



The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology

Jürgen Moltmann , John Bowden (Translator) , R.A. Wilson (Translator)

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"This is Jürgen Moltmann's best and therefore most important book. He has substantially changed the central thrust of his theology without sacrificing its most vital element, its passionate concern for alleviation of the world's suffering."

-Langdon Gilkey

"*The Crucified God* rewards, as it demands, the reader's patient and open-minded attention, for its theme is nothing other than the "explosive presence" of the sighting and liberating Spirit of God in the midst of human life."

-The Review of Books and Religion

The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology Details

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From Reader Review The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology for online ebook

Tony Jones says

The best christology of the twentieth century.

Bob says

The single best understanding of the crucifixion -- in my opinion.

Dwight Davis says

Is it possible for a 40 year old book to be a breath of fresh air? Because this was such a breath of fresh air for me.

Moltmann articulates a theology of the cross that simultaneously takes orthodoxy and the tradition seriously while breaking new ground. Of utmost concern for Moltmann is the cross as that which liberates humanity from evil and oppression and enables us to stand in solidarity with the outcast and downtrodden. The godforsaken cross empowers the godforsaken in society. Such a simple, beautiful idea.

My main question is whether the cross saves us from some ontological reality or if it is primarily liberation from evil circumstances. This was somewhat unclear in this work, but may be addressed in one of Moltmann's many other writings.

This is the kind of book that I'm disappointed I had to read so quickly for class (I had to read the entire thing in just 5 days). I look forward to returning to it again and again and spending much more time in it's company.

Theresa says

The theology Moltmann proposes, that the Trinity is revealed primarily in the crucified Christ, is the most startling theology I have read in a long time. What I liked about his claim is that it provides an ontological base for the suffering of God in love and an explanation for the suffering in the world.

This claim must be seen in the perspective of an eschatological view, that is, a reading from the end to the beginning.

I liked that Moltmann demolished the theistic god (and so the atheistic god) projected out of man's need, and set the Jewish theology of God in the context of Covenant of God with Israel. He moves then to the revelation of the Trinity, understood in the sense of the relationships of persons in a love which is expressed for the all the godforsaken and the godless in the event of the Death and Resurrection in God's inner life.

From that vantage point, the Gospels (the ministry of Jesus) are seen as the account of the early disciples of Jesus explaining who He is from the vantage point of their experience of the Resurrection, and the Spirit of

God as the one who has and who progressively in Time unites all being in one communion.

This was my introduction to the work of Moltmann's post Holocaust, post Cold War theology. I hope to read more of his work. I need more explanation. He offers a dynamic concept of God that seems in many respects attuned to our time.

Tim says

After three years, I've finally finished this book. I've restarted it three or four times. The Crucified God is an amazing theological statement about the work of the cross of Jesus Christ and is a must read for serious theologians. The only critique I have is the occasional tendency of Moltmann to be repetitive, which is only frustrating due to the depth of the text. Moltmann is an amazing theologian and I am very glad I read what some have called his greatest work in, "The Crucified God."

Gloria says

This is a book of theology. Sometimes, a *very very deep* book of theology. The subtitle is: The cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology. There are references to "present day" and must be placed in the context of the date of publication: the 1970's.

How does the cross impact Christianity? What does it mean for those not Christians? These are not just questions that come from the book, but are simplified because the author is quite thorough in his analysis. The book is organized into chapters and then parts of chapters have headings with questions the author answers - all laid out in the table of contents. The author combines, criticizes and uses different theological ideas to either supplement his ideas or to distinguish those from his, as well as Freudian psychological ideas and liberation theology which addresses five "vicious circles of death" as well as five ways to combat those vicious cycles.

Quotes from book:

"The cross is not and cannot be loved. Yet only the crucified Christ can bring the freedom which changes the world because it is no longer afraid of death. In his time the crucified Christ was regarded as a scandal and as foolishness. Today, too, it is considered old-fashioned to put him in the centre of Christian faith and of theology. Yet only when men are reminded of him, however untimely this may be, can they be set free from the power of the facts of the present time, and from the law and compulsions of history, and offered a future which will never grow dark again....."(p. 1)

"Christian identity can be understood only as an act of identification with the crucified Christ, to the extent to which one has accepted the proclamation that in him God has identified himself with the godless and those abandoned by God, to whom one belongs oneself." (p. 19)

