

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JÜRGEN MOLTSMANN'S THEOLOGY OF HOPE AND THE CROSS FOR CHRISTIANS IN NIGERIA TODAY

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Abstract

This article, in honour of Msgr. Prof. Cletus Gotan, focuses on the significance of the theological presentation of hope and the cross in two of Moltmann's books: The Theology of Hope and The Crucified God. The combination of the principal theses of these two books and the contextualization of their significance for the Church and Christians in Nigeria is what this article intends to do. This is an intent to contribute to the existing discussions on the Church's role and the participation of Christians in the political decisions of Nigeria, especially with the 2023 General Elections drawing close and the high stakes as to what direction in the future of Nigeria will be charted. It calls for the sincerest and active participation of all members of the Church in deciding the right course of history we should take as Nigerians.

Keywords: Moltmann, The Crucified God, The Theology of Hope, Exodus Church, Open-friendship, Mission.

Introduction

The hope built on the event of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ inspires Christians to put their faith to work towards the liberation the Kingdom of God brings. Here lies the mission of the Church: "The *pro-missio* of the kingdom is the ground of the *mission* of love to the world"¹. The Christian hope and mission make it possible for Christians to hope on behalf of the world.² The reason for the Christian mission in the world lies in the fact that its faith and vocation depend on the life of Jesus Christ, the crucified, the resurrected and the one who is coming. It sets the

¹ MOLTSMANN, Jürgen, *Teología de la esperanza*, Sígueme, Salamanca 1969, 292.

² HINOJOSA, Lynne W., "The kindling of lives hopes: Eschatological historiography in Jürgen Moltmann's *Theology of Hope*", in *Fides et Historia* 52 (2020) 106.

community of believers in confrontation with the antagonistic and repressive identity of the society in which the community finds itself.³ The Christian hope is one that invites one to a revolution in the sense of the “negation of the negatives” so as to install positive positions for her society. “Ascetic Christianity called the world evil and left it. Humanity is waiting for a revolutionary Christianity which will call the world evil and change it”.⁴ Having made this postulation, this paper dwells fundamentally on the significance of Moltmann's theology of the cross for Christians in Nigeria today.

The Church's identity in the light of the cross of Christ

The Church has its duty in the task of emphasizing its identity and mission first of all within itself, among the faithful, before it can move to meet the world outside. If her identity is not convincing and credible to herself, it cannot be relevant to the society, and in order to prove its identity to herself, she must do that in the presence of God, to the world, and this requires the disposition to the internal renewal inspired by the Spirit of Christ and the power of the coming kingdom.⁵

The Church in Nigeria must consider the historical direction the world is taking and cease to maintain a static attitude in the face of historical changes that are taking place. The identity of the Church is not subject to change based on its origin in the life of the Blessed Trinity. It must always recognize this origin. This is importantly highlighted in Moltmann's ecclesiological perspective as he establishes the close relationship between Christ and his Church: “Every affirmation about the Church will be an affirmation about Christ. Every affirmation about Christ will be an affirmation about the Church, but it is not reduced to the Church for it goes beyond it”.⁶

The Holy Spirit's presence in the Church is experienced by the fact that her journey towards the new creation in Christ is mediated by his power in the Word and in the Eucharist. This gives rise to a Church that is not only Christological but also

³ MOLTSMANN, *Teología de la esperanza*, 420; MOLTSMANN, Jürgen, *Religion, Revolution and the Future*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 34.

⁴ RAUSCHENBUSCH, Walter, *Christianity and the social crisis in the 21st century: The Classic that woke up the Church*, RAUSCHENBUSCH, Paul (ed.), HarperOne, New York 2007, 68-72. The revolution referred to is not that which has any connection to violence and catastrophic destruction of lives and property. It will be absurd to maintain an idea of a violent and catastrophic Christianity that seeks to be liberative and wants the experience of God's freedom to permeate through all realities. For things to change, according to the desires of God, there is the need for a new ethic that is set on guaranteeing the satisfaction of the hungry, the meek and poor (Mt. 5:1-12) and “the rich are sent away empty” (Lk. 1:52-53). This revolution from the dimension of what the Christian faith hopes for means to be subjected on and inserted into the attitude of Jesus Christ and his relationship with those marginalized in the society. It is the revolution that once again guarantees the universal fraternity of all men and women as equals in the presence of God the Father. It is the Christian protest that calls for the transformation of the world.

