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Reading Jürgen Moltmann in Asia: Trinitarian Theology of Suffering in Christian and Buddhist Dialectical Dialogue

Abstract

Jürgen Moltmann is one of the world's foremost and creative theologians today. He is probably best known for his interpretation of a theology of the cross or suffering from a trinitarian passibility, reconciling, and liberating perspective. His theology of suffering, however, is not widely engaged from the Asian interreligious perspectives of Christians and Buddhists who have convergent and divergent concepts of suffering. The aim of this paper is, therefore, to engage Moltmann's trinitarian theology of suffering from the Asian Christian and Buddhist perspectives. It is on the basis of their



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interreligious convergent and divergent views of suffering that I use a dialectical dialogue as a methodology for Christian and Buddhist engagement. The paper has a threefold aim. First, I will explore Moltmann's theological methodologies and themes, such as the orthopathic relation between love and suffering, liberation Christology and reconciliation Christology, and the cross of Christ as the dialectical event of God's trinitarian revelation and hiddenness. Second, I will examine some problems and prospects of his trinitarian theology of suffering in Christian and Buddhist dialectical dialogue on suffering. Finally, I will construct his trinitarian theology of suffering and its contextual significance for solidarity, liberation, reconciliation, healing, and hope in Asia.

Keywords

Moltmann, Trinity, Suffering, Solidarity, Liberation, Reconciliation, Buddhism

1 Introduction: From Germany to Asia Human Nature

Jürgen Moltmann was born in 1926 in Hamburg, Germany. From 1967 to 1994, he was a professor of systematic theology at the University of Tübingen. He is one of the world's leading twentieth-century Protestant theologians after Karl Barth (1886-1968). There is no other more celebrated theologian in the second half of twentieth-century who has shaped theology so profoundly as Moltmann has. The creativity of his method has deeply inspired many new theologians across the world. As one of his doctoral mentees Miroslav Volf records, "more than 130 dissertations have been written so far on Moltmann's

thought in the past decades - testifying eloquently to its continued attractiveness.”¹

Moltmann appeared on the world theological scene with his first book *Theology of Hope* (1964).² The reasons why *Theology of Hope* was able to do so, according to Richard Bauckham are no doubt complex. As Bauckham puts it, “against the background of previous twentieth-century theology’s consistent refusal to take the future eschatological dimension of biblical faith seriously, Moltmann’s assertion of the overriding significance of future eschatology for Christian theology is remarkable.”³ Moltmann reads Romans 15:13 as a text for theologizing “God of hope” in the context of human suffering. He takes the resurrection of Christ as a starting point for theologizing “God of hope.” Building on Christ’s victory over evil and death on the cross through the Spirit, his emphasis is on the possibility of hope in the midst of suffering and despair.

In his book *Theology of Hope*, Moltmann shows how the modern experience of history as a process of radical transformation in hopeful search of a new future. From his *Theology of Hope* (1964) to the *Coming of God* (1995),⁴ as Volf rightly asserts, “Moltmann always seeks to be both contemporary and future-oriented- his theology can be viewed as an exercise in thinking not only from the perspective of God’s future, but also toward a new human future.”⁵ The idea of a new human future in the

¹ Miroslav Volf, “Introduction: A Queen and a Bagger: Challenges and Prospects of Theology,” Miroslav Volf, Carmen Krieg and Thomas Kucharz, eds, *The Future of Theology: Essays in Honor of Jürgen Moltmann’s 70th Anniversary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996).

² Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On The Ground and Implications of A Christian Eschatology*, trans. James W. Leitch (London: SCM Press, 1967) This was first published in German in 1964.

³ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), p. 30.

⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1995). This was first published in German in 1995.

⁵ Miroslav Volf, “Introduction.” p. ix.

midst of present despairs and in the power of God was developed in his second and best book *The Crucified God* (1973).⁶ The book appeared on the cover of the *New York Times*. Moltmann himself said in his response to Volf's question, "*The Crucified God* is his best book."⁷ The reason why *The Crucified God* is his best is that it laid the trinitarian, soteriological and ecclesiological foundations for his subsequent books,⁸ starting with his third book *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (1975).⁹ According to Bauckham, Moltmann's trilogy - *Theology of Hope*, *The Crucified God*, and *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* brought him to international fame in the Western world as well as the Non-Western world and in wider church circles as well as in academic theology.¹⁰

In his first book, Moltmann focuses on the resurrection of the crucified Christ and interprets hope and promise eschatologically, while in his second book, he interprets the cross of Christ from the trinitarian perspective of theodicy, divine solidarity and suffering (these themes will be the main focuses of this paper), and in his third book, he examines the Spirit-empowered role of the church in God's liberating mission.¹¹ Moltmann said, "The third book - *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* - is intended to complement to his earlier two influential

⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. R.A. Wilson, and John Bowden (London: SCM, 1974). This was first published in German in 1972 when Moltmann was a forty-six-year-old professor of theology at the University of Tübingen.

⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 40th Anniversary Edition (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2015), pp. viii-ix, with a new foreword by Miroslav Volf.

⁸ Ibidem, viii-ix.

⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1977). This was first published in 1975.

¹⁰ R. Bauckham, *The Theology of Moltmann*, pp.1-3.

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 5.

books - *Theology of Hope* and *The Crucified God*.”¹² Especially *The Crucified God* will be my main interlocutor for developing an Asian trinitarian theology of the cross. I will also engage with some of his books, which are related to the subject. To mention few of them, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (1980),¹³ *God in Creation* (1985),¹⁴ *The Way of Jesus Christ* (1989),¹⁵ *The Spirit of Life* (1991),¹⁶ *God for a Secular Society* (1997),¹⁷ *Experiences in Theology* (2000),¹⁸ *Passion for God* (2003),¹⁹ *On Human Dignity* (1984, 2007),²⁰ *Ethics of Hope* (2012),²¹ of which some won the Grawemeyer award, which is one of the most prestigious academic awards in the US.

His theology was written in Germany, but the vision and scope of his theology encompass the whole world - from Europe

¹² Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, p. xxi.

¹³ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1981). This was first published in German 1980.

¹⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1985). This was first published in German in 1985.

¹⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1990). This was first published in German in 1989.

¹⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1992). This was first published in German 1991.

¹⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1999). This was first published in German in 1997.

¹⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2000). This was first published in German in 2000.

¹⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *Passion for God: Theology in Two Voices* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

²⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, *On Human Dignity: Political Theology and Ethics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1984).

²¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *Ethics of Hope*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012). This was first published in German in 2010.

through North America, South America, South Africa to Asia.²² In his award-winning book, *Experiences in Theology*, Moltmann acknowledges that his theology is for all men and women. He poignantly wrote:

For me, theology was, and still is, an adventure of ideas. It is opening, inviting and stimulating people to discover theology for themselves, to set out along with their contexts based on their knowledge of God, in the praxis of their lives, their happiness, their suffering, perceive God's presence with all their senses.²³

For Moltmann, theology is born out of our experience of suffering and of God's presence in the midst of that suffering. As Bauckham states, "Moltmann finds the initial source of his theology in his first experience of the reality of God when he was a suffering prisoner of war in the period 1945-48 at the ages of the early 20s."²⁴ His experience of the resurrected God as the power of hope, and of God's liberating presence in suffering shapes his trinitarian theology of the cross. Using his experience of war as his social location, suffering as a theme and the cross of Christ as a source for articulating an important interpretation of a trinitarian theology of the cross. As I bring Moltmann in Asia, I find his context both similar and dissimilar to Asia's. The similarity is that Asia experiences collective suffering of political oppression just as Moltmann experiences the suffering of imprisonment. The dissimilarity is that Asia is a continent of other religions, and Christianity is only 9% of the entire population.²⁵ Aloysius Pieris sums up the context of Asia into a twofold reality: "socio-political poverty (Christianity and

²² For global theologians who were inspired by Moltmann's theology, see Jürgen Moltmann, Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *Passion for God*, p. 79.

²³ Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, p. xvi.

²⁴ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of Moltmann*, p. 1.

²⁵ Scott W. Sunquist, *The Unexpended Christian Century: The Reversal and Transformation of Global Christianity, 1900-2000* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), p. xviii.

other faiths suffering together) and religious diversity (in which Christianity is a minority).²⁶

As a theologian addressing theology globally, Moltmann knows the Asian context. He is not new to Asia, especially South Korea. In his article *Minjung Theology for the Ruling Class*, Moltmann mentions his encounters in Asia in general and South Korea in particular. He visited South Korea several times by the invitation of *Minjung* theologians - Ahn Byung-Mu, Suh Nam-Dong, Park Pong-Nang - to give lectures at Yonsei University, Hankuk University and others.²⁷ I will argue that Moltmann's trinitarian theology of the cross is still new to Asia methodologically, partly because there are not many Moltmannians in Asia, as other continent and countries have. However, my aim is not to invite or urge Asian Christians to be Moltmannians either. Instead my aim is to explore the contributions of Moltmann's trinitarian theology of the cross to Christian-Buddhist dialogue on human suffering by proposing themes and concerns in his theology.

Living in the age of world Christianity, we need a theological exchange between western theology and non-western theology or Asian theology through interactions with each other on the cultural issues and theological insights. Asian Christians have to learn Western theology as much as Western Christians have to learn Asian theology.²⁸ Therefore, I do not treat Moltmann as the subject and Asia as an object. Rather I engage his trinitarian theology of suffering as a theme for an Asian contextual theo-

²⁶ Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), p. 124.

²⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, "Minjung Theology for the Ruing Class," in Paul S. Chung, Veli-Matti Karkkainen and Kim Kyong-Jae, eds, *Asian Contextual Theology for the Third Millennium: Theology of Minjung in Fourth-Eye Formation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stocks, 2007), pp. 69-86 (here p. 69).

²⁸ For full discussion on conversation between western theology and Asian theologians, see David Thang Moe, *Pyithu-Dukkha Theology: A Paradigm for Doing Dialectical Theology of Divine Suffering and Human Suffering in the Asian-Burmese Context* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2017).

gy of suffering in Christian and Buddhist perspectives. Nor do I start an Asian theology of suffering from Moltmann's, instead I start an Asian theology of suffering with the Asian religious and cultural experiences of suffering and bring it in dialogue with Moltmann's methodologies. In dialogue with Moltmann, I use "intercontextuality" as a methodology.

Intercontextual is a combination of two words (inter and contextual). Contextuality means communicating the gospel in a comprehensible way for people to understand,²⁹ whereas "inter," meaning between or betwixt refers to the dialectical exchanges of divergent and convergent expressions of theology between different cultures and religions.³⁰ Intercontextual theology has two double meanings. One refers to the theological exchange between Moltmann's Western theology and Asian theology. The second refers to the religion-cultural exchanges between Asian Christian perspective on divine suffering and an Asian Buddhist perspective on human suffering. "Inter" refers to a dialectical description of what is convergent and divergent in two religions, whereas 'contextuality' refers to a prescription of how one should communicate the gospel of suffering relevantly to Buddhists through their notion of suffering. The telos of Asian contextuality is impossible without the methodological support of "inter." An Asian theology of an intercontextual liberation cannot be done against Buddhists, who share a universal concept of suffering, but with them. Another reason for using an intercontextual method is to argue against those who try to replace contextual theology with intercultural theology. Instead of replacing one with the other, I propose that we should use the middle term *intercontextual theology* for synthesizing the two in the age of world Christianity.

²⁹ Shoki Coe, "In Search of Renewal in Theological Education." *Theological Education* 9.4 (1973), pp. 233-243.

³⁰ Mark J. Cartledge and David Cheetham, eds. *Intercultural Theology: Approaches and Themes* (London: SCM Press 2014), p. 2.

In communicating the gospel of divine suffering to Buddhists in Asia, I argue that we must take suffering as a point of contact between Christianity and Buddhism. It is because suffering is central to both faiths. Buddhism is grounded in a realization of human *dukkha* or suffering. Likewise, Christian faith is grounded in the suffering of Christ (Lk. 24:26; 1Cor. 1:22). In the Christian and Buddhist dialectical dialogue, I focus on the salient themes in Moltmann's trinitarian theology of the cross. They include the relationship between a Christian view of divine suffering and Buddhist doctrine of human suffering, the relationship between sin and suffering, and the role of the church in witnessing to a trinitarian theology of the cross, divine solidarity and reconciliation.

2 Moltmann's Trinitarian Theology of the Cross: Methodological Explorations

Influenced by Luther's theology of the cross, Moltmann treats the cross of Christ as the foundation for his classic *The Crucified God*. He declares, "a theology of the cross is not a single chapter in theology, but the key significant for all theology."³¹ While remaining indebted to Luther, Moltmann feels the need to move beyond Luther's theology of the cross in a new direction for God's trinitarian involvement in cosmic salvation for the suffering world.³² Going beyond Luther means seeing the Trinity as theological background and discerning what took place on the cross between the Father and the Son through the Spirit.³³ He also feels the need to move beyond Barth's monarchical trinity.³⁴ Going beyond Barth means rejecting the monarchical idea of the subordination of pneumatology to Christology. Instead,

³¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, p. 72.

³² *Ibidem*, pp. 235-237.

³³ Jürgen Moltmann, Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *Passion for God*, p. 78.

³⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, pp. 139-143.

Moltmann develops the mutual relationships of three Persons as one God for understanding their relationship with the world within their perichoretic love and suffering on the cross.³⁵ In *The Crucified God*, he re-interprets the suffering of Christ not as a divine-human event, but as a trinitarian event between the Father who loves and the Son who is loved in the presence of the Spirit.³⁶

In light of this trinitarian thought, his *The Crucified God* is one of the theological classics of the second half of the twentieth century.³⁷ On the other hand, it became controversial and received critiques from some theologians, such as Karl Rahner and Dorothee Solle. Rahner criticizes Moltmann's *The Crucified God* from the perspective of divine impassibility (God cannot suffer) and Solle criticizes it from the perspective of sadistic God (God kills His own Son).³⁸ Especially Solle's criticism has been picked up by some feminist theologians in Germany and North America as feminist criticism against men's abuse of women.³⁹ I suspect Solle's criticism of *The Crucified God* comes from her misunderstanding of Moltmann's interpretation of Jesus' death as a blasphemer in light of the relationship between Jesus and the Jewish law.

It is true that Moltmann sees Jesus' death as a "blasphemer."⁴⁰ By this, he means Jesus' death is a result of His declaration to be the Messiah and the cleansing of the temple and the prophecy of the destruction of the temple.⁴¹ For Moltmann, this, however, is not the only reason for the suffering of Christ. In order to understand what happens on the cross, Moltmann talks about

³⁵ Ibidem, pp. 139-143.

³⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, pp. 245-246.

³⁷ Quoted in Jürgen Moltmann, Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *Passion for God*, p. 69.

³⁸ Ibidem, pp. 80-83.

³⁹ Ibidem, p. 83.

⁴⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, p. 128.

⁴¹ Ibidem, p. 128.

the suffering of Christ from a threefold perspective. First, in the relation to Jesus to the Jewish law, "Jesus died as a blasphemer. Second, in relation of Jesus to the Roman authority, Jesus died as a rebel, in the relation of Jesus to the Father, Jesus died as a godforsaken."⁴² The first and second only provide an explanation of Jesus' condemnation and crucifixion as a blasphemer and a rebel, just as a criminal is executed, but Moltmann argues that "they do not explain the true inner purpose of the suffering of Christ for redeeming the world from the inter-trinitarian perspective."⁴³ Prioritizing the third over first two, Moltmann's aim is to show how the cross should be seen as a trinitarian act - God allows Jesus to suffer through the Spirit.

2.1 Can God Suffer? Love and Suffering in Companion

The shortest summary of Moltmann's trinitarian theology of the cross is the theological answer to the question of whether God is passible or impassible. Is God capable of suffering? If we think God cannot suffer, how can we think of the suffering of Christ as the supreme revelation of God? "If God is incapable of suffering, then the passion of Christ can only be viewed as a human tragedy," bluntly said Moltmann.⁴⁴ Arguing against the Greek idea of God's impassibility (God cannot suffer), Moltmann believes that God can suffer. To him, "the God who is incapable of suffering cannot be involved in the liberation of human beings those who are subject to suffering and pain."⁴⁵ He does not merely say that God can suffer, he demonstrates why and how God can suffer. Moltmann sees the suffering of the cross as internal to the love of the Trinity. To him, the idea of God's suffering does not begin on the cross; it begins in the story of suffering Israel. The God of Israel is a God full of pathos for the life of His people and justice for them. Moltmann's concept of God's

⁴² Ibidem, pp. 136-153.

⁴³ Ibidem, p. 145.

⁴⁴ Ibidem, p. 74.

⁴⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, p. 222.

suffering is influenced by a Jewish scholar Abraham Heschel who develops the idea of God's pathos. Heschel develops God's pathos as a way of God's empathetic relationship with His suffering people of Jews.⁴⁶

Following in the traditions of Heschel, Moltmann argues that "God's pathos has nothing to do with the irrational human emotions, like desire, anger and desire, but describes the way in which God is effected and moved by the actions of humans or Israel created in His image and freely enters into their history as liberator."⁴⁷ A consequence of Israel's disobedience to God's promise and covenant, God enters into human history through the incarnate Christ by the power of the Spirit. Moltmann sees God's pathos for suffering Israel as a paradigm for God's suffering in Christ. Prophet Isaiah prophesizes Jesus as the Suffering Servant of God for the redemption of the world (Is. 53:5). The Gospel of Mark echoes Isaiah's messianic image of the Suffering Servant as the godforsaken victim on the cross (Mk. 15:34).⁴⁸ What is most significant in Moltmann's *The Crucified God* is rediscovering the trinitarian event. He writes:

The Son suffers dying in godforsakenness; the Father who forsakes Him suffers the death of the Son in the infinite grief of love. The grief of the Father is as important as the death of the Son. The Fatherlessness of the Son is matched by the Sonlessness of the Father. Yet the suffering and dying of the Son is a different kind of suffering from the suffering of the Father in the death of the Son.⁴⁹

Moltmann argues that we must understand the trinitarian event of the cross neither in 'patripassionist terms' (the Father also suffered and died) nor in 'theospaschite terms' (God is dead),

⁴⁶ Ibidem, p. 270.

⁴⁷ Ibidem.

⁴⁸ Ibidem, pp. 271-276.

