

A Promised Presence

A Systematic Theological inquiry into the Theodicy Question in the thought of Jürgen Moltmann and Paul S. Fiddes

by Reinhardt Stander



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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

Many scholars claim that the discourse on theodicy is in a crisis. Against this backdrop this study argues that the idea of a “promised presence” holds promise for a more adequate engagement with the theodicy question. To argue this, I will offer a thorough reading of two theologians who have explored this question extensively, namely Jürgen Moltmann and Paul Fiddes. The study builds therefore on the writings of Moltmann, who argues that the cross and resurrection event establishes God’s promise, and thus hope, in the heart of the suffering believer, as it reveals a suffering God – the triune God. The notion of Promised Presence is further based on the proposal of Fiddes that the sufferer needs to take death seriously, so that he or she can take the promise of a suffering God seriously. This is supported by three theodicies: the theodicy of consolation, the theodicy of story, and the theodicy of protest. The consequential proposal from this research is a Theodicy of Promised Presence. In response to the question “What promise does the concept of promise in theodicy hold for theology?”, it is argued that a Theodicy of Promise, which recognises the promise of God’s presence, even in his absence, holds promise for a more adequate engagement with the theodicy question.

OPSOMMING

Die aanspraak word dikwels gemaak dat die diskoers oor teodisee in 'n krisis is. Teen hierdie agtergrond argumenteer hierdie studie ten gunste van die idee van 'n "belofde teenwoordigheid". Die argument is dat hierdie idee belofte inhou om op 'n meer adekwate wyse bemoeienis met die teodisee-vraagstuk te maak. In 'n poging om groter klarigheid oor hierdie begrip te verkry, bied hierdie studie 'n deeglike en kritiese interaksie met die werk van twee teoloë wat uitgebreid met hierdie saak geskryf het, te wete Jürgen Moltmann en Paul Fiddes. Die studie bou daarom op die werk van Moltmann, wat argumenteer dat die kruis- en opstandingsgebeure God se belofte, en dus ook hoop, in die hart van die lydende gelowige daarstel deurdat dit 'n lydende God openbaar. Hierdie God is die drie-enige God. Die idee van 'belofte teenwoordigheid' is verder gebaseer op die voorstel van Paul Fiddes dat die lydende persoon die dood ernstig moet neem, sodat hy of sy die belofte van die lydende God ernstig kan neem. Hierdie idee word ondersteun deur drie vorme van die teodisee-vraag wat Fiddes aan die orde stel, te wete 'n teodisee van troos, 'n teodisee van storie, en 'n teodisee van protes. Die voorstel wat vloei uit die navorsing in hierdie studie is daarom 'n "teodisee van belofde teenwoordigheid". As antwoord op die vraag: "Watter belofte hou die idee van belofte in terme van die teodisee-vraagstuk vir teologie in?", argumenteer hierdie studie dat 'n teodisee van belofte – wat die belofte van God se teenwoordigheid beklemtoon, ook te midde van ervarings van God se afwesigheid – belofte inhou vir 'n meer adekwate teologiese bemoeienis met die teodisee-vraagstuk.

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DEDICATION

To my wife, Irinda Stander, thank you for all your love and support through this period of study during which you sacrificed hundreds of hours as I was spellbound behind my laptop and books.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 RESEARCH PROBLEM

What is theodicy? Migliore (2004:118) formulates it as follows: “If God is both omnipotent and good, why is there so much evil in the world?” Erickson (1983:437) lists three areas in which the believer is challenged with regard to theodicy: “God’s power, God’s goodness, and the presence of evil in the world”. The tension within theodicy thus deals with the challenge how to relate to God, goodness, power, and evil. The problem of evil is carefully encapsulated and expressed by Joyce (1957:583):

The existence of evil in the world must at all times be the greatest of all problems which the mind encounters when it reflects on God and His relation to the world. If He is, indeed, all-good and all-powerful, how has evil any place in the world which He has made? Whence came it? Why is it here? If He is all-good why did He allow it to arise? If all-powerful why does He not deliver us from the burden? Alike in the physical and moral order creation seems so grievously marred that we find it hard to understand how it can derive in its entirety from God.

Many find the way in which theology deals with these theodical questions, and the explanations and answers theodicy provides, unsatisfactory. Even theologians are questioning the orthodox accounts of theodicy. Hence theodicy is not just a question about God, evil and suffering; rather, it itself gives rise to the question of the notion of theodicy as such.

The notion of theodicy is thus being challenged as ambivalent and reductive. Migliore (2004:118) argues that “in the wake of horrendously destructive wars, acts of genocide, and the grim possibility of biological warfare and nuclear annihilation”, theodicy is confronted by its limitations in “such easy faith” responses which are “discredited” by the “immense reality” of evil. The question, that also lies at the heart of this study, is whether this notion can be redeemed, and if so, where the emphasis will be. If the notion of theodicy itself is being questioned, will it be beneficial to give an adequate theodical account in the light of suffering and affliction?

Further, the question might indeed be raised whether we can have an adequate theological engagement with the question of theodicy, and if so, what other notions could be central to this account. Some important studies refer to God's presence in God's suffering (Fretheim, 1984; De Gruchy, 2013). But how, can one ask, would the notion of presence relate to the question of theodicy? Another notion often linked to the concept of presence is the idea of promise. Can this notion of promise, in conjunction with the concept of presence, help us on the path toward a more adequate and responsible engagement with the theodicy question?

If there is for many no promise in theodicy, the question can be asked whether a theodicy of promise might not address some of the challenges posed by voices critical of theodicy discourse.

1.1.1 SCOPE OF RESEARCH

With reference to the title of this thesis, *A Promised Presence*, it is crucial in one's understanding of theodicy to observe that there is a lack within this theological discourse pertaining to the notion of promise, and more specifically, of the notion of "a promised presence" as part of a theodical response. If so, the question that needs to be asked is how one could conceive of the relation of promise to theodicy. Before putting forward a research question that probes the connection between promise and theodicy, I will first make some comments that serves as background to this study into the question of theodicy and its relation to broader theological discourse.

1.1.2 BACKGROUND TO THEODICY

Theodicy – in the sense of asking questions about how God's power and goodness relate in the light of the pervasiveness of evil – can in one sense trace its roots back to when humanity started to roam this earth. Through all cultures and all religions, and through the centuries, humans have asked the question "Why?" Why does evil befall us? How does one make sense of it? Many of the different religions and their core beliefs and practices originated as a result of

this very question. Thus, religions worldwide tried to appease the divine, in order to either avert evil, or to manage it, as part of the attempt to make sense of God and their world.

Only since the Enlightenment has theodicy been formulated in the way we know it today. A seminal text in this regard is the German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's monumental work *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil*, originally written in 1710, in the French language as *Essais de Théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l'homme et l'origine du mal*. This work was not born in a vacuum. Leibniz was a protestant Christian, responding to philosophers' assertion that there is no solution to the problem of evil. Whereas Leibniz wrote his book as a theological account, agnostic philosophers incorporated it as part of the intellectual currents that marked the Enlightenment. They utilised the problem within theodicy to support their logic and reasoning to exclude faith and religion. Thus, theodicy in a certain sense became the metaphysical theoretical approach of the Enlightenment to bypass faith and Scripture. While theologians would later and to this date make theodicy part of theology, agnostic and atheistic philosophers of the Enlightenment subjected Christianity and theology to pure rational demands (as born out of the cultural milieu of the Enlightenment), and discrediting Christian theological discourse in the process.

These agnostic philosophers submitted God and Scripture to human reason and experience. While the question of theodicy relates to God, they had to use reasoning about God, divorced from any essence or referral to God and Scripture, to negate God and his existence. The direct consequence of this is witnessed by history. In the wake of the French Revolution, God and Scripture were banned from the public for more than three years, and society turned secular.

Today some theologians refer to this period to establish the fact that theodicy in itself cannot be part of theology. Whereas theodicy may have been used to discredit the divine and even theology, Migliore (2004:118) affirms that "theology cannot avoid the theodicy question", and therefore the need arises to establish that theodicy is indeed part of theology.

1.1.3 IS THEODICY PART OF THEOLOGY?

Besides the different types of theodicy associated with the different religions throughout history, the Christian religion of the past two millennia demonstrates that theodicy has always been a part of theology. There are letters and whole writings dedicated to this subject, notably since the time of Augustine of Hippo. Since then, and to this day, the church and theologians have recognised theodicy as a theological issue.

Some theologians, however, reasons that it is not that simple. According to them, theodicy originated with the Enlightenment, and thus cannot be used in theology as it stands. Vorster (2007:191) proposes that it is only a 'theoretical approach', and thus, in itself, unable to have a sensible theological outcome. Vorster (2007:191) explains this as follows:

The modern formulation of theodicy finds its origin in the Enlightenment that approaches the problem from a theoretical framework based on human experience. This theoretical approach leads, however, to further logical inconsistencies. Theology must rather approach the problem in the same way as Scripture does, by taking the cross, resurrection and parousia of Christ as point of departure.

Vorster (2007), therefore, argues that the question of theodicy needs to be reframed, in that theology must approach theodicy from the perspective of 'the cross, resurrection and parousia'. According to Vorster (2007), this emphasis should be established as the new 'point of departure'.

Theologians take the position that much of the theodical discourse is too theoretical and rational. But the question still remains whether some kind of rational defence of theodicy is not required in public discourse, and that theology should not vacate the public engagement resulting from the existential and intellectual challenges that arise out of the theodicy question and its perceived limitations. Based on this question, I maintain that theodicy should be part and parcel of theology and that theology should in turn engage theodicy, as part of the attempt to make sense of the evil that befalls us. But even if this is said, how does one proceed in the search for an adequate theological

account that views itself within the parameters of the discourse associated with the theodicy question?

It might be argued that one must leave space for the alternative; that theodicy, as it stands, cannot form part of theology, or at least that it must be seriously reframed. However, many of these attempts to “reframe” may tend to be reductive.

Adams (1999:218) asserts that suffering is beneficial in that “by integrating participation in horrendous evils into a person’s relationship with God” one’s faith is strengthened. Suffering is thus made into a broken vehicle of inherent goodness. This could remind one of a devastated sufferer who wants to know how a God, who claims he is caring, can inflict such pain for our benefit. Can words help such a sufferer; even words trying to justify such suffering? Little can be said about the reality of evil. Words cannot depict it. To Boyd (1997:34), it is essential to establish in the theodicy question that “the essence of evil transcends words, for words are always one step removed from concrete reality”. Reference to evil is abstract and can never encapsulate the reality thereof. If we do not take evil and sin seriously, our theology about theodicy will not be serious and sincere enough. If we do not perceive the reality of evil, our reaction in our theodicy will not be real enough. Therefore Brand (2011:290) maintains that, “Evil is not good at some deeper level. Evil is evil. Evil should not be. Evil is against God’s will.”

Surin (1983:230) deduces that it “is imperative therefore that the theodicy asks himself: Am I operating with a conception of evil that, because of its abstract nature, effectively reduces evil to banality?”

One cannot divorce theodicy from theology and theology from theodicy. One will either be out of touch with the reality of people’s hurt, experiences and feelings; or one will create superficial theology that means nothing and is senseless. Theodicy is part of theology, since God is the subject of our questionings in theodicy. Thus, it is with great expectation that I start this research journey in the field of theology. My goal is to discover meaning with regard to theodicy, which is being challenged as limited. My question is whether the notion of theodicy can be redeemed, and if so, if it will be beneficial in the

face of suffering and the reality of people and communities who find their faith being challenged. Theology needs to illustrate what notion of promise is to be found in a responsible engagement with the theodicy question.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTION

This research seeks to address the following question: *How can the notion of promise help us to give a theological response to the question of God and suffering?*

Questions forth flowing out of this main question and that directly relates to it, includes questions such as:

- How does the notion of promise relate to God's presence as possible theological response to theodicy?
- What reductive understandings of theodicy are prevalent in theological discourse?
- What theological sources would one utilise *en route* to a more adequate account of theodicy that links theodicy to notions such as promise and presence?

1.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

I will endeavour to answer the research question (and related questions) by engaging critically with two theologians who have linked theodicy with promise, namely Jürgen Moltmann and Paul S. Fiddes. The study will take into consideration the different ways in which the theodicy question has been approached traditionally. Yet, this research will not follow a critical-philosophical or historical approach, but rather a more constructive, theological approach. While theodicy is often approached from the angle of analytic philosophy or informed by analytical philosophy (Brand, 2012:1,2), I will commence my theological approach in a more systematic way. I will engage through careful reading (as part of a literary approach) with the two above mentioned theologians, who have studied this question in depth, to reach a constructive

proposal through analysis, evaluation, and literature study, utilising a systematic theological methodology and hermeneutic.

This study follows the systematic method of Migliore (2004:xiii) where he presents theology in the "classical theological tradition" and where he is "critically open to the new voices and emphases of recent theology." Although I realise that it is not an easy task, I've tried to "be self-critically aware" of my "own social location and ecclesial context" (Migliore, 2004:xiv) so as to not be unbalanced in the attempt to give a fair theological analysis and evaluation, and to listen and "welcome the help and correction that comes from continuing dialogue with Christians whose experience and context is quite different from my own" (Migliore, 2004:xiv). Theology, in my approach, is not superficial reasoning, but a "critical reflection on the community's faith and practice" (Migliore, 2004:xv), which naturally calls for a christological and trinitarian approach that I follow throughout this research.

Furthermore, for the purpose of this research, I met with Paul Fiddes in Oxford, England, where I had the privilege of interviewing him for 90 minutes. In Chapter 4, where I engage the work of Fiddes, I will make use of this interview, with written permission from Fiddes, by quoting from it as to enrich this research that mainly builds on his written texts.

1.4 HYPOTHESIS

This study hypothesises that the idea of a "promised presence" holds promise for a more adequate engagement with the theodicy question. To argue this, I will offer a thorough reading of two theologians who have explored this question extensively. I hope to discover that the promise in theodicy is contained within a Theodicy of Promise, which brings our past suffering and theodicy questions within the hopeful space of a God who promises God's presence in the present, and whose presence anticipates a future. In response to the question "What promise does the concept of promise in theodicy hold for theology?", it is the hypothesis of this study that a Theodicy of Promise, which recognises the

promise of God's presence, even in his absence, can provide comfort amidst the painful realities of human suffering.

1.5 STRUCTURE OF RESEARCH

The overall structure of the study takes the form of five chapters, including this introductory chapter, where I situate and problematise the notion of theodicy. Subsequently, a concise background to theodicy is provided. This poses the question that has always posed a challenge to theologians: Can theodicy be part of theology? In response to the question "What promise does the concept of promise in theodicy hold for theology?", it is the hypothesis of this study that a Theodicy of Promise holds promise to reframe a theological account of theodicy as it seeks to address existential and intellectual challenges.

Chapter Two lays the foundation for the next three chapters which critically evaluate the current approaches to theodicy. The critical finding is that the discourse around theodicy is in a crisis.

To reach a constructive proposal regarding the emphasis on the view of God as a promising God, and to relate the theodicy question to an adequate doctrine of the triune God, who reveals the suffering God, I critically engage the notion of promise in the works of Jürgen Moltmann in Chapter Three. Moltmann proposes that the cross of Christ and his resurrection speaks to the promise of God. This creates hope for the believing sufferer.

Chapter Four presents my critical engagement with the works of Paul S. Fiddes. This engagement with Fiddes's works discloses how he takes suffering and death seriously and reveals the promise of a suffering God, who is not merely passible, but sensitive to the sufferer's suffering. I will dialogue with his proposed theodicies, the theodicy of consolation, the theodicy of story, and the theodicy of protest, in order to reach a constructive proposal regarding the promising God.

The fifth and final chapter is where, after inquiry into the works of Moltmann and Fiddes, I trace some possible contours of a theology of Promised Presence, and the way it can have bearing on the problem of theodicy. The chapter

includes a brief constructive proposal in the light of the above - a proposal that will tie theodicy to Promised Presence, in that theodicy is not about answers, promise, or presence – but about the promise of the Promised presence of the triune God.

CHAPTER 2: THEODICY IN CRISIS?

2.1 IS THEODICY IN A CRISIS?

Reading the deeply moving book *Led into Mystery – Faith seeking Answers in Life and Death* by John W. de Gruchy, a theologian who had lost his beloved son to death, one realises that theodicy is in a crisis. De Gruchy (2013:11) states in his prologue that the book “is not written as an aid to grieving. But it’s an attempt to ‘own my grief’ by responding to the questions posed by Steve’s death”. As an attempt to reconcile the reality of human suffering with that of God’s love, theodicy is in a crisis in the way it approaches this reconciliation.

In his book, *The Evils of Theodicy*, Terrence Tilley criticizes theodicy, by literally analysing each little statement by theodicians with such minute scrutiny that after reading his book, theodicy itself seemed evil. Tilley (1991:247) declares: “I have tried to show it possible, if not obvious, that the discourse practise of theodicy was and is a practise which created and sustains the continued misdeclaration of evil... If theodicians misdeclare evil, they create a destructive discourse”. Following this logic, he extrapolates that all ‘theodicians misdeclare evil’.

In the next section I am not following in Tilley’s critical footsteps, but will rather highlight the main theological approaches to theodicy. I will further provide a short critique to lay the necessary foundation for the chapters which follow. This chapter will endeavour to show that theodicy is in a crisis in its varied traditional approaches. I will dialogue with a variety of theologians from a wide range of theodical perspectives, and I will review the best-known and most widely believed theodical approaches, to provide an overview and concise critique of traditional theodicy. Since there are so many perspectives within theology regarding theodicy, I have selected a few terms under which approaches could be placed. I have given the following headings to systematise a typology for some general views and arguments: Perfect Plan Theodicy; Cosmic Conflict Theodicy; Process Theodicy; Soul-making Theodicy; and The Free Will Defence.

2.1.1 PERFECT PLAN THEODICY

Typically, theodicy is approached by trying to vindicate God (Boyd, 1997: 35), separating any notion of evil from God. Stackhouse (1998:51) refers to some theologians that reason that 'good' can only be grasped and appreciated in the light of 'evil', since 'good' can't be understood nor appreciated, unless 'evil' has been experienced first, thus making 'evil' a prerequisite for recognising 'good' on earth. This approach only complicates and confuses our reasoning, as well as the outcomes of theodicy. Yet, regarding the existing crisis in theodicy, it only forms part of a much larger issue.

Within the 'perfect plan' theodicy, some people mechanically subscribe to the idea that God is the author of everything that happens to them, and that the trauma and suffering (even mistakes) that cross their paths are all part of His perfect plan. Rice (2014:77) relates the story of how Joni Eareckson became a quadriplegic, and how she shared her story and faith with millions. Part of this story entails how she views the story of her life as part of God's perfect plan. She wrote a book in which she states that "When God allows something, he is acting deliberately – he is decreeing that event" (Eareckson, 1997:82). Clearly this is her way of coping with her situation, resulting in this view becoming foundational to her belief system. Thus, this 'perfect plan' theodicy has become part of her faith. Eareckson (1997:76) unapologetically writes:

... nothing happens outside of God's decree. Nothing is good, nothing bad, nothing pleasant, nothing tragic ... We may not fathom God's reasons ... we may love him for it, we may hate him for it. But in simple language, God runs the world.

The belief that every detail is part of God's planning and doing is evidence of the depth of actual pain and suffering on an unfathomable level. Rice (2014:39) affirms the innate need in people to believe in a 'perfect plan' theodicy:

Because suffering is unavoidable, theodicy is inescapable. Because we cannot live without a sense that our lives make sense, and suffering threatens that confidence, we must find a way to recover, rescue or rehabilitate it.

This belief creates a way of understanding why suffering is happening, while still being able to believe in a loving God. This 'perfect plan' belief helps one to trust God blindly, in the knowledge that everything that happens is according to

God's divine will. But how can theologians have the deterministic notion that suffering is willed by God? *Deus Vult* – God willed it. One such theologian is Henri Blocher. Pondering the theodicy question, his basic conclusion is that “Scripture never doubts God's command over every event, or that he determines everything that happens, in its entirety and in minutest detail: God is sovereign totally, radically, absolutely” (Blocher, 1994:90). As if this determinism is not enough, Blocher (1994:91) further states that “God's care extends even to the minutest occurrences”.

The ‘perfect plan’ theodicy is for many others, however, too simple. For Surin (1986:148), “the narrative of faith collides with the narrative of its negation, but neither achieves an ascendancy over the other”. This simple narrative, that every molecule and atom is fiercely controlled by the divine, brings one to the practicum conundrum of its viability in the face of pure evil. As Surin (1986:148) simply puts it: “At the level of belief, Auschwitz gives one reason both to believe and disbelieve.” Theodicy is not as simple as just believing that God is at work in everything that happens. The suffering that humanity had to endure just during the past century bears witness to the fact that the face of evil cannot be the face of the God of the Bible.

How is it possible, in human terms, to see screaming babies butchered, and to lay that at the door of an all-loving God? What type of ‘perfect plan’ is this of God to exterminate millions of people of a race He once promised to be His people at the hand of merciless, sometimes young people, who grew up as Christians? What would be such divine intent? How is this perfect?

Some Reformed theologians will defend this by referring to God's intention (Erickson, 1983:387) in an effort to vindicate God from being implicated in the real pain and suffering humans experience. However, some Calvinist theologians, like Erickson (1983:387), to uphold Calvin's doctrine, try to maintain this mystery of God's will, by stating that “There are times, many of them, when God wills to permit, and thus to have occur, what he really does not wish”. Others will argue that the reformed doctrine of predestination has nothing to do with how theodicy is understood. Why then does the Westminster Confession of 1646 start out as follows: “God from all eternity did, by the most

wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass ...”?

The irony of the ‘perfect plan’ theodicy is that, while it is the belief system that supposedly creates trust and makes sense of suffering, it is also the belief system that seems totally spurious. Simply put, the proposition holds that God is responsible for all evil, for God is the planner and executer of it – so now one can trust in God’s goodness. This is totally illogical and irreconcilable with the very notion of a loving God. Theodicy is in a crisis.

2.1.2 COSMIC CONFLICT THEODICY

Richard Rice (2014:77) observes that, to some theologians, suffering results directly from Satan and that God is in no way involved. Davis (1981:74-75) terms it *luciferous*, when suggesting that Lucifer, as the fallen angel, is a probable explanation to evil and its origin. A growing number of modern and postmodern theologians consider the existence of angels and demons mere mythology, derived from an ancient worldview (Davies, 1995:93). Du Plessis (2005:165) agrees with this notion, whereas Strecker (2002:117) is more sceptical about unseen forces, suggesting that the Biblical authors adopted the “possession paradigm” of the time. Some theologians, however, take this even further back to the influence of Babylon and Persia on the Jewish mind, and the very construct of their worldview and religion (Van Aarde, 1986:547). Not surprisingly then, Hick (1966:369) writes: “It is disquieting to find that ... even the logical possibility that God exists seems to depend upon the existence of the devil.”

In this regard, Bultmann (1953:5) is adamant:

It is impossible to use electric light and the wireless and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries, and at the same time to believe in the New Testament world of demons and spirits.

In contrast to this growing understanding of ‘evil’, Möller (1987:173) is convinced that this viewpoint adds to the rise of evil, in the sense of denying its very essence. Van Zyl (1992:22) considers this to be Satan’s ploy and his

greatest victory in the battle of evil. CS Lewis (1942:9) argues as follows for the existence of a Devil:

... when I first read the New Testament seriously ... it was always talking about a Dark Power in the universe – a mighty evil spirit who was held to be the Power behind death and disease, and sin... I think it's a civil war, a rebellion, and that we are living in a part of the universe occupied by the rebel.

This thought pattern seems to be still prevalent today, judging by contemporary movies. For instance, DC Comics have a Dark Power and a Superhero or more, who fight the problem of evil – pure theodicy. Mostly, in these realms, it is illogical to have evil without a dark power to fight. In this extremely interesting context, El-Khoury (2017: 62) finds a theodical kind of irony, which is reflected in the starkly contrasting question superheroes ask themselves: “If we devote our lives and our superhuman powers to the good of humankind, how can humankind still be evil?” The existential deduction is that there is evil because of an evildoer. There is the ‘good’ fight against evil, since there is an ‘evil’ fight by a devilish being. While many theologians will uphold the reality of Christ and his stance against evil, the very same theologians will argue against an evil being taking a stance against good. According to El-Khoury (2017:64), “the conventional opposition in the superhero genre sees the birth of the hero naturally followed by the creation of his nemesis...”. In these action dramas, this dualism of two opposing forces is necessary to portray the power of evil and the combat against it. This reality is sometimes used as the very means to reject the existence of an evil one, but Andrew Walker (1987: 28) refutes this by simple reason: “Christian dualism, however, is not a philosophical dualism, because the concept of a rebel is not an alternative god: it is a creature trying to be God.” This is no Hellenistic and dualistic reasoning which could negate that there is a supernatural opposing power in the universe, since he, as evil power, is not of the same magnitude in power and divinity.

Yet, a Devil or Dark Power is problematic to many theological minds, and only a “hypothesis” (Keller, 2007:7), which lacks sufficient proof or “reason to think this hypothesis is true” (Keller, 2007:7). Hick’s (1966:369) deduction is that, owing to “a gap” in people’s theodicy, they need to appeal “to a mythological idea”, referring to the existence of a devil. While there is clearly a crisis in this

area of theodicy and much study to be done, one needs to recognise that there are complications within theodicy that call for a more sustainable, pragmatic, and reliable theodicy. Theodicy is in a crisis.

2.1.3 PROCESS THEODICY

Hartshorne (1941) developed the metaphysical system of Whitehead into the basic theory we have today of God's nature and actions in process theology and theodicy. The basis of this theology subscribes to the dualistic nature of God, that while being an all-powerful absolute being, God is also temporal and personal. Surin (1986:87), attempting to define process theology, suggests that "God is bi-polar, that is, he is a synthesis of concrete and abstract aspects: the latter comprising his 'necessary' attributes and the former his 'contingent' or 'accidental' attributes".

