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The Crucifixion Toward Relationality

HOPE IN THE TRINITARIAN DIALECTIC

MASON DAVIS

Jurgen Moltmann once said, "Where we suffer because we love, God suffers in us." This paper intends to address issues of relationship, theology, and culture with the compelling reminder that God is with us. There is theology that exists primarily in the theoretical realm, readily available for those who desire cognitive stimulation. For people who desire cognitive theology, the danger lies in Gnosticism -- secret knowledge imparted only to those who understand. Knowledge is addressed in Scripture as a neutral subject, a tool that may be wielded for beneficial or destructive purposes. If the theology I am addressing were to be defined by knowledge, it could not be confessional. Confession only comes by way of faith. This paper will aim toward faith as an act of hope. If there is a way of living through the Spirit for millennials, it will come by way of the Godhead that leads the way into vulnerability as a manifestation of hope for the social self.

Theology of Postmodernity

In order to understand why millennials generally revere God less than previous generations, one must be willing to look at the epistemological shortcomings of popular evangelical theology that emerged as the modern age transitioned into the postmodern age. While philosophers like Immanuel Kant declared the modern age of enlightenment to be one in which religion has no place in the public arena, Christians adopted the modern age as an age in which God could be grasped as the onto-theological God of the philosophers, a moral-metaphysical God who gave absolute morals and provided humans with the ability to apprehend absolute, capital "T" Truth. Apologetics, or defenses of the faith, emerged in courses at Christian institutions and continue to make up a large majority of the book sales in Evangelical circles. The problem with modernist apologetics is that many of them trivialize the work of people who were not Christians while continuing to use reason as the primary way of understanding God. In fact, modernism is still a large force in the western world since many individuals reject God on the basis that a belief in God is no longer reasonable to them. For Christians who buy into the idea that reason is the ground upon which the proof of God must be fought, academics and state officials end up being posited as the antagonists who persecute religious beliefs and practices. Films like "God's Not Dead" portray the atheistic philosophy professor who, in his poor abilities to reason, is really only angry at God, therefore refusing to believe in Him. "God's Not Dead" plays on the words of Friedrich Nietzsche, who made famous the claim "God is dead." The writers, directors, and supporting audience of the film do not understand the context in which Nietzsche was speaking.

Nietzsche's "madman" proclaims that God has died because "we have killed him." The "we" here is the modernist first-person plural. We have killed God with our sophisticated apologetics and rationalizations. Modern theology and rationality have ultimately "murdered God." Atheism and nihilism

are not the dire consequence of unbelief. They are actually the covert agenda of Christian “belief” projected through an attempt to argue a defense for God. When we put God on trial, we are murdering Him. Atheism and nihilism are the covert core of modernist religion. This seems contradictory, but Christian evangelicals today will adapt to the structures of reason and expound that reason in their doctrine before adapting to the traditions and practices of historical Christianity. The religion of modernism is not openly confessional, but so covert that there is a general reluctance to critique it among evangelicals. After all, it is difficult to critique one’s own way of thinking when that way of thinking has always defined one’s epistemology. Modernist religion is indeed a vast cemetery, as the madman shows, strewn with the tombs and memorial shrines of a dead God.

The film “God’s not Dead,” actually participates in an ironic gesture if Nietzsche’s critique is correct. If the relational God of Abraham, Jacob, and Isaac is reduced to the ontological-moral “god of the philosophers,” the God of true transformation, true relationality, and true conviction is no longer made manifest through his people. The film, by staging a climactic scene where God is put on trial, inadvertently murders the relational God of Scripture. The move that is made in putting God on trial is what causes a phenomenological “death of God” for Nietzsche.¹ The more evangelicals try to prove God in this way, the more toxic the poisons of modernism become. Alongside Nietzsche, Soren Kierkegaard acts a prophet to those who recognize the dangers of elevating God as an ontological projection of reason. Kierkegaard continues to confuse the modernist with pseudonyms, irony, and satire -- literary techniques that do not fit the rationalist appreciation of perspicuity. Most importantly, Kierkegaard shows that “the truth of Christianity does not lay in historically verifiable facts, nor in philosophically demonstrable truths but is rooted and grounded in the subjective passion of the individual believer... Religious truth cannot be separated from the individual’s striving to live out the religious life.”² Kierkegaard’s notion of subjectivity is prophetic when he says things that the majority of the religious people do not want to hear. His attack on Christendom and his call for others to live in radical subjectivity before the face of God continues to offend self-proclaimed Christians. For the modernist, the fight for the objective, absolute truth often acts as a cover up, protecting a lack of subjective faith as well as a lack of passion in the individual before the face of God. Kierkegaard had seen all along the dangers of elevating cognitive knowledge over and above convicting faith lived out in

¹ By this, I do not mean God, as an independent object apart from our understanding, is dead. Nietzsche did not mean this either. As an atheist, he did not think of God in his writing unless it was in a phenomenological, relational way.