⁴⁹ Ibidem, p. 243. He also said, "the death of Christ is not the dead of God, but the death in God," p. 207.

but in trinitarian terms - "the Son suffers death and the Father suffers the death of the Son."⁵⁰ What proceeds from this trinitarian event of the cross between the Father and the Son is the Spirit who connects the two persons (Father and Son), opening up the new future with the resurrection of Christ, filling the godforsaken with love, bringing the dead to life.⁵¹

Moltmann's understanding of the possibility of Jesus' suffering is rooted both in Johannine doctrine of God as love (Jn. 3:16; 1Jn. 4:18), the Father and Son as one (Jn. 10:30) and Pauline doctrine of delivering up (Rom. 8:32; Gal. 2:20).⁵² In Rom. 8:32 and Gal. 2:20, Paul describes the godforsakenness of Jesus as a surrender and His dying surrender as love. Jn. 3:16 sums this up well, "God so loved the world that He sent His begotten Son that all who believe in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life." Jesus suffers because God so loved the world and wanted to redeem it. Love is the motivating power of communion of the Father's surrendering of the Son and Son's self-surrendering for death on the cross. Jesus suffers not because God is powerless, but because God as love allows Him to sacrifice Himself through the Spirit. Nor does God the Father sadistically kill His Son Jesus on the cross.⁵³ Moltmann writes:

A trinitarian theology of the cross understands God as the suffering God in the suffering of Christ, which cries out with the godforsaken God, "my God why have you forsaken me?" For this theology, God and suffering are no longer contradictions, as in theism and atheism, but God's being is in suffering and the suffering is in God's being itself, because God is love.⁵⁴

The suffering of Christ is internal to the perichoretic loving nature of the Trinity. Bauckham calls it "God's inner-trinitarian

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 243.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*.

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 244.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, pp. 244-249.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 227.

suffering.”⁵⁵ To Moltmann, the cross is the event of the trinitarian act, in which Father and Son are deeply united in their division.⁵⁶

It is in their common love that the Father surrenders the Son to the death and the Son surrenders Himself to the death for a common will of redeeming the world. They are deeply one through their mutual surrender. It is the Spirit, the third trinitarian person who unites the Father and the Son at the point of their painful separation - Jesus suffers in godforsakenness and the Father suffers in the grief of the Son.⁵⁷

It is through the common love that the triune God is capable of suffering for the world. Since God is love, He opens Himself to be touched and affected by His creation. As Moltmann boldly argues, “God does not suffer, as we do, out of deficiency, but God suffers from love for creation, which is the overflowing superabundance of God’s trinitarian being.”⁵⁸ It is from this point that we can say God can suffer, will suffer and is suffering with us in the suffering world (Rom. 8:22). Love is God’s nature and suffering is His response to the suffering world.

2.2 For Whom Did Jesus Suffer? For God or Sinners?

The second major theme in Moltmann’s *The Crucified God* is the theological answer to the questions of why and for whom Jesus suffered on the cross? Moltmann criticizes a traditional answer to the question that Jesus died for us. He does not reject the traditional idea of Jesus’ vicarious suffering for us (Rom. 5:8-10), but he feels that such a claim is not enough to address a trinitarian theology of the cross. Therefore, he addresses a contemporary idea of Jesus’ suffering for God-self. This echoes the mutual suffering of the Father and the Son. The Father does not simply let the Son suffer for us, but He also suffers with Him by

⁵⁵ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of Moltmann*, p. 56.

⁵⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, p. 243.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *Passion for God*, p. 75.

“taking the death and suffering of Christ onto God’s self.”⁵⁹ According to Moltmann, “the traditional concept of Jesus’ vicarious suffering for us is sin-oriented, whereas the contemporary concept of Jesus’ suffering for God-self is victim-oriented - both sides belong together in the world of sin, suffering, violence and victims.”⁶⁰ Let me begin with Moltmann’s view of Jesus’ vicarious suffering for sinners.

Jesus’ suffering for us has to do with the doctrines of sin and reconciliation, in that he develops “reconciliation Christology.”⁶¹ Sin separates us from our relationship with God. Paul said, “but God proves His love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son” (Rom. 5:8-10). Moltmann believes that “reconciliation is not possible for sinful humans because the wrong that has been done cannot be made undone or made good by any human act. Only God can reconcile the guilty with their past.”⁶² How? It is only through Christ. We are reconciled only through the Isaiah’s imagery of the Suffering Servant (Is. 53:5) and the Johannine imagery of the Lamb of God (Jn. 1:29) who takes away the sins of people.

By taking the sins of people, God transforms their aggressions into suffering.⁶³ Without forgiveness of sin, the guilty cannot live because they have lost all their self-identity. Moltmann sees the vicarious suffering of Christ as a requirement for God’s reconciling sinners to Himself by the power of the Spirit.⁶⁴

Following in the tradition of Moltmann, Volf also argues that “in taking upon Himself the sins of the world and humans, God told the truth about the deceitful world and enthroned reconcilia-

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 75.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 76.

⁶² *Ibidem*.

⁶³ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*.

tion in a broken world.”⁶⁵ When God was made sin in Christ (Jn. 1:29; 2Cor. 5:21), the broken world was healed and the enemies are reconciled to God. For Moltmann, reconciliation is the highest achievement of the cross of Christ. Jesus did not merely suffer the death and violence without achieving reconciliation. However, Moltmann stresses the “communal and cosmic dimension of reconciliation, not just an individualistic dimension of the relationship between God the self.”⁶⁶

By a communal reconciliation, Moltmann means reconciliation between God, the oppressors and victims. Moltmann sees Christ as the brother of the victims and the redeemer of the perpetrators. “Jesus carries the sufferings of the victims, on the one hand, the sins of the perpetrators on the other. Both sides of the reconciling Christ belong together for the liberation of the world, but they are not equal.”⁶⁷ The victims have a long memory of suffering caused by their perpetrators, while the perpetrators who caused suffering have a short memory because they do not want to know what they have wronged to the victims. Moltmann states that the perpetrators must learn to see themselves with the eyes of the victims if they want to see who they are and be reconciled with their victims in the name of Christ.⁶⁸ This leads us to the second answer to the question of why did Jesus die for God?

Second, why did Jesus suffer for God-self? The answer to this question, according to Moltmann is “solidarity Christology.”⁶⁹ Volf rightly notes that “a major thrust of Moltmann’s thinking about the cross can be summed up in the notion of solidarity.”⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration on Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), p. 294.

⁶⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *Passion for God*, p. 77.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁰ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, p. 22.

We, however, should not misunderstand that Moltmann's notion of solidarity is a substitute for reconciliation Christology. In my view, both reconciliation Christology and solidarity Christology play a complementary role in *The Crucified God*. If the former has to do with a vertical dimension of soteriology, the latter has to do with God's horizontal presence among the victims. Both are indivisible because being in solidarity with the victims and atoning reconciliation with the perpetrators is at the heart of the triune God, whose universal love extends both to the victims and perpetrators. Interpreting the concept of Jesus' suffering for God in light of solidarity Christology, Moltmann writes

To say that Jesus suffers for God means God takes the suffering of Christ. To say that God takes the suffering of Christ on Himself means that God is present in the suffering people. If God takes the road of the crucifixion with Christ and God is where the humiliated Christ (Phil. 2:7-8), then Christ brings God's solidarity with the humiliated and oppressed people.⁷¹

This statement can be seen as Moltmann's concept of God's co-suffering with us. In light of reconciliation Christology, God suffers from Christ for us, and in light of solidarity Christology, God suffers with the oppressed who are the paradigms of the humiliated and godforsaken Christ (Eph. 2:7). God's suffering for us is an event, and God's suffering with us is a process. We should not prioritize one over the other; rather we should hold them both for a better understanding of God's nature and His salvation. Christ does not merely suffer for us as a vicarious savior and sits at the right hand of the Father without being involved in the suffering people on the earth. Christ also suffers with the oppressed and victims as their comforter and liberator. Moltmann's understanding of solidarity Christology is inspired by Dietrich Bonhoeffer's insightful comfort in the Gesta-

⁷¹ Ibidem, p. 75.

po Cell: "Only the suffering God can help"⁷² the suffering people. Matthew 8:17 makes it plain that Christ helps us not by way of His omnipotence, but by way of His co-suffering.⁷³

In his book *The Spirit of Life*, Moltmann argues that "the sufferings of Christ on the cross are not just His sufferings, they are the sufferings of the poor and the weak, which Jesus shares in His body, in His own soul, in solidarity with them."⁷⁴ Since Christ Himself has experienced the human suffering and oppression, He is compassionately identified with those who suffer and pass through the valley of fear, rejection, oppression, alienation and exploration. In short, solidarity Christology is the foundation for liberation theology. To this I will return. Here an epistemological question is how we can know God's presence among the suffering people? Can we see God? This leads us to the exploration of the cross as the dialectical event of God's revelation, yet hiddenness.

2.3 The Cross as the Dialectical Event of God's Revelation and Hiddenness

David Tracy rightly observes that Moltmann's trinitarian theology of the cross is shaped by "dialectical rather than analogical thinking."⁷⁵ I agree with Tracy that Moltmann sees the cross of Christ as the dialectical event of God's revelation, yet hiddenness. In my view, Moltmann's reading of the cross as the dialectical event comes from his understanding of God's dialectical nature - a revelation in Christ, a hiddenness in Spirit. First, Moltmann stresses that the cross of Christ reveals who God is. Building on the Pauline metaphor of "Jesus as the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15), Moltmann sees the cross of Christ as a

⁷² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, enlarged edition (New York: NY: Touchstone Book, 1997), p. 361.

⁷³ Ibidem, p. 361.

⁷⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, p. 130.