According to this strand of theodicy, God is creatively reduced to a type of mythological god who is dependent on God's creatures to form God's experience. In this sense, everything that we experience, God experiences. God is part of our universe as we are part of God's. This is panentheism, as God is not only objective, but also subjective. This is not unlike anthropomorphism. Buchler (1942:245), in response to this, describes this divine temporality as "the world's God's body", while God "is the supreme mind and force of the cosmic organism".

In the words of Hartshorne (1941:248):

None but God... can be infinitely passive, the Endurer of all change, the adventurer through all novelty, the companion through all vicissitudes. He is the auditor of all speech who should be heard because he has heard, and who should change our hearts because in every iota of our history we have changed his. Unchangeably right and adequate is his manner of changing in and with all things, and unchangeably immortal are all changes, once they have occurred, in the never darkened expanse of his memory, the treasure house of all fact and attained value.

To the proponents of this theory God is love, which means that God is suffering with us in our suffering, since God is part of our universe. To deal with suffering and the problem of evil, Hartshorne (1941:30) states that there is "the necessity

of a division of powers, hence of responsibilities, as binding even upon a maximal power". Thus, all works toward the doxa of the divine, since "really there is to be no service of God, but only a service of men through the – to them – beneficial practices of religion" (Hartshorne, 1941:48). Be it good, be it evil – it all works towards the good pleasure and glory of God.

This theology is but a response to classical theism and its limitations and challenges, but in itself it is also limited as the opposite to the other extreme. The logic that God alone cannot be accountable for all evil has led to this theology which presupposes that God cannot be in total control of the entire universe. In this paradigm creatures have freedom, and the misuse of it leads to evil – not God. But, whether good or evil, it is in God. While such dualism causes some confusion, the order in this 'chaos' is met in the intent of this theology. That is, God is personally involved in our pain and suffering, and ultimately in all of our destinies, and grows with us in this world. This essentiality of a suffering God, as we shall discover in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, is a pragmatic realism that helps us to find promise within theodicy. However, some aspects of this theodicy are also problematic, in the sense that there is a collective suffering that resides in the mind of God "who transforms these experiences in the process" of good and evil in this world, which is the body of God, so that there is no distinction between God and creation (Surin, 1986:90).

The inherent discrepancy within this theology is that the beautiful essence of a *theologia crucis* is being applied to the whole being of God as the essence of everything that exists "what is meted out to them is no less than what God himself has to endure" (Surin, 1986:90). This theodicy proposes that God is in this world, this world is in God; thus, there is only one reality which is prone to change, as God and the world are one. Clearly, such a conception of an evolutionist divinity makes it impossible to consider such theology to be theodicy, since theodicy is the problem of evil in the light of an all-loving and all-powerful God, where God and creation is apart and distinct – which this theology fails to address. Theodicy is in a crisis.

2.1.4 SOUL-MAKING THEODICY

To further complicate this theological *Dicta Probantia*, it is suggested that the pain in suffering is necessary to make one a better person (Louw, 2000:122, 123). God allows pain and suffering in this world to our own benefit, in that it will enhance character and equip us for the world to come, where there will be no pain nor suffering. Popular author, Philip Yancey (1977:25), writes about pain and suffering as “the gift nobody wants”. In this line of thinking it sounds like an oxymoron. Why would God need evil to free us from evil in the future? Reduction to this level renders such thought illogical.

Soul-making theodicy, deduced from Irenaeus, was popularised by theologian John Hick. Irenaeus understood that free will was at stake in the theodicy question, but argued that the actual purpose of this earth was to qualify us for inheriting the eternal home in heavenly bliss. Hick took this to mean that God’s creation is actually still in process as we develop. In Hick’s (1966:369) own words:

The right response... is that offered by the Irenaean approach, which sees moral evil as an inevitable result of God’s creation of man as an immature creature, at the beginning of a long process of moral and spiritual development.

To Hick, his theology offers a solution to the many problems posed by theodicy, like that of natural and moral evil. He substantiates it, suggesting that “This Irenaean approach also has the merit that, on the basis of a single comprehensive and coherent hypothesis, it offers a theodicy in respect of natural as well as moral evil” (Hick, 1966:369).

In Hick’s reasoning, the impact of natural evil on the life of a believer is to the benefit of the child of God. Since believers are morally and spiritually immature, they need to grow toward eventual perfection, and God achieves this by means of evil. Hick (1966:369) explains his theodicy stance by the following theological statement: “For the harsh features of the world, which we call natural evil, are integral to its being an environment in which a morally and spiritually immature creature can begin to grow towards his perfection”.

The question would be why would God need or utilise evil to do this. This theology fails to address the current problem of evil of the present, and thus

Hick (1966:375) shifts his theological gears to eschatology and tries to rectify that which is of no benefit to us in the present:

... if there is any eventual resolution of the interplay between good and evil, any decisive bringing of good out of evil, it must lie beyond this world and beyond the enigma of death. Therefore, we cannot hope to state a Christian theodicy without taking seriously the doctrine of a life beyond the grave.

In later years, Hick's theology has assumed a more imaginative slant to provide his theory with better outcomes. If it is the reasoning that in this theodicy people ought to become perfect, where are all the perfect people? Thus, Hick expanded his theology to provide for this shortcoming. According to him, people will return after death to another life, time and again (a sort of reincarnation), until they have achieved perfection through suffering. Some theologians' innovation can become quite ingenious when it comes to soul-making theodicy. Adams (1990:209-220) writes that, since God loves us and allows us to suffer, God's goodness surely must outweigh our suffering. In her book, *Horrendous Evils*, she concludes that real evil is that which "engulfs" the goodness in a Christian's life. Thus, God's goodness is tied to evil "by integrating participation in horrendous evils into a person's relationship with God" (Adams, 1999:218).

Adams (1999:219) insists adamantly that God's goodness will be found if such evil is integrated into one's relationship with God when she writes:

Everyone will eventually be enabled to recognise any antemortem participation in horrors as other moments of intimacy with God and so integrate them into the relationship that floods their lives with objective and recognised and appropriated positive meaning.

Theodicy is a discipline in theology which aims to provide answers and comfort to the suffering. With soul-making theodicy, one can only conclude that theodicy is really in a crisis. How can one harmonise the stark contrast between true evil and the intrinsic beauty of God as some solution to theodicy, as Adams (1999:162) attempts to do, by writing statements like "The sufferings of this present life are thus concretely balanced off in beatific intimacy with God"?

The inherent problem theologians cannot really justify is how suffering can be positive to anyone, in terms of growth and redemption, being intended by a God of love who just wants the best for his children. Hick (1966:371,372)

acknowledges this discrepancy in his theology, but once again tries to defend it as follows:

The mystery of dysteleological suffering is a real mystery... it challenges Christian faith with its utterly baffling, alien destructive meaninglessness. And yet at the same time, detached theological reflection can note that this very irrationality and this lack of ethical meaning contribute to the character of the world as a place in which true human goodness can occur and in which loving sympathy and compassionate self-sacrifice can take place.

This perplexing justification by a noted theologian is quite bewildering. It is a concerted effort to creatively, with theological word play, downplay the enormity of this theodical problem. Soelle (1975:149) acts without restraint towards such thoughtless theology in her statement that "The God who causes suffering is not to be justified even by lifting the suffering later. No heaven can rectify Auschwitz".

Trying to create a theodicy that attempts to justify the problem of evil is no theodicy at all. Theodicy is in a crisis.

2.1.5 THE FREE WILL DEFENCE

Since God is omnipotent, why does God not prevent evil? Since God is omnibenevolent, why does God not banish evil? If God is good, God will have the desire, and if God is all-powerful, God will be able to. Here lies the crux of theodicy. Some theologians, like Harold Kushner (1981:40), doubt God's righteousness, arguing that "God is so powerful that He is not limited by considerations of fairness and justice". Other theologians question the limitations of God's omnipotence, but still agree that He is almighty. Richard Swinburne (1994:129), for instance, tries to balance God's almightiness, using words like "God is omnipotent in that whatever he *chooses* to do, he succeeds in doing".

One of the ways in which this question of theodicy is explored is through the free will defence. It is surmised that humanity has abused their free will and chose evil, and even today experience evil, as they make the wrong choices.

Primarily, this theodicy proposes that evil entered this world when Adam and Eve exercised their *Free Will* in the Garden of Eden, when they chose to disobey God. The record of this can be found in Genesis 2 and 3, where God endowed humanity with the gift of choice. Millard Erickson (1998:448) writes: “For God to prevent evil, he would have had to make humanity other than it is. Genuine humanity requires the ability to desire to have and do some things contrary to God’s intention.”

Secondarily, this free will results in more evil, as people remain with the choice to disobey God. “Suffering then, is a consequence of sin” (Rice, 2014:44). Erickson (1998:453) defines sin and its consequences as follows:

For humans to be genuinely free, there has to be an option. The choice is to obey or to disobey God. In the case of Adam and Eve, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil symbolized that choice. The serpent’s temptation appealed to desires that were not evil in themselves, but could be expressed and actualized in the wrong way (by disobeying God). When that was done, a twisted or distorted relationship to God resulted. Indeed, one word for sin carries the idea of being twisted.

Swinburne (1979:153) expounds it as follows: “I understand by a being’s having free will that he acts intentionally and that how he acts is not fully determined by prior states of the world; his choices are to some extent up to him.” Thus, God is not responsible for evil, according to this theodicy. People chose their destiny, and that brought about evil. The world was shaped by evil because of the choice of humanity, and not directly by that of God. The most well-known summary of this reasoning is given by Plantinga (1974:30):

A world containing creatures who are significantly free (and freely perform more good than evil actions) is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all. Now God can create free creatures, but He can’t cause or determine them to do only what is right. For if He does so, then they aren’t significantly free after all; they do not do what is right freely. To create creatures capable of moral good, therefore, He must create creatures capable of moral evil; and He can’t give these creatures the freedom to perform evil and at the same time prevent them from doing so... The fact that free creatures sometimes go wrong, however, counts neither against God’s omnipotence nor against His goodness; for He could have forestalled the occurrence of moral evil only by removing the possibility of moral good.

According to Plantinga, we as humans have the sole, unforced privilege of choice, which makes us responsible for moral evil. This means that “God is responsible for the *possibility* of evil, but not for the *actuality* of evil” (Rice, 2014:47). What then would be God’s rationale, according to these theologians who champion *free will*, for creating free moral agents in the first place, if God could have prevented evil by not creating humans with free will?

This fundamental question underscores the basic problem some theologians have with the principle of the free will theodicy. Besides just creating us with free will, why create humans with a will to choose that which would cause them immense suffering? Mackie (2001) argues this case in such a way as to keep God ultimately responsible for the problem of evil, whereas the theodicy of free will tries to remove this responsibility and place it before the door of humanity. Mackie’s dilemma is why God could not create free beings, who would choose good and not evil. His argument is totally opposed to the free will defence:

If God has made men such that in their free choices they sometimes prefer what is good and sometimes what is evil, why could he not have made men such that they always freely choose the good? If there is no logical impossibility in a man’s freely choosing the good on one, or on several, occasions, there cannot be a logical impossibility in this freely choosing the good on every occasion... There was open to God the ... possibility of making beings who would act freely but always go right. Clearly, his failure to avail himself of this possibility is inconsistent with his being both omnipotent and wholly good (Mackie, 2001:86).

Despite these arguments, the question remains why God would create humans with a will to choose that which would cause them immense suffering. Mackie’s argument is refuted by Rice (2014:51), who suggests that “a world where freedom exists and evil doesn’t is not a possibility that God can bring about unilaterally”.

One of the most elementary answers to this question is given by Rice (2014:47) in his book *Suffering and the search for meaning*: “God’s very nature is to love, God seeks to be loved, so God created beings who could return God’s love for them. Love, however, requires freedom.”

Although this theodicy rings truer and more pragmatic to me than others, I am still searching for the comfort in such theodicy. How do I employ this as pastor

in consoling the bereaved who have just lost a loved one to an untimely death? Is there no consolation for humanity as the guilty party? Theodicy is in a crisis.

2.2 THE NOTION OF PROMISE?

Hence, as we consider the different theodicies in contemporary theological discourse and its historical antecedents, there is clearly an immense crisis in theodicy. The five theodical approaches I have shortly reviewed are probably the best-known and most widely believed. There are others, including the natural law theodicy, openness of God theodicy, finite God theodicy, and protest theodicy, to name a few. The question remains, moreover, if these theodicies provides comfort on a pastoral level for people experiencing the effects of evil.

While it is quite clear from the above overview and concise critique of theodicy that theodicy is indeed in a crisis, the questions that immediately arise are: Where is the promise in all of this? Where is the hope that promise brings? Why is the very essence of promise so vague in these theodicy models? While we can clearly observe that theodicy is in a crisis, is there not maybe a promise in the category of promise for rethinking the theodicy question?

2.2.1 DIVINE PROMISE

Promise conjures up many thoughts and expectations: Future, hope, a Golden Age, expectation, ecstasy, a New Day, or no more suffering. To the individual, as well as the ecclesia, Divine Promise is something eschatological. But this is where the Theodicy of Promise differs in pleroma. Moltmann (1993:106) states that “the promises of God disclose the horizons of history” and “what happened”, meaning history, is “then an eschatological event which has its goal in future revelation and universal fulfillment” (Moltmann, 1993:201).

A Theodicy of Promise is divine promise that extends from the “determined process of history” (Moltmann; 1993:163), where Christ brought God’s presence into the present of human suffering; and the hope of the future Kingdom of God where pain will be no more, and spills into the present

(Moltmann, 1993:17). While Essential Eschatology deals with some aspects of this reality in Systematic Theology, a Theodicy of Promise covers much more. Past and future are fused and brought into the present by God's promise. What makes promise reliable? Moltmann (1993:119) contends that it "lies in the credibility and faithfulness of him who gives it".

2.2.2 PROMISE ROOTED IN SCRIPTURE

While Scripture is rooted in prophecy (2 Peter 1:19-21), Moltmann (2000:96) suggests that "God promises, but does not prophesy". In fact, to Moltmann (2000:94), "A promise is a speech act, which is authenticated by the person who promises. It is performative, not interpretative [as in prophecy]". This entails that all of Scripture is the promises of God. Why is this crucial to our understanding of the notion of promise? Louw (1998:379) answers this: "God fulfils his promises in and through Scripture. Scripture also awakens and applies faith, because the promissory character of Scripture is a viable truth." Since Scripture is the very promises of God, God employs Scripture to further and extend his promise – which makes theodicy quite a pitfall if Scripture does not play a part.

According to Scripture, all promises of God are brought to fruition in Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20). The logical deduction is that in Jesus Christ, the promise of God is made manifest to humanity. Christ, being the essence of God and the answer to evil, brings about the Scriptural promise of God in the face of doubt and pain. Promise is the Word of God in action through Jesus Christ. The importance of this principle will be analysed in a later chapter.

2.3 WHAT DEFINES PROMISE?

Is the notion of promise not risky, when viewed detached from the notion of presence? For is the nature of promise not to assure that tomorrow will be better, whereas reality has shown it might not be the case? The concept of promise may not be detached from the notion of presence, or so this study argues. Hence, it is qualified as Promised Presence. This promised "presence

of the Spirit is the presence of future glory”, which wants to make us “the home of the triune God” (Moltmann, 1981:125). The promise is a promise of Presence, “the inner-trinitarian life of God” (Moltmann, 1981:127). God’s presence in human suffering, secured at the cross, is the past that is brought forth, while God’s presence in God’s Kingdom for God’s people, makes up the future that is brought forth. These two aspects of promise, past and future, fill the present reality of human suffering with the promise of God’s presence. This is a Theodicy of Promised Presence, one where God “not only suffers ‘with’ but ‘as’ and ‘in’ us, in the interweaving relationship of the divine dance” (Fiddes, 2000:186).

2.3.1 HOPE AND PROMISE

The problem of theodicy is that, during the search for hope, the suffering and painful situations seem hopeless and devoid of a future or hope. This very hope is the result of promise. Promise is the basic premise for hope, for hope cannot exist without promise, or the guarantee of what is to be.

Promise denotes future and eschatology, the very area of theology that Moltmann recommends needs to be revised. He advocates a revision of the place of eschatology in Christian theology, since it has always been “at the end of Christian dogmatics”, “like a loosely attached appendix” (Moltmann, 1993:15). He submits that “Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving” (Moltmann, 1993:16), which indicates the need for the prominence of promise in theology, and thus, also in theodicy. The result is that Moltmann contends that the greatest of sins is “hopelessness” (Moltmann, 1993:22), the “sin of despair” (Moltmann, 2004:93) – for we cannot live without hope, without promise.

2.3.2 DEATH AND PROMISE

Fiddes dedicates his book, *The Promised End*, with the words, ‘to my son Benjamin 1978-1998’. The stark tragedy of the death of his son at age 20 gives Fiddes every reason to look seriously at the reality of death and the theodicy

questions it evokes, such as: 'What happens at death? Is it the end? Is the promise of God real, that we will see the dead again? Will they have a chance to grow to fullness of maturity? How will our relationship be with them in eternity?'

Fiddes (2000:71) uses the story of King Lear to assure one that it "prompts us to shape our dialogue in a certain way, measuring up to the demand to look unflinchingly on the face of death".

This is only possible when believing in the promise(s) of God. One can have certainty in the face of death, only through the very promise of God. Death crushes promise and all that seemed promising, but promise outweighs death in that it surpasses the finality of death through the ever faithful, promising God.

2.3.3 THE PROMISING GOD

In this chapter we proposed that the notion of theodicy as often advocated in theological discourse is limited in its many and varied approaches. Thus, the question arises whether this notion can be redeemed, and if so, whether it will be beneficial, in the face of suffering, to the reality of people and communities who find their faith being challenged. In the next three chapters I will engage theology to address the following question: What can the notion of promise bring to a responsible engagement with the theodicy question? In the process, I would like to intimate towards a Theodicy of Promise.

CHAPTER 3: MOLTSMANN ON HOPE AND PROMISE

3.1 ENGAGING JÜRGEN MOLTSMANN

Jürgen Moltmann, a German theologian and Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology at the University of Tübingen, is one of the most respected theologians of modern times and has written well over forty books on theology. I had the great privilege of meeting him personally on 29 March 2017 at a conversational meeting for post-graduates held at Stellenbosch University, under the guidance of Professor Robert Vosloo. Prof Moltmann enlightened us in a discussion on “the future of theology,” and we had the opportunity of engaging him on different theological issues.

Jürgen Moltmann was not born into privilege. In 1944 he was incorporated in the German army, where he was sent into battle. In 1945 he was taken captive by the British and held as a prisoner of war until 1947 (Moltmann, 2008:3-35). This was a turning point in Moltmann’s life. He moved from camp to camp, saw human suffering, and lived the inhumane consequences of war. He realised that the only soldiers who survived were those with hope. Hence, the reality of hope became key to Moltmann – a realisation which eventually led to his best-known book, *Theology of Hope*. This seminal work of theology was not born in a vacuum, but came into existence because of Moltmann’s direct confrontation with theodicy and his realisation of the importance of hope in the light of suffering.

In *The Crucified God*, Moltmann (1994:1) reveals that his suffering led to his plight, need, and theological consideration of hope:

... I believe that this – that is the theology of hope – has been the guiding light of my theological thought. This, no doubt, goes back to the period of my first concern with questions of Christian faith and theology in actual life, as a prisoner-of-war behind barbed wire.

Commenting on the influence of the war on Moltmann and his theology in *The Crucified God*, Richard (1992:42) writes: “Moltmann brought the various elements of his experience of the reality of God and his methodological perspective together. In this book God is perceived as one involved in the

suffering and despair of the world.” Besides the crucial aspect of hope, which is part of the crux of Moltmann’s theology, the notion of a suffering God is interweaved as a golden thread throughout his early writings on human suffering. Moltmann’s background is the backdrop to the artwork he devises through his theology on the canvas of the readers’ mind. He depicts the sufferer as not being alone, but drawn into the suffering of the triune God, as seen in the cross of Christ. Richard (1992:42) states: “It is here that the author points to the trinitarian nature of the cross and the redeeming power of the self-sacrificial love of the triune God.” Central to Moltmann’s theology is the cross and the sacrifice experienced and demonstrated there. But, as will be established in a later section of this chapter, the cross and the suffering God only have meaning within the context of the triune God. For the sufferer there is meaning in an indwelling love that suffers. Richard (1992:42) comments on Moltmann’s book *The way of Jesus Christ* to expound on the centrality of the cross, stating that the emphasis on the suffering of Jesus is necessary “in order to develop a Christology which is relevant in the suffering of our own time”. This is exactly in keeping with the background of Moltmann’s theology, where he is in search of a relevant theodicy for the suffering “of our time”.

Since this reality of theodicy was played out in the mind of Moltmann, one cannot understate the impact of Moltmann’s experience of the war and suffering on his theology. Dau (2002:131), in his book *Suffering and God*, reflects on Moltmann’s theology in earlier years, suggesting that “his experience of suffering and despair in the prisoner-of-war camp made these themes more pertinent to his theological thinking in those years”. What theological thinking would this be? Logically, it refers to theodicy. Since Moltmann witnessed horrendous suffering, his mind was naturally drawn to this subject. Dau (2002:132) suggests that the “main concern in that regard” (this being theodicy) “was not so much to explain suffering and evil, but rather to provide hope for those who suffer and that the promise given in the resurrection of Jesus Christ was God’s final triumph over evil”. Moltmann’s mind was impressed with the fact that no adequate reason existed to clarify theodicy other than helping the sufferer. Hope was needed, Christian hope, hope in the reality of Jesus Christ that suffered, died, and was resurrected. Dau (2002:132) takes this further by

explaining the proposed theodicy by Moltmann: “Moltmann’s theodicy, as expressed mainly in *Theology of hope* and *The Crucified God*, presupposes a two-aspect possible response to suffering.” Moltmann’s theodicy as a two-part view will again be referred to in the conclusion of this chapter. The first part of his view is “that ‘innocent and involuntary suffering’ must neither be justified by theodicy nor by anthropodicy’. If this happens, the protest and the sense of moral outrage against evil will be suppressed and infliction of suffering on the vulnerable will be justified” (Dau, 2002:132). Crucial to grasp about Moltmann’s view on suffering is that it cannot be justified. (This view is also critical to a later aspect in the research.) Moreover, God is not responsible for suffering, as there is to be no justification for evil. If there had been any justification for evil, the objectivity in the matter would be diluted, since the ‘outrage’ and ‘protest’ against evil would be ‘suppressed’. The second part to Moltmann’s (2002:132) theodicy is “that any adequate theological response to suffering must include a practical initiative to overcome suffering. This response does not exclude protest and outrage against suffering, but it contains them and at the same time intensifies the chances of a strong initiative to overcome suffering”. This is the part where hope features within the theodical paradigm of Moltmann. Without a pragmatic outcome to the sufferer, the exercise of theodicy is worthless. Therefore, the notion of hope and promise, with no justification for evil, will be explored extensively in the next sections.

The irony of suffering and theodicy lies in the fact that both take issue with God. Actually, theodicy is to be found in “the very nature of suffering”, as Richard (1992:44) observes. He notes that “anyone who suffers without cause first thinks that he has been forsaken by God” (Richard, 1992:44). The subject under consideration within suffering, and thus theodicy, is God. Richard (1992:47) concludes that “the Christian understanding of God has its roots in an historical event: the cross”. This statement affirms the notion of hope and promise within Moltmann’s theodicy, as he also highlights the centrality of the cross. In the sufferer’s search for and about God, he must come to the cross. Richard (1992:47) suggests: “The way of history is the way of the cross and the cross is the way into the trinitarian God.” Within this world there is suffering and evil, which makes it difficult to find answers here. Yet, according to Richard

(1992:47), “It is not creation that leads us to God, but the cross”. Our answers are outside of ourselves, outside of our suffering, and outside of our creation. It is to be found in the triune God who is outside of creation, through the cosmic event of the cross, brought into our world and place of suffering.

3.1.1 MOLTMANN’S PANENTHEISTIC PARADIGM

The reality that God is distinct from his creation is quite essential to maintain the distinct attributes of God which renders him God. The modern and post-modern response to the more classical and traditional transcendent views about God is to over emphasise his immanence to such extent that his divinity loses its unchanging, eternal and mysterious nature, and is projected to the mere nature of creation.

Although this may not appear to be the case in Moltmann’s theology, careful study would show degrees of panentheism within Moltmann’s theology. This proposes the non-distinction between Creator and creation, which, as will be discussed in Chapter 4, is quite problematic. In the Gifford lectures of 1984–1985, titled *God in Creation*, Moltmann explains his theology of the indwelling Spirit in Creation and the importance of perichoresis, which can be panentheistic in its essence (Cooper, 2006). Moltmann establishes this theology, based on three crucial theological works. Firstly, he bases it on *The Crucified God* from 1973, where he traces God’s love at work through the event of the cross, and the divine perichoresis between Son and Father, and how all of humanity are drawn into this perichoresis of the triune God. Sometimes in Moltmann’s writing, some of these notions may tend to be panentheistic, for instance where Moltmann (1994:239) argues for a “complete reshaping of the doctrine of the Trinity” so that the “nature of God would have to be the human history of Christ and not a divine ‘nature’ separate from man”. Further in Moltmann’s (1994:240) reasoning, he quotes Rahner, showing this absolute perichoresis within God as Trinity, stating that “The Trinity *is* the nature of God” as well as “God’s relationship to us is three-fold. And this three-fold... relationship to us is not merely an image or analogy of the immanent Trinity; it

is this Trinity itself...”. Consequently, Moltmann’s (1994:249) logical conclusion is that, at the cross, the Son “is taken up in the grief of the Father...into the inner life of God” and, similarly, humanity is taken into the inner life of God, since “God’s life is open to true man. There is no ‘outside the gate’ with God” (Moltmann, 1994:249). It is because of this panentheistic view of Moltmann (1994:247) that he believes “‘God’ is not another nature or a heavenly person or a moral authority, but in fact an ‘event’”, speaking of the event of the cross and working within the triune God. Concerning the believer praying to this ‘God’, he adds that “In that case one does not simply pray to God as a heavenly Thou, but prays *in* God. One does not pray to an event but *in* this event” (Moltmann, 1994:247). When reading the whole passage, the context is the triune God. The point of this reference is to highlight the panentheistic tone, that there is not a praying *to* God, but *in* God. The distinction that is crucial between Creator and creation is thus lost.