² Pattison, George (1997). *Kierkegaard and the Crisis of Faith: An Introduction to His Thought*. Eugene, OR: WIPF & STOCK Publishers. P12.

the religious life. People began to listen to his voice once the idea of objective knowledge was understood to be unstable ground.

The nineteenth century brought about a complete change in the epistemology of the western world. Traditionally, man was thought of as a creature who saw the meaning of the world outside and evaluated it objectively. The goal of science was to discover and explain this objective world in an absolute way. Modernism saw the world as a math problem- there was a right answer and a wrong answers in discovery. All thought started from the notion of the autonomous self, the reasoning ability of the thinking mind. For the modern rationalist, Cartesian doubt revealed that absolute authority was held in the thinking self. Philosophers, cultural anthropologists, and linguists came to a different conclusion with the advent of structuralism and post-structuralism. With their realization that the western world needed to interpret other cultures also came the realization that all knowledge was a matter of interpretation. "Interpretation is the idea that knowledge is not the pure, uninterested reflection of the real, but an interested approach to the world, which is itself historically mutable and culturally conditioned."³ Projects like Derrida's deconstruction brought about a complete reversal of traditional metaphysics. Anthropologists like Michel Foucault understood knowledge as a product of power discourses. The postmodern return of religion and the realization that a sense of the world as produced has been incredibly influential in Christian theology, worship, and practice.

Though many understand postmodernism as a critique of modernism, it is better understood as a critique of the institutions, systems of thought, and concepts that have been understood through a modernist lens. This does not exclude the church. For many evangelicals, to give in to this critique is to go against the notion of being in the world and not of it. These same evangelicals will refuse the critique of their modern lenses because they refuse to see that their own interpretation is in fact an interpretation. Nietzsche reveals that their God is dead when they continue to see God as an ontological being of reason that is constantly on trial. The least the culturally aware can say, and this again comes from a phenomenological perspective, is that their God is dying. This can be observed by the decay of the institutional church in the United States, following the example of post-Christendom Europe. Cathedrals are now memorials, the shrines of a dead, modernist God.

An Awareness of Language

An embrace of postmodernism not only changes the way that the church thinks about God, but also changes the way the church interacts with God. The Evangelical Church is too often caught up in

³ Caputo, John D. & Vattimo, Gianni (2007). *After the Death of God*. New York: Columbia University Press. P31.

language that is thoroughly modern, creating an unnecessary barrier between the believer and the postmodern culture at large. In a well-meaning effort to avoid modernist language, some Christian groups have posited Christianity as a relationship rather than a religion. Religion is too often associated with obligations and laws that the adherent must stand by. A relationship, on the other hand, sounds like a cooperative effort to move toward intimacy. Even though the “relationship not religion” phrase sounds appealing, any relationship that moves toward deeper intimacy requires the obligations associated with religion. This is why Pauline language was especially appropriate in the first century and continues to hold meaning for many. One theme that penetrates God’s interactions with his people throughout the Scriptures is the theme of God’s nature as expressed through judicial metaphors and courtroom language. When God established a covenant, that covenant was dependent upon the relationship between God and his people as well as the stipulations that followed in the contract in that covenant relationship. Paul was a Pharisee, so he was trained in the language of the law. There is, however, a way to read Paul’s letters in a way that primarily emphasizes the relationality side of his language, rather than the judiciary side. N.T. Wright has extensively developed Paul’s theology in this manner. Judiciary language is only one way -- and not the best way -- of understanding the events at the cross. Courtroom language is less relevant in an age of postmodernism. The particular structure of the courtroom does not account for the suffering of the judge and a penultimate change within the judge.