⁵ MOLTSMANN, Jürgen, *La Iglesia, fuerza del Espíritu. Hacia una eclesiología mesiánica*, Sígueme, Salamanca 1978, 17-19.

⁶ *Ibid*, 22.

charismatic.⁷ This pneumatological dimension of the Church permits the emphasis on the Church's life and mission as it anticipates the coming Kingdom of God.⁸

It is also important to realize that its present situation has become different from what it was when the missionaries first came to Nigeria more than a century ago. Today, in the face of the myriad of churches and Christian sects, we can point to the change in the sphere of politics and governance, the rise of the culture of indifference and apathy to religion, the technological advancement and the accessibility to the internet, the pluricultural nature of Nigeria, etc. as reasons why the Church must take seriously the question of its identity. The Church in Nigeria must continue to recognize these changes in order to know how to define its identity.

The identity of the Church from the cross means that it must desist from the temptation of triumphalism and assume for itself an honest self-critical image that will allow her practice what she has learnt from the crucified Christ, participate in the suffering of those who suffer and cry to God for freedom from the vicious circles of death present in our society.⁹ The Church is where Christ is present in the reality of the celebration of the sacraments, the apostolate mission and fellowship, in the reality of those who are poor and marginalized and in the dimension of the hope of the expected Kingdom in the world.¹⁰ Moltmann avers that "The Church is not here for itself. It is here for the Kingdom of God and the freedom of the children of God".¹¹ Thus what the Church is called to do is to serve God and man, as the sacrament of the hope of the new creation against the situation of captivity and slavery that characterizes the past and present realities. It is the "Exodus Church".¹²

Moltmann dedicated the last chapter of his work to the theology of hope to dwell on the significance of the Church as the exodus church. The principal idea is that the Church as the pilgrim people of God is to live out the eschatological hope of the coming Kingdom of God in their societies. This is where the identity of the Church becomes manifest because she will show herself incapable of being assimilated and inadaptable to the institutional stabilization of things in order to communicate its own hope to the society.¹³

The political and socio-cultural situation of Nigeria does affect the state of the Church and its task of prophetic witnessing and it is commendable to see that the

⁷ *Ibid.*, 54-58.

⁸ BAUCKHAM, Richard, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1995, 123.

⁹ Cf. MOLTSMANN, Jürgen, *The Crucified God*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN 2015, 29.

¹⁰ MOLTSMANN, *Iglesia, fuerza del Espíritu*, 152-164.

¹¹ MOLTSMANN, *Religion, Revolution and the Future*, 120.

¹² MOLTSMANN, *Teología de la esperanza*, 393.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 418.

Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, the organ that shows the unity and presence of the Catholic Church in Nigeria, has been doing her best to always refer to the state of the nation and insist on the government to own up to its responsibility of offering social justice to all citizens of the country.¹⁴

But it is not enough to transmit communiqués after various meetings and this is where Christian communities must be disposed to responding to the testimony of what they hope in (Cf. 1 Pet. 3:15), manifesting this hope to other members of the society in love and truth. The worst that will happen to the Christian faith in Nigeria is for Christian communities to remain silent in the face of the oppression that takes place in the country or take the side of the oppressor against the oppressed and the victimized. That the Church is not a charity organization is not an excuse to cease from being charitable and a shelter to those who need it. However, this cannot happen if the Church relegates the crucified God to a second level. It is in him that the Church's identity is revitalized and its mission met with a willing response to the invitation of the coming Kingdom of God.