"The decay of faith and its identity, through a decline into unbelief and a different identity, forms an exact parallel to their decay through a decline into a fearful and defensive faith. Faith is fearful and defensive when it begins to die inwardly, struggling to maintain itself and reaching out for security and guarantees. In so doing, it removes itself from the hand of the one who has promised to maintain it, and its own manipulations bring it to ruin. This pusillanimous faith usually occurs in the form of an orthodoxy which feels threatened and is therefore more rigid than ever. It occurs wherever, in the face of the immorality of the present age, the

gospel of creative love for the abandoned is replaced by the law of what is supposed to be Christian morality, and by penal law. He who is of little faith looks for support and protection for his faith, because it is preyed upon by fear. Such a faith tries to protect its 'most sacred things', God, Christ, doctrine and morality, because it clearly no longer believes that these are sufficiently powerful to maintain themselves. When the 'religion of fear' finds its way into the Christian church, those who regard themselves as the most vigilant guardians of the faith do violence to faith and smother it. Instead of confidence and freedom, fearfulness and apathy are found everywhere. This has considerable consequences for the attitudes of the church, faith and theology to the new problems posed by history. 'Why did the church cut itself off from cultural development?' asks R. Rothe, whose messianic passion in the face of the modern age can speak for itself here: I blush to write it down: because it is afraid for faith in Christ. To me, it is not faith in Christ if it can be afraid for itself and for its Christ! To me, this is not to have faith, but to be of little faith. This, however, is the consequence of a lack of faith that the Saviour is the real and effective ruler of the world; and only when this faith is lacking is such fear psychologically possible.

"Christians, churches and theologians who passionately defend true belief, pure doctrine and distinctive Christian morality are at the present day in danger of lapsing into this pusillanimous faith. Then they build a defensive wall round their own little group, and in apocalyptic terms call themselves the 'little flock' or the 'faithful remnant', and abandon the world outside to the godlessness and immorality which they themselves lament. They lament the assimilation of Christianity to the secularized society which has declined since the 'good old days', and bewail the loss of identity of those who in theology and in practice involve themselves in the conflicts of this society and work with others to resolve them. But by this reaction, they themselves are running the risk of a loss of identity by passive assimilation. They accept the increasing isolation of the church as an insignificant sect on the margin of society, and encourage it by their sectarian withdrawal. The symptoms of the increase of this kind of sectarian mentality at the present day include the preservation of tradition without the attempt to found new tradition; biblicism without liberating preaching; increasing unwillingness to undergo new experience with the gospel and faith, and the language of zealotry and militant behaviour in disputes within the church. People boast of their own growing meaninglessness, and the failure of the world to understand as the 'cross' which they have to bear, and they regard their own obstinate lack of courage as bearing the cross." (p. 19-20)

"In this post-Christian, legalistic apocalyptic, the present time becomes the moment of the great decision: the world is lapsing into the spiritual death of atheism, atomic catastrophe, the death of the young from drugs or ecological self-destruction. At the same time, it is the hour in which the true church has to rise up as the visible place of refuge in the disaster: 'Rise up for the final struggle.' It cannot be denied that such visions of the future exist in the New Testament, and that the crises of history may come to such a critical end. But nowhere in the New Testament does the 'end of the world' bring about the second coming of Christ. The New Testament looks forward to the very reverse, that the second coming of Christ will bring the end of destruction and persecution in the world. Anyone who reads the 'signs of the time' with the eyes of his own existential anxiety reads them falsely. If they can be read at all, they can be read by Christians only with the eyes of hope in the future of Christ. Otherwise the apocalyptic interpretations of the age will be like the nihilistic attempt of the 'devils' of Dostoevsky, who want to destroy the world in order to force God to intervene, and who for romantic reason regard chaos itself as creative. But this no longer has anything to do with the cross as the horizon of the world, for this cross is the sign of the unity of love for God and the love with which, according to the Gospel of John (3.16), God 'so loved the world, that he gave his only Son'." (p. 21)