⁷⁵ David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), p. 408.

supreme revelation of God's love and His act of suffering. In his interpretation of the cross as the revelation of God, Moltmann treats two natures of Christ - truly God (Mk. 8:29) and truly human (Jn. 1:14) as central.⁷⁶ To Moltmann, the idea of two natures of Christ is the key to understanding the three Persons.⁷⁷ By way of His divinity, Jesus represents God to us and brings His fellowship with us, and by way of His humanity, Jesus represents us to God in communion with Him. "In Jesus, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (Col. 1:19). The cross of Christ is the final and supreme revelation of the Trinity. God revealed Himself through Christ regarding becoming human without ceasing to be divine so that all humans experience Him.⁷⁸

It is through the incarnation of Christ that all humans experience the mystery of God and it is through the suffering of the cross that the suffering people experience God's presence in their midst knowingly and unknowingly. The cross of Christ not only reveals God's redeeming purpose, but it also reveals God's nature of sacrificial love. Borrowing Barth's famous expression of "God is revealing Himself through Himself (Jesus) by the effect of the Spirit,"⁷⁹

Moltmann interprets Pauline metaphor of Jesus as the image of the invisible God with the notion that the meaning of the crucified Christ is that "this is God and God is like this."⁸⁰ To Moltmann, Jesus is the image of who God is and what God's nature looks like. This means we know God through the revelation of Christ by the power of the Spirit. Following in the traditions of Barth, Moltmann believed that we know the mystery of the

⁷⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, p. 88.

⁷⁷ Ibidem, pp. 87-98.

⁷⁸ Ibidem, p. 88.

⁷⁹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God*, I.1, trans. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936), p. 296.

⁸⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, p. 205.

Trinity through the incarnated and humiliated Christ.⁸¹ But going beyond Barth, Moltmann emphasized that we know the suffering Christ through the suffering people because Jesus is the human face of God. In his response to Volf's interview with him over who God is for him in June 2014 in Tübingen, Moltmann said, "Jesus Christ."⁸² To him, the cross reveals not only the suffering God but also the loving God.⁸³

His passion on the cross, Jesus not only reveals God's love and suffering but also brings God's mysterious presence among the suffering people who are the paradigms of the suffering Christ. To say that Jesus' reveals God and brings His presence in the suffering world means Christ both identifies the suffering and loving God with the oppressed regardless of religions and identifies the oppressed with God so that all the suffering experience God's mysterious presence in their daily struggles.⁸⁴

God the Father who was present and revealed in the suffering Christ by the power of the Spirit is ontologically present and revealed among the victims through their sufferings. No one can see God face to face; we can only experience God's presence. As Paul said, "so now we see God in a mirror dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part because of Christ; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known" (1Cor. 13:12).

Using Paul's dialectical concept of God, I argue that a God we can see and understand fully is not true God. It is an idol. True God is dialectical in our apocalyptic world, remaining hidden in His revelation of salvation and liberation in terms of both special revelation in the humiliated Christ and general revelation in

⁸¹ Ibidem, p. 88.

⁸² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_XG7Nyw7JM&t=131s (accessed on October 6, 2017).

⁸³ Ibidem, 88. For the similar concept of God's revelation and hiddenness in dialectics, see also Michael Welker, *God the Revealed: Christology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), pp. 185-191.

⁸⁴ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, p. 23.

our daily experiences of suffering. This relates back to what I have said earlier; two natures of Jesus Christ - are the keys to understanding the dialectical natures of the revealed, yet hidden Trinity.

3 Moltmann's Trinitarian Theology of Suffering in Asia: Some Problems and Prospects in Christian and Buddhist Dialectical Dialogue on Suffering

As I apply Moltmann's trinitarian theology of suffering in Asia, I find few problems and more prospects. While a trinitarian theology of the cross or suffering is central to a Christian faith and theology, it is problematic to Buddhists in Asia. Just as the cross of Christ is a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks (1Cor. 1:23), so is a dreadful and problematic image to Buddhists because of Jesus' brutal death on the cross.

The central teaching of Buddhism is to avoid harming any living beings. The Buddhist doctrine of *ahimsa* or non-violence prohibits one from injuring any living beings. I call this the problem of ethics. The other problem is that of soteriology. Christianity and Buddhism stand in opposition - the former believes in salvation outside of us (salvation is graciously done by God through the death of Christ), whereas the latter believes in salvation inside of us (self-salvation by works).

Another contrast between Christianity and Buddhism lies in their symbolic uses of the powers of the cross and the lotus. In his book *Third-Eye Theology*,⁸⁵ a noted Asian theologian C. S.

⁸⁵ Choan-Seng Song, *Third-Eye Theology: Theology in Formation in Asian Settings* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979). Song's use of third-eye theology has a double meaning. First, the third-eye notion is rooted in a Buddhist concept of enlightenment, which states a new awareness of situation from within through an inner eye. Second, Song refers to third-eye theology as a contextual product of reading the Bible through the Asian third eye in distinction from the Hebrew and Greek first eye and the Western second eye, p. 11.

Song from Taiwan states that the cross and the lotus are the most powerful symbols of two religions. For Christians, the cross is not only the symbol of God's love and suffering but also the symbol of human violence. By contrast, for Buddhists, the lotus is the symbol of beauty and peace.⁸⁶ The lotus appears to the aesthetic feelings of peace and beauty, whereas the cross appears painful and harsh to the eyes of the beholders.⁸⁷

History tells us that the cross has been misused as military symbol for violence at the beginning of Christianity. For example, Emperor Constantine (360-337 A. D) ordered his soldiers to paint a cross on their shields, they fought and conquered Rome. Moltmann argues that such was not a real cross; it was just a misused symbol of the cross. The mere symbol of the cross is destructive, whereas the real cross of Christ is redemptive.⁸⁸

Some liberal Christians criticize the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross in general and Moltmann's trinitarian theology the cross in particular. For example, some feminist Christian theologians criticize a theology of the cross from their maternal experiences of suffering and torture under male domination.⁸⁹

We must agree with their feminist critique of the cross of Christ, but the problem is to equalize their suffering with the suffering of Christ. Generally, some radical liberation theologians equalize the suffering of Christ with the suffering of people. In Asia, Song advocates for the human suffering of Jesus in his book *Jesus, the Crucified people*. To Song, "the Jesus who suffered on the cross is not divine, but people. He said, "Jesus

⁸⁶ Ibidem, p. 101.

⁸⁷ Ibidem, p. 109.

⁸⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, "The Cross as Military Symbol," in Marit Trelstad, ed, *Cross Examinations: Readings on the Meaning of the Cross Today* (Minneapolis, MN, 2006), pp. 259-263 (here p. 259).

⁸⁹ For example, see Mary J. Streufert, "Maternal Sacrifice as a Hermeneutics of the Cross," in Marit Trelstad (ed.), *Cross Examinations: Readings on the Meaning of the Cross Today* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2006), pp. 63-75.

means the crucified people.”⁹⁰ While I appreciate his hermeneutics of looking at Jesus through the eyes of the crucified people in Asia, I respectfully disagree with his view of Jesus as merely people, not as divine.⁹¹ As I said, this problem is the consequence of separating the humanity of Christ from the divinity of Christ instead of holding the two in dialectical tension. This creates the problem of equalizing the suffering of Jesus with our human suffering.

To overcome this problem, I find Moltmann’s concept of Jesus’ divine-human suffering on the cross as God’s delivering up or *paradidonai* in Greek (Rom. 8:32) persuasive for dialogue with a Buddhist doctrine of *anatta* or self-denial, which inspires one to eliminate “I” (*atta*) for the sake of others. To Moltmann, Jesus suffers because of His sacrificial love. We feel pain for someone because we love that person. Moltmann is right in seeing the suffering or pain of Christ as flowing from God’s love or compassion. Moltmann’s trinitarian theology of the cross is crucial for three main reasons in Asia.

First, the cross is not just the symbol of pain and compassion, but the embodiment of Jesus’ suffering love or passibility that opposes the impassibility of God. The patristic theology (except Origen) holds fast to the apathy axiom. According to patristic theology, God cannot suffer because suffering is against God’s omnipotence. In contrast to this, Moltmann claims that God suffers not because His power is limited, but because His love is sacrificial in terms of self-giving love and other-receiving love. God gives up His Son in order not to give up on receiving us into a divine communion of love. As Moltmann puts it, “the God who is incapable of suffering is a loveless being. Since God is love

⁹⁰ Choan-Seng Song, *Jesus, the Crucified People* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1990), p. 216.

⁹¹ For my appreciation and critique of Song’s Christology in Asia, see my work, David Thang Moe, “A Critical Reading of C.S. Song’s Asian Third-Eye Liberation Theology for a Myanmar Intercontextual Liberation Theology of *Pyithu-Dukkha*,” in *Interreligious Studies and Intercultural Theology*, Vol. 2, No. 2. (November 2018), pp. 193-215.

(1Jn. 4:8), He is touched and moved by the suffering of humans and takes action for their sakes.”⁹² The active side of God’s suffering love leads to transformation of the other.

Second, Moltmann’s concept of the passionate and compassionate God and His soteriology plays a crucial role in developing an Asian trinitarian theology of the cross or what I would call an “Asian trialectic theology of orthopathy, orthodoxy, and orthopraxis,” when it comes to liberation theology in the context of suffering, we always concentrate only on two aspects of orthodoxy (right belief in God) and orthopraxis (right action). One is rational (head) and the other practical (hand). What is lacking is orthopathy, feeling-oriented (heart). I would argue that Asian trinitarian theology of the cross must hold three aspects of “orthopathy, orthodoxy, and orthopraxis.”

Asian trinitarian theology of liberation must take orthopathy as the ground that leads the other two.⁹³ Orthopathy plays a crucial role both in our relationship with the passionate God and in our compassionate relationship with the suffering people. Song is right when he said, “Asian theology must begin with the heartache of God.”⁹⁴ For Song, Asian liberation theology is a Christian spiritual and social reflection on God’s orthopathy.⁹⁵ Song metaphorically regards God as a “warm-hearted God, not as a cold-hearted God.”⁹⁶

Like Song, his contemporary Asian theologian, Kosuke Koyama sees the suffering and compassionate God as a “hot God.”⁹⁷ For Koyama, God is hot because He feels pain for the other, rather

⁹² Jürgen Moltmann, Elizabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *The Passion for God*, p. 75.