The Christo-practical identity of Christians in Nigeria

The expositions of thoughts in the foregone have presented the need to see the realities of the cross and resurrection, of suffering and glorification, of the present marred with trials and the future that promises liberation as present in the salvific design of God, represented in the life of Jesus Christ. The sacramental presence of this divine salvific design is identified in the Church, the community that is founded on the mysteries of Christ. But it is not enough to assume this point of reference of origin; it is not enough for a Christian to say he or she is one because of the faith professed. It is important that the professed faith corresponds with the praxis and ethics of the life of a Christian.¹⁵

It is necessary to ask after the identity of Christians, given that Nigeria tells of a pluricultural reality. Christians share the same habitual space with Muslims, traditional religion adherents and those who profess no religious creed.

The primary determinant of the Christian identity is Christ and his messianic mission. The crucified God must continue to play a vital role in determining the lives of Christians in Nigeria, for it is the identification with Christ, his messianic mission,

¹⁴ CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE OF NIGERIA, "Moving beyond precarious living in Nigeria". A Communiqué issued at the end of the Second Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) at the Divine Mercy Pastoral Centre, Agbamaya, Obada-Okò, Abeokuta, Ogun State, 11-20 September 2019.

¹⁵ Cf. WILLIAMS, Reggie, "The problem of the human in theological anthropology: Reading Jürgen Moltmann's Christology with intellectuals of the Harlem Renaissance", in *Theology Today* 74 (2017) 38. "For us, short of the eschaton, there is no other verification of theological language possible than ethical verification" (HERZOG, Frederick, "Towards the waiting God", in HERZOG, Frederick (Ed.), *The Future of Hope. Theology as Eschatology*, Herder and Herder, New York 1970, 69).

his crucifixion and his resurrection into the new and eternal life that is essential to the faith,¹⁶ for the resurrection of the Crucified one is the ground of hope in the life that overcomes death.¹⁷ This calls for the need to emphasize on the identity of Christians in Nigeria and the responsibility attached to it. The relevance of their testimony in the Nigerian society depends on this emphasis of identity.

The recognition and confession of Jesus as the Messiah implies a practical discipleship that is consequent on the messianic path of Jesus' life. This can only happen when we take the implications and significance of his mission and the event of his crucifixion and resurrection seriously. By becoming members of the community of the Messiah, they are invited to actively hope for the future of the coming Kingdom of God and his glory. It is an invitation to believe in the victory of Christ and the revolution against the machinations of sorrow and despair.¹⁸ It is the call to work for the kingdom of God that is to come.¹⁹

This mission implies that the gospel of Christ is proclaimed to all men but through the perspective of the common situation of men in their lack of humanity or plight of guilt, suffering, sorrow and death. The gospel presents itself as the beacon of hope that anticipates the future of God for those who are lost and forsaken.²⁰ The second implication of the mission of the members of the messianic community is that it promotes the attitude of fraternity, despite the differences that exist, in the case of Nigeria, as a result of class, tribe and ethnicity. The mission also implies the creative, battling and loving obedience ready to suffer in the everyday situations of the present world for its transformation and the anticipation of a new humanity.²¹

The Christian is invited to build his or her identity, from the horrible event of Good Friday to the glorious resurrection of Easter Sunday. As stated earlier, the Christian is truly Christian when he or she is identified with the crucified Christ and by showing solidarity with all who are suffering in their poverty, hunger and oppression. The mode of identification is based on faith and praxis. The Nigerian society's distasteful

¹⁶ MOLTSMANN, Jürgen, *¿Qué es teología hoy? Dos contribuciones para su actualización*, Sígueme, Salamanca 1992, 62.

¹⁷ MOLTSMANN, Jürgen "Towards the next step in the dialogue", in HERZOG, Frederick (Ed.), *The Future of Hope*, Herder and Herder, New York 1970, 163.

¹⁸ MOLTSMANN, Jürgen, *Experiencias de Dios*, Sígueme, Salamanca 1983, 59.

¹⁹ MOLTSMANN, *Teología de la esperanza*, 429.