"The cross is the utterly incommensurable factor in the revelation of God. We have become far too used to it. We have surrounded the scandal of the cross with roses. We have made a theory of salvation out of it. But that is not the cross. That is not the bleakness inherent in it, placed in it by God. Hegel defined the cross: 'God is dead' -- and he no doubt rightly saw that here we are faced by the night of the real, ultimate and inexplicable absence of God, and that before the 'Word of the Cross' we are dependent upon the principle *sola fide*; dependent upon it as nowhere else. Here we have not the *opera Dei*, which point to him as the eternal creator, and to his wisdom. Here the faith in creation, the source of all paganism, breaks down. Here

this whole philosophy and wisdom is abandoned to folly. Here God is non-God. Here is the triumph of death, the enemy, the non-Church, the lawless State, the blasphemer, the soldiers. Here Satan triumphs over God. Our faith begins at the point where atheists suppose it must be at an end. Our faith begins with the bleakness and power which is the night of the cross, abandonment, temptation and doubt about everything that exists! Our faith must be born where it is abandoned by all tangible reality; it must be born of nothingness, it must taste this nothingness and be given it to taste in a way that no philosophy of nihilism can imagine." (p. 36, quote of quote)

"If faith in the crucified Christ is in contradiction to all conceptions of the righteousness, beauty and morality of man, faith in the 'crucified God' is also a contradiction of everything men have ever conceived, desired and sought to be assured of by the term 'God'. That 'God', the 'supreme being' and the 'supreme good', should be revealed and present in the abandonment of Jesus by God on the cross, is something that it is difficult to desire. What interest can the religious longing for fellowship with God have in the crucifixion of its God, and His powerlessness and abandonment in absolute death? In spite of all the 'roses' which the needs of religion and theological interpretation have draped around the cross, the cross is the really irreligious thing in Christian faith. It is the suffering of God in Christ, rejected and killed in the absence of God, which qualifies Christian faith as faith, and as something different from the projection of man's desire. The modern criticism of religion can attack the whole world of religious Christianity, but not this unreligious cross. There is no pattern for religious projections in the cross. For he who was crucified represents the fundamental and total crucifixion of all religions: the deification of the human heart, the sacralization of certain localities in nature and certain sacred dates and times, the worship of those who hold political power, and their power politics. (p. 37)

"To be radical, of course, means to seize a matter at its roots. More radical Christian faith can only mean committing oneself without reserve to the 'crucified God'. This is dangerous. It does not promise the confirmation of one's own conceptions, hopes and good intentions. It promises first of all the pain of repentance and fundamental change. It offers no recipe for success. But it brings a confrontation with the truth. It is not positive and constructive, but is in the first instance critical and destructive. It does not bring man into a better harmony with himself and his environment, but into a contradiction with himself and his environment. It does not create a home for him and integrate him into society, but makes him 'homeless' and 'rootless', and liberates him in following Christ who was homeless and rootless. The 'religion of the cross' if faith on this basis can ever be so called, does not elevate and edify in the usual sense, but scandalizes; and most of all it scandalizes one's 'co-religionists' in one's own circle. But by this scandal it brings liberation into a world which is not free. For ultimately, in a civilization which is constructed on the principle of achievement and enjoyment, and therefore makes pain and death a private matter, excluded from its public life, so that in the final issue the world must no longer be experienced as offering resistance, there is nothing so unpopular as for the crucified God to be made a present reality through faith. It alienates alienated men, who have come to terms with alienation. And yet this face, with its consequences, is capable of setting men free from their cultural illusions, releasing them from the involvements which blind them, and confronting them with the truth of their existence and their society. Before there can be correspondence and agreements between faith and the surrounding world, there must first be the painful demonstration of truth in the midst of untruth. In this pain we experience reality outside ourselves, which we have not made or thought out for ourselves. The pain arouses a love which can no longer be indifferent, but seeks out its opposite, what is ugly and unworthy of love, in order to love it. This pain breaks down the apathy in which everything is a matter of indifference, because everything one meets is always the same and familiar. (p. 39)

"This mysticism of the passion has discovered a truth about Christ which ought not to be suppressed by being understood in a superficial way. It can be summed up by saying that suffering is overcome by suffering, and wounds are healed by wounds. For the suffering in suffering is the lack of love, and the wounds in wounds are the abandonment, and the powerlessness in pain is unbelief. And therefore the suffering of abandonment is overcome by the suffering of love, which is not afraid of what is sick and ugly, but accepts it and takes it to itself in order to heal it. Through his own abandonment by God, the crucified

Christ brings God to those who are abandoned by God. Through his suffering he brings salvation to those who suffer. Through his death he brings eternal life to those who are dying. And therefore the tempted, rejected, suffering and dying Christ came to be the centre of the religion of the oppressed and the piety of the lost...." (p. 46-47)

Mauberley says

This book forces readers to re-consider why a 'theology of the cross' is at the heart of Christian worship and thought. Moltmann looks at the Crucified God from many different angles: the historical, the eschatological, the Trinitarian, the psychological, and the political and he does not shy away from confronting the reader and provoking her engagement. This is not an easy book to read but with some basic theological understanding and a commitment by the reader to follow Moltmann's arguments, the rewards are rich.

