doctrine of divine suffering makes praxiological demands on believers, it can be said that obedience to God means living a radically self-effacing existence.⁶⁶ This existence could be characterized as the authentic giving of one's life in order to gain it.

IV. KENOSIS AS A PARADIGM FOR IMITATION

There is a second element of Moltmann's development of divine suffering that yields fruit for discussions of praxis. The theological concept of kenosis begs the question that Donald Dawe ventures, "The question of kenosis is no longer: How is kenosis possible in light of God's nature? The question is rather: What is God's nature in the light of the kenosis?"⁶⁷ Moltmann insinuates the existence of kenotic element within his work on divine suffering. He says, "The self-humiliation of God, which we already talked about in connection with the doctrine of the creation of the world, is fulfilled in the incarnation of the Son. God permits an existence different from his own by limiting himself."⁶⁸ For Moltmann, the kenotic experience of God is one of the defining marks of God's nature. God is fundamentally selfless in his relationships both within the Trinity

⁶⁵ Moltmann, *Creation*, 241.

⁶⁶ Again, I am aware of a feminist critique to this statement. When I say "self-effacing," I intend to suggest an approach to others that fully actualizes the self in the context of other-love. In other words, I am not advocating the abdication of selfhood for the apparent good of another. I am instead suggesting that one give away their legitimate claims to self-aggrandizement for the sake of others.

⁶⁷ Dawe, Donald. *The Form of a Servant: A Historical Analysis of the Kenotic Motif* (Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 1963), 182.

⁶⁸ Moltmann, *Trinity*, 119.

and without. “. . . through his indwelling, people participate in his life and in his will; they love with his love and suffer with his suffering. The God who in his indwellings confronts himself, becomes recognizable in the incarnate Son who confronts the Father in the world.”⁶⁹ This quote seemingly illustrates that God limits himself in order to participate with both humanity and the other Trinitarian persons in their suffering.⁷⁰ In so doing Moltmann aligns his God closely with the world. Amuluche Nnamani notes that, “By insisting that God’s relationship to the world is retroactive and reciprocal, Moltmann aims to think of the world process and inner-Trinitarian process as one, without mixing them up.”⁷¹

Despite this apparent alignment of God with the world, Moltmann stridently denounces the tendency to associate the kenotic experiences of the Trinitarian persons with one another.⁷² Just as we previously delineated between the sufferings of God and Jesus, we must now be careful about speaking of God’s kenosis too generally. For Moltmann, upon the coming of the Spirit, there is a general kenosis of God into all creation.⁷³ He says,

The Word ‘becomes flesh’ but the Spirit ‘indwells’. If we keep this dogmatically useful distinction in mind, we can-and indeed must-talk about a kenosis of the Spirit. The Spirit is not one of the powers of God. According to the Christian and trinitarian understanding he is God himself. If God commits himself to his limited creation, and if he himself dwells in it as ‘the giver of life’, this presupposes a self

⁶⁹ Moltmann, *Trinity*, 118.

⁷⁰ This can be problematic for Moltmann, because it seems to insinuate that there are contradictions within the very nature of God (see following footnote).

⁷¹ Nnamani, Amuluche, *The Paradox of a Suffering God: On the Classical, Modern-Western and Third World Struggles to Harmonise the Incompatible Attributes of the Trinitarian God* (New York : Peter Lang Publishing, 1994), 164.

⁷² Moltmann, *Creation*, 102.

⁷³ It is along these lines that Moltmann’s detractors base their claims of pantheism.

limitation, a self-humiliation and a self-surrender of the Spirit.⁷⁴

This kenosis of the Spirit is fundamentally different than the kenosis of the Christ. The kenosis of the incarnation can further be separated from the kenosis of God the Creator. Moltmann gives flesh to this statement when he states, “In this sense, by yielding up his Son to death in Godforsakenness on the cross, and by surrendering him to hell, the eternal God enters the Nothingness out of which he created the world.”⁷⁵ In this way Moltmann differentiates between the kenotic undertakings of the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. In the same way that divine and human suffering cannot be purely analogous, neither can the kenoses of the Trinitarian persons.⁷⁶

In light of kenosis, the divine-human exchange can occur. Subsequently, the kenotic aspects of God’s relationship to humanity form the basis of the divine-human friendship. Moltmann finds basis for the concept of God’s limitation for friendship with the other in the Jewish mystical notion of “zimzum.” Moltmann describes zimzum, “God withdraws himself in order to go out of himself. Eternity breathes itself in, so as to breathe out the Spirit of life.”⁷⁷ Not only does kenosis (I consider zimzum to be analogous to the kenotic motif within Christian tradition) enable God to create, it allows himself to establish relationship with creation. Moltmann here uses Jesus to establish that relationship through the person of Jesus, who is the archetype for humanity.⁷⁸ Through

⁷⁴ Moltmann, *Creation*, 102.