In a later work, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* from 1975, Moltmann expounds on the work of the Holy Spirit, who brings about the inner life of God and acts through the Church, the very kingdom of God, to and in the people of God. In this work Moltmann (1995:56) writes: “The triune God is the God who is open to man, open to the world and open to time. In the sending of the Son and the Spirit the Trinity... opens itself for history.”

In *Trinity and the Kingdom*, written in 1980, Moltmann lays the foundation for his panentheistic views in terms of the trinity view he establishes, as well as by incorporating the term panentheism. Moltmann (1981:105) asks the age-old question: “Is the creation of the world necessary for God himself, or is it merely fortuitous?” Moltmann (1981:105) rejects the theistic approach, since, as he puts it, “Christian theism... depict creation solely the work of God’s free will...”. This, to Moltmann (1981:105), gives way to “divine arbitrariness”, and is not compatible with a God of love, nor a triune God. On the other hand, Moltmann rejects pantheism, since it views creation as a natural act of God whereby there is no independence of creation. The answer lies in “Christian panentheism”, according to Moltmann (1981:106). He explains it as follows: “Creation is a fruit of God’s longing for ‘his Other’ and for that Other’s free response to the divine

love” (Moltman, 1981:106). Since God is love and love wants to be selfless in its self-giving, there is an inherent longing within God for ‘his Other’, as Moltmann (1981:106) phrases it, meaning for humanity; to be able to love humanity and receive love again in this “divine kenosis which begins with the creation of the world reaches its perfected and completed form in the incarnation of the Son” (Moltmann, 1997:118). This is the reason why panentheism is the better view, according to Moltmann, on the question if creation is necessary to God or not, since this longing of God for ‘his Other’ validates that “the world is inherent in the nature of God himself from eternity” (Moltmann, 1981:106). If this is derived from the fact that God is love, longs for an other, and thus wants to create, what would the logical deduction from this reasoning be? Moltmann (1981:107) deduces that “God is as dependent on him (his creation, ‘his Other’) as he is on God”. This essentiality is core to the panentheistic view, and Moltmann subscribes clearly to this notion. Why would he? The reason is that he denies the theism and pantheism response to the question whether creation is necessary to God or not. Fiddes (1988:136) agrees when he states that “implicitly he justifies talking about the immanent Trinity in order to affirm panentheism and avoid pantheism. In order not to collapse God into the process of the world, it is necessary to talk about the God who is acting in history”.

Moltmann (1981:107) recognises that there are elements of truth to such views and tries to take the best, as he sees fit, to construct a new view: “One way of reconciling the elements of truth in Christian theism and Christian pantheism emerges when we cease to interpret God’s liberty as arbitrariness, and the nature of God as divine natural law.” This is a natural way for Moltmann to derive at reality in the context of his original question. Yet, while he tries to take elements out of theism and pantheism, the panentheism proposal is not sufficient enough, as will be elaborated on in Chapter 4 where this same type of paradigm will be discussed in the context of Fiddes. While Fiddes also subscribes to panentheism, he criticises the way Moltmann elucidates his panentheistic theology: “In the incarnation this self-confrontation of God by God comes to a climax, as the human son ‘confronts the Father in the world’, and

as God suffers utter dislocation of his own being in the cross, where the Son is forsaken by the Father” (Fiddes, 1988:137).

Fiddes’s criticism of Moltmann’s panentheistic perspective is quite paramount in meaning, since the reader can perceive that, besides the underlying principles to this view, there is a myriad of complexities within this view, like God acting in and on Godself, as deduced from Moltmann. Fiddes (Fiddes 1988:137) again criticises this:

Now, if moments of divine passion are all basically God’s acts upon himself like this, we are bound to ask whether the impress of the world upon God is being taken seriously. I have already suggested that Moltmann’s concept of the glorifying of God is too much God’s own operation... God seems less the supreme victim than the supreme self-executioner.

While panentheism in itself has a myriad of essential elements employed by Moltmann throughout his theology, he may take it just too far, as can be seen in this following statement, where his end conclusion shows the overall idea of non-distinction between Creator and creation:

In the end, however, the new heaven and new earth will become the ‘temple’ of God’s indwelling. The whole world will become God’s home. Through the indwelling of the Spirit, people, and churches are already glorified in the body, now, in the present. But then the whole creation will be transfigured through the indwelling of God’s glory. Consequently, the hope which is kindled by the experience of the indwelling Spirit gathers in the future, with panentheistic visions. Everything ends with God being ‘all in all’ (Moltmann, 1981:104,105).

It is a theological predicament when your theological view tends to make no clear distinction between Creator and creation, and more so, a theodical plight, as the theodicy question is about a God who is separate from his creation. While this matter will be explored further in Chapter 4, it is essential to note that these areas of concern in the panentheistic paradigm of Moltmann do not negate much of his excellent theological outcomes. It is mostly a response to theism, and when seen in that light, one could more effectively judge and appreciate Moltmann’s theological insight.

We should recognise that one of the greatest contributions by Moltmann is in the area of hope – hope in a God that is not far off or standing aloof in the midst

of our suffering, but One who wants to give us hope as a means to rise above one's suffering.

3.2 HOPE

3.2.1 THE CROSS AS FOUNDATIONAL TO HOPE

Richard (1992:46) asks the following crucial questions, as he reflects on Moltmann's theology: "What gives hope in God's promised kingdom in face of innocent suffering? How is it possible to continue to love and hope in the midst of repeated disappointments, suffering and death?" The answer is not given by the cross, but to be found within the cross event. The cross event does not solve theodicy's mysteries, but provides meaning and hope. Richard answers (1992:46): "The cross does not solve the problem of suffering but meets it with voluntary solidarity which does not abolish suffering but overcomes what Moltmann calls the "suffering in suffering": the lack of love, the abandonment in suffering." Thus, the underlying theology of the theologian will subscribe his response to theodicy. If the cross forms part of that underlying basis to one's theology, one can face the question, since it is in the event of the cross that we see that we are not abandoned in our suffering.

In the context of this crucial finding regarding the cross and theology, Richard (1992:46), in response to Moltmann, reasons that "Two basic questions govern Moltmann's understanding of the nature of theology". To understand Moltmann's view on the foundation of theology, it is essential to consider the following two questions as restated by Richard (1992:46): "What makes any theology be a Christian theology, and how and in what ways can a Christian theology become a critical theology?" Evidently, it is paramount to understand what makes theology Christian and critical. Richard (1992:46) infers: "For Moltmann, Christian theology is a theology of the cross, and because it is a theology of the cross, it is critical theology." Without a theology of the cross there is no Christian theology. Without the cross, Christian theology can as well be philosophy, or any other religious theology.

Richard further explores Moltmann's theology of the cross as the basis for theology: "In the first part of this answer, Moltmann is directly dependent on

Luther. Following Luther, Moltmann affirms that “the Cross is the criterion of all things” (Richard, 1992:46). Richard observes this as reformed position on Moltmann’s part, in keeping with the theology of Luther, who in his day had to deal with the more “prevalent theology: the theology of glory”, where God is known “through his power as that is manifested in creation” (Richard, 1992:46). Louw (2014:6) asserts that “In section 21 of his Heidelberg disputations, Luther (1518) declares that, whilst a theology of glory speaks well of the bad and calls the bad good, it is the theology of the cross that describes essential reality”. As Richard (1992:46) discerns, “Luther had contrasted his theology of the cross... with the prevalent theology: the theology of glory”. In this theology of the cross the individual “knows God as hidden in the suffering and humiliation of the cross” (Richard, 1992:46).

One can maintain that such a theology is the better one owing to its pragmatic application. Richard (1992:46) detects that “Such a knowledge of God can never be misused”. Moltmann (1994:212) explains why it cannot be misused: “To know God in the cross of Christ is a crucifying form of knowledge, because it shatters everything to which a man can hold and on which he can build, both his works and his knowledge of reality, and precisely in so doing sets us free.” To Richard’s (1992:46) mind this is crucial, since in many theologies God can be placed in such a box of all-powerfulness that we do not grasp the significance of the cross in the context of theodicy, where “All human expectation about God and God’s attributes are shattered on the cross, for on the cross God is not revealed in power but in the opposite – in powerlessness”. The theology of the cross, according to Moltmann, as explained by Richard, is the only essence that will set us free from that which binds us, like theodicy. Our views, pre-conceived ideas, and thought patterns are ‘shattered’ at the cross when God is revealed way beyond our expectation and thinking. There we see a God of ‘powerlessness’ – we see the suffering God.

This suffering God, in the context of the cross, brings about sense and hope to the sufferer, for as Louw (2014:6) attests, “the cross becomes a resource of comprehension and understanding” because of this pragmatic “dimension of the cross, namely that God relates to human suffering”. Whereas the theodicy question asks where God is, the theology of the cross reveals God. Louw

(2014:6) maintains that “God is revealed in the humility and shame of the cross”. Moltmann (1994:204) declares this reality fundamental in theology: “The death of Jesus on the cross is the centre of all Christian theology.” Not many theologians will differ from this statement, since it is a basic tenet of the Christian faith. Louw (2014:7) enhances this thought, asserting that “the fundamental truth of the Christian faith consists in the fact that God, in the passion history of Jesus Christ, has suffered the curse of death, the misery of infinite suffering and, eventually, suffered them into defeat”. The theology of the cross reveals a God who suffered the sufferings of humanity ‘into defeat’. This theology calls for a God of *pathos*, since an *apatheia* God cannot be reconciled with the theology of the cross. Louw (2014:7) affirms this when he states that “the essential theological point is that Christ’s suffering cannot be separated from God’s suffering”. This is why Moltmann (1994:246) suggests that “All human history, however much it may be determined by guilt and death, is taken up into this ‘history of God’”.

This is a profound insight that holds importance for theodicy, since evil, within this theology of the cross, is clearly affecting God in person and being. Moltmann (1994:246) further elaborates on this pivotal point: “There is no suffering which in this history of God is not God’s suffering; no death which has not been God’s death in the history on Golgotha.” This speaks pragmatically of such hope and comfort to the sufferer that there is no suffering one can suffer which is not God’s suffering. In Louw’s (2014:8) words: “The theology of the cross once again emphasises the solidarity of God in the midst of the history of suffering.” Without the theology of the cross, there can be no real theology, since there will be no divine demonstration of solidarity with and within human suffering.

The pragmatic side to this theology of the cross should not be overlooked, since in the theodicy question it is essential that the sufferer should experience hope and promise by its response. Louw (2014:8), a practical theologian, comments on Moltmann’s theology and his emphasis on the theology of the cross: “Moltmann’s theology of the cross is based on the premise that if the suffering on the cross is in fact a Messianic suffering, then God himself is involved in the suffering.” By its very nature, the fact that God promised beforehand that a

Messiah would come, and suffer, and die, is evidence enough that 'God himself is involved in the suffering'. Louw (2014:8) quotes Moltmann who believes that "the theology of the cross is a 'pathetic theology'". Louw (2014:8) therefore concludes that "It is in pathos that God reveals himself in such a way that he becomes involved in loving solidarity with human suffering". This is the revelation of the theology of the cross.

In the next section, the resurrection in Moltmann's theology in terms of theodicy and hope will be explored. It will be shown that the cross can only be of importance in the light of the resurrection. However, important to note are the two aspects of God revealed in these two events. Louw (2014:8) observes that in Moltmann's theology "In Jesus' resurrection, God is the God in action. In the crucifixion, he is the God in passion". The impact of this should be contemplated. God in passion, as revealed on the cross, shows "a dynamic God who is actively involved in the God-forsaken cry of Christ on the cross: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Louw, 2014:8). This is not a cry of an impassible God who stands aloof and removed from our sufferings; it is rather a cry echoing all the cries of each sufferer. Louw (2014:8) suggests that "Jesus' cry from the cross... outlines a Trinitarian theology of the cross". This is exactly what Moltmann proposes and which will be established in section 3.3.2. This desperate, suffering cry of Jesus Christ on the cross "defines God's 'how' in suffering" (Louw, 2014:8). Here, on the cross, all the questions people ask are answered. Moltmann (1994:204) utilises this very notion to further develop the theology of the cross in stating that it is the centre of all theology's "problems and answers on earth". This must be the case, since the cross of Christ is the foundation of Christian theology. As Bonhoeffer (2014:230) affirms, "God sends his Son – here lies the only remedy". Thus, Moltmann (1994:204) continues, "all Christian statements about God, about creation, about sin and death have their focal point in the crucified Christ". This signifies that, in our research into theodicy within this study, it is important to understand that we cannot come to a fuller or mature understanding or proposal if we do not take into full consideration the cross of Christ. Moltmann (1994:204) develops this further by incorporating the whole of theology onto this foundation: "All Christian statements about history, about the church, about faith and sanctification, about

the future and about hope stem from the crucified Christ.” Even hope and promise are included in the centrality of the cross event. Nothing can be said or written without this centre and foundation. All theology is based upon this one event, the cross, and thus, on this one principle that God is love. Moltmann (1994:248) affirms this: “God is unconditional love, because he takes on himself grief at the contradiction in men and does not angrily suppress this contradiction... God suffers, God allows himself to be crucified and is crucified.” God suffers willingly for and with us. This theology of the cross, according to Moltmann (1994:248), “consummates his unconditional love that is so full of hope”.

3.2.2 THE RESURRECTION AS ESCHATOLOGICAL HOPE

As the theology of the cross is the foundation of theology, Moltmann (1993:165) contends that “Christianity stands or falls with the reality of the raising of Jesus from the dead by God. In the New Testament there is no faith that does not start *a priori* with the resurrection of Jesus”. All faith is only possible because of the resurrection. Concerning the resurrection event, Moltmann (1994:204) advocates that “The multiplicity of the New Testament comes together in the event of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus and flows out again from it”. All of Scripture is tied into and based on the cross and resurrection event. Moltmann (1994:204) maintains that “It is one event and one person. The addition of ‘cross and resurrection’ represents only the inevitable temporality which is part of language; it is not a sequence of facts”. The question arises whether that means that the cross and resurrection is one event, or the same happening. According to Moltmann (1994:204), the “... cross and resurrection are not facts on the same level; the first expression denotes a historical happening to Jesus, the second an eschatological event”. But what does Moltmann mean with the resurrection being an ‘eschatological event’? While Moltmann (1993:180) acknowledges that “The resurrection of Christ is without parallel in the history known to us”, rather than terming it historical in the context of history, Moltmann (1993:180) terms it a ‘history-making event’. However, in the context of theology, he terms it an ‘eschatological event’, since “Christian

eschatology arose from the Easter experience, and Christian prophecy determined the Easter faith” (Moltmann, 1993:191). Moltmann (1993:191) justifies this link between the resurrection event and eschatology by declaring that the resurrection “stand directly within the special horizon of prophetic and apocalyptic expectations, hopes and questions about that which according to the promises of this God is to come”. Central within the prospects of God’s promises stands the resurrection, since the veracity of it is based on and in the resurrection. Moltmann (1993:192) further affirms the fact that, within theological paradigm, the resurrection is instead of historical event, an eschatological event, since “Christian eschatology... is related in content to the person of Jesus of Nazareth and the event of his raising, and speaks of the future for which the ground is laid in this person and this event”.

There is thus a distinction within this one event, since the one happened historically, and the other, the resurrection, is more an eschatological event, according to Moltmann. The question is whether one of these two takes pre-eminence above the other. In this regard, Moltmann (1994:204) suggests that

... the centre is occupied not by ‘cross and resurrection’, but by *the resurrection of the crucified Christ*, which qualifies his death as something that has happened for us, and *the cross of the risen Christ*, which reveals and makes accessible to those who are dying his resurrection from the dead.

The resurrection interprets the death of Christ, as the cross event predicts the resurrection event. The one can only exist by the other. But further, one must recognise that, without the resurrection, the cross bears no meaning. Richard (1992:45) agrees and explains this reasoning of Moltmann as a logical movement from the resurrection to the cross: “There is here a movement from the resurrection as the event of God’s promise, to the cross as the event of God’s love.”

The event of the resurrection being the event of God’s promise, brings great significance to this research in terms of promise. Moltmann (1993:143) declares that “it is peculiarly significant that in the New Testament God is known and described as the ‘God of Promise’”. As has been suggested, and as will be argued further, the God of Golgotha is the suffering God. The resurrection bears witness that it is also the ‘God of Promise’ who will keep God’s promise.

Moltmann (1993:143) reiterates: “The essential predicate of God accordingly lies in the statement... ‘faithful is he that promised’.” He who promised that there would be a Messiah that would die and rise again, is He who fulfilled this very promise. The foundation then to the cross and resurrection event that has been established as love, is only possible by the promise of God. Moltmann (1993:147) contemplates this significant reality: “The gospel has its inabrogable presupposition in the Old Testament history of promise.” For the people of God, all these promises concerning Christ “have become an eschatological certainty in Christ”, according to Moltmann (1993:147). How can we trust this promise of God? Moltmann (1993:145) declares that, “because he has raised Christ from the dead, therefore the fulfilment of his promise is certain”. The resurrection stands as surety that God keeps his promise. What then makes this event of such more value? “The life, work, death and resurrection of Jesus are therefore not described after the pattern of the appearance of epiphany gods, but in the categories of expectation that are appropriate to the God of promise” (Moltmann, 1993:143).

Moltmann says that the event of Christ is to be described and understood, not in the vainglory like that of mythological gods, but ‘in the categories of expectation’. This event of God’s life, death and resurrection must be understood in the light of God’s promise and the presence of the promising God. This would validate to the believer and sufferer who places hope in the Christ event that the same God will still keep His promise. Moltmann (1993:147) further confirms that – stating that “If the Christ event thus contains the validation of the promise – then this means no less than that through the faithfulness and truth of God the promise is made true in Christ – and made true wholly, unbreakably, for ever and for all”.

The sufferer can be a firm believer of the promising God in his or her painful situation by observing the resurrection event and drawing faith from it that God will keep his eschatological promise. “The Christian hope for the future comes of observing a specific, unique event – that of the resurrection and appearing of Jesus Christ” (Moltmann, 1993:194). This acknowledgement of the resurrection is not just any hopeful fancy, but in verity the belief that God has a future for you. As Moltmann (1993:194) upholds: “...to recognize the

resurrection of Christ means to recognize in this event the future of God for the world and the future which man finds in this God and his acts". Placing faith in the promising God from within one's painful situation will instil hope – hope in God and hope as expectation for the future. Moltmann (1993:20) deduces that "Hope is nothing else than the expectation of those things which faith has believed to have been truly promised by God". This belief in the God of the cross and resurrection event must translate into living hope. "To believe means to cross in hope and anticipation the bounds that have been penetrated by the raising of the crucified" (Moltmann, 1993:20,21). Does this mean that when hope descends the believing soul, the pain evaporates? Moltmann does not suggest such false hope. He explains: "In this hope the soul does not soar above our value of tears to some imagined heavenly bliss, nor does it sever itself from the earth" (Moltmann, 1993:21). Thus, hope, according to Moltmann (1993:21), "sees in the resurrection of Christ not the eternity of heaven, but the future of the very earth on which his cross stands". While hope within the believer expects the future, it will not be a hope of an artificial future, but a solid future on this very earth where suffering once reigned. The time will come for suffering to be no more. This is why Moltmann (1993:21) suggests that "The raising of Christ is not merely a consolation to him in a life that is full of distress and doomed to die, but it is also God's contradiction of suffering and death, of humiliation and offence, and of the wickedness of evil". Besides the fact that God provides hope to the hopeless in their suffering situation through the resurrection, this event also will avail the end of suffering and evil. This is also part of this hope. Moltmann (1993:21) continues this thought, stating that "Hope finds in Christ not only a consolation in suffering, but also the protest of the divine promise against suffering". While hope consoles the sufferer, it will not cause the believing sufferer to have peace with suffering. Suffering is not a friend, but foe. It is in this line of thought that Moltmann (1993:21) states: "If Paul calls death the 'last enemy' (1 Cor. 15.16), then the opposite is also true: that the risen Christ, and with him the resurrection hope, must be declared to be the enemy of death and of a world that puts up with death." As death and suffering is Christ's enemy, more so through hope it becomes our enemy. And so, as Moltmann (1993:21) concludes, "Faith takes up this contradiction and thus becomes itself a contradiction to the world of death". The believer will

protest suffering in hope. And yet, beyond this, Moltmann (1993:197) explains, “The hope that is born of the cross and the resurrection transforms the negative, contradictory and torturing aspects of the world into term of ‘not yet’, and does not suffer them to end in ‘nothing’”. This hope will not only protest, but help in the transforming of suffering into something meaningful in this world, since “The resurrection of Christ goes on being a *promissio inquieta* until it finds rest in the resurrection of the dead...” (Moltmann, 1993:196). The believer will be restless and be of transforming influence while he or she suffers within this world of suffering, until the hope is obtained, which makes this a living hope and not something only of distant future. It is a promise that invigorates.

Furthermore, Moltmann (1993:197) describes the outcome of suffering, namely death, in its reality: “Death is real death, and decay is putrefying decay.” In the face of this reality, how can one be hopeful? Moltmann’s (1993:19) response is that “It is only in following the Christ who was raised from suffering, from a god-forsaken death and from the grave that it gains an open prospect in which there is nothing more to oppress us”. By way of the resurrection can we, in the face of death, take this promise by faith, and be instilled with hope. That does not mean that suffering will stop in the present. Moltmann (1993:18,19) quotes Calvin, who stated that “A blessed resurrection is proclaimed to us – meantime we are surrounded by decay. We are called righteous – and yet sin lives in us. ... What would become of us if we did not take our stand on hope”. While we suffer, hope changes our stance and perspective, and thereby our lives. It changes our horizon, as Moltmann (1993:196) puts it: “The horizon within which the resurrection of Christ becomes knowable as ‘resurrection’, is the horizon of promise...”. This promise gives way to hope. “Christian hope”, which Moltmann (1993:18) states “is resurrection hope”.

3.2.3 HOPE ESTABLISHES PROMISE

Soskice (2000:78) proposes that “Hope is one of the three theological virtues, but hope seems to us different from faith and charity. You can dispose yourself to faith and charity – try to be more kind or more devout. With hope, however, you either have it or you do not”. Hope is one of the least written upon topics in

theology, whereas there is an abundance of material on faith and love. And yet, when hope evades the sufferer, what is left living for? Soskice (2000:78) asserts that “In contemporary culture hope is represented, even by the churches as a psychological mood. Lack of faith and charity can be treated by prayer, but lack of hope is treated with antidepressants”. This is a factual observation, which raises the question how theology will address it. Is it time to ponder and reflect more on hope, and thus on promise? Soskice (2000:78) regards this as “flawed” in terms of “theological purposes”, for “Christian hope is neither a psychological mood nor an emotional commodity but a gift and a grace. The same is true of faith and love” (Soskice, 2000:78). It is not a matter of state of mind, or psychological state; it is a Christian essential obtained by the Holy Spirit. Soskice describes this as virtue rather than a state: “We do not “possess” these – or certain quantity of them – as commodities, any more than we will possess God as a commodity when we see Him face to face. Rather, we are constituted in these theological virtues by God” (Soskice, 2000:78).

Soskice then turns to Karl Rahner to aid in this description of hope. She writes: “Rahner even suggests that hope is not to be dispensed with in the hereafter. Hope abides, he says, as distinctly and irreducibly itself even in heaven” (Soskice, 2000:78). If hope is just temporary, does it not affect the lastingness of its object, which is God? Rahner suggests that “Christian hope will not dissolve once it possesses its ‘object’ as do profane hopes, because Christian hope is not directed toward some object or finite goal but toward God” (Soskice, 2000:78). Soskice upholds that, while hope is centred on and in God, it still stays a mystery. “Hope, Rahner says, is an attitude that bears upon God as God is in and for Godself. It is an attitude toward God who, even in total givenness, remains mystery” (Soskice, 2000:78). Soskice concludes that hope is a pragmatic attitude. “Hope in God is a little like this. It is not a transient and optimistic emotion. It is readiness to act, a directedness, a commitment, a passionate practicality” (Soskice, 2000:86).

In addition, Yancey (1977: 209) observes that “Sometimes hope seems irrational and pointless”. While it may be the case, hope is crucial. In this regard Yancey quotes Solzhenitsyn, who asserts that “people without reasonable hope must still find a source for hope; like bread, it sustains life” (Yancey, 1977:209).

Soskice (2000:87) records the transforming inherent power hope contains, stating that “If you hope in God’s future, you do not just feel rosier about few things, your life is changed by it”. Hope is essential to live life. Without hope, there is no motivation to live. Hope is forward looking, expecting of the future as has been shown. Peters (1994: 292) states that “We are bound in a sense to the world’s future. But it is a future embraced by hope”. While we do not know what the future holds, or the next day may bring, hope makes it possible to go forward. But beyond normal hope, there is this divine hope given by the triune God. Peters (1994: 292) writes that

The Easter resurrection, when combined with the biblical symbol of the new creation, gives us grounds for hope on behalf of the world. Despite its past and present history, the world is slated for a future fulfilment. Tis glorious fulfilment will be God-given, the result of a transformation on a cosmic scale comparable to the new life granted Jesus at the resurrection.