²⁰ Kanu, Ikechukwu A. & Elizabeth Ezenweke O., The Dynamics of Human Suffering in Operative Theology. *International Journal of Theology and Reformed Tradition*, Vol. 2. 2020, pp. 168-182; Kanu, Ikechukwu A., African Liberation Theology and Women's Experience of Violence and Discrimination in Africa. *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development*. Vol. 1. No. 3. 2018. pp. 162-177; Kanu, Ikechukwu A., Theological Echoes vis-a-vis the Suffering of women in African. *Oracle of Wisdom Journal of Philosophy and Public Affairs*. Vol. 2. No. 3. 2018. pp. 88-97; Kanu, Ikechukwu A., Theological Models of Youth in *Christus Vivit*. *Nnadiabube Journal of Religion, Culture and Society*. Vol. 1. No. 1. 2018. pp. 1-11.

²¹ MOLTSMANN, Jürgen, "Theology as eschatology", in HERZOG, Frederick (Ed.), *The Future of Hope*, Herder and Herder, New York 1970, 34-40.

situation is an opportunity for Christians to put their faith to work. It is an opportunity to continue to extend the paternal implication to others when we pray the Lord's prayer.

Towards concrete options for social justice

Moltmann's pneumatological perspective and the community

The internal dynamics of Moltmann's theology has always referred to the trinitarian life of God. The intention to dedicate this segment to the pneumatological perspective of Moltmann is to show that each person of the Blessed Trinity plays a role in the lives of humans and in creation. In this segment, the Holy Spirit is the protagonist and it shall be evaluated from the point of view of his gift of communion to man and how this gift is necessary for Nigeria today in the quest for social justice from a Christian perspective.

The Holy Spirit's presence in the early works of Moltmann (*Theology of Hope* and *The Crucified God*) is not as pronounced as it is in the works that followed (*The Church in the Power of the Spirit, Trinity and the Kingdom* and *Spirit of Life*). His pneumatology developed from his realization that the Holy Spirit is located historically between the resurrection of Jesus and the universal future of Jesus Christ.²² But on a doctrinal level, it is based on the desire to find a distinctive role of the Holy Spirit in such a way that pneumatology is not done in subordination to Christology, as the Western traditional concept of the *Filioque* postulates.²³ This distinctive role is built around comprehending the Holy Spirit as the Subject of unification, of communion between us and the Trinity.²⁴

For Moltmann, the experience, life and communion of the Holy Spirit comes as the result of the remembrance of the Christ and the anticipation of the new creation. The reference to the Holy Spirit is the presupposition of Christology and the preparation for eschatology.²⁵ Moltmann's interpretation of 2 Cor. 13:13: "the communion of the Holy Spirit" is his springboard to affirm that the nature of the Holy Spirit is communal.

This communion is the ability to accept others as they are. It is not a violent reality against that which is different. Communion is the reciprocal exchange and opening to others. It is the respect for one another. Communion exists among different or various persons that have certain realities in common and the sharing of a common

²² BAUCKHAM, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, 152.

²³ DABNEY, Lyle D., "The Advent of the Spirit: The turn to pneumatology in the theology of Jürgen Moltmann", in *The Asbury Theological Journal* 48 (1993) 99.

²⁴ BAUCKHAM, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, 164.

²⁵ MOLTSMANN, Jürgen, *El Espíritu de la vida. Una pneumatología integral*, Sígueme, Salamanca 1998, 31.

reality among different persons. It is not reserved for the class of equals, but it is the coming together of the unequal and the dissimilar. It is in the Spirit that we experience that the Blessed Trinity is an invitation to each one of us. The relation between God and Man is an unequal relationship, yet the Spirit makes it possible for us to participate in the trinitarian communion of God.²⁶

