

Moltmann the cross
at mark 15:34 as
evidence



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BUSTER**

Moltmann makes two main moves to combat this tradition. First, he argues that Christ and God the Father suffered in Crucifixion. All this is grounded by a dialectal, epistemological method, where God is revealed in His diametric opposite: the crucified Christ. 'It is the dialectical knowledge of God' which 'first brings Heaven down to earth of those abandoned by God.' (1974, 28). Moltmann takes his point of departure from the Scriptural reference 'God is Love' (1 Jn.

4: 18) (1974, 227). For Moltmann, a God who cannot suffer, is also one who cannot love. He argues that love presupposes relational involvement, which by definition means one cannot be completely detached from another. But this is precisely what an Impassible God is - one 'so completely insensitive, He cannot be affected or shaken by anything.' (1974, 222).

Christ, as Son of God, demonstrated such love through the Crucifixion (244). However, his greatest suffering was not down to the Jews, the Law, the Romans or politics - but with respect to God the Father. Moltmann points to Jesus' cry on the cross at Mark 15: 34 as evidence the Father abandons the Son. As such, Jesus represents the suffering godless and godforsaken: 'God becomes man in Jesus...in his death on the cross, he enters into the situation of Man's godforsakenness.' (1974,). And in this way, 'Christ suffers with us and Christ suffers for us'. (1980, 50). The Father also shares in this suffering - though in a different way to the Son's experience (1974, 203).

Although the Son suffers through abandonment; the Father only suffers compassionately - in terms of 'grief of the death of the Son.' The Father is not exempt from Christ's suffering because of Moltmann's second

major move. This involves a readjustment of the lens with which we view the Crucifixion. Rather than seeing the event in soteriological terms, in what God does for us - we must consider what the event reveals about the Triune God.

Moltmann's 'Passibilist' argument is underpinned by constructing an integrated, Trinitarian framework in which to understand the Crucifixion. Picking up from Rahner, Moltmann undercuts any distinction between Immanent Trinity (God who is), and Economic Trinity (God which acts). In other words, who God is, is revealed in what God has done (240). Any understanding of God which does not take this Trinitarian framework into account is a 'weakly Christianised monotheism' (236). The same goes for the Crucifixion. It is not a one-way process: where the Father, as the subject, sends the Son, who stands as the passive object. Instead, the Son actively willed to deliver himself, and crucifixion was not forced upon him: 'it is not just Father who delivers Jesus to die godforsaken...but the Son who gives himself up' (243).

The Cross is therefore an act of both Father and Son, which expresses their Trinitarian relations. Thus, Moltmann writes about the Triune unity at the Cross, and again his dialectical method pierces through: 'precisely at the point of the Father and Son's deepest separation...they are most inwardly one in their surrender.' (1974, 244). In this way, we can only talk of the cross with reference to Trinity, and can only talk of the Trinity with reference to the cross. It is a 'Trinitarian event between the Son and Father' (245). This explains why the Father participates in the suffering of the

cross, because of the relational unity of the Trinity, which is expressed in this act, and every act of God.

Moltmann's account raises more questions than it solves. It is important to realise what is at stake, if we accept Moltmann's arguments. First of all, it means a deviation from Scriptural testimonies to the Crucifixion, in terms of the role of Father and Holy Spirit.

Klaas Runia makes the point that the idea of a 'crucified' God is clearly not consistent with scripture. ¹Although Moltmann makes much of the Crucifixion being an act of the Trinity, Biblical record certainly does not see it as an event within the Godhead. Moreover, for an account which does make so much of this integrated Trinitarian Theology, Moltmann has a severely underweight pneumatology. Although he writes that to 'understand what happened between Jesus and his Father on the cross, it is necessary to talk in Trinitarian terms', he then goes on to talking about the Father and Son exclusively: 'The Son suffers dying, the Father the death of the Son'/'the Fatherless of the Son is matched by the Sonlessness of the Father.

' (1974, 243). Indeed, Moltmann himself acknowledges this weakness; he comments retrospectively on 'The Crucified God': 'I did not get further than seeing a binity of God the Father and Jesus the Son of God.' (1991, 174) ¹