Bob Price says

To the extent that I can understand him, Jurgen Moltmann's *Crucified God* tops the list of explorations of Christian Theology.

Developing on themes that he introduced in *Theology of Hope*, Moltmann now turns his attention to the crucifixion of Jesus and its theological, psychological, and political implications. Moltmann is not content to do theology for theology's sake. He sees in theology a complex matrix that helps not only the church, but the entire world.

Positively, the aspect of Moltmann's thought that I appreciated was his understanding of the suffering of God and of Christ. The cross, as a Trinitarian event, involves all the emotional aspects of God. Christ's suffering shows a solidarity with people who suffer. God's suffering at the cross completely reverses the thought and value structure of our world (or at least it ought to). Being the first theologian I have discovered to discuss at length *God's suffering* Moltmann brings to light an often overlooked element in Christian theology. The idea of God suffering has huge implications, not only for theology, but also for pastoral ministry.

Negatively, Moltmann consistently goes to places and reaches conclusions that I can not follow. For him, the Bible is not necessarily the authoritative Word of God, but a book that is divinely inspired, no matter how flawed it may be. His conclusions in the political realm are also troubling. He views socialism as the way to overcome economic injustice and democracy as a way to overcome political injustice. This creates, of course, Democratic Socialism, which has never presented itself as a real answer to the problems faced by human beings. Moltmann's concern is to bring concern to those areas that present major problems for our world today...and I appreciate it I appreciate his concern also that the cross of Jesus plays directly into these concerns. My problem comes at his conclusion.

The *Crucified God* is not an easy book to read. Much of Moltmann is difficult to understand, but the effort is well worth it. Moltmann at times can bring great insight and clarity to the issue of the cross.

I recommend this book to pastors or others with a serious concern for deep theology.

Aaron West says

Six months ago I set out to read this book after hearing some buzz about it among some theologically-minded friends and acquaintances of mine. It has taken six long months (in which some sabbaticals were taken) due simply to its density and my fickle impatience. It is certainly a scholarly read: many of the words and phrases Moltmann throws around with ease, and in expectation of understanding on the part of the reader, were lost on me. Italicized Latin phrases and theologian names were lurking around every other line.

But no matter, because I found the content of the book to be richly satisfying and thought-provoking. It was originally written in the 70s as part of a trilogy, and I found myself stunned at how applicable it is, even for today's audiences. I suppose Solomon's old ecclesiastical adage holds true: there is nothing new under the sun, after all.

The premise of the book lies heavily on a deeper look at just who and what the crucified Christ is--and what that means for society, churches, and theology today. Moltmann takes readers through a winding maze of examples and propositions to get us to consider a--more complex--set of theses surrounding the historical, trinitarian situation of the crucifixion. Throughout I found myself marking many of its passages and pages with sticky notes, and sadly, I must now return it to the library after a long journey together. If you have grit, and are profoundly interested in theological subjects, please dare to take this one on: it has changed my view of Jesus, and just what occurs in his amazing life, death, and resurrection, forever.

"Humiliation to the point of death on the cross corresponds to God's nature in the contradiction of the abandonment. When the crucified Jesus is called the 'image of the invisible God', the meaning is that this is God, and God is like this. God is not greater than he is in this humiliation. God is not more glorious than he is in this self-surrender. God is not more powerful than he is in this helplessness. God is not more divine than he is in this humanity. The nucleus of everything that Christian theology says about 'God' is to be found in this Christ event. The Christ event on the cross is a God event. And conversely, the God event takes place on the cross of the risen Christ. Here God has not just acted externally, in his unattainable glory and eternity. Here he has acted in himself and has gone on to suffer in himself. Here he himself is love with all his being."

Keith Lane says

This book had the most impact on me, personally and theologically, of all the books I read in my courses in grad school. I'm reading it again to know it better. Incisive and eloquent.