⁷⁵ Moltmann, *Creation*, 91.

⁷⁶ Moltmann still places emphasis on the Trinitarian nature of kenosis, saying, “But if the kenosis of the Son to the point of death upon the cross is the ‘revelation of the entire Trinity’, this event too can only be presented as a God-event in trinitarian terms (Moltmann, *Crucified*, 206).

⁷⁷ Moltmann, *Trinity*, 108.

Jesus humanity sees God as Creator and friend. Moltmann bases this friendship of God and humanity on the kenotic aspect of God's reign.⁷⁹ Again, the reader finds Moltmann being very Trinitarian. Moltmann says, "In fellowship with the only begotten Son, people become co-opted sons and daughters of the Father."⁸⁰ This relationship between God and humanity, whether characterized as friendship or the recognition of God's parenthood over humanity, can only be recognized through the kenotic facets of God. It is through kenosis that the infinite gap between the divine and human may be bridged.

Moltmann chooses to characterize this kenotic level of God's relation to humanity in yet another way-through the concept of "mutual participation" in life. Moltmann places the cross event at the center of his kenotic idea of mutual participation. Through the cross (the ultimate kenotic event), God reveals his "humanity" in the dehumanized Christ.⁸¹ This overlap of humanity and divinity, for both Trinitarian persons, creates the way for mutual participation in existence. Through this mutual participation God partakes in the suffering of the world, and vice versa. Moltmann says, "(New 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."⁸² Through this encompassing God humanity can partake in the divine life through suffering.⁸³

⁷⁸ Moltmann, *Trinity*, 120.

⁷⁹ For an explanation of divine/human friendship, see Porter, Jean, *The Recovery of Virtue: The Relevance of Aquinas for Christian Ethics* (Louisville : Westminster John Knox Press, 1990), 170.

⁸⁰ Moltmann, *Trinity*, 121.

⁸¹ Moltmann, *Crucified*, 205.

⁸² *Ibid.*

Finally, kenosis makes claims about God's power. For Moltmann, God's power is revealed in his humility. His humility is in turn revealed in his choice to suffer with humanity, rather than remain a transcendent abstraction. Moltmann notes,

If God were incapable of suffering in every respect, then he would also be incapable of love. He would at most be capable of loving himself, but not of loving another as himself, as Aristotle puts it. But if he is capable of loving something else, then he lays himself open to the suffering which love for another brings him; and yet, by virtue of his love, he remains master of the pain that love causes him to suffer. God does not suffer out of deficiency of being, like created beings . . . But he suffers from the love which is the superabundance and overflowing of his being.⁸⁴

Therefore, as a suffering God, God is not obligated to suffer, and therefore in some way "fated" to suffer for humanity. To assert this would lead to a necessarily finite deity. Instead, God *chooses* to suffer for and with humanity, which preserves his power and his love. In this way Moltmann seems to circumvent the classical problem of theodicy-God voluntarily limits himself and partakes in divine-human relationship for the sake of love.⁸⁵

The question again returns to issues of praxis. What does it mean for humanity to imitate the kenosis of God? As has been established, the kenotic motif courses throughout Moltmann's understanding of Trinity. In *The Crucified God* Moltmann states that the kenosis of the Son can only be understood in Trinitarian terms.⁸⁶ Moltmann goes so far as to say that it is the "heart" of our Trinitarian understanding of God.⁸⁷ Moltmann's *The*

⁸³ Moltmann, *Crucified*, 207.

⁸⁴ Moltmann, *Trinity*, 23.

⁸⁵ This paper is not ultimately about human theodicy, because the issue at hand is God's suffering rather than humanity's. At the same time, Moltmann's assertion of God's voluntary co-suffering hedges on this concept.

⁸⁶ Moltmann, *Crucified*, 206.