The communion of the Holy Spirit is not only restricted to the relationship between God and Man, but it also inspires the relationship between men here on earth. The communion with others is the vital experience that has its foundation in the Holy Spirit, for an isolated life without relations is a contradiction to what life is all about. The Holy Spirit's gift of communion unites the different and differentiates within unity. It flourishes based on the realities of love and freedom, both of which must always be active as far as the life of communion is concerned, for where love guarantees that which is common to all members of the community, freedom helps to bring about the distinctiveness of each individual member of the community. It is not a communion that is geared towards uniformity where difference and diversity is not permitted.²⁷

This takes us into the bigger ambience of the social trinitarian doctrine of Moltmann, where he avers that the trinitarian fellowship of the three divine Persons is a model for true human community. In her defense of Moltmann's social doctrine of the Trinity and proving its practical consequence taken from the Trinitarian perichoretic life, Joy McDougall highlights the Moltmannian concept of "open friendship"²⁸ which depends on the desire to share oneself fully in the life of another individual. It is predicated upon perfect reciprocity and equality among human beings. It helps to redefine freedom in communal terms as an attitude for and with another person. It is the antidote against an individualistic concept of freedom. She posits also that Moltmann's vision of the trinitarian fellowship helps in making an abstract ideal concrete. It leads the believer into the footsteps of Christ in imitating the boundless hospitality that Jesus shared with those he encountered and particularly with those on the margins of the society.²⁹

Moltmann also affirmed that the reality of community represents God's identity as love, and the trinitarian doctrine constitutes the Church as a community without

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 237-238.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 240.

²⁸ Cf. MOLTSMANN, *La Iglesia, fuerza del Espíritu*, 150-152ff. Moltmann means that the Church must be a community in which "public protection and public respect" are given to the poor, to tax-collectors and sinners. The concept of friendship should no longer be a private affair but a friendship that is humanitarian and sets the pace for a friendly world (See also RHODES, Stephen, "Jürgen Moltmann: The comfort and challenge of Open Friendship", in *The Asbury Theological Journal* 49 (1994) 63-70).

²⁹ MCDUGALL, Joy, "The Return of Trinitarian Praxis? Moltmann on the Trinity and Christian life", in *Journal of Religion* 83 (2003) 197-200.

domination.³⁰ The communion propagated by Moltmann in his social trinitarian doctrine is an argument against individualism and relationships of inequality and domination. It provides a model for the human community in which people are free for one another and find freedom in relationship with one another.³¹

From the perspective of faith, it is clear that the task set before Christians in a pluricultural setting like that of Nigeria is quite huge and it is one that cannot be overlooked. Nigeria's multiethnic identity is meant to be an example of the beauty of a society of coexistence that is based on the search for the common good of all without the denial of the respectful nature of each individual's cultural identity. But the reality is far from what is expected, as it has continued to be marred by various forms of inter-ethnic violence. The Nigerian society, sadly, has not moved on to search for that which is common and beneficial to all and sundry, and in the absence of this reality, what we have is a culture that seeks to highlight that which differentiates the Igbo from the Yoruba, the Hausa from the Idoma. It is a process that is built around the personal and communitarian survival of a cultural group against other groups, and if there were any alignments between cultures, it is because there is a "common enemy" to be unseated or neutralized. As mentioned, this only leads to a culture of mediocrity over the culture of merit. It is unaccountable and unproductive. It leads to the fragmentation of the larger society to small ineffective communities that in the end will be fruitless.

From the communitarian idea of the pneumatology of Moltmann, it is important to highlight that the love of neighbour and oneself in God's love and the possibility of an open friendship are beneficial to the Nigerian society today more than ever. Christians, as agents of the Holy Spirit, and witnesses to the Risen Christ and the coming Kingdom of God, are to be enablers of these communitarian relations and not to be found as agents who fuel violence and disintegration. The struggle for justice can always take place without losing our focus on the dignity of man.