Theodicy in itself is meaningless without hope. The problem of theodicy is that, while the seeker is on the lookout for hope, the suffering and painful situation seems hopeless and devoid of future or hope. This very hope is the result of promise. Promise is the basic premise for hope, for hope cannot exist without promise, or the guarantee of what is to be.

Promise denotes future and eschatology, the very area of theology that Moltmann recommends needs to be revised. He advocates a relook at the place of eschatology in Christian theology, since it has always been “at the end of Christian dogmatics” “like a loosely attached appendix” (Moltmann, 1993:15). He submits that “Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving”, which indicates the need for the prominence of promise in theology, and so also theodicy (Moltmann, 1993:16). He contends that the greatest of sins is “hopelessness” (Moltmann, 1993:22), the “sin of despair” (Moltmann, 2004:93) – for we cannot live without hope, without promise.

Moltmann develops the essence of promise to explain why progressive revelation of Pannenberg and others is more “Greek cosmic theology” (Moltmann, 1993:79), and that “the eschatology of revelation” (Moltmann, 1993:84) accords more with the promise of God. Moltmann (1993:84) attests that

The revelation of the risen Christ is not a form of this epiphany of the eternal present, but necessitates a view of revelation as apocalypse of the promised future of the truth.

Promise fuses revelation and eschatology, a critical principle in our study of theodicy and promise.

In *Ethics of Hope*, Moltmann (2012:166) asks: “Are Ethics always too late on the Scene?” This question almost echoes mine concerning his writings. In this study I will critically evaluate Moltmann’s ethics, for some of his underlying philosophical principles seem Hegelian in nature, causing some of his conclusions to remove ethics from the open present to some future that is yet, and not yet. In the philosophical approach that informs some of his theological arguments, Moltmann seems to present time, moving forward in the future, as the essential reality; making the future, and the “future of God” (Moltmann, 1999:251) an unknown reality to God and man, presenting God as limited to time in the present. However, in *The Coming of God* he argues against those that say “future and present lie along the same temporal line” (Moltmann, 1996:6). In a more recent work, *In the End – the Beginning*, Moltmann (2004:159) directly confronts any misunderstanding concerning his perception of time by stating that “the time of this world is the time of transience, the time of the future world is the time of the world that endures and is hence eternal”.

There is much value to be drawn from Moltmann’s theology, for central to his *Theology of Hope* is the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This event is key and central in history as God’s demonstration that God is the One who is faithful to God’s promise and brings hope to our experience. For Moltmann, (1971:157) the promise of God’s presence “frees man from the world and practices the end of history where, in the fulfillment of the moment, he perceives the truth of existence”. For while we are “in history”, “history itself is contained in a totally-other” (Moltmann, 1973:45).

Moltmann (1993:190) surprises his readers who might not be following his argument in pronouncing that Christ’s resurrection “is an event which is understood only in the *modus* of promise”. The resurrection is the very core of hope and promise, for “by virtue of his resurrection, Christ’s end in the catastrophe on Golgotha became the true beginning of his new life for us”

(Moltmann, 2010:38). For Moltmann (1981:122), the resurrection is not just the fulfilling of promise, but the start of promise, the very time “the eschatological era begins”. It is a promise to be expected by those who hope in Christ and God’s promise:

... the Christian hope expects from the future of Christ not only unveiling, but also final fulfillment... the fulfillment of the promised righteousness of God in all things, the fulfillment of the resurrection of the dead that is promised in his resurrection, the fulfillment of the lordship of the crucified one over all things that is promised in his exaltation” (Moltmann, 1993:228,229).

No wonder Moltmann (1993:33) exclaims that “... hope ... arises from faith in God’s promise ...”.

3.3 PROMISE

3.3.1 CAN GOD SUFFER?

Before commencing research on the notion of a suffering God, the age-old theological question *if* God can suffer must be dealt with. Although there is much controversy about this subject within theodicy, it is crucial to address it before proposing the promise of a suffering God. God, or the divine as an ‘Unmoved Mover’, as Aristotle would describe Him, is to many theologians and philosophers a primary cause who cannot be moved – a God without feelings that could move him. Augustine (Brachtendorf, 2000:79-92) based his argument for God’s impassibility on the notion that God’s feeling is unlike human feelings, even in the way He cares and feels for us. Anselm (1964:8) echoes this notion:

How are Thou at once pitiful and impassible? For if Thou art impassible, Thou dost not suffer with man; if Thou does not suffer with man, Thy heart is not wretched by compassion with the wretched, which is the meaning of being pitiful. But if Thou are not pitiful, whence can the wretched gain so great comfort? How then art Thou, and art Thou not, pitiful, Lord, except that Thou are pitiful in respect of us, and not in respect of Thyself? Truly Thou are so in respect of our feeling, and art not in respect of Thine. For when Thou lookest upon us in our wretchedness we feel the effect of Thy pity. Thou feelest not the effect. And therefore Thou are pitiful, because Thou savest the wretched, and sparest the sinners who belong to Thee; and Thou are not

pitiful, because Thou are touched by no fellow-suffering in that wretchedness.

Evidently much thought went into Anselm's reasoning, since he concedes that we need a pitiful God, but through careful reasoning concludes that He can't suffer, since He is God and His feelings are not human.

Not only did most of the early Church Fathers see God as impassible, even the medieval scholars accepted as fact that God is unmoving. Wolterstorff (2015: 45) writes:

Already in the early Church Fathers there was also discussion of the closely related question of whether God suffers. In this case the focus of the discussion was on whether Jesus could have suffered on the cross without God also suffering. Almost all theologians until the nineteenth century argued that God is incapable of suffering. Any biblical language that suggests that God suffers must be interpreted figuratively.

However, in contrast with this theological tradition, when one carefully and honestly explores Scripture, one must come to the conclusion that God is passible. About this Steen (1990:71-72) comments as follows:

In the Biblical-theological movement a static concept of God has been exchanged for a dynamic perspective in which God is conceived as personal, loving, and history-making; as such, He is involved with his creation and his people. It is striking that God is represented in an 'anthropomorphic' manner in the Bible. Even such human feelings as love, anger and sorrowful regret are attributed to Him. Hence theologians increasingly wish to valorize the so-called 'anthropomorphic' and 'anthropopathic' God. So the living God of the Bible comes into focus.

What does one do with the classical Bible passage that states that "God is love"? If, according to Scripture, the very essence of God is love, how can God not be passible and be moved by emotion? How could 'perfect' love be devoid of emotion and movement? Stated differently, if Scripture declares humanity to be created after the 'image' and 'likeness' of God – and we are emotional beings of feeling – how can it be that God is impassible? In his book *Does God suffer?* Weinandy (2000:8) maintains that it is the ability of God to suffer that captivates the minds and imagination of contemporary theologians. If God is truly involved in the lives of people, if He actually enters into and acts within time and history, and most of all, if He does so as the God of love, then He undoubtedly experiences suffering. In the beginning of his book Weinandy (2000) writes

about theologians' view on this possibility; although towards the end of the book he indicates that he does not agree. The suffering referred to speaks of pathos, divine pathos. Moltmann borrows this idea of divine pathos from Abraham Heschel, which is, according to Mostert (2013:173), "a uniquely Israelite understanding of God, arising out of God's involvement in what God has created, in particular humankind". Mostert (2013:173) then quotes Moltmann, who suggests that "the pathos of God is God's 'suffering, caused by Israel's disobedience and his passion for his right and his honour in the world". God's pathos relates to His character, meaning that "even the idea of God's wrath can be justified" (Mostert, 2013:173), since God's wrath "belongs 'in the category of the divine pathos'" (Mostert, 2013:173). How is this possible, when the traditional view of God's wrath is incompatible with his love? According to Mostert (2013:173), Moltmann believes that the source of God's wrath "is God's love, which is disappointed and injured by the Covenant-people. God cannot be indifferent to evil and injustice. God's 'wrath' is the way God suffers evil and injustice in the world." Everything God does, and feels, is because of love in divine pathos.

Fiddes (1988), in his monumental work *The Creative Suffering of God*, describes this as a blend of 'love and wrath'.

The sorrow of God because his people reject his loving care leads to a unique kind of pain which is ascribed to God, a state of feeling which is characterized by the prophets as a blend of love and wrath. This is presented as a pathos which is God's own pathos (Fiddes, 1988:20).

This is profound. God suffers such sorrow that His being is hurt? How is that impassible? Biblically it coincides with the notion of divine love and the triune God being love to its core. In the rejection of this love there is an experience of pain. But besides God suffering because of the rejection of His love, there is, according to Scripture, a joint suffering in our suffering. In this regard, Van Beeck (1993:13) observes:

Since the faithful remainder of Israel was now a suffering nation, the conviction arose that God must be more, not less, closely involved with it. But this in turn meant that God must be in a real sense suffering as well.

Moltmann, and even Fiddes, are frequently misunderstood in their stance on the absolute passibility of God. Concerning God suffering, Moltmann (1994:230) asserts: “Were God incapable of suffering in any respect, and therefore in an absolute sense, then he would also be incapable of love.” Moltmann (1994:222) further contends that “a God who is incapable of suffering is a being who cannot be involved. Suffering and injustice do not affect him. And because he is so completely insensitive, he cannot be affected... by anything”. What is the effect of such insensitivity? Moltmann (1994) concludes that such a God is a “loveless being”. Fiddes (1988:17) agrees, suggesting that

... if God is not less than personal, and if the claim that ‘God is love’ is to have any recognizable continuity with our normal experience of love, the conclusion seems inescapable that a loving God must be a sympathetic and therefore suffering God.

Weinandy (2000) expostulates that this rationale falls short of the actual reality. According to him, there are two main reasons why it is impossible for God to suffer. He asserts that “The simple answer to the question: ‘Does God suffer?’ is: No, God in himself as God does not suffer...God is never in a state of inner angst” (Weinandy, 2000:153). The reasons he provides for disagreeing that God is capable of suffering are:

First, we must remember that God and all else are in distinct, but not unrelated, ontological orders. This distinction and relation is founded, as we saw, upon God’s act of creation. The act of creation establishes that God is distinct, as Creator, from what is created (Weinandy, 2002:153).

This is an excellent argument, which challenges the notion of God as suffering at its core. It debates the nature of God. However, Fiddes sees God and nature not distinct, whereas Moltmann does; yet, both arrive at the conclusion of a suffering God. It is imperative to note the different views of these two theologians on this issue to establish their pattern of thought. The argument of God and nature being distinct is mostly used to refute the notion of a suffering God; yet Moltmann and Fiddes disagree on this issue. To Fiddes it is an either-or situation. Either one believes that God is totally and wholly dwelling in this world and the world in Him, or one does not. The problem Fiddes has with Moltmann, is that he cannot reconcile the notion of God wholly dwelling in the world and the world in Him, like the incarnation. In this panentheistic model it is

important to observe the technicality of this approach, for in this mindset God is totally dwelling in this world to such an extent that the world is affecting, and thus changing God. Since this is problematic to Moltmann, who still wants to cling to the importance of God's immanence, he differentiates these realities. This is the precise point where Fiddes fails to agree and argues with Moltmann:

... there's a profound difference I think between me and Moltmann. He is still working with two spheres of reality. God's reality and the world's reality, somehow there's a kind of movement from the one to the other rather than an interpenetration that I deal with...If God is not dwelling in the world, how can you have the church in the power of the Spirit? (Fiddes, 2016: Interview)

The complete quote will be provided in Chapter 4, but for now the above is sufficient for noting the core difference in the views of Fiddes and Moltmann on the distinction between Creator and creation. During my interview with Moltmann, I put it to him that Prof Fiddes states that he works with two realities, whereas Fiddes works with one – his two realities being God's world and our world, and Fiddes's reality being God in the world and the world in Him. I then posed the question of what it means for God to be in the world. Moltmann confirmed the ontological difference between his arguments and those of Fiddes. The confirmation of Moltmann's belief in a distinction between Creator and creation, while also affirming a suffering God, puts a question to Weinandy's first argument against the notion of a suffering God.

Weinandy (2000:157) offers a second argument against a suffering God:

... There is also a second related positive reason why God cannot suffer. Because evil, due to the reality of sin, is a privation of some good or perfection which in turn causes suffering, God as pure act, and thus pure goodness itself in act, can never be deprived of a good or perfection which would cause him to suffer. Since God is pure good in perfect act, nothing can impair God's goodness so as to inflict a loss of some good which would then entail God suffering.

This is smart logic, but not sound theology. God is indeed holy and pure, but why would evil or suffering affect this holiness? The issue at stake is not His holiness, but His capability of feeling humanity's pain. What God would this be, if His holiness and purity could be tainted? What God would this be, if His holiness would prevent His emotion and love to comprehend our suffering? And

what God would this be, if He claims omnipotence, but does not know or understand our pain? Ironically, in the footnotes on page ten, Weinandy (2000:10) quotes Johannes van Bavel, who insists that a God of love cannot but feel the pain of its creation, “If God is love, then he must be involved at its highest. If he is such, it is not odd that he is affected by human suffering, and that he shares in the legitimate joys and the suffering of innocent people”. One could not but agree.

Yet, it is not only Weinandy who disagrees. A plethora of theologians object to the notion of God as a suffering God. Mostert (2013:175) summarises the arguments of these theologians into 5 objections. “First, a major criticism... the relation between God and all created reality is utterly asymmetrical.” Mostert (2013:175) quotes Kathryn Tanner to support this objection: “God is not changing God’s relation to us in Christ but changing our relation to God.” This argument corresponds with the first argument of Weinandy, which has been dealt with above.

Mostert (2013:176) continues: “Second... God’s love and forgiveness are of a different order from ours.” The argument is against words and concepts that are human in relation to the divine. Yet, how can humans, who only have access to human words, practise theology without using human words in relation to the divine? This is therefore not an argument.

Mostert (2013:177) relates the third objection to the notion of a suffering God as follows: “Third... since there is no evil in God... there is not and cannot be any suffering in God’s love.” This corresponds with Weinandy’s second objection, which has also been dealt with above.

Mostert (2013:177,178) summarises the fourth objection as follows: “A fourth criticism of the passibilist view is that its understanding of God’s *apatheia* is flawed.” In this argument it is contended that for God being impassible does not entail that He is indifferent to our pain or suffering. Mostert (2013:177) quotes Daniel Castelo in support of this objection: “On the contrary, for many writers and thinkers, God’s *apatheia* suggested the opposite: that God was so distinct from and transcendent to the world’s occurrences that his presence and actions could carry meaning and significance.” While it was evident from Moltmann’s

argument that one does not have to deny that God is distinct to believe in a suffering God, a distinct God does not necessarily define an impassible nature. Why would it? Are no similarities allowed between Creator and creation? The substance of the argument is thus not logical.

The last objection Mostert (2013:178) presents from this plethora of theologians opposed to the notion of a suffering God is “the relation between the utterly transcendent God and the contingencies of history”. Mostert (2013:178) refers to Küng, who shows that Karl Rahner, who was influenced by Hegel, sought out a way to maintain the possibility of “the self-externalizing of God in creation”. Mostert (2013:178) suggests that “in pure freedom of his infinite and abiding unrelatedness” there is this ‘becoming in God’. While in essence this could pose a problematic question, the argument is not about the motives of Rahner or Moltmann. The issue at stake is whether God suffers or not. Objecting theologians contend that “God’s eternity and transcendence are immune to time’s contingencies” (Mostert, 2013:187), while theologians like Moltmann and Fiddes believe that “the eternal God is open to” time’s contingencies (Mostert, 2013:178). A simple response might be that of Pannenberg who suggests that “the unity of the economic and the immanent Trinity cannot be ‘located’ anywhere in time but only ‘in the eschatological consummation of history’” (Mostert, 2013:178).

Moreover, to the question ‘Does God Suffer?’ some theologians, like Weinandy, claim that “a God who does not suffer is more loving, compassionate and merciful than a God who does” (Weinandy, 2000:159). Having observed the objections raised by theologians regarding a God who suffers, some of Moltmann’s thoughts on this matter will be discussed to determine the validity of the statement above.

Moltmann (1994:222) deals extensively with protest atheism, and even the Hellenistic influence of a myriad of impassible gods that need to be pleased and are “immortal and omnipotent”. He questions this impassible notion which is riveted within theology, but clearly inherited from the Greeks: “What kind of a poor being is a God who cannot suffer and cannot even die?” (Moltmann, 1994:222). Besides Moltmann’s response to this momentous question, which

follows below, it is critical to note that he coins this placement of God within the transcendence box “metaphysical rebellion”, since it places man in some sense higher, with possibilities to him which God cannot access (Moltmann, 1994:222). Moltmann’s (1994:222) response to his own question above is that “a God who is incapable of suffering is a being who cannot be involved. Suffering and injustice do not affect him”. A God who cannot experience and comprehend what his creation is experiencing, is clearly not involved in his creation, but is theistically withdrawn into himself. All the suffering we experience means nothing to his ‘emotions’. In other words, “he cannot weep, for he has not tears” (Moltmann, 1994:222). Moltmann’s (1994:222) logical deduction is then that “the one who cannot suffer cannot love either”. How could there be true understanding and caring compassion from a God who has no idea what you feel? Such a proposed being must be a “loveless being” (Moltmann, 1994:222). Moltmann holds Aristotle partially responsible for this ‘irresponsible’ theology: “Aristotle’s God cannot love; he can only be loved by all non-divine beings by virtue of his perfection and beauty, and this way draw them to him” (Moltmann, 1994:222). This view of God purports that the compassionate feeling towards the other can only be from humanity towards God. What a distorted view of God. No wonder so much appeasement is still taking place within religion. Soelle (1975:42), in her book *Suffering*, also refers to Aristotle in this context: “According to Aristotle one aspect of God’s perfection is that he has no need for friends.” What stern and relationless view of God. She continues and states the direct result thereof: “This apathetic God became the God of the Christians, although he was a contradiction to the biblical God, with his emotions and suffering” (Soele, 1974:42). Instead of a love relationship, as portrayed within the triune God, God is feared and served in appeasement. Moltmann (1994:222) depicts this God as follows:

The ‘unmoved Mover’ is a ‘loveless Beloved’. If he is the ground of the love (eros) of all things for him (*causa prima*), and at the same time his own cause (*causa sui*), he is the beloved who is in love with himself, a Narcissus in a metaphysical degree. *Deus incurvatus in se*.

This is profound reasoning. If God has only self-love, He is the highest form of narcissism one can find. However, instead of *eros* love that desires, the biblical testimony provides the triune God with *agape* love, which is selfless in nature

and other-centered. God's love, according to C.S. Lewis (1940:43), is "bottomlessly selfless by very definition" to such an extent that "it has everything to give". It is a love that is compassionate and emotive in response to the other's feelings, as De Gruchy (2013:132) fittingly describes it, "God's beauty is nothing less...than God's creative and redemptive, self-giving or kenotic love, which is described in the New Testament as *agape*." It is within this line of thought that Moltmann can reason that "a God who is only omnipotent is in himself an incomplete being, for he cannot experience helplessness and powerlessness... omnipotence is never loved; it is only feared". The understanding of God's nature has direct bearing on His character. Seeing Him as a being who cannot feel our helplessness because of his omnipotence, is seeing a being who cannot cause a response of love, but only fear. Yet, Scripture affirms that the very being of God, the nature of God, is love – *agape* love, a love that understands one's feelings and emotions. No wonder Moltmann (1994:230) exclaims that "the fundamental Christian assertion that 'God is love'" is the one factor and reality that breaks "the Aristotelian doctrine of God". We worship God for who He is, because of His character. Concerning this worship, Soelle (1975:43) states that "When a being who is free from suffering is worshiped as God, then it is possible to train oneself in patience, endurance, imperturbability, and aloofness from suffering". In the worship of an impassible God, suffering will be denied, and our fellow human beings' pain ignored.

There is no doubt in Moltmann's mind that God is a God who can suffer; one who is part of our suffering. God cannot be distant while we are captured in pain. If God is impassible, how could God know pain and be close when needed? Migliore (2004:135) connects this with judgment and grace when he states: "Thus in the face of the fierce reality of evil, God's solidarity with victims is both judgment and grace – judgment on all insensitivity and inhumanity, and grace to all who are afflicted". While God shows grace in his immanence to the sufferer, there is judgment to those who are insensitive – even to the theologian. Moltmann (1994:270) asserts that God "is affected by them because he is interested in his creation, his people and his right". The reality that God is interested in humanity shows his passibility. What we experience affects God. Our story becomes part of God's story, as Moltmann (1994:270) affirms:

The *pathos* of God is intentional and transitive, not related to itself but to the history of the covenant people... In the covenant he enters into the world and the people... The 'history' of God cannot therefore be separated from the history of his people.

How is covenant possible with an impassible theistic God? 'Our God and we his people' is not possible if God is not at one with our struggles and pain. While Scripture affirms this care and presence, how is it possible against the background of impassibility? Moltmann (1994:271) refutes this by simply stating: "The divine *pathos* is expressed in the relationship of God to his people." Thus, the promise of a God who cares within the theodical predicament in the reality of people's suffering, means a God who experiences our pain with us. This is a promise of a suffering God.

3.3.2 PROMISE OF A SUFFERING GOD BASED IN THE TRIUNE GOD

In *The Crucified God* Moltmann (1994:4) writes the following:

To take up the theology of the cross today is to go beyond the limits of the doctrine of salvation and to inquire into the revolution needed in the concept of God. Who is God in the cross of the Christ who is abandoned by God?

Moltmann (1994:201) later rephrases this question: "What does the cross of Jesus mean for God himself?" Expounding on this intricate question, Moltmann (1994:201) asks the vital question, "how can the death of Jesus be a statement about God? Does that not amount to a revolution about God?" Can the death of Christ mean that God died? Does it mean that the triune God suffered? What does that reveal about God? To what level was God drawn into the happenings of the cross? In line with these questions sprouting from Moltmann's original question, he continues by raising more questions in an attempt to find answers. He seeks to know "to what degree is God himself 'concerned in' or 'affected by' the fate of Jesus on the cross? Did God suffer there in Godself or only in someone else? Does the involvement go so far that the death of Jesus can be identified as the death of God?" (Moltmann, 1994:202).

Having studied the views of other theologians, both Catholic and Protestant, Moltmann (1994) gives some space and stage to Karl Barth, analysing Barth's

approach to these questions he posed. At first, he commends Barth who “has consistently drawn the harshness of the cross into his concept of God” (Moltmann, 1994:203). He praises Barth for taking “up the theology of the cross” and making “it more profound” (Moltmann, 1994:203). Further, Moltmann (1994:203) is impressed by how Barth “though consistently of ‘God in Christ’”, in order to be able to “think historically of God’s being”, so as to, in theological terms, be competent to write about “God’s suffering and being involved in the cross of the Son, and finally talk of the ‘death of God’”.

Yet, Moltmann (1994:203) is quite astonished that Barth is so limited in his thinking that “he still thinks too *theologically*”. This may seem a strange thing to utter as theologian, but the emphasis here is on ‘theo’, meaning that Barth is so God focused that some of the meaning, which could have been revealed had his approach been more “trinitarian”, is lost (Moltmann, 1994:203). Moltmann (1994:203) clarifies this view on Barth’s approach: “In stressing... that ‘*God was in Christ*’, *God* humbled himself, *God* himself was on the cross, he uses a simple concept of God which is not sufficiently developed in a trinitarian direction.” It is important to note that Moltmann does not criticise Barth in this Christology, or for not being correct. He objects to Barth not being adequately trinitarian-focused. As Moltmann develops his theology in *The Crucified God*, it becomes clear that he is focused on the triune God. He is adamant that a theology of God and his passibility can only be constructed within a paradigm of a triune God who is deeply interconnected.

Moltmann (1994:203) further compares Barth to Karl Rahner, who also indicates that a “distinction in the ‘God was in Christ’ between the God who proceeds from himself in his primal decision and the God who is previously in himself, beyond contact with evil”. Here Moltmann reveals a theological dilemma within the thinking of Rahner, and specifically Barth, who is under scrutiny here. They present a *God* who does all the different movements. Yet, how does it happen if not in the context of a triune God? The God as himself, out of himself, and thus in himself – and therefore ‘beyond contact with evil’ – nullifies the argument or position of God being crucified, or dying. Moltmann (1994) suggests that this confusion can “be avoided” when the triune God is

present at the cross. Graphically it can be explained as follows, according to Moltmann (1994:203):

The Son suffers and dies on the cross. The Father suffers with him, but not in the same way. There is a trinitarian solution to the paradox that God is 'dead' on the cross and yet is not dead, once one abandons the simple concept of God.

The logical conclusion from Moltmann's argument is that it is impossible to see a God suffering on and at the cross, if not the triune God. Moltmann thus lays a basis, which he will continually expand on, to establish the validity of a suffering God who is immanent and passible.

Besides the immense importance of the cross of Christ for humanity within theology, one must realise there is also great importance to God. Moltmann (1994:204) states that to grasp the significance of this cross event in God himself, "one must enter into the inner-trinitarian tensions and relationships of God and speak of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit". Only within the confines and open eternity of the triune God can one talk of the "Christ event" (Moltmann, 1994:204). This is not just an event of Jesus, the man of Galilee, or the God person sent from heaven. "The more one understands the whole event of the cross as an event of God, the more any simple concept of God falls apart. In epistemological terms it takes so to speak trinitarian form" (Moltmann, 1994:204).

It is not enough in our theology, especially the theology of the cross, even in the context of theodicy, to just speak about God. We need to define this term in theology as the triune God. Moltmann (1994:204) advocates that we move "from the exterior of the mystery which is called 'God' to the interior, which is trinitarian." Earlier we noted the question Moltmann posed in the beginning of *The Crucified God*: "Who is God in the cross of the Christ who is abandoned by God?" Moltmann called this "the revolution needed in the concept of God" (Moltmann, 1994:4). Now Moltmann (1994:204) answers this question: "'God'... which is trinitarian. This is the 'revolution in the concept of God' which is manifested by the crucified Christ."