Trinity and the Kingdom maintains that God's suffering is his own free choice-the product of radical love.⁸⁸ To speak of God's Trinitarian nature is to speak of Trinitarian kenosis on behalf of humanity. "The suffering of love does not only affect the redeeming acts of God outwards; it also affects the trinitarian fellowship in God himself . . . the divine suffering of love outwards is grounded on the pain of love within."⁸⁹ Due to the voluntaristic nature of this suffering and the kenosis required to actualize it, the "pain of love" is fundamentally kenotic. For praxis this leads towards a radical undoing of personal gain in favor of voluntary co-suffering with those who suffer and are oppressed.⁹⁰ The Moltmannian concept of Trinity illustrated the essentially communal nature of aligning with the "other," and his concept of kenosis answers the question of "how do we relate to the other?"⁹¹ The disciple pours himself/herself out for the other in a demonstration of other-love. Done communally and voluntarily, it is the representation of Christ to the world.

V. CHRISTIAN THIS-WORLDLINESS

Moltmann's theology of divine suffering offers one more praxiological insight-that of the this-worldliness of Christianity. This part of the discussion revolves around three facets of Moltmann's thought: mission, freedom, and promise. These three concepts

⁸⁷ Moltmann, *Crucified*, 207.

⁸⁸ Moltmann, *Trinity*, 23.

⁸⁹ Moltmann, *Trinity*, 25.

⁹⁰ Moltmann, *Crucified*, 17.

⁹¹ For an excellent evaluation of the implications of the kenosis for contemporary Christianity beyond divine suffering, see Richard Lucien, *Christ: The Self-Emptying of God* (New York : Paulist Press, 1997).

illustrate the nature of worldly discipleship for Moltmann. Mission, for Moltmann, is the outgrowth of eschatological hope.⁹² This eschatological hope stems from Moltmann's assertion that eschatology is the passion for what remains possible-in this case, the formation of the world and humanity *as it should be*.⁹³ It is clear from Moltmann's work that this hope for what should be does not undermine the worldly reality in which humanity lives. He says, "To believe does in fact mean to cross and transcend bounds, to be engaged in an exodus. Yet this happens in a way that does not suppress or skip the unpleasant realities. Death is real death, and decay is putrefying decay . . . Faith does not overstep these realities into a heavenly utopia . . ." ⁹⁴ In this milieu, Moltmann identifies mission as the impetus for going unto "all peoples" and telling them of the hope to be found in Christ. Moltmann explains,

The Christian consciousness of history is not a consciousness of the millennia of all history, in some mysterious knowledge of a divine plan for history, but it is a missionary consciousness in the knowledge of a divine commission, and is therefore a consciousness of the contradiction inherent in this unredeemed world, and of the sign of the cross under which the Christian mission and the Christian hope stand.⁹⁵

For the believer, this experience of mission is characterized by the events of Jesus' historical mission. Moltmann classifies these events as persecution, accusation, suffering, and martyrdom.⁹⁶ All four of these Christian experiences reinforce the this-worldiness of Moltmann's eschatological vision. The life of discipleship in light of the unfulfilled promise is focused on the promise, but not intoxicated by it. What I mean by this is that

⁹² Moltmann, Jürgen, *Theology of Hope* (Minneapolis : Fortress Press, 1967), 195.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁹⁴ Moltmann, *Hope*, 19.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*.

whereas persecution, accusation, suffering, and martyrdom exemplify the Christological experience of discipleship (and our own), it does not lead to idealism. Instead, for Moltmann, it leads to hopeful realism. Humanity cannot deny that it lives in a world fraught with pain and suffering. Yet at the same time, it cannot fail to recognize that it lives in a world of “not yet.” In a sense, the world as it is supposed to be, has not yet come to fruition. In light of this “not yet,” the Christian life of discipleship must always move outward and forward, in mission. The “should be” contradicts the status quo of society, and the “not yet” recognizes the finitude of those actions for true justice.