This open friendship that is brave enough to accept those who have been rejected or ostracized is a union that results from the meeting of free people, a personal relationship between human beings that love one another. It includes affection, respect and loyalty. From the life of Jesus, this open friendship is not an exclusive reality, rather it receives those who have been rejected and considered unworthy of relations according to societal standards. And it is in this friendship of Jesus that we experience the principle of equality of all human beings as children of God.³² According to Bauckham, the open identity of the friendship of Jesus makes the

³⁰ MOLTSMANN, Jürgen, *Trinidad y reino de Dios. La doctrina sobre Dios*, Sígueme, Salamanca 1983, 219.

³¹ BAUCKHAM, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, 176-177.

³² MOLTSMANN, *El Espíritu de la vida*, 275-279; Cf. ADIPRASETYA, Joas - SASONGKO, Nindy, "A Compassionate Space-making: Toward a Trinitarian Theology of Friendship", in *The Ecumenical Review* 71 (2019) 24.

Christian community find its identity outwards in the society through evangelism and practical acts of liberation and solidarity with the poor.³³

Mending the cracked wall through creative love

The incendiary and fragile state of Nigeria, a consequence of the deep-rooted attitude of suspicion of one ethnic group against another and the trauma of violence that has accumulated for more than 50 years after the civil war and intertribal conflicts, highlights the need for a true reconciliation to take place in Nigeria. Most of these conflicts have found the government incapable of mediating between warring factions, bringing perpetrators of heinous crimes to justice and in some instances, the government takes the side of criminals by its body language.

In this situation, the Christian community and Christians who have also been at the receiving end of some of these cases of violence are caught between the urge to retaliate and the difficulty of keeping calm and maintaining peace. But it is important to take note of what Moltmann says about creative love. This is inspired by Jesus' teaching on the love for enemies (cf. Mt. 5:44) and Moltmann terms it as responsibility for enemies. The significance of this particular teaching of Jesus is that it makes us realize that retaliation for every heinous act only draws us into the vicious circle of violence and "[I]f evil is repaid by evil, then one evil always makes itself dependent on another evil, because that is its way of justifying itself".³⁴

This culture of retaliation is particularly well known in Nigeria. The July 1966 bloody military coup by some northern non-commissioned officers that resulted in the deaths of General Johnson Thomas Aguiyi-Ironsi and Lt. Colonel Adekunle Fajuyi was a retaliatory act against the southern officers of the Army over the murder of some northern leaders like Sir. Ahmadu Bello and Tafawa Balewa in January of the same year.³⁵ The event that followed this ugly episode was the civil war, and till this day, true reconciliation has not taken place; rather, it has resulted in the constant agitation of secession which is not devoid of threat of violence.

The *lex talionis* that gives reason and justification for retaliation loses its legitimacy in the presence of Jesus Christ, and as members of this messianic community of Jesus, Christians must assume the responsibility of ending the vicious circle of violence and retaliation in order for a lasting peace to exist. This is done through creative love which aims at creating something new and not just recompensing a love that has been received. It is the ability to love in such a way that the enemy is deprived

³³ BAUCKHAM, Richard, *Moltmann: Messianic theology in the making*, Marshall Pickering, Basingstoke 1987, 133.

³⁴ MOLTSMANN, Jürgen, *The Way of Jesus Christ. Christology in messianic dimensions*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN 1993, 131.

³⁵ SIOLLUN, Max, *Oil, Politics, Violence: Nigeria's Military coup culture*, Algora Publishing, New York 2009, 97ff.

of his hostility and is drawn into the Christian's sphere of responsibility.³⁶ It is the duty of Christians wherever they find themselves to be messianic agents of peace and not to be drawn into the tension of always seeking to retaliate acts.

This is not an easy task as it has been stated earlier; but the fact that retaliation has not brought the peace desired means that we cannot continue to do the same thing and expect different results. Through creative love, an avenue for dialogue towards reconciliation becomes possible. It does not exonerate the culprits of heinous crimes from assuming the responsibility of the acts that they have committed; rather, it sets them to come face to face with that ugly part of their history that is past so that they can truly be healed through the forgiveness of all they have wronged. This creative love of Christians should be built on the hope of the coming Kingdom of God as members of the community of the Messiah. This way, the fruits of liberation and freedom that come from the experience of what is expected are also spread into various aspects of the society at large.