The crucified Christ thus reveals the inner working of the triune God. Moltmann (1994:206,207) develops his argument as follows: "What happens on the cross

manifests the relationships of Jesus, the Son, to the Father and vice versa. The cross and its liberating effect makes possible the movement of the Spirit from the Father to us.” The cross shows us movements of redemption and love; however, it is crucial to see the differentiation within the triune God, for only in this context is it possible to understand. “The cross stands at the heart of the trinitarian being of God” (Moltmann, 1994:207). What does this mean? How is the cross in the midst of God? Moltmann (1994:207) suggests that “it divides and conjoins the persons in their relationships to each other and portrays them in a specific way.” In the context of God’s image formed within the Christian, Bonhoeffer (2014:233) suggests that “where Christ lives, there the Father also lives, and both Father and Son through the Holy Ghost. The Holy Trinity himself has made his dwelling in the Christian heart, filling his whole being, and transforming him into the divine image”.

At the cross we get a glimpse of the inner dimensions and movements of the Godhead where they work and act together, but each differently. “In these relationships the person of Jesus comes to the fore in its totality as the Son” (Moltmann, 1994:207). The Cross shows each person of the trinity in its movement and function. The roles of each are clear. Moltmann (1994:207) thus concludes that “Anyone who really talks of the Trinity talks of the cross Jesus, and does not speculate in heavenly riddles”.

This brings us back to the concept of ‘death of God’ in the context of God suffering. Moltmann (1994:207) states emphatically that “Jesus’ death cannot be understood ‘as the death of God’, but only as death *in* God”. The question arises whether this is just a play on words, a theology of semantics that Moltmann tries to employ or establish. According to him it is not. He explains clearly that “The ‘death of God’ cannot be designated the origin of Christian theology, even if the phrase has an element of truth in it” (Moltmann, 1994:207).

What then is the basis of Christian theology? Moltmann (1994:207) maintains that “the origin of Christian theology is only the death on the cross in God and God in Jesus’ death”. This is clearly not a theology of the correct term, but a theology focused on the perception of God and the event of the Cross in connection of God and the death that happened there. This death cannot be

loosely referred to as 'the death of God'. Words, terms, and phrases are loaded with meaning; hence Moltmann's (1994:207) plea that we must understand that when we refer to, or contemplate, within theology the death on the cross, it is "death on the cross in God and God in Jesus' death". From within the triune God, we can understand this death. For, "from the life of these three, which has within it the death of Jesus, there then emerges who God is and what his Godhead mean" (Moltmann, 1994:207). The Godhead contains the death of the cross. From here one can perceive the God who suffered on the cross. God asks us into this understanding, within the triune God, of his suffering for and with us. As Moltmann (1994:207) expresses this: "He invites the whole earth to understand his suffering and his hopes in the outstretched arms of the crucified Jesus and therefore in God." As we see the Son of God suffering on the cross, we see a God who suffers. It is an "invitation to understand the Christ hanging on the cross as the 'outstretched' God of the Trinity" (Moltmann, 1994:207).

Yet, some will object, as Moltmann (1994:216) readily agrees, that "God cannot suffer, God cannot die, says theism, in order to bring suffering, mortal being under his protection". Despite this objection, it is clear that God indeed "suffered in the suffering of Jesus, God died on the cross of Christ says Christian faith, so that we might live and rise again in his future" (Moltmann, 1994:216). Far and beyond the philosophies about God being far removed from us, stands a cross that shows us the opposite. It reveals to us a God who became intimate with our suffering. Something that we never could have imagined, happened; not only in this world, but within God. Moltmann (1994:215) maintains that "with the Christian message of the cross of Christ, something new and strange has entered the metaphysical world". Our philosophies were interrupted by "the suffering of Christ as the power of God and the death of Christ as God's potentiality" (Moltmann, 1994:215).

There is an inherent correlation between the death of Christ on the cross and the triune God. The one cannot be understood without the other, since it is at the cross where God is revealed, and it is in the triune God that the depth of love is revealed, demonstrated at the cross. Migliore (2004) also sees this connection, and utilises Moltmann's theology to establish the reality of a suffering God. Migliore (2004:132) writes:

According to Moltmann, in his passion and death the Son of God experiences suffering and death out of love for the world. But the Father who sent him on his salvific mission also experiences the grief of loss of the beloved Son. And from this event of shared suffering love comes the Spirit of new life and world transformation. All of the suffering the world is encompassed in the affliction of the Son, the grief of the Father, and the comfort of the Spirit, who inspires courage and hope to pray and work for the renewal of all things.

Here is an inner working within the triune God: There is an experience of our suffering, yet comfort is extended to the sufferer. The triune God understands and acts in response. Migliore (2004:133) acknowledges that there are those who “charge” Moltmann that “he comes close to eternalizing suffering in God”; however, this is not the case. Clearly in Moltmann’s description the triune God is one inherent love, and not forced with suffering from the outside. Migliore (2004:133) quite forcefully agrees with Moltmann on this critical aspect:

... that a trinitarian understanding of divine providence and the reality of evil is marked not by a pagan notion of God as sheer almightiness but by the power of love at work in the ministry, cross and resurrection of Jesus.

With these strong words, such as ‘pagan notion of God as sheer almightiness’, Migliore is not denying that God is almighty, but denying that he is not a ‘co-sufferer’ with us in our pain. This is the reason why Migliore (2004:133) terms Him “not a despotic ruler but ‘our Father in heaven’”, and also “not a distant God, but a God who becomes one of us”; “not an ineffective God but one who rules... by Word and Spirit rather than by power”.

3.3.3 TOWARDS A THEODICY IN THE CONTEXT OF A SUFFERING GOD

Progressing towards a constructive proposal regarding a theodicy that includes promise, it is vital to understand Moltmann’s contribution of an indispensable element towards this constructive proposal. He establishes the essential principle of hope, demonstrating how this hope is established in the cross and resurrection event, which in itself indicates the promise of a suffering God, the triune God. This knowledge will empower the sufferer, as “the knowledge of God in the crucified Christ takes seriously the situation of man” (Moltmann, 1994:69).

Hope does not mean that one does not take suffering seriously. On the contrary, hope is really needed when confronted with the reality of suffering. Still, pain feels senseless and meaningless, which in itself reduces hope to hopelessness, it may seem. Writing about real life situations trapped in suffering, Weaver (2013: 94) says: “Hopeless pain refers to the pain that emerges when hope for recovery and return to health dissipates.” When hope evades the sufferer, as there seems to be no outcome, the hopeless situation asks for hope beyond the physical. Weaver (2013: 94) deduces that “Although hope is possible in all stages of life, for those who suffer, especially at the end of life, hope must be redefined and calibrated to different expectations”. This means that, by the hope established by Moltmann (1993:31), “the believer” can look “beyond the day to the things which according to the promise” are already in the future.

Yet, what about the painful present? Moltmann (1993:31) asserts that this living hope “makes us ready to bear the ‘cross of the present’”. While hope takes suffering seriously, a suffering that is hopeless in itself, or as Moltmann terms it, “the spell of the dogma of hopelessness”, is “broken” by hope itself when it sees that “he who raise the dead is recognized as God” (Moltmann, 1993:31).

Speaking of meaninglessness, one can still hear the theodical question many ask regarding the reality of evil and why God will allow it. Why would God allow such meaningless pain and suffering? While in the next chapter we will see how Fiddes explains that God is not responsible for evil, for now it suffices to state that logically, when we look around us, we do not see a God who inflicts pain; but rather, humanity. In this regard, Weaver (2013:9,10) quotes Lewis: “It is men, not God, who have produced racks, whips, prisons, slavery, guns, bayonets, and bombs; it is by human avarice or human stupidity, not by the churlishness of nature, that we have poverty and overwork”. This does not negate the theodical question with God at the center of this question. In the next chapter it will be revealed that, rather than God being the perpetrator, he is in fact also victim, with us, to the suffering in this world. Thus, when we speak of meaninglessness, we can only do so in the absence of a God who is impassible. A God who suffers with us brings not only meaning, but also hope and promise to our situation. It is only through hope that suffering can beget meaning. For

hope “pronounces the poor blessed, receives the weary and heavy laden, the humbled and wronged, the hungry and the dying” (Moltmann, 1993:32).

How and why is this possible? Moltmann (1993:32) responds that hope “perceives the parousia of the kingdom for them”. Hope sees the coming kingdom of God. Hope, through “the promises of God”, sees a “future also for the transient, the dying and the dead” (Moltmann, 1993:32). How does this translate into meaning for the sufferer in their painful situation? Having hope translates the hopeless situation to a hopeful one, for “living without hope is like no longer living” (Moltmann, 1993:32).

To the believer in this God, seeing the suffering God in the cross of Christ, suffering becomes something that is not meaningless. Bonhoeffer (2014:45) totally reframes the issue of suffering in terms of the cross of Christ when he writes: “Suffering, then, is the badge of true discipleship. The disciple is not above his master... Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ.” This is the incredible meaning the cross brings to our suffering.

Scott (2015:167) writes extensively about theodicy in the light of the cross and concludes that “For theodicy, two powerful insights arise from the cross. First, God’s internalization of suffering in the incarnation means that God identifies with human suffering, and stands in solidarity with us when we suffer”. One cannot view the cross and state that God is not suffering with us. The cross is the picture of a suffering God not leaving us in our suffering. This is crucial to theodicy, as Scott (2015:167) declares: “Divine solidarity with human suffering has powerful implications and applications for theodicy.” What can the theologian offer the sufferer within his or her theodical situation, if not a God who is in solidarity with them in suffering as a suffering God? Scott (2015:167) provides another vital insight to be deduced from the cross event: “God’s redemption of humanity through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ opens new vistas in theodicy, and enables theodicy to look for the redemptive possibilities of human suffering.”

This view is in keeping with the proposal by Bonhoeffer, who reframes suffering into something meaningful to the believer. Scott describes this meaning as ‘redemptive possibilities of human suffering’, which invites the theologian to be

open for more meaning through the cross event, which assimilates human suffering, pain, and death. Scott (2015:167) states that “Divine solidarity with human suffering and human identification with the redemptive significance of Christ’s suffering recast the problem of evil and creates exciting new pathways that Christian theodicy has only begun to explore”. It is not the theologian, but actually the suffering God, through the cross of Christ, who reframes the problem of evil into a meaningful event that translates one’s senseless painful situation into a hopeful event.

In conclusion to this chapter, it is important to observe that a suffering God is reality because of love. It has been established that the basis of the notion of a suffering God is the triune God. Love is only possible within a framework of three, by the inner core of love namely self-giving for the other. The importance of this is that “Love does not snatch us from the pain of time, but takes the pain of the temporal upon itself” (Moltmann, 1993:31). Without the reality of love, a suffering God has no meaning. The opposite is just as true: Without a suffering God, what divine love is there that can hold meaning to a sufferer in his or her pain? Moltmann (1995:65) summarises this all-important aspect as follows:

Love participates in the history of God’s suffering. Wherever men take up their cross and in their self-giving are made like the one who was crucified, wherever the sighings of the Spirit are heard in the cry for freedom, there is the church. The true church is ‘the church under the cross’.

The element of a suffering God, as established by Moltmann, will form part of my constructive proposal towards a theodicy of promise in Chapter 5. Hope underscores the promise of a God of love, a God suffering with us in our sufferings. As Moltmann (1993:32) affirms: “In love, hope brings all things into the light of the promises of God.”

CHAPTER 4: FIDDES ON DEATH AND PROMISE

4.1 ENGAGING PAUL S. FIDDES

4.1.1 BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

Paul S. Fiddes, systematic theologian of note and Principal of Regent's Park College at Oxford, dedicates, as already noted, his book *The Promised End* as follows: "Dedicated to my son Benjamin 1978-1998". The stark tragedy of the death of his son at age 19 gave Fiddes every reason to look seriously at the reality of death and contemplate theodicy. He pondered the questions all human beings ask: 'What happens at death?' 'Is it the end?' 'Is God's promise that we will see the dead again real?' 'Will people who have died young have the chance to grow to fullness of maturity?' 'How will our relationship be with those who died young in eternity?'

Upon reading this one line of dedication to Fiddes's son, one sensed that a deep personal understanding of the sheer pain of loss and the theodicy quest had given rise to this work. As part of the research for this thesis, I interviewed Prof Fiddes for 90 minutes on the essentials of his book, as well as on the broader theme of my research.

Fiddes was in no way uncomfortable or unwilling to reflect on the impact of his son's tragic death upon his theology and understanding of theodicy. Yet, the pain in his voice was evident as he dwelled on what had led to his son's death. He related it as follows:

At the age of 16 Ben suddenly showed signs of hallucination and to begin with we thought it was bipolarity or manic depression – and it was treated that way for 2 years or so. Then we saw it was schizophrenia." (Fiddes, 2016: Interview)

This illness is not easily treated with positive outcome, and the extreme behaviour is undoubtedly challenging to the immediate family.

Fiddes continued to recount his family's experience with their sick son:

So he was living in a very different world. The world I was living in was a very threatening place to him. He had all sorts of imaginations, obsessions and hallucinations and basically if we could keep him safe until he was about 25 - we would've been

able to control the schizophrenia with both drugs and therapy. It was very difficult though for him at that age of growing and developing where one is unstable. (Fiddes, 2016: Interview)

Fiddes's professional demeanor could not conceal the pain in his emotionally loaded words. In a somber sentence he explained what had resulted: "So he took his life, he hung himself which is not uncharacteristic of young people that have schizophrenia." (Fiddes 2016: Interview). I was deeply moved by his pain and found it difficult to contain myself. Yet, he calmly continued with a strong and sure bearing, trying to help me find answers, and at the same time let me feel at ease.

He lived for four years a rollercoaster life in and out of hospitals, while we were trying to keep him safe. I can't go in all the details, but it was a very painful four years. He basically blamed us for treating him for he felt he was unique in the world for various reasons and that all the suffering in the world was due to him. One of his fixed delusions was that he caused all the suffering in the world. So in the end he took his own life just short of 20. (Fiddes, 2016: Interview)

Although I felt like steering the conversation away from the death of Fiddes's son, our conversation veered in the direction of the trauma experienced by him and his family and how it had impacted his theology. He responded:

I have written about the problem of suffering, and to find myself in a situation where someone was very close to me and suffering considerably was not easy. I was drawn into this pain and anguish. It was kind of an exemplification really. But I wouldn't say it changed my theology at all, but it did really underline it and confirmed it I would say (Fiddes, 2016: Interview).

Thus, the death of his son neither gave him a new theology, nor did it shake the foundations of his faith, forcing him to seek for a new paradigm. On the contrary, his theological thoughts about theodicy were confirmed by this tragedy. Therefore, this theodicy event in his life helped to establish his theology of theodicy. *The Promised End* is greatly informed by Fiddes's experience of pain, which challenged him on his own turf, tested his beliefs in the field of theodicy, and helped him to see that his view of theodicy is pragmatic. His theodicy was more firmly fixed in his mind through the loss of his son.

Having a son living in a different world, to whom the world seems strange, one is driven to ask the question 'where is Christ in this?' and I came to the fixed conclusion that Christ was in all these worlds of people and is familiar with us. I suppose it also

underlined the fact that there is a continuation of human life beyond this life because I felt very strongly about the potential of humanity in the hereafter. (Fiddes, 2016: Interview)

Markedly, the notion of afterlife, hope and promise was more firmly rooted in the mind of Fiddes than ever before, since it was personal now. No more could he wonder about the theory of theodicy he had been proposing for years. It was now a theology of theodicy: a theology that is pragmatic in its approach, where death is not the end, and human life is still full of potential ‘in the hereafter’. Furthermore, it was evident that Fiddes did not withdraw his theological mind to a secluded place to bemoan his loss and feel sorry for himself; instead he was thinking as ever, just on a higher plain, and with new determination and vigor: “I couldn’t conceive of eschatology as some kind of fixed perfection, but rather of growth development in young people who die – there must be potential for that development.” (Fiddes, 2016: Interview)

Fiddes thus argues that there is no hope in making sense of the death of a young person if there is no further development in the afterlife. In the way that he supposes that theology cannot exist without having an impact on believers, one senses a theologian who takes theodicy seriously. According to Fiddes, theology exists to give meaning to the believer in the here and now; a pragmatism that is personal, makes sense, and gives hope through promise. It is in this context that eschatology should be viewed and researched. It is not ‘some kind of fixed perfection’, but a promise of human development and existence. This gives hope and meaning to the suffering who try to make sense of theodicy.

4.1.2 DEVELOPMENTS IN FIDDES’S THEODICY

In the early stage of the interview I was eager to be validating what I believed was key in *The Promised End*. However, there was another critical aspect of the death of Fiddes’s son that I had to pursue. I needed to establish whether, at this critical stage of his life, Fiddes’s theology had helped him to pragmatically deal with and make sense of what had happened. His answer was simple and to the point:

I suppose it did. Because if I had the kind of theology of that of a divine plan worked out where everything is determined and planned it couldn't be as relevant as promise. Because promises are being fulfilled in unexpected ways unlike predictions. Predictions are worked out in a mechanical way where promises are open to surprise and have openness (Fiddes, 2016: Interview).

Critical to the theology of Fiddes is the notion of 'promise', which to him is inherently open and flexible, but at the same time sure and definite. It is a theology of God's promise, and not a theology of the deterministic notion that suffering is willed by God – *Deus Vult*. This theology and paradigm enabled him to pragmatically process the death of his son and make some sense out of it. Fiddes contrasts a god of predictions and mechanics to the God of promise, who provides space and freedom:

If I had the view of a God who plans all the things that happens in this world I would've probably distrusted such a God. But I for a long time saw suffering as part of a whole chaotic contingent nature of the world as it is and God lives in that as we live in it, and he's always needing the co-operation of us beings to do this – so I simply understood this as God was someone who needed me in this chaotic nature of life. This is not a need imposed on God from outside, but God's free choice to be in need. Perhaps a combination of genes and circumstances. What one could say is that God didn't intend this, but was in it. (Fiddes, 2016: Interview)

Fiddes thus proposes that one's God image plays a pivotal role in one's natural reaction to and processing of death and suffering. He believes that a theology which portrays a God who controls and plans everything happening in this world is inherently problematic in the theology of theodicy. A God who controls everything is the God who is the direct cause of pain and suffering. Such a God is to be blamed and not trusted. Conversely, Fiddes sees God as needing us in something He did not intend, but wants to address. He is very outspoken against the theological perception and image of an interventionist God: "I suppose that if I had a theology of an interventionist God to whom you could simply appeal to stop your suffering as it were it would be extremely frustrating" (Fiddes, 2016: Interview).

In many cases the God-images we subscribe to prescribe our experience of God. Misconceptions of God may not only cause frustration, but could also give rise to a faith crisis. Louw (1998:330) defines these confused God-images and

determines their impact as follows: “They do not reflect the essence of God in terms of an ontological paradigm, but reflect God’s actions and style (his mode) as experienced by believers according to real life events.” As our God-images determine our faith amid pain and suffering, God needs to show us that we can trust him. Fiddes supports this by stating that “we see that the only authority lies in being trusted” (Fiddes, 2000:100). Theodicy calls for faith in an unseen God. When one needs to see Him being there for you, one needs to see Him through one’s God-image. For faith to withstand a crisis, “it must repose in a faithful God” (Carson, 2006:159). This calls for a view of God outside of yourself and your situation. As Lewis puts it so aptly: “I need Christ, not something that resembles Him” (1961:65).

Fiddes offered the following key elements regarding the impact of God-images on our theology and what we need in our theodicy: “The way God, as the uncreated, relates to the created is fundamental to promise, which is at the heart of this” (Fiddes, 2016: Interview). Thus, God’s promise, in the very specific context of God as Creator and us as the created, is key. This promise is encapsulated in the covenant.

...the covenant brings everything together including people, other created things and the church - and promise is part of this. The promise of God to dwell with people is at the heart of the covenant promise, stating ‘I will be with my people’. This is covenant language. (Fiddes, 2016: Interview)

While our God-images draws on reality, our conception should be informed by God’s promise related to us in the New Covenant. God is our God, and God will dwell with us, covenants with us, and promises His presence.

Subsequently, the question might arise in which way God will dwell with us. Beyond question, God does not dwell with us in the way of classical theism, whereby an unchangeable God of absolute immutability is only timeless as the unmoved Mover, unable to be subject to time or human emotion and experience. In this traditional view of God, the divine omniscience is understood as an all-determining God. Without negating God’s supreme and divine attributes, it is imperative to comprehend that “time is not an alien medium within which God is ‘trapped’ or ‘limited’; rather time, in the sense of a changeful

succession of states, is inherent in God's own nature" (Hasker, 2008:27). Within the dogma of divine impassibility, where God, as the original source of everything, is untouched and unmoved by any of His creation, His own creation cannot cause Him any pleasure or pain, meaning that God cannot suffer or feel our suffering. If it were true that God cannot know experientially what we suffer and to what degree, the question arises how the covenantal promise Fiddes refers to – that God will dwell with us – can be of any consolation. In contrast with classical theism, "open theism insists that God, far from being impassible, is profoundly affected by events in the lives of his creatures: he suffers with us" (Hasker, 2008:27).

4.1.3 FIDDES'S PANENTHEISTIC PARADIGM

During the period of the church fathers, theologians like Augustine created the theology that God is not only a transcendent God, but also one who is impassible, the unmoved mover. Fiddes (2000:153,154) protests strongly against this, maintaining that "God acts with loving persuasion on the inside of nature, luring creation from within towards a fullness of life. Centuries of belief about the impassibility of God have been overturned in our age... I believe that this revolution has been right and necessary."

While it is imperative to reject the idea of an impassable God, the proposed alternative may be too far to the other side. The question arises whether God's transcendence should not be retained in our theology. Fiddes (1988:135) disagrees, suggesting that "in attempting to retain the transcendence of God in an impassible pole of his being, it both undercuts the commitment of God to suffering in this world and subordinates God to a principle of creativity which is beyond his decision". To state that the transcendence of God 'undercuts' God's commitment to suffering is not necessarily accurate. A lack of commitment to suffering could rather be attributed to the impassibility of God, since impassibility and transcendence are not the same. Yet, as will be established at a later stage, Fiddes's proposed theodicies can be adopted, as the immanence of God suffices theologically, rather than His impassibility.

In his criticism of Moltmann's view of the *individua substantia* Trinity, Fiddes reveals his panentheistic views as follows:

... we notice in Moltmann's account of the Trinity is his conception of the three persons as each analogous to a human person. Moltmann is arguing for a social analogy of the Trinity in the strict sense of the 'persons' being 'individual, unique, non-interchangeable subjects... with consciousness and will' (Fiddes, 1988:139).

To explain the personality of God in the context of the Trinity, Fiddes says that "we might think of God as one complex personality, in which the 'persons' are really existing relationships, or movements of being characterized by relationship" (Fiddes, 1988:139). This panentheistic hypothesis of God is purporting the view of God as the cosmos, and the universe as God. While Moltmann is criticised by Fiddes (1988:140) for his personalist view of the trinitarian God, ("in this I believe that Moltmann is mistaken"), the question remains how Fiddes arrives at this conception that "the divine personality can only be thought of as an event of relationships" (Fiddes, 1988:140).

Fiddes negates and explicates the orthodox belief of the three persons of the Godhead, stating that "we must insist that God is complex Being, so complex that we can only think of him as a Son relating to a Father and Father to a Son, in the Spirit of fellowship" (Fiddes, 1988:140). Panentheism denies that God can consist of three persons, as that would implicate that the world cannot dwell in all of God. Modality is needed for Christian panentheism, where the Trinity is basically the three modes of God. Fiddes defines these modes as "the circle of relationships" (Fiddes, 1988:142). The emphasis is on the relationship. The relationship within God is either the Father, Son, or Spirit, which in essence renders the Father, Son, or Spirit basically personless and impersonal. Thus, in Fiddes's model the Father, Son, and Spirit are but the description of the relationships within God, instead of each being a distinct person. Fiddes's own words confirm this: "... the circle of relationships which is the Father, Son and Spirit" (Fiddes, 1988:142). The panentheistic view of dwelling is born out of this perspective.

During our interview, Fiddes responded as follows to my question on what it means for God to dwell in the world:

It's an important question, and here I differ with Moltmann as you know, because Moltmann has more an eschatological view of dwelling and not an entirely consistent one. I have talked this over with Moltmann several times and I am still not convinced of what he is doing. (Fiddes, 2016: Interview)

Fiddes frequently writes about disagreeing with Moltmann on his view about eschatology and the covenant promise, and dwelling within the triune God. During the interview Fiddes maintained:

Moltmann's idea is that at the last time (in the end) God as it were fills that space up again, and comes so as to dwell in created reality. I'm working with an idea in which God makes space in God's self. This is for me a much more Trinitarian idea – that God makes space within the interweaving relationships of the divine life so that there is not a space outside God but space in God. So any notion that God only finally comes to dwell in created reality clashes with the problem that God will be with us. Moltmann has a kind of a view of a provisional dwelling. (Fiddes, 2016: Interview)

It is important to note how Fiddes is deeply rooted in panentheism, whereas Moltmann is more of mild proponent of this view:

The Shekinah for example that appeared in the OT temple and then finally the incarnation in Christ - these are God dwelling with us, and at times he wants to speak of a dwelling in the world and a dwelling with humanity, but it's not the final dwelling. So these become provisional or antecedent of a final dwelling. I find this unsatisfactory, because is it a dwelling or isn't it a dwelling? (Fiddes, 2016: Interview)

To Fiddes it is an either-or situation. Either one believes that God is totally and wholly dwelling in this world and the world in Him, or one rejects that belief. He cannot theologically reconcile with Moltmann's view of the periodically indwelling of God in the world, like the incarnation. It is important to observe that in the panentheistic model God is totally dwelling in this world, to such an extent that this world is affecting, and thus changing God. This is problematic to Moltmann, who wants to cling to the importance of God's immanence. During our interview, Fiddes explained the difference in their points of view as follows:

... there's a profound difference I think between me and Moltmann. He is still working with two spheres of reality. God's reality and the world's reality, somehow there's a kind of movement from the one to the other rather than an interpenetration that I deal with. And at times, Moltmann does speak of that kind of mutuality. He says that some relations are reciprocal and some unilateral. It's the unilateral ones that I'm

not happy about... and I do think it leads to a lot of inconsistency in what he wants to say about the activity of God in the world, the church, in the power of the Spirit and so on. If God is not dwelling in the world, how can you have the church in the power of the Spirit? (Fiddes, 2016: Interview)

In the context of theodicy and God, I tend to agree more with Moltmann than with Fiddes in his critical analysis of the theological paradigm. Considering the classical view, that an immanent God is crucial in theodicy, it is not clear what the problem is with panentheism in theology, as it appears there is much to agree with. Gulley (2011:240) observes that “God cannot exist without the physical universe, nor can the world exist without God, for there is a mutual interdependent relationship between them”. The question is, how does this view weigh against more traditional and reformed theology? When Gulley analysed God within this perspective, God is not God. God is not “a Creator, but a director... He is not sovereign over the world but works with the world. He is not independent but dependent upon the world. God is not unchanging, but changing. He is not infinite but finite. He is not absolutely perfect, but growing toward perfection” (Gulley, 2011:239).