Freedom is another Moltmannian concept that turns faith back into the world. The question of freedom is often framed in terms of opposites: is change to be had in the spirit or the body? In other words, does socio-political change characterize Christian discipleship, or is it the more spiritual “conversion of the soul”? Moltmann answers this either/or with a both/and. “Personal, inner change without a change in circumstances and structures is an idealist illusion, as though man were only a soul and not a body as well. But a change in external circumstances without inner renewal is a materialist illusion, as though man were only a product of his social circumstances and nothing else.”⁹⁷ This both/and necessitates reflection on the relation between freedom and enslavement in Christian discipleship. The suffering nature of God in Christ frees the believer from the ruthless march of self-advancement. As Moltmann says, “If anyone identifies with him (Jesus) . . . He becomes alienated from the wisdom, religion and power politics of his society. The crucified Christ become the brother of the despised, abandoned and oppressed.”⁹⁸ Moltmann’s God releases the disciple from constant concern over social

⁹⁷ Moltmann, *Crucified*, 23.

status in favor of hope.⁹⁹ This hope in turn is a liberating hope, both for the believer and for those who come into contact with him/her.

Finally, the relationship between promise and praxis in Moltmann forms the final point of my argument. Promise, for Moltmann, is actually the recognition of the God of promise depicted in the Old Testament. This God of promise, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, must be recognized as the God of Jesus as well.¹⁰⁰ Moltmann's motive for advocating promise is his understanding of Jesus as a historical figure. By this I mean that Jesus was a product of a particular people in a particular circumstance. God is not the God of the world, but a God of the Jews, spoken of in the Old Testament.¹⁰¹ Consequently, the portrayal of the God depicted in the Old Testament as a philosophical "being" participating in the entire world is misleading at best and completely wrong at worst. "Who he (God) is, is not declared by the world as a whole, but is declared by Israel's history of promise. His attributes cannot be expressed by negation of the sphere of earthly, human, mortal and transient, but only in recalling and recounting the history of his promise."¹⁰² Only from the particularity of promise can the universal work of Christ be understood. From the universal work of Christ, the hope to come makes practical demands on the life of faith. While eschatological hope has been universalized in the Christ event, the particular tradition from which Jesus comes is still relevant.

⁹⁸ Moltmann, *Crucified*, 24.

⁹⁹ Of course, this freedom is not a once-for-all deal where the "true" disciple never engages in the structures of power. Identification with the crucified Christ is obviously the process of a lifetime, lived in hope. Moltmann says, "Christian life is a form of *practice* which consists in following the crucified Christ, and it change both man himself and the circumstances in which he lives. To this extent, a theology of the cross is a practical theory," emphasis mine (Moltmann, *Crucified*, 25).

¹⁰⁰ Moltmann, *Hope*, 141.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

As Moltmann argues that the eschatological element of Jesus' tradition affects the universal message of God, I would argue that the social element of Jesus' tradition makes similar claims. Both wisdom literature and the prophets advocate the causes of those who cannot defend themselves and those who have no advocate. In Old Testament tradition, social emphasis is consistently on the widow and the orphan.¹⁰³ In a word, the Old Testament does not forget about the poor and the oppressed. As Timothy Sandoval notes, for the writer of Proverbs, ignoring those who are poor is an active work. One must try not to hear the cries of the poor.¹⁰⁴ This blatant attempt to make someone invisible has obviously long been a problem, and discipleship in light of the crucified God has no place for it. Furthermore, Sandoval argues that Proverbs is concerned with promoting a sense of social virtue within its hearers. This is done in light of the divine concern for the poor.¹⁰⁵ The Old Testament prophets reveal a similar concern for those who are marginalized and powerless. Daniel Simundson says that in the book of Amos, "The weak, the vulnerable, oppressed, who see no relief from human sources, can be assured that God will act to help them."¹⁰⁶ The Old Testament tradition that fostered Jesus makes social demands on the followers of Jesus. The depiction in the New Testament of Jesus being an imitator of God exhorts the disciple to work on behalf of the poor as God does.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Levin, Christoph and Margaret Kohl, "The poor in the Old Testament: some observations," *Religion and Theology* 8, no. 3-4 (2001): 253.

¹⁰⁴ Sandoval, Timothy, *The Discourse of Wealth and Poverty in the Book of Proverbs* (Boston : Brill Academic Publishers, 2006), 181.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 183.

¹⁰⁶ Simundson, Daniel, *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah* (Nashville : Abingdon Press, 2005), 155.