The obligation of Christians to the less-privileged in the society

The direction of the theological exposition of Moltmann in *The Crucified God* points towards bringing liberation to those who are victims of man's inhumanity within history, and the center of this exposition is rooted in the fact that God has shown himself in love and solidarity to all who suffer in the death of the Son, Jesus Christ and exaltation in the resurrection of the same Jesus that was crucified (cf. Acts. 2:36).

One could ask why the attention is heavily tilted to those who are victims of various forms of oppression in the society. The reason for this is that for Moltmann, any theology of liberation must try to conceive the universal in the particular, the eschatological in the historical, the abstract in the concrete and that as far as it is concerned, it (theology of liberation) cannot be relevant without the corresponding materializations of the presence of God without which it becomes idealistic.³⁷ But this one-sided attention to the poor and less-privileged has been criticized as being too narrow and incomplete to serve as a base for Christian ethics because it does not have an ethics of affirmation. The ethics of the crucified God should be included in the ethics of God the Creator.³⁸

This criticism is acknowledged, but it is important to note that Moltmann's theological-ethical inferences also take into note the concept of liberation from the theology of the cross as it affects both the victim and the perpetrator in that both are

³⁶ MOLTSMANN, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 131.

³⁷ MOLTSMANN, *The Crucified God*, 492-493.

³⁸ SCOTT, David A., "Ethics on a Trinitarian Basis: Moltmann's *The Crucified God*", in *Anglican Theological Review* 60 (1978) 166-179.

found out by God in their indignity and inhumanity, for while the victim loses his or her dignity and humanity by the actions of the oppressor, the oppressor loses his or her humanity and dignity by self-deification and self-righteousness. The crucified God saves both the victim and the oppressor.³⁹ In summary, the attention to those who are suffering is justified because it highlights the radical character of the crucified Christ's solidarity with them and the same type of radical character is asked of Christians in their imitation of the crucified Christ's identification with the abandoned.⁴⁰

As noted by Richard Bauckham, the concretization of the political theology of Moltmann is found in the prominence that is given to the concept of human rights and this is where specific goals, those against the vicious circles of death, are formulated. This task is also accompanied by the eschatological hope that strives for the realization of human rights in the society.⁴¹ This should also apply to Christians in Nigeria. The struggle for the human rights of the less-privileged is not alien to the vocation of the Christian faith, but it is found directly in the mind and desire of God. The option for the human rights is not a private nor individual affair, but a consequence of the public testimony of divine liberation and covenant with God in the crucified Christ.⁴²

Application of non-violent action in the struggle for a just society

In 1969, Moltmann postulated a thesis where he averred that the question of violence and nonviolence is illusory; that the real problem is the question of the justified and unjustified use of force and whether the means are proportionate to the ends. The use of revolutionary violence, according to him, must be justified by the humane goals of the revolution; otherwise, it cannot be made meaningful or appropriate.⁴³ In this regard, he considers the use of violence only and only if it is a means proportionately applied to bring about a revolutionary future.

This position of Moltmann has been criticized by George Hunsinger who averred that Moltmann's political theology of violence stands in contradiction to this theology of the crucified God. For Hunsinger, the decisive mark of Christian suffering lies in the fact that it is a suffering that is voluntarily assumed with the intention of solidarity and liberation and not inflicting the same suffering on others. It is inspired by the love of God that finds the suffering of others intolerable, and accepts it in the hope that suffering will become redemptive. Moltmann, according to

³⁹ MOLTSMANN, *The Crucified God*, 98-99; *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 114.

⁴⁰ MOLTSMANN, *The Crucified God*, 30.

⁴¹ BAUCKHAM, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, 19.

⁴² MOLTSMANN, Jürgen, *Teología política. Ética política*, Sígueme, Salamanca 1987, 119.

⁴³ MOLTSMANN, *Religion, Revolution and Future*, 143ff.