The postmodern age emphasizes the separation of “law language” and “relational language.” Historically these two are seen as compatible, but the postmodern age is ultimately one that is identified by its propensity to critique language and the structures associated with certain types of language. One of the most significant critiques of culture comes in its critique of authority and law. Deconstructive movements question the structures within all hierarchies, including the hierarchy of God and man. While religion, or “relationship” as some evangelicals would have it, depends upon the hierarchy of God above man, God willingly embraces a reversal of this hierarchy by his kenotic self-emptying upon the cross.⁴ Not only does the transcendent, suzerain God become the vassal when he becomes human, but God submits himself to the lowest form of human, even experiencing dehumanization as a dying man in Godforsakenness and the depths of hell. The idea that God would experience Godforsakenness often fails to translate to other parts of Christian doctrine, and the very notion of a suffering God brings into question his omnipotence, omniscience, and immutability.

⁴ Moltmann, Jurgen (1974). *The Crucified God*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press. P206.

Moltmann challenges the neat theology of many evangelical Christians when he asks, “who is God: the one who lets Jesus die or at the same time the Jesus who dies?”⁵ For evangelical Christians, the Son of God suffered while the Father poured his wrath upon him. Penal substitutionary atonement usually makes sense to Christians that have grown up listening to this judicial language. The penalty of sin had to be paid for a God who is just. For those who have not grown up in the Christian faith, the idea of an all-powerful God that must sacrifice his own son is absurd. There is, of course, no lack of respect for justice in the postmodern culture, but there is a skepticism toward an omnipotent being that cannot have justice in a more “humane” way. The idea that God killed Jesus can be a confusing notion to those who understand God as an omnipotent being. In judicial terms, the death of Christ for the justice of the Father is in the least an ineffective metaphor for a generation that is skeptical of judicial language. A God who suffers, rather than a God who is elevated as a judge during the crucifixion, is a God whose love is more easily understood in a postmodern context. Moltmann explains, “God and suffering are no longer contradictions, but God’s being is in suffering and the suffering is in God’s being itself, because God is love.”⁶ If the judicial language of the Father as judge is used in reference to the crucifixion, those who are skeptical of judicial language will be quick to dismiss the Father as a cold punisher, unsympathetically pouring wrath upon his own Son. Judicial language undermines the pain of grief that cloaks the Father.

Nineteenth century theologian Karl Barth saw the division between the Father as the punisher and the Son as the receiver of that punishment as a theology that did not embrace the full meaning of the cross. Barth writes, “In God’s eternal purpose, it is God Himself who is rejected in his Son, for God wills to lose so that man may win.”⁷ This however, is language that does not emphasize the Trinitarian relationship harbored in the name of God, and this theology can still be grasped with courtroom language. If theologians are to “develop a particular theology within earshot of the dying cry of Jesus,” the cross must be more than the observation of the Christ who rejected God. The cross must be a sign of the relational change within the Father once the Son experienced the hell of God-forsakenness. This is a change that is better addressed in theologically relational language and not judicial language. While a relational understanding of the crucifixion usually does not lead to the abandonment of judicial metaphors, the Trinitarian understanding of the crucifixion, which is at the heart of Christian faith, ought not to be explained in judicial terms for a postmodern age that seeks to critique authority and yet make room for relationships. Though the Father is not changeable as creatures are changeable, this does not

⁵ Moltmann, Jurgen. *The Crucified God*. P202.

⁶ Moltmann, Jurgen. *The Crucified God*. P227.

⁷ Barth, Karl (1957). *Church Dogmatics Vol. II, 1*. London; New York: Clark. P 167.

imply that God is absolutely and intrinsically unchangeable as the god of the philosophers is.⁸ The Father undergoes relational change, a change that judicial language cannot account for.

The message that God is love is not subverted by judicial language itself, but instead by the relationship that judicial language has to culture. Anselm, the 11th century Bishop posited that since the Father hates sinners, he sent Jesus so that he can pretend to see Jesus when a believer dies and goes to heaven. While this may contain truth in some sense, the language easily perverts the unity that the Father has with his entire creation. In the courtroom, if a man is declared as not guilty, his actual status concerning his guilt is no longer a factor. He becomes what the judge declares him to be, which is not guilty. This idea that the transcendent God declares to see something in us that is in fact not us can be seen as merciful in one sense, but can also be seen as an act of intentional self-deception. This theology sounds as if God is playing a mind game with himself in order to find a loophole in his system of justice. Because judicial language has been culturally conditioned in a way that does not bring the crucifixion into the positive light that it is intended to be, relational language is better suited to address the actions of the Triune God both in relationship to Godself and to humanity. Ultimately, relational language is best suited to break the bad associations of courtroom language since it is by relationally opening ourselves onto the other that the Holy Spirit is made manifest.