By following Jesus' example, contemporary Christianity is drawn by promise back into the world. The promise of what is to come, ironically, pours Christian faith back into the world where that promise was actualized by the person of Christ.¹⁰⁸ Once disciples have accepted the reality of the promise in daily existence, mission occurs.¹⁰⁹ Espousing the hope that Christ offers of who humanity can be, "missionaries" live in light of the continuing promise that the suffering God will redeem them into the new creation.¹¹⁰ In this way, Christianity is identified as a thoroughly worldly entity, even while it hopes for the future resurrection of all creation.¹¹¹

My project for this paper has been to argue that while he does not deal in particular approaches to specific ethical problems, Jürgen Moltmann's theology of divine suffering does have importance for ethical dialogue. I have further argued that through the *imitatio dei*, realized through the person of Christ, humanity sees the value of voluntary co-suffering for one another. As God voluntarily suffers within the Trinity, so the disciple of Jesus is obligated to suffer with those who suffer. Trinitarian relationships and the ideas of kenotic theology serve as wonderful examples of how God suffers for himself and for us. Finally, I have argued that this emphasis on the Trinity and kenosis leads back into the world in which we live now. Although future hope is the focus for Moltmann, in no way does he maintain the future over and above the present.

¹⁰⁷ Patterson, Richard, "The Widow, the Orphan, and the Poor in the Old Testament and the Extra-Biblical Literature," *Bibliotheca sacra* 130 (1973), 230.

¹⁰⁸ Moltmann, *Crucified*, 92.

¹⁰⁹ Moltmann says, "The future of the kingdom which is made present in the parable bursts apart everyday experience and through this 'alienation effect' shocks us into a new awareness," (Moltmann, *Creation*, 63).

¹¹⁰ Moltmann, *Creation*, 228.

¹¹¹ Moltmann, Jürgen, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (Minneapolis : Fortress Press, 1996), 65.

Again I come back to James Gustafson. His argument, as I contended earlier, asks for norms that few ethicists are comfortable offering. Gustafson's critique of Moltmann centered around *Theology of Hope*, but given the nature of his critique, it could apply to all of Moltmann's work. Nowhere does Moltmann offer a precise formulation of a social ethic; that is neither his purpose nor his concern. My primary contention with Gustafson is his conclusion that because Moltmann lacks a detailed social ethic, that he is of no value to ethical dialogue. Gustafson argues that Moltmann provides no "what" to theological ethics. I argue that Moltmann provides the "why" of Christian ethics. Instead of asking what fiscal policy is most ethical, Moltmann asks why the Christian is responsible for creating an ethical fiscal policy at all. My second contention with Gustafson is that he desires a specificity that few ethical systems offer. Take utilitarianism, for example.¹¹² As one of the most popular philosophical approaches to ethics available, utilitarianism bases the ethical action on what brings pleasure to the greatest number of people.¹¹³ Ray Billington illustrates its attraction when he says, "The basic criterion by which we test everything we do-'the greatest happiness of the greatest number'-seems, for once, clear and rational, and having what is rare in philosophy: the virtue of simplicity."¹¹⁴ Unfortunately, Bentham and Mill's system is no clearer than any other. It is plagued by epistemological questions. How does one know what makes everyone else happy? How can one possibly know what makes the *most* people happy?

¹¹² Gustafson does not promote utilitarianism as normative, or even valuable. It is, however, one of the most popular ethical approaches, and his discomfort with it does not parallel his vitriol for Moltmann.

¹¹³ Newberry, Paul, *Theories of Ethics* (Mountain View : Mayfield Publishing Company, 1999), 313.

¹¹⁴ Billington, Ray, *Living Philosophy: An Introduction to Moral Thought* (New York : Routledge and Kegan Paul, Inc. 1988), 131.

My point is that all ethical systems have epistemological issues, unless they are a form of divine-command ethics. Utilitarianism would be no more help in determining specific ethical solutions to problems than Moltmann's consistent Trinitarian emphasis on the other.¹¹⁵

At the very least, Moltmann's theology, particularly his emphasis on divine suffering, provides impetus for social action among those who consider themselves disciples of Jesus. In describing diverse topics such eschatology, Christology, God, and eco-theology, the strands of divine suffering woven throughout his work drive God's people back into the world in which they live. This concept of Moltmannian mission, borne out of divine suffering, remains a largely unaddressed facet of Moltmann's work.

¹¹⁵ I will concede that some ethical systems, including utilitarianism, offer better surface options to ethical problems. Warfare, for example, can apparently be addressed more concretely than with Moltmann's work. This, however, does not solve my critique; there are still prominent problems with knowing what brings about the best situation for the greatest number of people. Therefore, perhaps Moltmann's is not the most concrete system, but Mill's does not work much better.

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