⁹³ See David Moe, “A Critical Reading of Song’s Asian Third-Eye Liberation Theology for a Myanmar Intercontextual Liberation Theology of *Pyithu-Dukkha*,” pp. 193-215.

⁹⁴ Choan-Seng Song, *Third-Eye Theology*, p. 35.

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 207.

⁹⁶ Choan-Seng Song, *Jesus, the Crucified People*, p. 98

⁹⁷ Kosuke Koyama, *Water Buffalo Theology*, 25th anniversary (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999), p. 108.

than a “cool God” who has no compassion for us. The metaphorical idea of the hot God is comparable to Buddhist doctrine of compassion. Buddhism is an orthopathic and orthopraxic religion of compassion and suffering. Building on this theological concept, an Asian theologian from Japan, Kazoh Kitamori developed his famous book *The Theology of the Pain of God*.⁹⁸ Kitamori’s book is one of the early contextual theologies from Asia, appearing in English after WW II, to address the suffering Christ and suffering people. It introduced Martin Luther’s Western reformation theology of the cross to Asian soil. More interestingly, it shapes Moltmann.⁹⁹

Kitamori uses the combination of Buddhist doctrines of pain (*dukkha* or *tsutsumu* in Japanese) and compassion (*karuna* or *tsurasa* in Japanese) for making an essential interpretation of Asian theology of the cross. Basic to Kitamori’s theology is that compassion rooted in God’s pain.¹⁰⁰ To Kitamori, God suffers pain by giving up His Son for redeeming the suffering world. I consider Kitamori’s theology of the pain of God to be central to applying Moltmann’s trinitarian theology of suffering in the Asian context of Christian and Buddhist perspective on suffering and compassion. The difference between Kitamori and Moltmann, however, cannot be ignored. Kitamori sees love rooted in God’s pain,¹⁰¹ whereas Moltmann sees Jesus’ pain rooted in God’s love. Kitamori interprets salvation within the conflict of God’s love and wrath. Though Moltmann believes that God judges Jesus on our behalf (Rom. 5:8-10), he asserts that Jesus’ suffering is a result of His self-surrendering love. His concept is more analogous to a Buddhist concept of *anatta*. I agree with Moltmann’s view of pain rooted in compassion.

⁹⁸ Kazoh Kitamori, *The Theology of the Pain of God* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1965). This book was first published in Japanese in 1946 after World War II.

⁹⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, p. xi.

¹⁰⁰ Kazoh Kitamori, *The Theology of the Pain of God*, p. 19.

¹⁰¹ *Ibidem*, p. 150.

Song also criticizes Kitamori's reverse of pain and love and he said, "We must disagree with Kitamori when he speaks of the love rooted in the pain of God instead of the pain rooted in the love of God."¹⁰² I find Moltmann and Song's interpretation of a theology of the cross more prospective for addressing an Asian intercontextual theology of Christian and Buddhist dialogue on suffering and love—suffering rooted in love, not the other way around. John 3:16 reminds us that God's sending of the Son flows from His love for the suffering world. So we cannot reverse the order of love and suffering.

Third, Moltmann's trinitarian theology of the cross encourages Christians to look at the suffering Christ through the lens of the suffering people. Again, in looking at the suffering of Christ through the lens of human sufferings, our goal is not to equalize the former with the latter because our suffering is not an offering to God nor is redemptive. Jesus' suffering is redemptive (Is. 53:5; Gal. 4:4-5; Heb. 9:22). Human suffering is not a quality of redemption. This is not to say that human suffering is not important to God, rather the point of the suffering of Christ is dialectically to present an alternative to human suffering. In other words, the suffering Jesus is a paradigm of the suffering Christians and Buddhists in Asia. In this way, Jesus' suffering of godforsakenness is important to our suffering of godforsakenness in our search for God's revelation of liberation in His hiddenness. From this perspective, I will stress that a trinitarian theology of the cross encourages Christians and Buddhists to see and feel the reality of human and world suffering (the first noble truth of Buddhism) and respond to it compassionately.

¹⁰² Choan-Seng Song, *Third-Eye Theology*, p. 67.

3.1 Sin and Suffering: Moltmann and Buddhism in Dialogue on the Unequal Relationship between the Oppressed and Oppressors

Perhaps the most significant contribution of Moltmann's trinitarian theology of the cross is the relationship between the doctrine of God (love) and soteriology (through the suffering of Christ) and their trinitarian involvement in the suffering world (our experience of the suffering and liberating God). What is lacking in his *The Crucified God* is the doctrine of sin. He does not explicitly address the relationship between sin and suffering. This is not to say that Moltmann is not interested in the doctrine of sin. Of course, he briefly discusses that sin requires the forgiveness and reconciliation of Christ. However, the oppressors could take Jesus' forgiveness for granted and keep committing sin of oppression. This requires for addressing the relationship between sin and suffering.

The relationship between sin and suffering must be taken seriously for an Asian trinitarian theology of suffering and its contribution to what I call an interreligious liberation of both the oppressed Christians and Buddhists. Sin and suffering are indivisible in the context of political oppression. No liberation or justice can be attained without re-defining and resisting sin. There is no clear doctrine of sin in Buddhism. When Christian missionaries tell Buddhists that they need Jesus the Savior because they are sinners, they feel offended and their response is: "I did not kill anyone and burn anyone's house, why you call me a sinner?"¹⁰³ Buddhists see sin more as an immoral act, whereas Christians see sin more as a state (Rom. 5:12-22). There are two different Christian ways of perceiving sin in Asia. Missionaries those who preach the gospel of spiritual salvation see sin more as a state, whereas liberationists those who advocate for physical salvation see sin more as an act of socio-political domination (Eph. 1:21; Col. 2:15). The former approach is essential

¹⁰³ Simon Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith from the Ground Up* (Downer Grove: IL, 2014), pp. 80-81.

in evangelism with its emphasis on Christ's forgiveness of sinners and calling Buddhists to Christ with repentance. However, missionaries' approach to sin has weakness in its failure to address social injustice. On the other hand, liberationist's approach to sin is essential in advocacy for social justice. Yet its weakness is the failure to address the importance of evangelism among Buddhists. The church in Asia must embrace both groups' approaches to sin both as a state and as an immoral act.

The latter approach to sin plays a crucial role in evangelism among Buddhists who need the salvation of Christ, whereas the former approach to sin plays a crucial role in the interreligious struggle for the common good of social justice in Asia. I must argue that the question is not *either* evangelism *or* social justice, but *both* evangelism *and* social justice because they reflect God's mission of witnessing to Christ's holistic salvation in Asia. In the context of socio-political oppression, I stress that sin is to be understood as an immoral act, which causes the unequal relationship between the victims and perpetrators.

In his book *Experiences in Theology*, Moltmann addresses the problem of oppression, which causes the unequal relationship among human beings. Moltmann equates sin with one's act of oppression over the other created in God's image with equal dignity and inherent rights (Gen. 1:27).¹⁰⁴ He attempts to see the equal and perichoretic communion among the triune God as the model for a social and personal relationship in respect, in that he famously introduces social Trinity. To quote his words:

The doctrine of the Trinity provides the intellectual means whereby to harmonize personality and sociality in the equal and perichoretic community of men and women without sacrificing one to the other or without dominating one over the other.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, pp. 183-188. See Jürgen Moltmann, *On Human Dignity*, pp. 3-36.

¹⁰⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, p. 199.

Moltmann asserts that Christ is the only Lord. Under Christ's Lordship of justice and freedom, one's lordship or domination over the other is illegal, and it stands against Christ's Lordship of justice and freedom. This comes close to the Buddhist doctrine of law, which requires upholding proprieties of right personal relationships. The failure to uphold proprieties among human beings is immoral, and it is a sin. Oppression stems from the sin of pride.

Reinhold Niebuhr is right in defining "sin as pride."¹⁰⁶ Niebuhr's concept of sin as pride is similar to a Buddhist concept of the immoral act as the result of pride and greed. For example, in Myanmar, one of the longest military-ruled nations, the regimes commit the sin of pride by misusing their power. Their sins of omission have to do with their failures to uphold law and order for the welfare of people, whereas their sins of commission have to do with their immoral commitment to exploiting people.

The regimes' sins of pride are the causes of people's suffering. Aung San Suu Kyi, a noble peace laureate rightly argues that the economic suffering of Myanmar, a country blessed with rich natural resources is not the result of people's *karma*, but of the regime rulers' behavioral *karmas*.¹⁰⁷ To develop her insights, I argue that the Buddhist first noble truth (the reality of suffering) should not be misunderstood as a justification for people's suffering in Myanmar.

It is true that Buddha teaches the reality of suffering as a result of one's ignorance and cravings for something (the second truth). Buddha also taught a summary of *dharma*: "not to commit evil, but to do good and purify one's mind."¹⁰⁸ If so, we must

¹⁰⁶ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), p. 178.

¹⁰⁷ Aung San Suu Kyi, *Freedom from Fear* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), p. 170. The concept of *karma*: the link between acts and consequences, see also Moltmann, *The Ethics of Hope*, pp. 172-174.