A Trinitarian Dialectic

Once one appreciates the criticism inherent in a postmodern epistemology as well as an awareness of the type of language used when speaking of God, space is opened to speak about a Trinitarian dialectic, the result of what Moltmann calls inner-trinitarian tensions. These inner-trinitarian tensions come to fruition in the historical event of the crucifixion and can only be understood in light of Jesus' cry to God at the end of his life. The resurrection, an eschatological event⁹, can only be seen in light of the dichotomy between God the Father and God the Son during the historical event of the crucifixion. "The event of the cross is something that occurs through the Godhead- a Trinitarian suffering that becomes the grounds for something new, a change that takes place within God that becomes the foundation for new creation."¹⁰ Moltmann does not see the death of Jesus as a way to take humanity's sins away that they may have an afterlife, but that man would experience a union with God in this life, even in the places where God is not. The very paradox of God suffering as both the Father and

⁸ Moltmann, Jurgen. *The Crucified God*. P229.

⁹ By an eschatological event, I mean an event that is inevitably existential, lived out in the daily lives of Christ's followers. Since Jesus showed that he could not be separated from his teachings, the resurrection is a resurrection of the Christ in the believer through obedience to his way and his teachings. Moltmann 204

¹⁰ Moltmann, Jurgen. *The Crucified God*. P217.

as the Son is inconceivable to those with an onto-theological, transcendent God of omnipotence, omniscience, and immutability. Instead, God suffers precisely because he becomes vulnerable. To truly become vulnerable is to lack knowledge about the future, releasing omniscience, to lack power, releasing omnipotence, and lastly, to acknowledge that to be all in all, the Godhead must have had to experience transformation, releasing immutability. God's transformation from suffering is completed in order to experience solidarity with mankind. "In this way, the suffering of God on the cross becomes the presence of God with the forsaken in weakness and suffering, for the purpose of deliverance and transformation."¹¹

If inner-trinitarian tensions are to be taken seriously, the Father must be more than an onlooker or even the distributor of wrath. He must suffer as well. The suffering of the Father cannot simply be resolved by the different placement of the two Trinitarian persons, the Father in transcendence and the Son in the depths of hell. "The grief of the Father here is just as important as the death of the Son. The Fatherlessness of the Son is matched by the Sonlessness of the Father... God suffers the death of his Fatherhood in the death of His Son."¹² Just as father Abraham learned more about his own faith in the journey to sacrifice Isaac, God the Father learns something about himself through the suffering of the Son. His infinite love that turns into infinite pain over the death of his son is met by the infinite pain of the Son expressed in his Godforsakenness upon the cross. For this reason the events happening in the cross constitute the heartbeat of the triune God, beating for his whole creation¹³ "It is not enough for God to separate man from himself so that mankind will love him- this separation has to be reflected back into God himself-so that God is abandoned by himself"¹⁴ It is important to recognize that when Jesus cries out, it is not to the Father with whom his entire life was synchronized with. Instead, Jesus yells aloud, "My God, my God!" The Son ceases to recognize the Father and shows that he "wavers in his faith." In the Son's expression of Godforsakenness, there is the suggestion that God becomes the God that would die for those who have lost faith in him. God becomes the God who dies for the men in places where God is not, who suffer and struggle apart from God. Only in Christianity is there a God who does not believe in himself. However, God does so precisely to gather in those who experience and express Godforsakenness.

¹¹ Lief, Jason (2014). "Theology and the Contemporary Experience of Young People." P34

¹² Moltmann, Jurgen. The Crucified God. P243

¹³ Moltmann, Jurgen (1990). The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. P173.

¹⁴ Zizek, Slavoj, & Milbank, John (2009). The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic? Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. P40.