Does a more traditional or reformed theology mean a natural acceptance of the impassibility of a God who is far removed from us? Not necessarily. Panentheism and theologies like process theology, are but a rejection and response to the classical view(s) of God as impassible and far removed from the suffering of his creation. Some elements of this theology are not only of value within theology, and specifically theodicy, but also contain elements of truth. These qualities and elements must be utilised in a more wholesome and balanced response to the classical view of the divine. One does not have to become as radical in theology as Whitehead (1929:72,73) and others, who denied the trinity as “terrifying and unprovable”. The problem with panentheism at large is it was intended to replace the classical God, but “it was merely a nonbiblical view of God attempting to replace a nonbiblical view of God”, according to Gulley (2011:240). This does not mean that there are no good elements to it. Gulley (2011) supports this notion, stating that “it was laudable to exchange a remote God for one who relates”. Thus, the question is which of the elements within panentheism can be utilised. Gulley (2011:240) suggests

that the classical view of God, as well as the views of other theologies like panentheism, should be “corrected by the relational Trinity” view. In addition, De Gruchy (2013:131) advocates that the doctrine of the ‘relational’ Trinity “rejects any dualism between the material and the spiritual on the basis of the Incarnation; it rejects pantheism and deism by asserting both God’s transcendent freedom *from the* world and God’s immanent freedom *for* its well-being, and it rejects both individualism and the submersion of identity in the collective by affirming God’s sociality and relationality”. Further, according to De Gruchy (2013), there is a clear distinction between God and His creation, as God is transcendent, and is a God feeling with his people in their suffering, the immanent God. Erickson (1998:341) acknowledges God’s immanence, while affirming that “we must at least provide contemporary Christians with a mode of thought that will make it clear that God is spiritually and metaphysically other than humans and nature”.

Among the classical scholars there had also been those who had respect for the transcendence of God, but denied that he is impassible. The reformer Martin Luther, for instance, affirmed a solid belief in God’s immanence. Another scholar who shared this belief was Ignatius. Even Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, was clear in his teachings that God, although transcendent, is near to us. Polycarp was martyred when he refused to burn incense to Ceaser and deny Christ. He stood firm in his faith, as he believed in the immanence of God and rejected the impassibility of God. Gulley (2011:231) confirms this when commenting on contemporary views by stating that “some classical scholars do have a passible God”, men like “Ignatius, Polycarp, and Luther”.

While one can respectfully disagree with the panentheistic model Fiddes subscribes to, there is much to be learned from him. In the sections to follow, aspects of his model that are of value to research in the field of theodicy will be explored.

4.2 DEATH

4.2.1 FACING THE END: DEATH

If there is one thing that is at the heart of theodicy, it is death. Schweiker quotes Irving Singer as follows: “Death is so great a problem for human beings only because it intrudes upon our search for a meaningful life” (Polkinghorne, 2000:131). According to Hauerwas (1990:150), who grapples with the end death brings to this ‘search for a meaningful life’, “death shatters our illusion that we can make do without coping”. Although as humans we have learned to cope with many things, something remains, as Hauerwas (1990:150) observes: “When we have overcome absence with phone calls, winglessness with airplanes, summer heat with air-conditioning – when we have overcome all these and much more besides, then there will abide two things with which we must cope: the evil in our hearts and death”. Thus, the question to be asked is: “How can one face death?”

CS Lewis also grappled with the reality of death and grief in his book *A Grief Observed*, to the extent of being frustrated with people who did not take death seriously. He writes:

It is hard to have patience with people who say ‘There is no death’ or ‘Death doesn’t matter’. There is death. And whatever is matters. And whatever happens has consequences, and it and they are irrevocable and irreversible. You might as well say that birth doesn’t matter.

I look up at the night sky. Is anything more certain than that in all those vast times and spaces, if I were allowed to search them, I should nowhere find her face, her voice, her touch? She died. She is dead. Is the word so difficult to learn? (1961:7)

One can sense his pain. In this pain is contained the realisation that death is the end. “She died. She is dead.” It is the end. So much can be said of death, and yet words evade the grieving, or the one trying to console. When death enters relationships, it brings relations to an end. Love ends in a sense. Life ends. The end it brings is painful. Lewis, trying to make sense of death, starts his book by describing the reality of his grief:

No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. ... At other times it feels like being mildly drunk, or concussed. There is a sort of invisible

blanket between the world and me. I find it hard to take in what anyone says" (1961:7).

Facing death has never been easy or griefless. One is hurled into the reality of death with an unexpected force from which one cannot escape. Is one ever ready for the end? 'If we just had one more moment together!', has been the wish of many. Lewis cried: "Oh my dear, my dear, come back for one moment and drive that miserable phantom away" (1961:9). But, it is the *end*.

Theology recognises the end as important. Fiddes quotes Moltmann establishing the premise of the importance of the end or things bringing an end:

... eschatology is not just an appendix to Christian doctrine, to be abandoned to the enthusiasms of fanatical sects and revolutionary groups; since eschatology is the doctrine of Christian hope and witnesses to the God of hope, it is 'the medium of Christian faith as such, the key in which everything is set...'" (2000:5)

When we speak of the end, we speak of things that will not come to an end since eschatology is hopeful, and marks the start of a new era. The end marks a new beginning. What then about the end in death? Central to the theodicy debate is the issue of death. The stark, dark and cruel reality of death can invoke deep pain, intense suffering, deep-rooted anguish, and bitterness to the point of hate – bitterness or hate towards others, self, and even God. And yet, there are crucial aspects to learn about death. Referring to Kübler-Ross's research, Carney and Long (1995:111) conclude that "the lessons of those facing *death* might teach us better how to face *life*".

Fiddes (2000), after analysing hope extensively, starts out on the hazardous path of seeking understanding in the mystery of death in the context of eschatology and theodicy. Essential to start out this much discussed and researched subject matter, is the realisation that death is one of the very few certainties of life. Fiddes (2000:67) simplifies this certainty, stating that "death cannot be escaped".

4.2.2 TAKING DEATH SERIOUSLY

Commenting on the work of Ernest Becker (1994:45), who concluded that “the denial of death” is the “source of human evil”, Ted Becker maintains that you are not helping theodicy in denying the reality of death. In addition, Janet Soskice quotes a friend who encapsulates the reality of death by stating that “from data you have come and to data you shall return” (Polkinghorne, 2000:82). She refers to science as a factor in how we understand death, because “science has proved that man is dead, that all we really are is a perceptual apparatus of a particular sort, destined for extinction” (Polkinghorne, 2000:82). Taking death seriously is in no way an easy task. Even though most people have faced the reality of death and the grief it brings, none alive has yet been dead. Fiddes (2000:12) approaches the matter of death as follows: “... any Christian view of eschatology must take the fact of death seriously, as the ‘last enemy’ that the Apostle Paul identifies”.

Taking death seriously means to come to terms with what death means. Evidently one needs to start with the end it brings. Fiddes (2000) utilises Shakespeare’s *King Lear* to illustrate this. He asks whether Shakespeare had gone too far in his ending to *King Lear*. Fiddes (2000:53) further prompts the discussion by asking why it had to end with death. Nahum Tate revised the play in 1681 to where “Cordelia escapes death”, but in doing so basically destroyed the ultimate goal and meaning of the play, which Fiddes (2000:54) describes as “a journey to absolute zero; it is the story of man reduced to nothing”. While this nothingness of death will be expounded upon by Fiddes as he progresses, his reason for utilising *King Lear* is that it “prompts us to shape our dialogue in a certain way, measuring up to the demand to look unflinchingly on the face of death” (Fiddes, 2000:71). We observe Lear’s hope in the face of the reality that “he has entered apocalypse now”, with a thing as death on his hands – “Lear with Cordelia dead upon his lap” (Fiddes, 2000:54,64). It is serious, Lear sees “what humanity is like here and now... reduced to its basic elements...” (Fiddes, 2000:64). Thus, one must take death seriously, for “death cannot be finally escaped” (Fiddes, 2000:67). This is not merely an act for entertainment, it contains great significance, as Fiddes writes in his chapter ‘Taking Death

Seriously'. He affirms that "the play moves the theologian to take a view of the status of death" (Fiddes, 2000:66).

In terms of taking death seriously, it is imperative to observe that one of Fiddes's main conclusions is the notion that death is dead. Fiddes (2000:66) maintains that "a whole range of factors prompts us to face the finality of death for human life, that is, to regard it as the end of the whole person".

According to Fiddes (2000:69), *King Lear* illustrates that the doctrine of the immortal soul is a fallacy: "King Lear with Cordelia in his arms insists that we take death seriously, rather than as a door through which an immortal soul floats unscathed. 'Look here!' he says; 'look well.' The end of the play thus makes the theologian enquire about the status of death in God's creation." In his book *Theology, Death and Dying*, Anderson (1986:58) comes to the conclusion that the "theological problem with theories of the immortality of the soul is that death is not taken seriously as a limit placed upon human persons as embodied souls and ensouled bodies". Anderson (1986:58) has a problem with the inherent logic that this 'embodied soul' is "that of the continuity of the self", which is in direct contrast to "human nature bounded by mortality and dependent upon God for the gift of immortal life through resurrection from the dead" (Anderson, 1986:59). Towards the end of this section it will become clear why it is not only crucial to grasp this contrast, but also to understand which is the better theological view.

Fiddes disagrees with many theologians in this field who believe that there is a natural transition from one life phase to a next life phase through death, which actually brings an end. Fiddes, unlike Richard Abanes (1996:231), who claims that death serves "as a gateway to blessed existence", is quite adamant that death is not just the "cracking of an outer shell of flesh so that the butterfly of an eternal soul can emerge" (Fiddes, 2000:66). Bloesch (2004:126), however, strongly disagrees and purports that "at death we fall not into nothingness but into the hands of the living God". Fiddes (2000) asks us to look logically at this question, first just from a pure biology perspective, and then theologically. Simply put, "the modern biological view of psychosomatic unity" makes it impossible for a dualistic person to exist (Fiddes, 2000:66,67). On the other

hand, Abanes (1996:9) views death as “when the soul leaves the body”. Or, as Bloesch (2004:126) proposes, death “marks not the end of life but the transition from this life to the life to come”. Fiddes’s (2000:67) belief that the notion of a dualistic person is beyond the bounds of possibility, corresponds perfectly “with the Hebrew understanding of the human being as a body animated by ‘life’ or ‘breath’”. For that reason, Fiddes (2000:66) terms death as the “end of the whole person”. In contrast with this stance is “the Greek view of a soul imprisoned within a body” (Fiddes, 2000:67), which creates an either-or situation: Either a person is a whole being, meaning if you are dead you are dead; or a person is a dualistic person, meaning that while you are dead you are actually alive elsewhere. Fiddes (2000:67) explains as follows why the latter view is favoured by most: “The Hebrew view of a human person knows nothing of the dualism between soul and body that Christian tradition has absorbed from Platonism.” Since Fiddes (2000) claims that this view had been adopted from the Hellenistic tradition, the question remains what a Christian’s view should be. Further in this section, as well as in the next section, it will be revealed why it is crucial in the realm of theodicy to have a clear understanding of death. In support of the Hellenistic view, Isak Burger (2009: 133) explains: “Die oomblik wanneer jy sterf, vind die skeiding tussen liggaam, siel en gees plaas.” (The moment you die, the separation between body, soul and spirit goes into effect.) Abanes (1996:225) appeals to Scripture to affirm this view of death, stating that “according to Scripture, a person is dead when the spirit/soul leaves the body (Gen 35:18).” In explaining this Scripture, Abanes (1996:226) continues as follows: “An individual dies when this ‘inner person or personality’ departs from the body. Genesis 35:18 reads: ‘And it came about as her soul (Rachel’s) was departing (for she died), that she named him Ben-oni’”. Thus, many theologians subscribe to the Platonic thought, and some theologians, like Abanes, even try to justify it biblically. Yet, while this seemingly convincing statement is based on Scripture, Fiddes (2000:67) also appeals to Scripture: “According to the Old Testament, the *nephesh* or ‘life’ (often translated ‘soul’) may certainly be distinguished from the ‘flesh’ (*basar*), but not as an independent entity, or ‘ghost in the machine’ that inhabits the body and could exist outside it as a personal consciousness.”

The soul that leaves the body, as Abanese and Burger suggest, is but the *nephesh*, according to Fiddes's explanation. It is firstly imperative to discern the distinct difference between the *life*, which is the breath, and the *flesh* of a human being. Secondly, not one of these, the *life* or *flesh*, is an independent entity, which makes it impossible for either to survive or function without the other. Gulley (1998:285) agrees with this interpretation of Scripture and adds that Genesis 2:7 should be utilised to illustrate this necessary concept of life and death in a person: "Death is merely the reverse of creation. In creation God joined the dust of the ground with his life-giving breath, and the first human being became a living person." Philo offers an alternative view on Genesis 2:7. De Boer (1988:100) encapsulates Philo's interpretation that this *nephesh* is "soul of the soul" and claims that the "earthly human being is of both 'mortal and immortal nature'" in the sense that the body is mortal and this soul immortal. Fiddes (2000:67) affirms Gulley's reasoning by stating that "at death the *nephesh* is...breathed out, or poured out like water that has been spilt on the ground and cannot be gathered up again (Job 11:20, Isaiah 53:12, 2 Samuel 14:14)".

There is an *end* to life at death, according to Fiddes, who uses Scripture to not purport this idea, but to establish it. Fiddes (2000:67) explains what happens as the life, the *nephesh*, is released from the body: "Having lost all the vitality, purpose and emotions represented by the *nephesh*, the body is in the very weakest state and is thought to inhabit Sheol as a kind of shadow ('shade') of its former self." Fiddes later defines Sheol as "exhausted bodies...in Sheol, the land of the grave." Fiddes (2000:66,67) continues this study of the Scriptures to affirm that "death cannot be finally escaped", since death is the "end of the whole person". He concludes that there had been an evolution in the Hebrew faith – from viewing the person as just dead, the end; to there will be an afterlife, but only after the resurrection. Until then the dead is dead. "This history of Jewish thought also shows that death could not be escaped by some kind of survival capsule; it could only be conquered – by resurrection" (Fiddes, 2000:68). Thus, in the one paradigm, death is just a transition, in the other, death is serious as it brings end.

Bringing this thought to a climax, Fiddes (2000:68) compares the deaths of Jesus and Socrates: “Socrates urbanely discussing philosophy with his friends while the poison was taking effect, Jesus in a bloody sweat in the garden and crying out on the cross.” Why would there be such a difference in their ways of dying? The difference lies in the perception of death and what it holds. The paradigm of Jesus and Socrates differed widely. “Socrates thought of himself as stepping into immortality, his soul released from the prison-house of his body, while Jesus as a Jew could only feel the onset of death as an attack upon life” (Fiddes, 2000:68). Death is not our friend. In theodicy this becomes quite indicative. “The finality of death can thus be felt... as ‘the last enemy’” (Fiddes, 2000:68). If death is a friend, something to be desired, most of the arguments concerning theodicy would be nullified. Theodicy only makes sense in the senselessness it wants to address, when death is viewed as enemy. Moreover, death can only be viewed as enemy when it is taken seriously, as death to the whole person, and not just a transition from one life form to another.

Besides the fact that death must be taken seriously in theodicy, it is crucial to understand that the dead is dead, and not alive. This understanding will affect our view of the promise of a suffering God, which is life for us in our deadness. The doctrine of justification, the great Reformation principle brought to light by Luther, that the ‘just shall live by faith’, lays one’s accomplishments to waste. Fiddes (2000:60) explains death as “the image of unclothing, or stripping bare; humanity is to be reduced to a state of nakedness”. This explanation of death also indicates our finite condition: Without God we are not only suffering senselessly, but are dead in a state of nakedness. Upon my question to Fiddes regarding why he believed the whole person dead, as it didn’t correspond with his faith tradition, he quite profoundly reminded me that “that sort of a thing was said by Eberhard Jüngel in the Lutheran tradition in justification theology. What justifies us? God! And, therefore, we can’t rely on anything within ourselves, including an immortal soul. That is my reason for not having this view of an immortal soul that separates from the body. It’s actually self-justification” (Fiddes, 2016: Interview). This is extremely profound. Bailey (1979:27) affirms that immortality only belongs to God, referring to immortality “As a quality intrinsic only to divine beings which distinguishes them from humans: ‘Not

everything is within man's reach, for the human race is not immortal' (Eccles. 17:30); God 'who alone has immortality' (1 Tim 6:16)". Anderson (1986:58) asserts that "the concept of immortality as a quality of life intrinsic to human persons, however it is conceived, strikes at the heart of our authentic humanity". The very notion of an immortal soul, or death just being a transition to a next life form, would mean self-justification, since God is not needed in that equation. In everything one must rely on God, especially so to have life. Trusting in God alone is the principle of justification. This brings us back to promise. Why would one rely on the promise of God's presence if one relies on oneself, even in death?

A further question which arises is: What is God's promise in a context where the dead is dead? Take heed of Fiddes's summary of this, and note his conclusion:

And so far as life beyond death – it is a non-life in the Hebrew view, a mere shadow of the self, eking out its existence in a non-meaningful way because if there's no more nephesh there's no more vitality. So yes, I do think for all these reasons, and the pastoral reason that death is felt to be actually a decisive event, death is the end of the whole human being. BUT we hope for the resurrection. God will recreate us. (Fiddes, 2016: Interview)

Death is simply the absence of life and not a transition to another life form as Gulley (1998:285) observes, "no immortal substance lurks within the mortal. Each individual came alive as a holistic person. Death is merely the reverse of creation". Death is the end of the "whole human being".

Only in the light of the promise of the resurrection can we accept our mortality. As a whole person we are mortal and totally dependent on the divine. Bailey (1979:109,110) summarises this as follows:

... to be a whole person and theologically mature is to bring the three developmental curves (physiological, psychological, and theological) into phase: to accept mortality, to surrender one's life freely to the Sovereign of life and death. Therefore, death becomes more than a biological event. It may be the occasion for one's boldest act, the ultimate renunciation of egocentricity in favor of theocentricity.

Facing death and taking it seriously, is to accept our mortal condition and entrust our helpless condition to the divine. Justification is not only a theological term we employ within our semantics and reasoning, but an eternal principle in

the realm of faith. By faith we affirm that which God will do for us and in us, since we are helpless within ourselves. Moltmann (1993:208) observes this helpless condition as “the dead (are) cut off from God from living communion with him”. Yet, we can have faith in God and His promise, since our faith is rooted in the “death and resurrection of Jesus Christ”, “where death will be swallowed up in victory, and where mortals will ... share the immortality of God through the divine Sonship and resurrected humanity of Jesus Christ” (Anderson, 1986:59). Faith is essential for receiving this promise. De Boer (1988:186) supports this by stating that “the believer is someone who places complete trust in God in the midst of and in the face of the evidently continuing hegemony of sin and death. The believer knows in faith that these powers have lost their rulership to the reigning Christ, despite appearances to the contrary”.

4.2.3 ESCHATOLOGICAL PROMISE OF IDENTITY

In the previous section the view was proposed that the “soul” has no immortality and dies. This poses the problem of what type of afterlife one will one face. Would it be one without identity? Does this do away with promise and hope? Traditionally, theologians like Gehman (1999:252) suggested that the period between death and resurrection is an “intermediate state” and that in this state the dead still exist, since at death “the righteous ascend immediately to heaven and the wicked descend immediately to hell”. Fiddes (2000:79) acknowledges this theological dichotomy; however, he suggests that

... the break between death and resurrection, however brief, seems to be a gulf in which identity will be swallowed up forever unless there is some kind of continuing link between the old person and the new.

While it was shown in the previous section, and above, that Fiddes claims that the dead stay in their graves until the resurrection, he writes in a later work that “all the saints are alive in Christ” (Fiddes, 2014:11). Is he really contradicting himself here, or are we misunderstanding his intention? He continues that “the church on earth is one with those who now are a great cloud of witnesses” (Fiddes, 2014:11). Is this cloud of witnesses the dead who are not in their graves, as he asserts in *The Promised End*, but in heaven, well and alive?

Fiddes affirms this by stating that “these saints are not inactive for their prayers rise up to God... together they sing a new song” (Fiddes, 2014:11). Upon my question (during our interview) regarding this apparent contradiction in theology, his response was to the point and logical:

You can only speak of death and the hereafter in relation to God. We can't speak of it in terms of our own existence. It's all in God and while we are nothing of and by ourselves, we are something because God makes us something. God obviously thinks we are very valuable or God wouldn't have made us in the first place, and indeed God made God's self vulnerable. (Fiddes, 2016: Interview)

Thus, death in itself has no meaning, nor does any type of afterlife. Hence, we cannot interpret death in the way we want to or think it might be. God is the only barometer and reality. Since God made us, we are valuable, and so is our existence. It is in this light that Fiddes clarifies the apparent inconsistency in his belief that, although our existence is valuable, at death the whole person ends.

I do think because God is making, maintaining, standing in for us, representing us, that we can speak meaningfully of communion with the dead. The Communion of Saints. And we can also speak meaningfully of prayer with and for the saints, so long as it is always in God. Where we go wrong is where we look for direct communication, where we get messages from the dead. (Fiddes, 2016: Interview)

This interpretation makes sense in the context of Fiddes's view that we dwell in God. His explanation entails that even while we are dead we are still a reality within God. Fiddes makes it clear that this does not mean that there is some consciousness that is alive, but God keeps the dead a reality until the resurrection where he will recreate them. Fiddes maintains the stance assumed in *The Promised End* where he writes: “Death also puts an end to personal identity”, which means there is “no afterlife in a meaningful sense at all” (Fiddes, 2001:231). For Fiddes there are no relationships in death as there are in life, and for the triune God “death becomes the most extreme point of relationlessness” (Fiddes, 1988:201).

However, Fiddes believes that the focus in the tragedy of death within the context of theodicy is the promise of the resurrection.

The New Testament hope for eternal life is in the resurrection of the body and personality together, when God acts to conquer

death. Death itself then cannot be our 'final concern' in the way that Heidegger proposes; but we must agree with John Macquarrie and Paul Tillich that facing the shock of nothingness of death will alert us to God who is our final concern, and it is openness to the God of promise that will bring an integration to a broken existence. (Fiddes, 2000:12)

As seen in the statement above, Fiddes is of the opinion that theodicy has the potential to draw us towards God when we see that without him we are nothing. Death strips us of all the layers of the artificial and virtual reality of our very 'broken existence'. Thus, the answer to death within theodicy is the promise of a God who 'acts to conquer death'. Still, there remains a gap, as it is not yet clear what, how, and where the person is between death and resurrection.

Fiddes (2000) offers an alternative to the "Intermediate State" suggested by Gehman (1999:252), proposing a continuing link within the triune God. He explains that our identity is contained within God, whether in life or death, and because of this, God can recreate us after death at the promised resurrection. Fiddes (2000:99) states:

... we can trust that "I" will be the same person with the same life story, not just because God identifies us but because God has preserved our identity within God's own self ...

This is not superficial theology, trying to conjure up some images of dislocated souls as answer to death, but consistent and logical theology that provides hope when death occurs, by the very promise of God and his life and presence imparted at the resurrection. The dead person's identity is maintained within God, and at the resurrection God will recreate the person. Fiddes explains this view as follows:

I think that between death and the new creation God maintains our identity, so we can say we are with God and in God. In fact, we dwell in God. Dwelling seems to be an important metaphor here. God's maintaining of our identity is a very real maintenance, for when God does this that seems to me to be full of life and vitality, not meaning you have an immortal soul, but it has to do with God. (Fiddes, 2016: Interview)

Does this entail that the dead will be angels playing harps with nobody recognising them? Not according to Fiddes:

In the resurrection we will have a spiritual body. But still bodily life. God is committed to bodies, as God made a physical

universe, for God is committed to that what we believe to be a new creation. But again, we can only speak of this in imagery, for we are in the old creation. So, I would simply say it is more appropriate to say that after death our identity and existence will be maintained by God, than to speak of a soul. (Fiddes, 2016: Interview)

Thus, when God recreates the dead at the resurrection, 'death will be swallowed up in victory' as he 'makes everything new'. While the dead will receive spiritual bodies, it will still be 'bodily life', according to Fiddes (2016). It is still earth. It is still creation. Yet, it will be new and in another dimension. It will be life as we know and love it, with those we love. This is all part of the promise. Furthermore, the resurrected will have the same identity as the one that had died, as Kelsey (2009:560) affirms: "What continues is personal identity. It is the same basic personal identity in the new creation that it was in the old."