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Masao Abe, "The Problem of Evil in Christianity and Buddhism," in Paul Ingram and Frederick Streng, eds, *Buddhist-Christian*

question the regimes in Myanmar. Do they uphold this law? No! They omit to purify their minds, fail to do common good for people and nation, and commit to doing social evils, which causes social injustice and suffering in Myanmar. Thus, it is right to conclude that people's collective suffering in Myanmar is not chiefly caused by their voluntary ignorance to do good and purify their minds (second noble truth), but by the ruling regimes' intentional and unethical commitment to socio-political and economic exploitation and oppression in the name of their greed.

In our dialectical dialogue with Buddhists for the vision of liberation, we must re-define sin not merely as a state, which requires Jesus' forgiveness. If we defined sin in this way, the oppressors would take Jesus' forgiveness for granted, and they would continue to commit structural evils. In order to cease their social evils (the third noble truth) and pursue political liberation, we must also address sin from an ethical perspective.

If we define sin from an ethical perspective, our collective task is to resist structural sins, which cause social injustice. Unethical sins cause undesirable suffering. Andrew Sung Park is right when he states "sin is of the oppressors and suffering is of the oppressed."¹⁰⁹ Defining sin regarding unethical behavior, we are to see the oppressors as the greater sinners. It is not because the oppressed are sinless, they are sinners, too if we define sin as a state, but they are innocent concerning their being the victims of oppression. Buddhism has the same aspect of the equal relationship among humans. Unlike Hinduism, which teaches the doctrine of caste system, Buddhism teaches that all

Dialogue: Mutual Renewal and Transformation (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986): pp. 140-160 (here p. 141).

¹⁰⁹ Andrew Sung Park, *The Wounded Heart of God: The Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1994), p. 69.

humans are born equal with dignity. Justice must be pursued by naming what sin is.

3.2 Suffering and Solidarity: Moltmann and Buddhism in Dialogue on a Compassionate Solidarity

Moltmann is concerned with two fundamental questions in his trinitarian theology of the cross for the suffering world. One is a theoretical question about accusing God in the face of human suffering. Where is God in our suffering? This is a theodicy question. The other is an existential question about communion with God in suffering. Does God share in our suffering?

The former question presupposes an apathetic and untouchable God in heaven without involvement in the world, whereas the latter question is searching for a compassionate God as a co-sufferer with us in the suffering world.¹¹⁰ Two questions play crucial roles in Moltmann's theology of solidarity-Christology in the context of suffering. While some theologians see the godforsakenness of Christ as a problematic sign of theological sadism, Moltmann sees it as a prospect of talking about solidarity-Christology.

Moltmann said: "For me, God's forsakenness is the most profound expression of God's solidarity with forsaken people in the face of suffering."¹¹¹ Moltmann believes that the innocent Jesus crying out to the Father, "My God my God, why have you forsaken for me?" is the clue to understanding the victims who have been crying for God's justice and solidarity in the context of human power and oppression.

According to Moltmann, the highest form of justice in the Biblical story is the "justice of compassion."¹¹² It is through the justice of compassion that God sides with the oppressed and mar-

¹¹⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *Passion for God*, p. 75.

¹¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 76.

¹¹² Jürgen Moltmann, "Political Theology and the Ethics of Peace," in Theodore Runyon, ed, *Theology, Politics and Peace* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), pp. 31-42 (here p. 34).

gins and restores their justice (restorative justice) by resisting the oppressors. God's solidarity with the oppressed is described by liberation theology as its slogan of "God's preferential option for the poor or margins."

In the context of human injustice, God is never neutral, but sides with the crying victims. God is just because He sides with the oppressed and restores their rights (Ps. 146:17-19). God sides with the oppressed, not because they are morally superior, but because God is fundamentally compassionate to them who are the least and the last in the world. As Matthew reminds us, the least and the last are the clues to who Jesus is (Matt. 25:40).

In this sense, we may say that Jesus sides with the least and the last not only because He is compassionate to them, but also because they are His humiliated images (Phil. 2:7). For this, Moltmann writes "In taking upon Himself humiliation and passion, Jesus becomes the liberating brother of the humiliated and forsaken and brings them God's embracing presence."¹¹³

The Bible tells that Jesus comes not simply as humanity in general, but as one marginalized from the center (heaven). In this connection, Koyama rightly states, Christ the center-person comes to us in the true form of a periphery-person. For our sake, He was crucified at the periphery place outside the city of Jerusalem" (Heb. 13:12).¹¹⁴ Since Jesus Himself was once on the margins, He does not merely understand the suffering of the marginalized but identifies with them as their liberator and comforter.¹¹⁵ The Gospel of Luke sums up well the mission of Jesus' liberating solidarity with the margins.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me; He has sent me to announce good news to the poor, to proclaim

¹¹³ Jürgen Moltmann, Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *Passion for God*, p. 76.

¹¹⁴ Kosuke Koyama, "Extend Hospitality to Strangers: A Missiology of Theologia Crucis," in *Currents in Theology and Mission*, Vol. 20, No. 30 (June 19993): pp. 165-176) (here p. 167).

¹¹⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, p. 205.

release or liberation for the prisoners and recover of sight for the blind, and to let the broken victims free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Luke 4:18-19).

Buddha also vowed an analogous message of solidarity after his enlightenment:

Having myself crossed the ocean of suffering; I must help others to cross it. Freed myself, I must set others free from the bondage of suffering. This is the vow, which I made in the past when I saw all that lives in despairs and suffering.¹¹⁶

Where do the compassionate Jesus and the compassionate Buddha converge and diverge from each other? What has Jesus' public message of compassion to do with Buddha's message of compassion for an Asian intercontextual theology of liberation against suffering? Song reminds us that there are two fundamental divergences between Jesus' vows and Buddha's vows. Buddha is fundamentally different from Christ because he was a self-appointed human herald of good news after a long search that culminated in his enlightenment, which does not claim any relationship with the Spirit, while Jesus was appointed by God and anointed by the Spirit, a Savior for the world.¹¹⁷ The most basic difference is that Jesus is fully divine and fully human, but Buddha is not. The other difference lies in forming their followers. Jesus' followers are the working classes, whereas Buddha's disciples are the middle classes. We also see some convergences between the two. Their convergences are concerned with their compassion and the philanthropic acts of political liberation for the oppressed. Jesus and Buddha not only preached their liberating message to the oppressed, but they embodied it.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 115. See also Edward Conze, *Buddhist Scriptures* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin, 1959), p. 54.

¹¹⁷ Choan-Seng Song, *Third-Eye Theology*, p. 115.

¹¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 116.

Buddha mingled with the oppressed and taught them how to overcome suffering. Likewise, Jesus mingled with the crowd and took pains to communicate the liberating message of the Gospel to them. He broke away from the religious elites and brought rights and dignity back to those who lose their rights and dignity and share with them the hope of God's kingdom (Mk. 13:11).¹¹⁹ Analogously, Buddha repudiated the Brahmanical claims that Vedas is the sole source of religious truth. He also rejected performance of the rituals as a means of salvation and introduced the eightfold path as a way to self-salvation. He disapproved of the Upanishadic emphasis on intellectual means to attain liberation. He criticized the social inequalities of the caste system, especially the high pretensions of Brahman class and welcomed his disciples from not only the four castes but also from among the outcasts.¹²⁰ Jesus and Buddha had the compassionate heart for the oppressed and sided with them for social equality and justice in their days.¹²¹

To many people in the West, Buddhism means merely a religion of mysticism, withdrawing from socio-political issues.¹²² However, in Asia Buddhism means an energetic engagement¹²³ with socio-political issues regarding advocating for the oppressed without ceasing to practice a meditation. In a contemporary Asian context, two exemplars are evident: Dalai Lama of Tibet and Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar. Both of them are socially engaged Buddhists without ceasing to hold the need for spiritual meditation. Their nonviolent practice of social engagement and spiritual meditation in the context of Tibetan and Burmese

¹¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 110.

¹²⁰ Ibidem, p. 111.

¹²¹ Ibidem.

¹²² Christopher S. Queen and Sallie B. King, eds, *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1996), p. ix.

¹²³ The term "engaged Buddhism" was first coined by a Vietnamese Buddhist Thich Nanh Hanh in 1963.

socio-political oppression are appreciated. Moltmann is in support of what Jesus and Buddha taught and practiced solidarities. In his foreword to Paul Chung's book *Luther and Buddhism*,¹²⁴ Moltmann wrote the following words

What we perceive in the compassionate Buddha and the compassionate Jesus is *dukkha*, *karuna* grounded in their doctrines of self-denial and self-sacrifice. With limitless compassion, the Buddha takes part in the cosmic suffering of the world, and in so doing, he shows his completeness. However, he does not cry; he died a beautiful death on the way to salvation or enlightenment. Jesus did not die a beautiful death, but a death that was dreadful to the beholders. The suffering Jesus is no image of beauty. However, this image of the Savior on the cross does not stand for Himself alone, because His background is always drawn in the shining color of the light of the resurrection. It is not the cross of the dead, but always the cross of Christ who was resurrected by the Spirit into the new creation.¹²⁵

Moltmann's statement indicates the convergences and divergences between Jesus and Buddha. However, he does not develop explicitly how they are divergent and convergent. In my view, their convergences lie from the ethical perspective. As I have said, Jesus and Buddha have the compassionate heart for the oppressed and resist socio-political oppression and domination. They do not merely teach the message of compassion, but they embody it. They also have sharp divergences from the eschatological perspective. A Christian concept of eschatology is grounded in the death and resurrection of Christ. In the time between the resurrection and the parousia, Christians have the interim hope—hope in the midst of despairs and hope for the coming of Christ who will eliminate suffering. Buddhism has no such an eschatological concept. Buddhists do not hope for the

¹²⁴ Moltmann, Foreword, p. x, in: Paul S. Chung, *Martin Luther and Buddhism: The Ascetics of Suffering* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stocks, 2007).