The notion of a triune God posits God as a dialectical force rather than an ontological force. There is a presence but not an essence. “Presence and absence, sameness and otherness, are interstitial terms in the unfolding of what the Greeks meant by *ousia*. “*Ousia*” for the Greeks, was not something in itself, but in relation to what is not itself. This ontology of relationships allows us to think of God as a dialectic, a presence only present in relationship to what is not God. “As the God-man, in his passion, Jesus sustained the contradiction between life and death, identity and difference, thus achieving reconciliation. The death of Christ is the death of death itself, the negation of negation.”¹⁵ This rethinking of ontology as a dialectic also allows us to move toward a “reconceptualization of the nature of personhood and the self that that emerges from the radical individualism spawned by the enlightenment, with its elevation of the individual viewed in isolation and as fundamentally detached from the world.”¹⁶ Religion has done the same thing under the banner of modernity. If God is detached from a relational nature in worship, what immediately ensues is the worship of an idol, an entity that can be grasped and comprehended. The beauty of a Triune God is in the very notion that in relationship to God, there is always the inability to grasp what is present in God. The Bible often uses the language of marriage because in a marriage, one’s spouse is never simply defined as an independent object. One’s spouse is always becoming, always forming, and always defined through the ongoing event of the relationship.

Christian mystics were particularly in tune with the relational connectedness of everything in the universe. The idea sounds like it is of eastern origins, and this is no coincidence. Eastern religions embrace an aspect of the mysterious so that the mysterious may shine light upon the rest of life. For Christian mystics, the belief in God is the mysterious conviction that allows the light of reason to shine upon everything else. As GK Chesterton puts it, “The whole secret of mysticism is this: that man can understand everything by the help of what he does not understand. The morbid logician seeks to make everything lucid, and succeeds in making everything mysterious. The mystic allows one thing to be mysterious, and everything else becomes lucid.”¹⁷ The mystery of God can be compared to the sun. Looking directly at the sun causes blindness, but the sun is what allows one to perceive everything else that is around. Though humanity does not have direct access to God, God transforms every experience and “everything else becomes lucid.”

¹⁵ Moltmann, Jurgen. *The Crucified God*. P254

¹⁶ Stanley J Grenz and John R. Franke (2001). *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox. P193.

¹⁷ Chesterton, G. K. (2012). *Orthodoxy*. Hollywood, FL: Simon & Brown. P33.

To take this a step further, the believer must accept the notion of mystery in the event of the crucifixion. Rather than rationalizing the crucifixion with penal substitutionary atonement, the believer must understand that the Father suffered in the event of the crucifixion as well. The suffering of God is both a mystery and an evidence of authentic love. “One suffers because he lives and he is alive because he loves. The one who can no longer love, no longer suffers, for he is without grief, without feeling and indifferent. In this way we experience the love of God in life and in death.”¹⁸ Many modernist evangelicals make the mistake of believing only one person of the Trinity suffered upon the cross. The mystery is in the suffering of the entire Godhead and how the “God event in which the life giving Spirit of love emerges from the death of the Son and the grief of the Father.”¹⁹

The mystery is compounded when one tries to explain the eschatological purpose of Christ beyond his functionality in the cross. There would be no resurrection without the cross- at least, no resurrected Christ that would serve any future purpose. For John Calvin, Jesus is only functional as a mediator upon the cross, and eventually serves no purpose since the rule of Christ begins at the incarnation and ends with the eschatological surrender of the Kingdom to the Father. “In the consummation, the mediator is removed from the middle so that the redeemed may depend immediately upon God himself. Even the humanity of Christ, which acts as an intermediary between the holy God and sinful man, contains an element of hindrance, since for Calvin, it is a veil with which the Godhead clothes itself in order to draw near to us.”²⁰ Calvin was trained in law, so as a result, his theological language often sounded like courtroom language. His attempt to systematize the interaction between the Son and the Father leaves Christ to be the vanishing mediator, the superfluous figure without a post-consummation role. The difficulty for Calvinists is in Calvin’s use of systematic courtroom language, the mark of a man immersed in modernity. If we embrace the suffering of God upon the cross as a mystery, Christ becomes less a product of functionality superfluous in the consummation, and instead is the “power of God that throws history open to the possibility of life and justice. This means the dead have a future, the crushed lives of the oppressed are promised a future, and the living are freed from the powers of death and destruction to participate in the kingdom of God.”²¹

¹⁸ Moltmann, Jurgen. *The Crucified God*. P268.

¹⁹ Moltmann, Jurgen. *The Crucified God*. P253.