God is not only present in all our sufferings in the here and now, he will also be present in the future, when he will rid creation of death and suffering. In the first chapter of *The Promised End*, where Fiddes (2000:55) tries to theologially make sense of *end*, even in the context of literature and human thought, he explains that for "Christian doctrine about the nature of eschatology: we shall need to consider the end as organizing the whole, the end as expressing a desired world, the end as dispersing meaning and the end as opening hope". Therefore, in the thought and mind of God, the end, our theodicy as a whole, calls out to inherent desires and wishes for meaning as it moves to the end as 'opening hope'.

4.3 PROMISE

Upon my question (during our interview) regarding promise being fixed or open, in the context of the search of promise within theodicy, Fiddes related his viewpoint in short.

I make a distinction between the reality of the promise and the content of the promise. The promises that God will overcome evil and will have a new creation are closed for me in the sense that it's certain! In terms of faith certainty! Not logically certain, but

that we believe that God will overcome all evil. (Fiddes, 2016: Interview)

Fiddes is therefore convinced that God's promise is sure and certain. Moreover, the difference between promise as fixed and promise as open is quite simple. The reality of the promise is fixed, whereas the content, with such a creative God, is open. Furthermore, Fiddes believes in the certainty of God's promise regarding the theodical situation here on earth, and people fearing that all life might end soon. He explains this as follows:

I don't think in my vision of God and the world that everything could hit disaster, and that the world and universe could break up and end in complete dissolution because I think when you believe in God at all you must believe that God will bring about a new creation. That God will fulfil God's purpose in Creation. (Fiddes, 2016: Interview)

For the purposes of this study it is crucial to determine the promise and hope to be found within theodicy, for if there is no promise, theodicy at its core is futile. If promise cannot inject hope and bring about meaning and sense, theodicy has lost its meaning. Fiddes (2000) finds this promise in a suffering God who will bring about the promise. He suggests that "... we shall need to think about how a suffering God might not be a helpless God, but victorious over evil through weakness. There can be no theodicy without an end to evil" (Fiddes, 2000:154).

In the face of evil, humanity needs a God who suffers with us, as this promise instills hope. In the context of this promise, Fiddes (2000:155) asks the following relevant question: "What light, then, is cast on the problem of evil by affirming that God suffers with humanity?" He answers his own question, maintaining that there are three kinds of theodicies which help us find comfort in a suffering God, namely a theodicy of consolation, a theodicy of story, and a theodicy of protest (Fiddes, 2000).

A grasp of these three kinds of theodicies may be crucial in the search for meaning in suffering with regard to the promising God, which is addressed in the next and final chapter. Fiddes (2000:155) phrases this search for meaning as follows: "How does it help us practically in our experience of suffering to say that God suffers too?"

An exploration of the three kinds of theodicies suggested by Fiddes, which follows in the next section, should enable us to comprehend and utilise them in our search for meaning in suffering.

4.3.1 A THEODICY OF CONSOLATION

This type of theodicy is not interested in justifying God by satisfying questions to make sense of suffering, or indicating that “God provides some sort of divine self-justification in the face of evil” (Moltmann, 1994: 279). Rather, it is focused on consoling the hurt and bereaved. Fiddes (2000:155) argues that it is “consoling to those who suffer to know that God is with them, that suffering has not cut them off from God”. This theodicy enables the type of outcome searched for in this study, namely to establish that “the God who is with them also suffers alongside them” (Fiddes, 2000:155). This is a presence of promise – God himself with the victim “within” (Fiddes, 2000:155).

This theodicy is therapeutically consoling in its effort to comfort the hurting. It directly influences the “God images within belief systems” (Louw, 2012:197), which has a direct bearing on the mood and behaviour of the hurting. It is more “a picture of God” than a “rational argument” (Fiddes, 2000:155). Our belief systems, according to Louw (2012:197), “are deeply determined by God images, and the conceptualization of God and the connectedness to the ultimate of life”. How we view God, especially in a theodical situation of suffering, impacts the whole person. Louw (2012:197) affirms that the crux aspect in this testing of faith has to do with our perception of whether God is keeping his promise or not, as he puts it: “Within Christian spirituality the core issue within faith is the faithfulness of God and the expression of God’s will”. Louw further maintains that this core questioning of God challenges his threefold promise: 1) “covenantal grace: the promise I will be your God”; 2) “a living presence: I am there”; and 3) “vicarious suffering on behalf... of the people of God” (Louw, 2012:197). These God images must be addressed, and can be addressed in a theodicy where the sufferer can observe that this God is keeping His promise of presence and co-suffering.

Fiddes explains the reason for his proposed theodicy of consolation by saying that it “may in the end be more convincing to sufferers than any formal theodicy can be” (2000:155). The empirical significance of this theodicy is that it bears pragmatic value in its attempt to help ease the pain within the situation. Not by words, or the correct theology, but by the simple belief that God is present with the sufferer within the situation. Within the reasoning of the hurting, it is natural to feel that God stands aloof, leaving the sufferer alone in the painful situation. In this mindset the suffering one who stands alone is the victim of an all-powerful God. God is directly blamed for the pain and situation. However, in a theodicy of consolation, God is presented as a Comforter and “Co-sufferer”, as termed by Migliore (2004:132). Soelle (1975:44) affirms this view, stating that “People in our society take pain as a fate to which they and others have fallen prey”. Undoubtedly the notion that God is also subject to this ‘fate’ of pain must have an enormous impact on that kind of reasoning.

Fiddes (2000:155,156) further illustrates the above by quoting Moltmann’s argument “that ‘the Shema of Israel and the Lord’s prayer were prayed in Auschwitz’, and that ‘there would be no theology after Auschwitz’... if there had been no ‘theology in Auschwitz’”. Making sense of suffering can only occur if one has experienced the comfort of God within the suffering. This calls for the belief that God is present in the senseless situation. Some theologians may raise questions regarding the grounds and rationale for backing this theodicy of consolation. They might see it as a theodicy created just to soothe the pain.

Fiddes (2000:156), however, is quite adamant that there are sufficient grounds for this theodicy, even without considering its pragmatic results. He finds these grounds in the biblical book of Job where “consolation” is offered to the sufferer. God has not left Job, but instead “God is still with Job” (Fiddes, 2000:156). This is no philosophy, but the reality of Job’s suffering. He experienced God as a presence with him within in the suffering, although he could not discern nor decipher the reason for his suffering. “What satisfies Job in the end is not that he has solved the mystery of suffering, but simply that he has met God” (Fiddes, 2000:156). What gives sense to Job’s senseless suffering is not the

comprehension why the evil befell him, but the presence of God that became more vivid as God broke the silence and spoke to him. Although Job took issue with God in his interaction with his friends and reasoned that his suffering is unfair, and that God should end it, the moment God made His presence more real and gave Job a picture of himself, Job was satisfied. Weaver (2013:30) concludes that “God does not answer Job’s question about suffering”, but rather provides him a view of reality that “reframes the whole dialogue”. Or, in the words of Komp (2001:109), “Job needed beliefs” about God to see that we cannot make God “into our domesticated pet”.

Fiddes (2000:156) further explains what satisfies Job in this senseless situation, where even his friends are against him, and are insensitive to the pain he is experiencing: “When God appears to him, he repents of trying to force God into a corner, it is enough simply to know that God is with him, that God has not abandoned him.” Job sees that God is with him, and has never left him. The presence of God is enough for Job, since he is not alone anymore. While before he wanted the suffering to end, he can now face the pain, since someone bigger than his hurt is with him in the very painful and senseless situation. He is no longer suffering alone. This profound realisation leads Job to exclaim, as Fiddes (2000:156) quotes Job 42:5-6: “I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you ...”. This scene from the book of Job portrays the monumental role played by the God image within Job’s mind. The very moment Job’s God image was reframed, his whole attitude towards his present suffering changed. Instead of being focused on his painful situation, which he had wanted to end, he found comfort in the knowledge that God was with him.

While Fiddes (2000:156) acknowledges that the story in the book of Job does not provide adequate grounds for a complete ‘theodicy of a suffering God’, he argues that this story is “the foundation” for a such a theodicy. Within the theodicy of consolation, which leads to a theodicy of a suffering God, there are crucial elements to be utilised in the final chapter where a proposal is searched for and constructed, tying theodicy to God’s presence within the hurting situation. The fact that God affirms that he is present with Job, opens the door to the presence of a suffering God in the sense that “God is present in the

deepest sense of sharing Job's pain" (Fiddes, 2000:156). The implication of this is quite profound. Job's reaction demonstrates that he did not only experience God's presence, but in a deeper way also God's recognition of and sharing in his pain. The question arises as to how Job observes this about God. Thiele (1988:131) suggests that "Job's search for God shines like a bright thread through all the troubled words of his nine speeches". Moreover, Thiele (1988:131) asserts that "Job was reaching out for a greater understanding of God". Job was in search of a theodicy of consolation. God showed enough evidence of comprehending Job's pain, that Job could appreciate God's presence within his situation, and not feel left alone in a senseless situation. No wonder Johannes Hempel (1938:73) refers to this revelation of God in the book of Job as "the struggle for the last truth about God".

Thus, it has been established that a pragmatic approach to the theodicy of consolation does not only add value to the theodicy question, but also provides solace in senseless situations that hurt the innocent. Confronted with a hurtful situation, the consoler is often left desperate, seeking for appropriate words and ways to comfort. The basic question of a father who came to me for counselling after his infant daughter had drowned in their swimming pool was: "How could God do such a thing?". How does one answer that? It depends on the theodicy one subscribes to. In the theodicy of consolation, Fiddes (2000:156) agrees, one might not have an answer, but one does have a response: "God is suffering this with you".

Before proceeding to the next section, the difference between pain and suffering should be established. These terms are not employed loosely in this study. According to Hick (1966:318), "Pain is... a specific physical sensation", whereas "suffering ... is a mental state which may be as complex as human life itself".

4.3.2 A THEODICY OF STORY

Very closely related to the theodicy of consolation is the theodicy of story. This theodicy is "a more modern version" (Fiddes, 2000:157), but still a pragmatic

one, with no real argument for or comprehension of 'why'. It is rather a theodicy of identifying with others who have survived it. Thus, instead of focusing on the reasons for the senseless situation, the grieving person is inspired by others who had experienced similar situations. We often observe broadcasts of mass shootings in the United States of America (USA), with reporters seeking for possible motives for the attack. However, as of late (even in the event of natural disasters like hurricanes), many reporters and journalists are switching to a more pragmatic approach, trying to inspire hope by focusing on the heroic acts of ordinary men and women. The indications are that this approach may have resulted in a direct increase in viewers, since people, when they cannot make sense, do not want to be stuck in a senseless situation.

With the theodicy of story, "an appeal is simply made to the power of stories of others who have suffered" (Fiddes, 2000:157). This is a powerful method of helping someone who cannot make sense. The sufferer is not alone in the suffering, since he or she can relate to someone who had been in the same type of situation and had made it through. Yet, it remains to be explained how this theodicy of story gives any meaning or sense to a senseless situation of suffering, bearing in mind that "suffering is not on the stage: it is real, not in silk and lace", as Simon (1967:67) notes. To Fiddes (2000:157) it is simply to "place alongside our story some greater story, a story of suffering which does have meaning". Hence, in the sufferer's immediate context of a painful, senseless situation, he or she can insert someone else's similar story that had a meaningful outcome or hopeful ending.

As was shown in Chapter Three, hope is established by promise. Thus, the story of a similar situation that had positive outcome or some sense, acts as a promise which inspires hope in the dire senseless situation. Fiddes (2000:157) quotes Soelle to establish the power of story in theodicy:

Those who suffer in vain and without respect depend on those who suffer in accord with justice. If there were no one who said, 'I die, but shall live' then there would be no hope for those who suffer mute and devoid of hoping.

This is a very profound statement. How would one cope in a painful situation if there is no example of somebody or anybody else going through the same

situation? Why would people find sense in listening to sad music when they are sad? Research shows that people who are depressed or sad indeed want to listen to depressing music, as we will see shortly. Even if some research encourages more uplifting and positive music, all research agrees that the sad and depressed mostly tend to listen to the type of music that expresses their mood. The most obvious reason for that is that the sufferer wants to identify with someone who can understand. The artist who creates sad music seems to understand the sadness of the sufferer, who identifies with the sad music, and tries to find not only meaning, but also him- or herself in the music.

A research study on ‘adaptive and maladaptive attraction to negative emotions in music’ (see: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1029864913478305>) found that the music ‘helps release sadness’ and helps people in a state of sadness to find and understand themselves, so that they ‘can relate to sadness’. In similar fashion, another study called ‘Memorable Experiences with Sad Music – Reasons, Reactions and Mechanisms of Three Types of Experiences’ (see: <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0157444>), determined that “people like to listen to music that mirrors the tone of their current life circumstances – the songs act as a sort of tuning fork for our own situations, and they resonate with us” (see: <http://www.sciencealert.com/new-research-reveals-the-pain-and-pleasure-of-listening-to-sad-music>).

Fiddes (2000:157) views it as an aid to help interpret a situation. He suggests that “This is why we like to go to the theatre and watch the tragedies of Shakespeare; they give us a story in which we can find ourselves, by which we can interpret our lives” (Fiddes, 2000:157). This is also illustrated in the movie industry, where, except for comedies which help people escape from their painful (or) senseless situations, dramas and romances are the most popular, since people can identify with them and try to interpret their own situations accordingly. This would explain why so many single, depressed people, who never find true love, watch romances. In that moment when the two lovers fall into each other’s arms and kiss, the sufferer places him- or herself in that situation, and finds meaning. Oliver, who conducted three studies in her

research titled “Exploring the Paradox of the Enjoyment of Sad Films Authors” (see: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1468-2958.1993.tb00304.x/abstract;jsessionid=D120DA8490288B159D5E6759744780B6.f02t02>) confirms that the viewer tries to identify with the film and thus finds meaning.

Yet, the question remains whether there are sufficient grounds for a theodicy of story to exist. Fiddes (2000:157,158) argues in the affirmative when he tries to draw the parallel with Jesus who depends on an Old Testament story. He reasons that Jesus on the cross, in the midst of his suffering, “recalls the little story of the righteous sufferer in Psalm 22, and out of his silence he speaks the words from that story: ‘My God, why have you forsaken me?’” Hence, in his suffering and pain on the cross Christ depended on a story, and even used it verbally, which Fiddes argues provides adequate grounds to use a theodicy of story. The expression Christ uttered here, ‘My God, why have you forsaken me?’, is at the heart of theodicy. These words are not spoken from a vacuum, but instead from an Old Testament story that Christ can relate to. Some other righteous sufferer had also felt forsaken, and spoke it to God. In similar fashion Christ spoke his anguish, “his experience of death”, to God (Fiddes, 2000:158).

Yet, rather than just understanding this as something Christ experienced, one needs to see the impact of his story on people who suffer. Fiddes (2000:158) draws this parallel by explaining that “the story of the cross of Jesus itself becomes a paradigm that we can place alongside our suffering, to see what meaning emerges”. Not only is this a story we can find meaning in, this is a whole new dimension of paradigm that shows a reality that will impact our own story. As we judge our story in the light of the story of Christ on the cross, real meaning will emerge. The cross of Christ is what gives our senseless suffering meaning. Fiddes (2000:158) expounds this as follows: “... the death of Jesus, experienced in the moment of its happening as apparently senseless and useless, ‘acquires a meaning’ with the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, so that we can perceive by faith in this event nothing less than *the story of God*”.

When Jesus hang on the cross, it was an apparent senseless suffering to His followers. When He died it also seemed senseless. No-one could comprehend His meaningless death – until the Sunday morning when He rose from the grave

and appeared to His followers. That is why Fiddes says the story 'acquires a meaning' in the resurrection of Christ. Looking at Christ's death it appears senseless, but seeing His resurrection, one is confounded with the importance of His death. Now the meaning emerges. This is the story of God. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself" (Fiddes, 2000:158). Weaver (2013:10) suggests that, "Apart from God, the Cross is merely the wicked end to the life of Jesus ... With God, the Cross is the scandal that raises the question: who is this misunderstood Messiah, the One who must suffer for the redemption of all, the one through whom suffering and dying reveal new possibilities of meaning, purpose, and new life in the face of human meaninglessness, purpose cut short, and mortality?" As the cross brings meaning to God, and specifically the triune God (as will be seen later), it is God who gives the cross meaning, and thus brings meaning to our senseless suffering. This meaning is not meaning in a vacuum, as Simon (1967:85) declares, for "this meaning... is perceptible only to faith. It is grounded in the belief that God has himself entered human history in the sacrifice of Jesus".

What makes the story of Christ on the cross so astounding is that it is a story of suffering with meaning. Fiddes (2000:158) explains: "Beyond all human stories we find that the suffering of God in the cross of Jesus has a purpose and a plot, and from this climactic point we can also read the story of God's suffering in the world before and after the cross". Seeing that Jesus took our pain and suffering on the cross, with reference to Isaiah Chapter 53, our suffering became His suffering; hence, God suffering in the cross of Christ shows us a suffering God, suffering for and with us in our suffering – even today. Therefore, the story of the cross does not only give impetus to our suffering, but also gives value and meaning to it – it brings promise. Fiddes (2000:158) explains as follows how it gives meaning and value: "In this story God has an aim in view, to transform human life by the power of sacrificial love, and to bring resurrection life out of the worst kind of death". The story of the cross is not just comparable to any story of meaning, it is the story of meaning, it is *promise*.

By this story of promise, God can give meaning to our lives and suffering. Even if we die there's meaning, since we will partake in the resurrection life to live

forever. The cross changes and alters our senseless suffering and situations into meaningful stories, by the “God of promise, whom even death cannot rob of his due but who must attain his due beyond death”, as Moltmann (1993:209) remarks.

Fiddes (2000:158) suggests a way to cope with senseless suffering through the story of the cross of Christ. “Telling the story of the suffering of God might then help us to find a path through our suffering, to enable us to use suffering in a way that will enhance life and overcome evil.” Thus, through the story of the cross of Christ, one can utilise one’s suffering to regain meaning in life. Observing the way in which Christ brings the suffering God into one’s own suffering is a way of learning to cope with suffering. An even a higher sphere of spirituality and meaningfulness for the seeker in this journey is that of considering one’s suffering as serving a purpose to the suffering God. This is not where God lets one suffer, or the theodicy that God has the intention of a divine goal with one’s suffering. Simply put by Fiddes (2000:158), “We can choose to make our sufferings serve the sufferings of God, or as one New Testament text puts it, to ‘complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions’ (Col 1:24)”. As we suffer, we can suffer with meaning – in the living recognition of the suffering God in the cross of Christ, because of His love for us. This love is not to be confused with self-regard. In this matter Weaver (2013:12) quotes Gagey, who states that “the cross of the Resurrected one announces that if it is possible to live, this is not to be done as goal to be attained... nor out of duty... but solely out of love. This is so because love does not give itself as an objective to be attained but rather as a reality supporting us and making us live.” The cross is not just another way of approaching theodicy, another story one can identify with. It is supposed to be the centerpiece of theodical approach and argument. Scott (2015:167) argues that “as God’s definitive response to evil, the cross takes on central importance in Christian theodicy”. In response to the question of what is so integral to the cross that can be so vital to theodicy, Scott (2015:167) explains that “on the cross, God suffers with, from, and for humanity”.

As in the case of the theodicy of consolation, we must ask ourselves how this theodicy of story will be of value, not only to ourselves, but also to others. How does this theodicy of story equip one to endure pain when one is captured in senseless suffering? How does a theodicy of story provide promise? In this regard Fiddes (2000:158) advises as follows:

The story of the suffering of God which reaches its greatest height and depth in the cross of Jesus may then help to give words to those who are struck dumb by suffering, may help them to start speaking about what they are feeling and enduring, even if at first they simply cry in protest at the unfairness of it all.

Moltmann (1993:143) connects the cross of Christ and the God of promise by stating that the “life, work, death and resurrection of Jesus are... but in the categories of expectation that are appropriate to the God of promise”. This means that we need to observe that the promise within theodicy, where there is a suffering God who suffers with you, can break through the utter depths of loneliness, and enable the sufferer to express him- or herself on the journey of finding meaning. This is quite crucial in the process of suffering, for where there is no expression of the situation, there cannot be actual grasp of it either.

A sufferer in anguish and desperation may shout blamefully at God in hate and call God different names, which could cause the pastoral counsellor to stop such addressing of God, but it would only prevent the sufferer from expressing him- or herself and grasping their own situation and bitterness. Fiddes (2000:158) pastorally addresses this, asking for space and grace, since “those who are their pastors must not react in shock at the accusations and bitterness that flow out; at least they have come out of silence and dark brooding, to speak to God and others”. Just the fact that the sufferer is starting to speak is a sign of progress. He or she is starting to express, and trying to find meaning. Our task as theologians, pastors, and counsellors is to help them open up, to express, and get them on this journey of discovery – a journey of finding meaning. It is not my journey, it is the sufferer’s journey – I can only help and lead and must be ever careful, as pain is sensitive and can cause fast withdrawal back into the depths of loneliness.

Fiddes (2000:159) explains this fragile pastor/counsellor approach as follows:

Telling the story of the suffering of God can help us to find meaning in our stories, but if we follow this line of thought we must be very careful to stress that we are talking about each person's finding a meaning for himself or herself, not having some meaning thrust upon him or her.

Thus, our task is not one of informing the sufferer, but guiding the sufferer. We may not enforce our ideas, but show the promise of a suffering God who is with them in their suffering. We should not push them forward, but draw them into this journey. The aim is for them to find meaning for themselves, which means we are not to interpret their situation for them. Fiddes (2000:159) is quite adamant in this respect.

Pastors must not say to someone suffering, 'in the light of the suffering of God, this must be the meaning for your suffering', or even 'God's suffering tells us that he must have some reason for your suffering that we cannot know'. There can be no question of God's having sent suffering to a person to work out some greater plan, however mysterious to us. That would be to make God an authority-figure who inflicts suffering and to whose omnipotent choice of meaning we must simply submit. Such a concept does not fit in with the character of a God who suffers.

As spiritual counsellors, we are there to help the sufferer to see the beauty of God's character, as a God who is present in their situation, as the suffering God. They have to discover for themselves the meaning within their suffering through this promise of God. The moment we try to pronounce meaning onto the situation, we open the door to greater suffering and misunderstanding the story aspect of the cross of Christ, which brings God as suffering God into their seemingly senseless situation. Since the counsellor is not in the situation him- or herself, it is impossible for him or her to speak meaningful thereof. That is why this theodicy suggests that the counsellor presents the suffering God's story to the sufferer, since he is also present in the situation and would know about the meaning within, which is the crux of the promise within theodicy. "To succumb to the temptation of *imposing* meaning on the suffering of others is to diminish the horror of their suffering; it is to fail to take their experience seriously" (Fiddes, 2000:159). As counsellor, I also experience that trying to be the expert in knowing and imposing meaning places a distance between you and the counsellee, as it creates the impression that you have no appreciation for his or her level of suffering.

The real discovery of meaning in such a seemingly senseless situation is one of making meaning, rather than receiving meaning pre-ordained by the divine. Fiddes (2000:159) emphasises that “the power of the story of God’s suffering is that we can *make* a meaning for our suffering, rather than uncovering some hidden meaning that already lies behind it. That is, suffering (like the cross of Jesus) can *acquire* a meaning”. In the practical sense, the counsellor would relate this theodicy, demonstrating how the story of the cross of Christ shows us that there is a God who suffers with us in our suffering. In the light of this, the sufferer “can put the story of God’s suffering alongside (his/her) ... apparently senseless suffering, and see what meaning emerges” (Fiddes, 2000:159,160).

Yet, the question arises again whether this is a pragmatic approach. About this, Scott (2015:165) contemplates that “God’s identification with suffering enables our identification with God through suffering”. Moreover, Fiddes (2000) suggests that we must “simply allow the stories of those who have suffered grievously to break into our lives, making us face the truth...”. We should create an opportunity for the sufferer to talk and express him- or herself. In this regard, Fiddes (2000:160) quotes Elie Wiesel, who had been in one of the death camps under the Nazi regime:

Let us tell tales... all the rest can wait... tales of children so wise and old. Tales of old men mute with fear... Tales of immense flames reaching out to the sky, tales of night consuming life and hope and eternity.

The depth of the theodicy of story is quite inspiring. The sufferer is not alone; somebody else had been in that situation too, and more – that person had made it through in the belief that God had been there in his or her suffering. Enduring the suffering in the seemingly senseless situation all by oneself is not possible; however, as Moltmann (1993:103) notes, it “is possible, to the God of the promise”. Scott (2015:165) discerns that “God’s incarnate suffering creates an existential and spiritual link between his suffering and ours ...”. Thus, there is a solidarity between the sufferer and God, for “when we suffer, we experience God ...” (Scott, 2015:165). Only God can give meaning to the sufferer’s senseless suffering, as Schilling (1977:254) quotes Nicolas Berdyaev: “God can reconcile man to the sufferings of creation because he himself suffers”.

In the light of the suffering God as crux of the theodicy of story, Fiddes (2000:154) says: “So as soon as we dare to speak of a suffering God, the theologian is faced with some tough questions. Is the belief that God suffers with the world really a theodicy, or is it a despairing view of God who is just as much of a victim of evil as we are?” In conclusion to this section on the theodicy of story, we must acknowledge that the notion of a suffering God leads to many questions we will not deal with here. The key question, however, is whether this theodicy makes God also victim to evil. About this Fiddes (2000:154) writes that “There can be no theodicy without an end to evil”, which simply means that God, as suffering God, will in the end be victor, and thus overcome evil and suffering.