¹²⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. x-xi.

coming of Buddha. Instead they hope to go *nirvana*, a place of bliss.

However, these eschatological divergences do not necessarily cancel their ethical convergences. Christ does not merely teach us to hope for His coming without social engagement with the public situation of suffering and oppression. As the followers of Christ, Christians are called to proclaim the gospel of His death and resurrection in word and to practice His transforming mission in the lives of the church and society. In other words, Christians have the double vocation in Asia: one is the dialogical vocation of the mission with Buddhists (social engagement), and the other is the cross-cultural vocation of a mission to Buddhists (evangelism). We must hold this twofold vocation of mission in Asia.

Despite their eschatological divergences, Christ and Buddha's ethical teachings of compassion serve as the bridges for the Asian Christians and Buddhist in their ethics of liberation for the oppressed and transforming society. While I appreciate Moltmann's privileging commitment of liberation hermeneutics for the oppressed, I examine him if he integrates it with the liberation of the oppressors as well. Many liberationists advocate for what I coin the term "an exclusive liberation of the oppressed only."¹²⁶ I must argue that the problem is not liberation itself (God's act of solidarity), but the way they conceptualize or contextualize liberation theology. The question is not why God is partially merciful to the oppressed, but how should we re-think liberation in an inclusive sense. Does the compassionate God's act of liberation exclude the oppressors?

¹²⁶ David Thang Moe, "Sin and Suffering: The Hermeneutics of Liberation Theology in Asia," in *Asia Journal of Theology*, Vol. 30. No. 2. (October 2017): pp. 208-225 (here pp. 214-216).

4 Suffering unto Hope: Moltmann and Moe in Dialogue for an Asian Inclusive Liberation Theology – Liberation *From* and *For*

Is Moltmann a liberation theologian? In his writings, he does not claim himself to be a liberation theologian, instead a systematic theologian (with the exception whether Volf claims him to be the “grandfather of all liberation theologies”).¹²⁷ I agree with Volf because many of Moltmann’s writings, especially on political theologies qualify him as a liberation theologian. Especially in his two books, *The Crucified God* and *Experiences in Theology*, Moltmann articulates the hermeneutics of liberation theology. The last two chapters of *The Crucified God* are all about the hermeneutics of liberation theology.¹²⁸ The whole part three of his *Experiences in Theology* deals with the hermeneutics of global liberation theologies, such as black liberation theology, Latin American liberation theology, feminist liberation theology, and Asian *minjung* liberation theology.¹²⁹

My aim is to be in dialogue with Moltmann on his hermeneutics of macro-liberation theology and to conclude by proposing my new hermeneutics of Asian inclusive liberation theology. By Asian inclusive liberation, I mean liberation of both the oppressed and oppressors.

An Asian liberation theologian Pieris provides two axioms that promote an exclusive liberation theology. His two axioms are these: “The irreconcilable antagonism between God and the wealth (the rich and the oppressor) and the irrevocable covenant between God and the poor and the oppressed.”¹³⁰ Pieris understands Jesus’ “option for the oppressed” as exclusive of the oppressors. I argue that the goal of Jesus’ option for the oppressed is not exclusive of the oppressors. In the context of

¹²⁷ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, p. 105.

¹²⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, pp. 191-340.

¹²⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, pp. 289-302.

¹³⁰ Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, pp. 120-121.

human injustice, Jesus sides with the oppressed and resists the oppressors. The goal is to liberate both. Moltmann states that in siding with the oppressed and resisting the oppressors, Jesus restores the rights for the former groups, and converts the latter to be just. God's justice of solidarity and resistance is not vindictive, but transformative for both groups.¹³¹

Why do the oppressed and oppressors both need to be liberated? The answer Moltmann gives is because oppression happens on both sides. He wrote:

Oppression has two sides. On the one side stands the oppressors or masters, on the other side lies the oppressed or slaves. On the one side is the arrogant-self elevation of the exploiter, on the other side the suffering of his/her victims. Oppression destroys humanity on both sides. The oppressors act inhumanely, the victims are dehumanized. The evils the perpetrator commits rob him or her of his or her humanity; the suffering he or she inflicts dehumanizes the victims. Where suffering is experienced in pain on the one hand, evil spreads on the other.¹³²

To Moltmann, human life means in equal community and communication with each other created in the image of God. To oppress other people means to cut oneself off from God because it breaks the commandment of loving God and neighbors (Mk. 12:30-31). From this point, he argues that "since oppression always has two sides, the liberation has to proceed on both sides, too."¹³³ He calls this "reciprocal liberations."¹³⁴ I prefer to call this "inclusive liberations" partly because it is a direct opposite of misinterpreting Jesus' solidarity with the oppressed as *exclusive* of the oppressors. In order to propose an inclusive liberation of the oppressed and the oppressors, let us consider

¹³¹ Jürgen Moltmann, "Political Theology and the Ethics of Peace," p. 37.

¹³² Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, p. 185.

¹³³ *Ibidem*, p. 186.

¹³⁴ *Ibidem*.

two fundamental beliefs about God: first, “God is perfectly just; secondly, God is God of all peoples.”¹³⁵ Since God is God of all peoples, His reconciling justice must be the justice for all peoples. A possible way toward the inclusive liberations of the oppressed and oppressors is combining justice and love. Jesus tells us that “God makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rains on the righteous and on the unrighteous” (Matt. 5:45).

This leads to the point of my core argument. If God causes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous, then His liberation must also be beneficial for the oppressed and oppressors. Although God sides with the oppressed, His resisting the oppressors does not mean that God hates them. The God who causes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good loves both the oppressed and oppressors. However, God does hate the sin of oppression, which causes the suffering of the oppressed. The distinction between God’s love of sinners and hatred of sins traces back to the history where Augustine “advised love for the persons and hatred for their vices.”¹³⁶

Analogously, Buddha’s teaching of compassion is for everyone, although he sided with the oppressed. Buddha indeed criticized people at their birth (caste), but his liberating message was for everyone, including the oppressors, and he preached that everyone, including the ruling classes who suffer because of their greed. In other words, the oppressors imprisoned themselves because of their greed and hatred. This calls for liberating the oppressors as well. Later I will suggest how they should be liberated.

At this point, I will develop how God loves the oppressors too. If God loves the sinners (Rom. 5:10), and hates their sins, we should love and extend our mercy to the oppressors (persons)

¹³⁵ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, p. 197.

¹³⁶ *St. Augustine: Letters 211-270*, trans. Roland Teske (Hyde Park: New York, 2005), pp. 211.11.

and hate and resist their oppressive sins (deeds). The goal of loving oppressors without ceasing to struggle against their oppressive sins is clear that they may be liberated from evildoing, and that justice may triumph. It follows from this account that liberation needs to be done for both the oppressed and the oppressors. Moltmann suggests that “the liberation of the oppressed from their suffering must lead to the liberation of the oppressors from the injustice they commit.”¹³⁷ I respectfully disagree with him on his reversal of the process of liberations. By contrast, I argue that the liberation of the oppressors leads to the liberation of the oppressed. We must distinguish the liberation of the oppressed and liberation of the oppressors. I find Moltmann’s distinction between the two liberations helpful. Building on Sigmund Freud’s insights, Moltmann develops a twofold liberation and names liberation of the oppressors “psychological liberation” and liberation of the oppressed “sociopolitical liberation.”¹³⁸

In contrast to Moltmann, I argue that the psychological liberation of the oppressors is a requirement for the political liberation of the oppressed. The oppressors’ psychological realization of their faults creates liberation of the oppressed. I connect Moltmann’s hermeneutics of psychological liberation to Song’s Buddhist sense of *enlightenment*. Song calls the Buddhist sense of enlightenment “third-eye.”¹³⁹ For Song, “third-eye” means an inner eye that allows the oppressors to see the wrongs they commit toward their victims. However, the oppressors are not enlightened voluntarily. In order for them to be enlightened or liberated, we must resist their oppressive sins. When the op-

¹³⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, p. 186.

¹³⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 40th ann. (Minneapolis: MN: Fortress, 2015), pp. 419-494.

¹³⁹ Choan-Seng Song, *Third-Eye Theology*, p. 11. Here Song adopts “third eye” from a Japanese Zen master Daisetz Suzuki who teaches that “Zen wants us to open a third-eye as Buddhists call it, to the hitherto unheard-of region shut away from us through our own ignorance.”

pressors become conscious of their wrongs, they would feel guilty.

However, too often, they do not. Another way of enlightening the oppressors is to offer them forgiveness as God in Christ has forgiven us (Lk. 23:34). Paul's uses of justification (*dikaiosisyne* in Greek), salvation, forgiveness and reconciliation have similarities with the concept of liberation, but I argue that the liberating processes of humanity are different. Loving and forgiving the oppressors should go hand in hand as the result of Jesus' command to love, forgive and pray for our enemies (Matt. 5:44). In the liberating processes of loving and forgiving our enemies, the work of the Holy Spirit is inevitably needed. It is because the Holy Spirit not only allows God to love and save us while we were enemies to God (Rom. 5:10), but He also empowers us to love and forgive our enemies or oppressors.

If the oppressors are repentant, forgiveness will come easier, but too often they are not. Thus, our task is not to wait for their repentance, but to offer them our forgiveness. God does not wait for our repentance to be forgiven. Rather He forgives us, and our repentance is a consequence of God's gracious offer of forgiveness in Christ. This is the supreme model of human forgiveness in the church and society.