Hunsinger, ignored the political implication of the cross as militant and non-violent agitation, although he was right to insist on the political implication of the resurrection as a revolution against unjust circumstances. This led him to equate non-violence with non-resistance, a consequence of his reaction to the cheap non-violence of churches in the face of social revolutions which is the hypocritical ideology of the ruling class. The question of violence and nonviolence cannot be dismissed as illusory.⁴⁴

Moltmann's position evolved in the 90s as noted in his messianic Christological program. In the light of the messianic peace, Moltmann affirms that counter-violence in the veil of retaliation is evil as the initial act that was done. The strength of evil is in violence, but it is only a non-violent action that robs evil of its legitimation and puts the perpetrator of evil in the wrong.⁴⁵

Moltmann presented two stages in which violence can be conquered. The first is to subject the exercise of power to law and the second is solidarity with the people in rejecting a dictatorial inhuman rule and their refusal to cooperate with it in any form.⁴⁶ This strikes at the heart of one of the problems of Nigeria's politicians who employ violence and thugs to win elections and get access to power. It also strikes at the heart of the government's easy resort to violence whenever the citizens protest against the poor amenities they have amid the wealth that surrounds them. The government's use of violence to perpetuate itself in power against the lives of the people is meant to serve as a provocation to retaliate, but as stated earlier, retaliation does nothing other than open a vicious circle of continuous justification for evil. The best attitude is to overcome violence with a non-violent action that is built on the solidarity of the people; this is where the real power of the people resides.⁴⁷ This must be accompanied by the struggle for justice, because the non-violent action does not mean that we give up searching for happiness and peace here on earth in expectation of the kingdom of God.

Conclusion

As Nigeria is preparing for her general elections in 2023, it has become necessary to lend voice to the discussions about the political, cultural and economic future of Nigeria and since this future affects the Church and Christians, we must ask after the

⁴⁴ HUNSINGER, George, "The Crucified God and the political theology of violence: A critical survey of Jürgen Moltmann's recent thought II", in *The Heythrop Journal* 14 (1973) 393ff.

⁴⁵ MOLTSMANN, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 129.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁴⁷ MOLTSMANN, *La justicia crea futuro. Política de paz y ética de la creación en un mundo amenazado*, Sal Terrae, Santander 1992, 69. The concepts of non-violence and resistance in Moltmann are to be understood with reference to the use of power. The Christian attitude does not give room for violence in the struggle for social justice but by the virtue of its identification with the Crucified God is called to resist any form of unjust situation in the society. Therefore, non-violence as far as the Christian faith is concerned, does not equate to non-resistance.

role we are playing or willing to play towards the future of Nigeria, having in mind that our actions or inactions determine the course and trajectory of this country. In Jürgen Moltmann's theology of hope and theology of the cross, we can be inspired to act in accordance to our faith in the risen Jesus Christ who was crucified and in the hope of the coming Kingdom of God.

In this piece, I have presented some important points that are valuable to us as Christians in Nigeria while we make up our minds for the political activity of 2023 and beyond. The Christian message of the Kingdom of God cannot have a political significance, it is not in the nature of our faith to be contented with contemplation alone, rather we are invited to share the fruits of our contemplation, prayer and liturgy in the praxis of life that is critical and seeks the liberation of those who are oppressed by the negatives of our country. The Church's role in the Nigerian society must not be contented with giving alms to the poor but must be the prophetic voice that speaks out in the wilderness of injustice, economic and financial stagnation, nay say retrogression, religious and ethnic discrimination and violence. The Church and Christians must live up to the standard of her Lord by holding those who are elected leaders and policy makers responsible for the masses in Nigeria without discrimination and segregation. This is what Moltmann's theology of hope and theology of the cross invites us to do: in the hope of the resurrection of the Crucified Jesus as missionaries of the kingdom of God and motivated by the cross of the Risen Christ, to be in solidarity with all who are victims of the negatives of political ideologies in Nigeria.