²⁰ Moltmann, Jurgen. *The Crucified God*. P258.

²¹ Lief, Jason. “Theology and the Contemporary Experience of Young People.” P22.

Opening onto the Other

While Moltmann insists that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is primarily added value over and above the cross that provides a historical hope for the future, I would argue that the added value of the resurrection is its affirmation of openness onto the other. While Moltmann is concerned with the futurity of the new creation, I would argue that the cross concerns futurity as it is the goal of the becoming in the present. This is not to say that I reject a concrete historical hope for the future, but instead I believe there is a closer affinity with an eschatological hope affirmed in the archetype of God on the cross. The vulnerability of God is the key to his relational nature as well as the key to how believers ought to be in relation to each other. Because God became vulnerable, believers must also become vulnerable. God is a God of love and to defend God as if he were on trial is to undermine the very aspect of God that ought to be appreciated most. That is, his willingness to be vulnerable for his people. The god of the philosophers is logical. The God of the patriarchs is relational. Because God is not a being in himself, but a being in relationship, believers know of God intimately by his vulnerability. This vulnerability is also what I would call openness onto the other, since there is no status of vulnerability without someone to be open and vulnerable to.

The dichotomy between modernism and postmodernism plays a central role in the way that one thinks of relationships. For the modernist, relationships are often institutionalized. The postmodernist is skeptical of the institutionalization of relationships, since relational institutions often break down. This breaking down can be seen through the family, an institution that is rapidly evolving today. The separation between relationships and institutions for the postmodernist is enforced by the history and community through which the individual interprets his world.²² The criticism of relationships as they are associated with institutions is a criticism that Christians ought to be mindful of. As a result, the argument I am making is one of transmission, of language, and of the culture in which we live together in order to develop better relationships. "To profess faith in Christianity is first of all to profess faith in the inevitability of a certain textual tradition that has been passed down to me."²³ The textual traditions and genres vary between the authors of the Scripture and we ought to recognize how patterns of culture align with certain textual traditions. Since our natural needs and interpretations are defined by whatever it is in which we are immersed, we must be aware of how our immersions come into contact with the texts we understand as authoritative.

²² Caputo, John D. & Vattimo, Gianni. *After the Death of God*. P29

²³ Caputo, John D. & Vattimo, Gianni. *After the Death of God*. P36

Evangelical Christians are often quick to demonize postmodernism because they believe it leads to relativism. Relativism has negative connotations, often blamed as the justification to follow whatever is convicting in surface relationships. What many evangelicals do not recognize is that “relativity” and “relationality” have the same etymology. The relativism that Christians ought to embrace is one that does not simply abandon all unifying premises, but a grounded relativism that recognizes God as found within the context of a relationship. In fact, it is Christianity that announces the end to the Platonic ideal of objectivity.²⁴ This applies both to God and to man. While it may be heresy to claim that God needs humanity, it is completely understandable to say that humanity only knows God insofar as his relationship to humanity is revealed. Through the sacraments, believers remember those events that God performed *pro nobis*, for us. This means that the sacrament of the Eucharist is intended not only to remind the believer of the sacrifice Christ made, but also to serve as a model in the way the believer is to live and die daily. The Christian life is to be lived relative to the culture we are immersed in and also relative to the way Jesus taught us to live.

Because God is understood through relational terms, the event of creation must be understood as an event in which “God has to open up a void in himself to create space for creation...recall the common experience of how –say, when we fall in love- the object can mysteriously undergo a radical transubstantiation, ‘nothing is any longer the same’ although it remains empirically exactly the same.”²⁵ This space in creation is the vulnerability that God must allow in order for true love to proceed. When there is death in God upon the cross, God knows himself in the places of suffering, death, and Godforsakenness. However this knowledge for God is not achieved without pain and suffering. The death of the Son upon the cross allows God to enter into the remaining space he had opened up at the creation- those places that where God was not present. The suffering of the Son and the grief of the Father opens up the future history of God in the world as the Spirit.²⁶ When God becomes all in all through the cross, God does so only by opening his nature to vulnerability and the ensuing pain as a consequence of that vulnerability. In order for one to practice the Christian life, one must see God as an archetype of openness onto what is other, and use that archetype as motivation to open onto the other as well. The Father opened himself to grief while the Son opened himself onto suffering and wrath that the believer might look upon that openness and do the same.