Aung San Suu Kyi, an activist Burmese Buddhist, is a good example for this. Although she is a Buddhist, her practice of forgiving her enemies - the military regimes - is a good example. She embodies the Buddhist doctrine of compassion and forgiveness in her relationship with the Buddhist military rulers who put her in jail and under house arrest for more than 15 years. Since her party (National League for Democracy) won the ruling regime party (Union Solidarity and Development Party) in November 2015, her top priority was to establish national reconciliation between her party and the ruling regime party by offering her genuine forgiveness to her oppressors. Some people criticize her cheap forgiveness of Buddhist oppressors. However, in my view, she has no choice. She is doing the right thing. Forgiveness is the first step to move forward a common

vision of national reconciliation and social justice and economic flourishing.¹⁴⁰

Forgiving oppressors is not only to let go of our hatred, but also to feel guilty of their wrongs and to enlighten them of humanity, both their own and others.¹⁴¹ Becoming enlightened of their act of dehumanization and their common humanity begins the process of reconciliation. Reconciliation means a new relationship with God and with one another. Reconciliation (*katallasso* in Greek) means the exchange of enmity for new friendship.¹⁴² Reconciling with the oppressors in the presence of injustice, however, is cheap reconciliation. Cheap reconciliation perpetuates social injustice.

A certain degree of justice must first be restored before reconciliation can take place. In order for the oppressed to be reconciled with their oppressors, liberation needs to take place on both sides. The oppressed need to be liberated *from* oppressors and the oppressors also need to be liberated *from* their colonized mind. As original sin separates us from our ability to reconcile with God, so the actual sin of oppression separates us from reconciling with oppressors. Overemphasizing liberation *from* oppression, many liberation theologians never pause to think about liberation *for* (telos).¹⁴³ However, Moltmann rightly suggests that the goal of reciprocal liberations is *for* building “a

¹⁴⁰ See <https://www.voanews.com/a/myanmar-aung-san-suu-kyi-nld-reconciliation-meetings/3064779.html> (accessed on September 30, 2017).

¹⁴¹ Some military rulers came to feel guilty of their wrongs to the civilians. Thura U Shwe Mann, one of military top leaders is one of good examples.

¹⁴² Stanley E. Porter, “Reconciliation as the Heart of Paul’s Missionary Theology,” in Trevor J. Burge and Brian S. Rosner, eds, *Paul as Missionary: Identity, Activity, Theology and Practice* (London: T&T Clark, 2011): pp. 169-179 (here p. 173).

¹⁴³ David Thang Moe, “Sin and Suffering,” pp. 218-223.

new community in true justice and freedom, in which there are no longer any oppressors and oppressed."¹⁴⁴

I agree with Moltmann. I further argue that the process of liberation *from* and the goal of liberation *for* are equally important. The oppressors' psychological liberation from dehumanization and the oppressed from oppression creates the goal of liberation *for*. The goal of liberation is *for* building a free community in which the oppressors will live side by side with their oppressed as new humans in Christ rather than the exclusive visions of winners and losers that promote hatred. This relates to the prophet Isaiah's apocalyptic vision: "the lamb and the lion shall lie down together" (Is. 11:6). The lamb is an analogy of the oppressed, and the lion represents the violent oppressors. Overcoming an exclusive view of liberation, we need to insert liberation in an inclusive framework of mutual love.¹⁴⁵

To Moltmann, the ultimate goal of mutual liberations is, however, not the "kingdom or community of freedom, but the community or kingdom of love. Rather the kingdom or community of freedom is the process to the kingdom of love."¹⁴⁶ To that process and goal of the kingdom of love in the midst of suffering, Moltmann encourages us to have hope—the hope grounded in the resurrected Christ.¹⁴⁷ He sees the "hope as forward-looking, forward moving, and also as transforming the present suffering world."¹⁴⁸

For Moltmann, suffering is not the last word. The resurrected Christ is the power, which suffers with us and transforms our suffering into hope.¹⁴⁹ Moltmann's theology of suffering does not stop at the cross, but it goes beyond the cross of Christ by embracing the light of Christ's resurrection by the power of the

¹⁴⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, p. 186.

¹⁴⁵ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, p. 105.

¹⁴⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, p. 219.

¹⁴⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, "Hope in the Struggle of People," in *The Open Church*, trans. M. Douglas Meeks (London: SCM Press, 1978): pp. 1-20.

¹⁴⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, pp. 15-36.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibidem.*, pp. 15-36.

Spirit.¹⁵⁰ It is important to say that Moltmann embraces the twin roles of Christology and Pneumatology in his trinitarian ecclesiology of suffering and liberation. He said:

Pneumatic Christology is only realistic when it is developed into a trinitarian theology of the cross. Charismatic ecclesiology too is only realistic when it makes the Spirit manifest in the conditions of the world that were without Him.¹⁵¹

Moltmann is right in embracing the trinitarian dimension of the church's hope and liberation in the midst of suffering. I consider this to be distinct from what many liberation theologians take their liberation hermeneutics root in Christology alone. In my view, a trinitarian Christology is a hermeneutical ground for liberation theology and a trinitarian Pneumatology is a methodological guide for liberation theology. Since Jesus Christ and the Spirit are indivisible in God's economic act of salvation and resurrection, they continue to work for the inclusive liberation of the oppressed and the oppressors. While Christ takes a stand with the oppressed in suffering love, the Spirit empowers the oppressed and heals their memories of suffering on the one hand, and liberates the colonized minds of the oppressors and transforms them into the just people on the other.

The Spirit who empowers the suffering and liberating ministry of Christ (Lk. 4:18-19) is the same Spirit who empowers the ministry of Asian church. In our ministry of liberation, the Spirit empowers us to experience Christ's Immanuel presence (Matt. 1:23) and to hold a trinitarian God of hope (Rom. 15:13). Where there is the power of God's suffering love, there is the future of liberation. Song stated "There is no power in the world greater than the power of hope rooted in God's suffering love and resurrection."¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, pp. 24-26.

¹⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 37.

¹⁵² Choan-Seng Song, *Third-Eye Theology*, p. 167.

Likewise, Moltmann rightly said, “when Christians talk about hope, it is talking about the promised future of God’s liberating world.”¹⁵³ It is talking about the liberating God of hope who sheds His light on the present sufferings. Thus for Moltmann, a trinitarian theology of suffering and liberation is an ethical imagination that is optimistic and hopeful in contrast to some Buddhists’ pessimistic view of the world and is delighting rather than lamenting in the dialectics of God’s hidden and present faces.

5 Conclusion

I have explored major themes and methodologies in Moltmann’s trinitarian theology of the cross. Reading Moltmann’s trinitarian theology of suffering in Asia for the Christian and Buddhist dialectical dialogue on suffering means that we must concentrate on both sides of the doctrine of God (God’s nature) and the doctrine of salvation (God’s action). Moltmann’s trinitarian theology of suffering is grounded in the two inseparable dimensions of God’s love and suffering. I find this methodology helpful for developing an Asian interreligious theology of Christian and Buddhist perspective on suffering and compassion. Moltmann’s trinitarian theology of suffering and its kenotic idea of humility allow Christians and Buddhists to see the reality of the suffering world and to transform it compassionately. A kenotic theology of the cross is not just about how we received God’s salvation as a gift, but also about how we act it as liberation in the suffering world.

Another significance in Moltmann’s trinitarian theology of suffering is God’s dual presences: God’s historical presence in the suffering Christ by the power of the Spirit and God’s contemporary presence among the suffering humans. Building on this, an Asian trinitarian theology of suffering can be made in this way:

¹⁵³ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, p. 134.

Jesus reveals who God is regarding His divinity and humanity, whereas the Spirit defines where the mysterious and liberating God is both in the church and in the society. Jesus, the image of the invisible God, through whom the character of God's visibility serves as the reminder of God's transcendent hiddenness and immanent revelation in human suffering.

Seeing collecting suffering as a whole, I have urged Christians to re-consider the components of Christ's suffering and solidarity in a dialectical dialogue with the Buddhist view of *dukkha* and *karuna*. What we perceive a comparative approach to the Buddhist view of *dukkha* and *karuna* and the Christian view of passion and compassion is self-denial, by which God reaches out to all suffering humans and makes a compassionate and liberating space for them to experience. Since Buddhists don't have an explicit knowledge of the Spirit's presence in their cultures, the church must witness to the Spirit's healing presence.

Finally, I have argued that Christians should start an Asian contextual theology with suffering in dialectical dialogue with their Buddhist neighbors who share the same experience of suffering. Their common task is to compassionately transform the suffering Asian society. Social justice in Asia cannot be promoted against the suffering Buddhists, but with them. I am not attempting to replace evangelism with social justice, but to hold both. The church must witness to the whole gospel of justice and evangelism without separating Jesus' atonement from His social ministry because they are one event of God's salvation. I also have proposed that Christ's solidarity with the oppressed not be understood as exclusive of the oppressors because the God of love is interested in the liberation of both the oppressed and the oppressors.

While Christ's ethics of solidarity with the oppressed is the ground for liberation, we must remember that the Spirit liberates the oppressed and heals their memories of pain, and resists and transforms the oppressors into the just people. God does not merely send us the gospel of comfort and liberation for the oppressed only; instead God liberates and heals all hu-

mans by entering into our suffering world in Christ by the Spirit. Suffering and love are two inseparable components of the cross. Suffering is a channel through which the triune God continually reveals Himself as creator, savior, comforter, and healer in the midst of suffering in Asia.