Frankie Della Torre says

Who is God? What is God's heart towards man, towards those who suffer, towards those who are godforsaken?

In the Crucified Christ, hanging on a tree, forsaken by God, we see God's heart towards man. Behold, the Christ has been rejected to end rejection; Christ has been oppressed to end all oppression; God has died to end all death; God is the scapegoat that ends all scapegoating. What love is this? It is the love of the Crucified God.

We wanted a God like Zeus, a God who comes with rolling thunder, a God who crushes the wicked under

His heel, a God who comes in power, in domination, whose force and authority are omnipotent. But then comes Jesus, weak and lowly at heart, sorrowful unto death, non-violent, and poor in spirit. He is the Crucified God.

Not vengeance, not retribution, but forgiveness, for the oppressed, for the oppressor. Jesus comes and reveals a new righteousness, a righteousness that breaks the cycles of vengeance and hate, a righteousness that liberates the captives and forgives the sinful.

David Gregg says

The second in Moltmann's trilogy, spanning forty-five years: commencing with "Theology of Hope" and ending with the recently-published "Ethics of Hope".

E. says

Sickness in the household has given me the time to complete Moltmann's masterwork. This is a stunning theological achievement. While dense it is eloquent and passionate and engaging.

It was a more thoroughly comprehensive and systematic work than I expected -- the penultimate chapter on Freud and the final chapter on how the church should be engaged politically.

I found myself agreeing throughout, rather than being persuaded, as this is one of those books that was so influential that it re-shaped subsequent theology. So, despite not having read it before, I already live and work within the world it shaped.

Despite wanting to read it for some time, I was finally compelled to as our adult education team wants me to teach a class on atonement later this year. Moltmann seems to lay the groundwork for the subsequent transitions in atonement theology and decades of critique and creativity which have lifted us beyond the traditional models from the middle ages. As I come to this work after having read works critical aspects of its approach, such as Proverbs of Ashes, I could not agree on all points. But the book can enter a lively conversation with those later works.

I have a few more books to read before I began to more seriously put together the curriculum for the class. I am very much looking forward to it.

Stephen Joseph says

Moltmann has an incredible perspective on Theology and Christology, and as a post-war theologian, he really understands the obstructions and troubles that WWII brought to traditional theology, and his answers to some of the questions that these events pose is really quite stunning.

One of the the things that struck me about this book is Moltmann's redefinition of love. He shifts his perspective from thinking about love as a divinely-given ideal of happiness and joy to a more realistic understanding of love which defines the word more as an opening up of one's self to being wounded. This seems to make sense for the Christian narrative and the concept of God partaking in reality, rather than

floating above it like a great tease that has chosen to relinquish its wonderful gifts for some divinely capricious reason. He stresses also that in order to avoid Docetism, it is imperative to understand that God, in Christ, suffered in God's completeness, not just in a small, annexed part. This brings a paradox in which an eternal God suffers and dies, but Moltmann stresses that this paradox, and the criticism that it must bring on itself, is as central to the Christian faith as the cross itself. Hence the sub-title of the book, which seems to suggest that the cross is an inherently self-critical event, which both speaks of a vision of God and yet is abandoned by that very God in the same space, which is fascinating.

Lastly, he ends the book with a holistic interpretation of salvation and the kingdom, which includes liberation on all fronts: psychological, political, etc. This seems to me to make more sense than just thinking about people as spiritual beings with other parts of their lives that are vestigial at best. We are conglomerates, therefore Moltmann understands that in order to be free to be human in one aspect of our life as an individual and as a society, we must bring freedom into every aspect.

I loved this book, and while it was very dense and there were some points where Moltmann quotes untranslated Latin, which went completely over my head, I do think that this is a very important work and a must-read for anyone interested in rethinking the cross in light of a world that does not support the assumption of an omnipotent, non-suffering God.

David says

Amazing, simply amazing. This may go down as one of my all-time favorite books. I highly recommend this for pastors, teachers and anyone interested in theology. Moltmann demonstrates the absolute centrality of the cross of Christ and its meaning for Christian faith. Importantly, he does this with a robust doctrine of the Trinity; on the cross the Son experienced Fatherlessness (in the cry "my God, why have you forsaken me") and the Father experienced Sonlessness. Yet through this break in the relational God, humanity is now welcomed in. And it changes everything. Overall, a dense and difficult, but great and rewarding read.