²⁴ Caputo, John D. & Vattimo, Gianni. *After the Death of God*. P31

²⁵ Žižek, Slavoj, & Milbank, John. *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* P43.

²⁶ Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Crucified God*. P256.

Vulnerability may look different to humans than it does to a transcendent God, though it is in recognizing that vulnerability occurs from such a place of transcendence that humanity is humbled toward motivation- motivation to be open and vulnerable. “We must bear the image of his shame if we are to bear the image of his glory.”²⁷ The most traditional and practical way to bear the image of shame, as Christ did, is to openly confess to the other. Confession must be an action directed toward another believer since it is God himself, through the Holy Spirit that dwells in the believer. Confession to the Father through prayer alone may be beneficial, but is insufficient as the inner life of the mind can be deceitful. Unless there is an intention to let the will of another be impressed upon our actions, our formative process as disciples will not progress. “Confession to another is the God-given remedy for self-deception and self-indulgence. When we confess our sins before a brother-Christian, we are mortifying the pride of the flesh and delivering it up to shame and death through Christ.”²⁸

This is not an easy task for any individual to do. To be truly vulnerable in confession is to be open to grief as the Father was, and even to suffering and pain as the Son was. The difference for the Christian is that in grief, suffering, and pain, the archetype of this action is found in the life of the Trinitarian dialectic, in which the synthesis is new, resurrected life. Motivation comes in recognition that the Son, who had every right to universal transcendence, was debased as a creature less than human on the cross. Because the example of the Son is before the Christian, there is no excuse not to be willing to risk debasement, to lose life that new life be gained through the resurrected Spirit. This entire process can be seen in the treatment of recovering alcoholics. Alcoholism is a disease because the individual loses autonomy. The only way for someone with alcoholism to find freedom is by opening onto the other in continual confession, letting the will of others progress him; even though he may suffer shame, physical pain, and suffering, there is a life independent of alcohol on the other side. Christians ought to be willing to learn from recovery groups and be open to the possibility that Penance is a legitimate sacrament. Like Baptism and the Eucharist, Penance mediates the universal and the particular²⁹, and its principle movement is exemplified by the vulnerability of God on the cross.

Believers are not only able to be open and vulnerable because God has done so first. The resurrection of the Son also puts the Son in a position to be with others in their vulnerability, their suffering, and their shame. The Son enables humanity to open onto God the Spirit, as “the Holy Spirit is Christ himself dwelling in the hearts of the faithful.”³⁰ Since the Spirit is gathered when one or more are

²⁷ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich (1959). *The Cost of Discipleship*. New York: SCM Press Ltd. P301.

²⁸ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*. P289.

²⁹ Zizek, Slavoj, & Milbank, John. *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* P116.

³⁰ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*. P233.

present, the Spirit is most with believers when believers open onto others and allow them solidarity in their struggles. We remember that Christ experienced Godforsakenness, but he also cried out, “Father into your hands I commend my Spirit.” If one understands in suffering and shame that releasing the Spirit unto God may feel like Godforsakenness, consequentially that person is directing that act of suffering in the pattern of the divine death of the Son at the crucifixion. Because the death of Christ has allowed God to be all in all, there is no longer any place where God is not. Since God is all in all, the church must consider the method of the Godhead at the crucifixion in order to become whole in sanctification. “If we regard sanctification as a purely personal matter which has nothing to do with public life and the visible line of demarcation between the church and the world, we shall land ourselves inevitably between the pious wishes of the religious flesh and the sanctification of the church which is accomplished in the death of Christ through the seal of God. This is the deceitful arrogance and the false spirituality of the old man, who seeks sanctification outside the visible community of the brethren.”³¹ In order to become fully human, the pattern of sanctification must resemble that of the death and resurrection, an openness onto the other, so that the deceitful arrogance and false spirituality of the old man ceases to exist.

It is perhaps the greatest strength of Christianity to have a God that suffers rather than a God who knows nothing of suffering. If God knew nothing of suffering, there would be no sense of unity in our struggles. As Christianity moves further away from the doctrinal correctness of modernity and closer to charity in postmodernity, the Church will come to understand that one of the greatest forms of charity is being open onto the other, as well as being a person the other would want to open up to. As God practiced openness upon the cross, the Church must see this as a posture to strive toward.

³¹ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*. P280.