4.3.3 A THEODICY OF PROTEST

A third proposed theodicy by Fiddes, in keeping with the notion of a suffering God, is a theodicy of protest. Like the theodicy of story and the theodicy of consolation, this is also a more pragmatic theodicy, not focused on explaining evil, but rather on protesting against evil and those involved in evil and responsible for inflicting pain. Although it could be inferred that, if this theodicy protests against evil, it tries to explain it, this is not the case. Theodicy is God in question. Instead of protesting against God as arbiter of evil, this theodicy is protesting with God against evil and those who perpetrate it. Hauerwas (1990) utilises the same concept in terming this protest expression. He encourages the sufferer “to express” the “pain and suffering”, for “then we can see that our willingness to expose our pain is the means God gives us to help us identify and respond to evil and justice” (Hauerwas, 1990:83). To express one’s pain is to respond to it and to the evil surrounding suffering. It is a protest, “a lament” whereby the sufferer by faith in God exposes evil by “exposing” the world’s “false comforts and deceptions” (Hauerwas, 1990:83). For Hauerwas (1990:83), the opposite of the coin is also true: not protesting testifies of the sufferer’s “faithlessness” in his or her “unwillingness to acknowledge” the “suffering and pain”.

Traditional theodicies try to explain why God created a place for evil to reside and cause pain and suffering, but Fiddes (2000:161) interjects, stating that “arguments which justify a God who has created a world with suffering in it often end up by justifying suffering itself, making it ‘reasonable’ and acceptable”. This is exactly what this study protests. In fact, the study aims to show that it is not true that theodicy is in a crisis in the way it purports and proposes its answers to our pain and suffering, ignoring the notion of promise. On the contrary, this study advocates theodicy in the correct context, such as the theodicies proposed by Fiddes. Traditional theodicies, in most instances, justify the concept that God is responsible for evil and suffering, and in the reasoning even try to make it ‘reasonable’ and for our best.

To understand the theodicy of protest, it is necessary to recognise that God is actually with us in our position when we protest. Fiddes (2000:161) argues that “if God suffers then God too ... is to be numbered among the victims”. Instead of God being perceived as a divine bully who is all-powerful, he is the God who also stands victim to evil; he actually suffers when we suffer. This element is crucial in the proposal of a notion of promise in a suffering God this study seeks to construct. Moreover, without this element God is the perpetrator, and since in theology that notion is unacceptable, the theologian will try to justify that stance. On the other hand, a protest theodicy, where God not only is the suffering God as seen on the cross, but is also victim to suffering and evil, makes the reasoning for a God responsible for evil redundant. In this regard Fiddes (2000:161) points out that “belief in a suffering God forbids us to structure any theological argument where God directly causes suffering”.

Fiddes (2000:161) further expounds on this train of thought, stating that a belief of a suffering God even “forbids the scholastic refinement of God being the primary cause of suffering within secondary causes in the world”. Numerous sophisticated reasonings exist within the field of theodicy in a theology that denies that God is the cause of suffering, but still makes and holds Him responsible within ‘secondary causes’. A prime example, observed by Long (2011:68), is the well-known and widely quoted theologian Rabbi Harold Kushner, who tries to maintain that God is not “the author of evil and suffering”,

but, as Long deduces, “puts him in a logical bind”. Kushner concludes that, since God cannot be the reason, “Fate, not God, send the problem” (Long, 2011:68). The intrinsic dilemma of this reasoning is that “Kushner has set up a second cosmic force”, which in Long’s analysis of this dichotomy, proves that Kushner has “fallen into a good-God, bad-God cosmic dualism” (Long, 2011:68). While a first cause for evil other than God has been established, God will still be the secondary cause. This reasoning implies that fate is beyond the control of the divine, which is the main predicament of traditional theodicy. Regarding this Soelle (1975:134) declares: “Whoever grounds suffering in an almighty, alien One who ordains everything has to face the question of the justice of this God – and he must be shattered by it.” However, infusing theodicy with the notion of a suffering God by natural occurrence removes responsibility for evil from God.

This poses a predicament for agnostics and atheists, who utilise natural theodicy to reason away a loving God, or the existence of a God at all. Fiddes (2000:161) forcefully argues that “The concept of a suffering God cuts away the ground from beneath an atheism of protest, because protest atheism envisages God as a cruel tyrant who manipulates people and moves them around like pieces on a chessboard – sacrificing a pawn here, a knight there, for the sake of the strategy of the game”. Fiddes skillfully employs the very reasoning of agnostics here, showing that with the notion of a suffering God, this reasoning evaporates like mist before the sun. Long (2011:127) quotes philosopher John Roth who describes his version of a theodicy of protest as follows: “a ‘theodicy of protest’ gives voice to the silent victims and confronts God: ‘This is not right, o God! I cannot make room in a good creation for this. I will not try to rationalize it. God, if you are in any way implicated in this, repent!’” Long (2011:128) also relates a doctor’s response, a protest towards God against the evil of cancer: “When I get to heaven – if I get to heaven – I’m going to go directly to the throne room of God with a cancer cell in my hand and say, ‘Why?’” Sufferers often view God as tyrant, moving us like pieces on a chessboard, manipulating all events at random ‘divine’ will. However, when God Himself is seen as victim to evil and its consequences, one cannot reconcile with such reasoning.

Furthermore, it is imperative to note that the theodicy of protest against evil removes the traditional protest against God, even though both started from the same premise – the problem of evil. Yet, atheists or agnostics might argue that it is impossible for God to suffer, since He is impassible through our recognition of Him being all-powerful. His impassibility has been dealt with earlier. Concerning Him being all-powerful and ultimately responsible for evil, Fiddes (2000:161) responds quite profoundly:

If the cross of Jesus tells us that God is in pain, then God's power can hardly be that of the human absolute monarch who shows his supremacy by avoiding pain; it can only be the power of a love that is made perfect in weakness.

This is impeccable reasoning. Fiddes could not have worded it better. The cross of Christ clearly shows us that God is in pain. Thus, if God in a passible way can experience pain, even our pain, how is it possible for Him to be powerful in an earthly way? Powerful people on earth will avoid pain if possible. Yet God, as all-powerful, can assume our pain by his power of love. His greatest strength is His love, a love so powerful that He finds Himself with us in our suffering. Thus, as we protest evil and suffering, we see a God who “protests with the protesters because God too suffers” (Fiddes, 2000:161).

The God image presented here should radically impact anyone who accepts it. Louw (2012:158) support this, stating that “crisis affects the spiritual realm... it invades spirituality due to the interconnectedness between self-understanding and different God-images.” The core aspect that influences your God-image is “the most burning question in suffering: why, God?” (Louw, 2012:158). The powerful image of a God who suffers with us is life changing, especially in the light of theodicy. Besides, God does not only suffer with us, He also protests with us against evil, since He ‘too suffers’. Fiddes (2000: 161,162) draws the astounding conclusion that “If God suffers then God too protests, and a God who protests against suffering cannot be the cause of it, or God would be protesting against God”. God is not opposed to Himself, and will not be. Thus, since God is protesting with us against suffering, it is evident that He is not the cause of suffering. Instead, He is protesting, with us, now, and in the promised future. Hall (1986:141) compares God's response to suffering with a story,

stating that “if it is a story, it is an unfinished story” – while He is with us in suffering, He promises a day when He will bring an end to suffering.

In conclusion to this section, I can pragmatically state that the theodicy of protest helps us to cope with suffering in as much it consoles us in our search for meaning and helps us to make meaning, as we observe the promise of a suffering God. This pragmatic theodicy is applicable in personal suffering as well as in counselling with a sufferer. Louw (2000:120) affirms that “Pastoral care is about how God ‘speaks’ in suffering so that people find consolation and are able to continue life in a meaningful way”. Fiddes (2000:162) suggests that if someone asks, “Why has God done this to me?”, one could answer that “God hasn’t: but God is suffering with you”. Fiddes also believes that the theologian/counsellor will have an intuition for the appropriate times to say, “God is suffering with you”.

4.3.4 THE HEART OF A THEODICY OF A SUFFERING GOD

It is of value to note that there is an essential truth in combining the three pragmatic theodicies suggested by Fiddes. The suffering God is not God in solitude; it is the triune God. When we grasp this, these theodicies become even more pragmatic, as “we affirm the suffering God exists in triune relationships, and that God has made room for us to participate in these movements of relationship” (Fiddes, 2000:162). Much more than just God with us, we should understand that it is the triune God with us in our suffering, bringing with Him the selfless reciprocal love of self-giving; thus, not only banishing our loneliness, but also our fear and senselessness within this relational love. The epitome of this truth is that the “interweaving patterns of the divine life” with which we move and concur, stirs meaning within, as we are involved in the inner being of the triune God.

In the context of the theodicy of consolation, Fiddes (2000:162) builds this essentiality “that God is ‘alongside us’ in our suffering”, refining it further so that it “may be understood as our involvement in currents of relational love that are already there before us”. In the section on the theodicy of consolation the story

of Job was utilised to indicate a God 'alongside us' in our affliction. Fiddes expounds it to further mean that this God 'alongside us' is the triune God, and having him 'alongside us' is to be involved in the love dimension of the relations within the Godhead. This involvement within the triune God creates a meaning to our suffering, since we are "embraced by movements of suffering love" (Fiddes, 2000:162). The depths of meaning within the love character of the triune God is experienced by the sufferer on an intimate level when he or she accepts this amazing reality of the triune God being 'alongside' him or her.

Trying to describe this intricate intimacy between the sufferer and the triune God, Fiddes cannot escape the reality of his own pain and loss, and yet tries to embrace this divine reality of the triune God 'alongside us' in describing these 'movements of suffering love' in terms of "a father who has lost a beloved son". One can feel his pain and yet sense his embrace of the reality of the divine suffering love in which he can move and find meaning, while contemplating his own 'senseless' suffering in losing his son to death.

Becoming intimate on such a level can be a tremendous consolation to the complex feelings and deep emotions of pain. Fiddes (2000:162) terms these "myriad aspects of loss and alienation contained", but while these floods of pain envelope the soul, being aware that God as the triune is 'alongside us' in our suffering, opens up the soul to be permeated "by the movement of a Spirit of hope, opening up the future in the midst of pain". Knowing that God is with you as trinity enables you to be infused with hope and meaning by the Spirit, which will open your mind to have a will to live and face the future.

In the context of the theodicy of story, it was shown that, besides everyday stories of inspiration and heroic tales, or just any story or mood we try to identify with to find ourselves, the story of the cross of Christ is "the story of God's suffering" (2000:162). This story of a suffering God "is not only a narrative to be told, 'once upon a time', but an ongoing story in which we can participate" (Fiddes, 2000:162). The story of the cross will transform our view and experience of our suffering. Our senseless suffering can be swallowed up in the triune God's suffering with us. That promise is not only for the moment, but 'ongoing'. Thus, the story creates the hopeful realisation that the sufferer can

make meaning of his or her situation in the experience of Christ, which “is held eternally within the patterns of the divine dance, bringing richness to the life of God and shaping the pattern of our own life” (Fiddes, 2000:162). This promise of a suffering triune God being with you in your sufferings, draws you, through the image of the suffering of Christ, into the inner life of God, which will reshape the experience of your previously senseless situation. Consequently, your suffering situation will be enriched with the overflowing love in the inner life of the triune God which you are drawn into.

The focus of the sufferer should then be directed to the event of the cross of Christ, to observe the reality of the suffering God. “Hearing the story told, or seeing it displayed in broken bread and outpoured wine, can thus draw us into a deeper awareness of the divine fellowship and the ‘communion of saints’, so that we can live in a larger story” (Fidder, 2000:163). The moment when the realisation dawns that God is not only with us, but suffers with us, our story becomes part of his story – making our history one of meaning. Seeing Christ suffering, and grasping the significance of it for your own life, creates the possibility to make and find meaning in your life. Experiencing the blood and broken body through communion, draws you into the greater communion of the triune God. This brings you and transfers your suffering into the triune God’s, making your reality part of God’s reality; thus, you now have life in a greater metaphor. This is promise experienced.

This is also true of the theodicy of protest, where instead of you protesting to a God who doesn’t care or causes evil, you participate in God’s protest against evil. Fiddes (2000:163) captures this reality in words that create hope for the sufferer, stating that “participating in the protest which is voiced in the triune communion makes our protest creative”. Instead of voicing someone else’s effort to make sense of your suffering, if you participate with this God that suffers with you, your story will take a creative turn. There is no limit to your potential, as your story is part of his story. To and within our stories “God comes with healing God’s wings” (Long, 2011:147). Our “suffering and pain” are His, “the enemies of God” (Long, 2011:147). Our story becomes his story, as God sees our suffering and “comes to do combat, comes in the power of the cross,

comes in the power of love” (Long, 2011:147). Instead of avoiding suffering, the senseless situation, and the questions surrounding it, the sufferer is expressing and protesting it. Hauerwas (1990:83) quotes Brueggemann who claims that Christians and the Church avoid ‘Psalms of lament’ and prefer ‘Psalms of joy’. Brueggemann says these ‘Psalms of lament’, “lead us into dangerous acknowledgment of how life really is. They lead us into the presence of God where everything is not polite and civil”. However, within a theodicy of protest there is honesty, as there is direct faith in a God who suffers with the sufferer, a God who is not scared of the actual reality, but acknowledges it, and therefore the sufferer can acknowledge it too.

There is much promise and hope in Fiddes’s theology. Upon my request, during our interview, to define promise in the simplest form, Fiddes responded without hesitation:

Promise. One could simply use synonyms like, pledge. Promise is an intention. It’s a pledge of faith isn’t it? – which has a strong dose of intention within it. When God promises to do something, when God states something it is God’s faithfulness carrying that through. (Fiddes, 2016: Interview)

What a precise description of promise by Fiddes, calling it a pledge of faith. We can trust his promise, since He is faithful. Being with us as the suffering triune God is a guarantee through his faithfulness in keeping His promise.

Fiddes immediately hastened to add:

But the fulfilment of that promise, as I already indicated, can happen in different kind of ways. You can see that by simply looking at the promises and fulfilments in Scripture itself, and see how they were fulfilled in very unexpected ways, so much so that the Jewish nation didn’t recognise Jesus as the Messiah. (Fiddes, 2016: Interview)

Thus, promise may not always be what we expect. It can be fulfilled in very ‘unexpected ways’ – for that is promise, the Promise of God.

While his book *The Promised End* deals with eschatology and the promise that will give us a future, it includes a key element that can be easily overlooked. While Fiddes (2000:287) writes poetically about the future, he concludes on this high note:

This city invites participation in a divine communion of life, promising a fullness of presence that we cannot experience now, but not promising that we shall ever possess God as an object of our desire. There will remain a delightful, enticing hiddenness which elicits and requires engagement in the movements of love. Moreover, the city, unlike a temple, is an image of busy activity and creativity as well as fellowship. So the gates of the city are open, promising that there will be journeys to be made, adventures to be had, strangers to be welcomed and home-comings to be enjoyed. There is no static eternity, not simultaneity, but a healing of time.

While the focus of this promise and hope is future, we need a promise in our theodicy that breaks into the present and transforms our past and future by creating an expected present by the very promise of God's presence. And this is the 'healing of time' that will stretch into the future and be more than real in eternity. The key element, therefore, is that the reality of God and His promise will be healing to us in our hurt and suffering in the here and now, as well as in the future and eternity, where we will be reunited with our loved ones from whom we were separated through the painful experience of death.

CHAPTER 5: THEODICY AND THE PROMISING GOD: TOWARDS A CONSTRUCTIVE PROPOSAL.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this study I have alluded to the fact that theodicy is in a crisis, and sought answers to a possible question that arises out of this malaise: Where is promise in suffering? Where is the hope that promise should bring? Why is the very essence of promise so vague in traditional theodicy models? While we can clearly observe that theodicy is in a crisis, the question lingers: Is there no promise in the category of promise for a rethinking of the theodicy question?

The theology of traditional theodicy is not satisfying – or so this study proposes – to the sufferer, and the very notion of theodicy and its usefulness is often being called into question. The standard discourse on theodicy is challenged as being reductive, and the questions we asked at the outset of this research need to be reiterated. Can the notion of theodicy be redeemed?

The argument of this thesis, in conversation with Moltmann and Fiddes, is that there is no promise without incorporating the notion of promise, which means that theodicy must be connected directly to promise to make any theological sense whatsoever. The subsequent question to this reality poses itself in itself: Can theodicy exist at all without promise?

5.2 RESPONSE TO RESEARCH QUESTION

In response to the research question, “How can the notion of promise help us to give a theological response to the question of God and suffering?”, I have engaged extensively with some of the major works of Moltmann and Fiddes, drawing on these sources to form a more constructive proposal that could be put forward for consideration.

While being aware of the theological language that speaks of God as transcendent, omnipotent, unchanging, and everlasting, this study affirms the statement that God – as the God of love – suffers with us in our suffering, since

God is also immanent, and a God who is present with us in our pain. I further asserted that, while there may not be total agreement among theologians, and we may not always agree with Moltmann or Fiddes for that matter; the promise of a God who is present within our suffering is not emphasised enough within the discourse on theodicy. Thus, the works of Moltmann and Fiddes in this regard, and within the framework of this research, brought us to an understanding, though not total agreement in all detail, that the triune God's presence holds promise for us in our suffering, since he also suffers with us. Hence, we are not alone in our suffering.

5.2.1 MOLTMANN'S CONTRIBUTION

The central foci in Moltmann's theology, as emerges, for instance, from his book *Theology of Hope*, is the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Moltmann (1971:157) maintains that the promise of God's presence "frees man from the world and practices the end of history where, in the fulfilment of the moment, he perceives the truth of existence", for while we are "in history", "history itself is contained in a totally-other" (Moltmann, 1973:45).

Moltmann establishes the cross event and the resurrection event as fundamental in theology, asserting that "The death of Jesus on the cross is the centre of all Christian theology" (Moltmann, 1994:204), and that "Christianity stands or falls with the reality of the raising of Jesus from the dead by God" (Moltman, 1993:165).

Louw (2000:90,91) summarises Moltmann's theology as follows:

Moltmann's theology of the cross is a radical theology. God is not only at work in suffering and history: suffering and history are in God, and occur within Him. God not only reveals his compassion; in the suffering, God identifies with the suffering (God pathos). At the same time, this identification is also a definition of the Being of God, Himself.

This pathos of God is centred in the triune God, as revealed at the cross in the person of Christ, where God is sufferer to our suffering. Louw (2000:89) describes this as follows:

Moltmann's Trinitarian theology of the cross is construed by Christ's cry: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.?' Forsakenness ... becomes the primary issue for a hermeneutics

of the cross ... which tries to reframe God-metaphors in terms of suffering.

I concluded that this suffering of God must be directly related to God's being. Louw (2000:89) confirms this conclusion: "God could only be understood properly as a suffering God if forsakenness is applicable to his very Being. Only the God WHO can be recognized in the face of the crucified One, is the true God." A further conclusion was that the cross shows us a suffering God, true to His promise, who gives us hope, since He takes our pain. Ante Jeroncic (2009:38) encapsulates:

Approached from another angle, we could say that Moltmann's theodicy rests on a rhetoric of radical metanoia... Our God is a suffering God who took our pain into himself. He is in solidarity with us, gives us hope, and quickens us to life through the Spirit of life.

In the study it was established that theodicy in itself is meaningless without hope, while the problem of theodicy is that the suffering and painful situations seem hopeless and devoid of future or hope. This very hope is the result of promise, as promise is the basic premise for hope; hope cannot exist without promise or the guarantee of what is to be.

The importance has emerged to observe that the emphasis on a suffering God is not to be separated from the statement that God is love. Therefore, the basis of the notion of a suffering God is the triune God, for – theologically speaking – love is only possible within a framework of the self-giving and other-receiving love of the triune God. The importance of this is that "Love does not snatch us from the pain of time, but takes the pain of the temporal upon itself" (Moltmann, 1993:31). Without the reality of love, a suffering God has no meaning. Just as the opposite is true: Without a suffering God, what divine love is there that can hold meaning to a sufferer in his or her pain?

It was shown that hope brings this promise of a God of love who suffers with us in our sufferings to the sufferer. As Moltmann (1993:32) affirmed, "In love, hope brings all things into the light of the promises of God". Therefore, a proposed theodicy of promise is divine promise that extends from the "determined process of history" (Moltmann; 1993:163), where Christ brought God's presence into the present human suffering; and the hope of the future Kingdom

of God where pain will be no more, and spills into the present (Moltmann; 1993:17). Moltmann (1993:119) contends that it “lies in the credibility and faithfulness of him who gives it”.

In summary, Moltmann’s contribution to my research is the following: The cross and resurrection event establishes God’s promise, and thus creates hope in the heart of the suffering believer, as it reveals a suffering God – the triune God.

5.2.2 FIDDES’S CONTRIBUTION

Fiddes (2000:12) approaches the matter of death, which is the end result of all suffering as follows: “... any Christian view of eschatology must take the fact of death seriously, as the ‘last enemy’ that the Apostle Paul identifies”. I perceived that theodicy does not exist to mollify the cold reality of death. Hauerwas (1990:148) summarises it as follows:

We have no theodicy that can soften the pain of our death and the death of our children, but we believe that we share a common story which makes it possible for us to be with one another especially as we die.

Hauerwas (1990:151), reflecting on the pain and words of Wolterstorff, quotes him:

Death is awful, demonic... What I need to hear from you is that you recognize how painful it is. I need to hear from you that you are with me in my desperation. To comfort me, you have to come close. Come sit beside me on my mourning bench.

To receive or be of comfort, death, the end result of all suffering, has to be taken seriously. In those haunting words of Wolterstorff, we sense the inherent need of the sufferer: presence.

It has been established that God is not only present in all our sufferings in the here and now, but God will also be present in the future, when God will free creation of death and suffering. In the first chapter of *The Promised End*, where Fiddes (2000:55) tries to theologically make sense of *end*, even in the context of literature and human thought, he explains that for “Christian doctrine about the nature of eschatology: we shall need to consider the end as organizing the whole, the end as expressing a desired world, the end as dispersing meaning and the end as opening hope”.

Three theodicies proposed by Fiddes were evaluated and found to be helpful in my research.

Firstly, in the theodicy of consolation, Fiddes (2000:162) builds the essentiality “that God is ‘alongside us’ in our suffering”, refining it further so that it “may be understood as our involvement in currents of relational love that are already there before us”. In the section on the theodicy of consolation, the story of Job was utilised to indicate a God ‘alongside us’ in our affliction. Fiddes expounds it to further mean that this God ‘alongside us’ is the triune God, and having him ‘alongside us’ is to be involved in the love dimension of the relations within the Godhead. This involvement within the triune God creates a meaning to our suffering, since we are “embraced by movements of suffering love” (Fiddes, 2000:162). The depths of meaning within the love character of the triune God is experienced by the sufferer on an intimate level when he or she accepts the amazing reality of the triune God being ‘alongside’ him or her. Migliore (2004:132) summarises this theodicy as follows:

God is present with the creatures both as co-agent and as co-sufferer... Trinitarian faith... recognizes that God’s eternal being-in-love reaches out to the world... God freely becomes vulnerable out of love for the world. The destructiveness of evil in creation can be overcome not by divine fiat but only by a costly history of divine love in which the suffering of the world is really experienced and overcome by God.

Secondly, the theodicy of story involves, besides everyday stories of inspiration and heroic tales, or just any story or mood we try to identify with to find ourselves, the story of the cross of Christ, which is “the story of God’s suffering” (Fiddes, 2000:162). This story of a suffering God “is not only a narrative to be told, ‘once upon a time’, but an ongoing story in which we can participate” (Fiddes, 2000:162). The story of the cross will transform our view and experience of our suffering. Our senseless suffering can be swallowed up in the triune God’s suffering with us. That promise is not only for the moment, but ‘ongoing’. Thus, the story creates the hopeful realisation that the sufferer can make meaning of his or her situation in the experience of Christ, which “is held eternally within the patterns of the divine dance, bringing richness to the life of God and shaping the pattern of our own life” (Fiddes, 2000:162).

Schilling (1977:249) summarises it as follows:

God intimately interpenetrates all aspects of existence. He does not stand over against the world, acting on it from without. Rather, his creative and redemptive activity underlies, permeates, and sustains it. He is the matrix of all its being and becoming, the dynamic personal Spirit who in unbound love seeks to fashion a community of shared values. Inevitably, therefore, when his creatures suffer for whatever reason, he not only knows about their suffering but concretely experiences it.

Thirdly, in the theodicy of protest, instead of protesting to a God who doesn't care or causes evil, one participates in God's protest against evil. Fiddes (2000:163) captures this reality in words that create hope for the sufferer, stating that "participating in the protest which is voiced in the triune communion makes our protest creative". Thus, instead of voicing someone else's effort to make sense of your suffering, if you participate with this God that suffers with you, your story will take a creative turn. Your story is part of God's story and you as sufferer comes to the realisation that God is also victim to suffering. Bonhoeffer (1972:361) summarises it as follows in his oft-quoted remark: "The Bible directs us to God's powerlessness and suffering; only the suffering God can help."

It is of value to note that an essential truth emerges when the three pragmatic theodicies suggested by Fiddes are combined. The suffering God is not God in solitude; it is the triune God. When we grasp this, these theodicies become even more pragmatic, as "we affirm the suffering God exists in triune relationships, and that God has made room for us to participate in these movements of relationship" (Fiddes, 2000:162). Much more than just God with us, we should understand that it is the triune God with us in our suffering, bringing with Him the selfless reciprocal love of self-giving; thus, not only banishing our loneliness, but also our fear and senselessness within this relational love. The epitome of this truth is that the "interweaving patterns of the divine life" (Fiddes, 2000:162) with which we move and concur, stirs meaning within, as we are involved in the inner being of the triune God.

In summary, Fiddes's contribution to this study is the following: As the sufferer needs to take death seriously, he or she can take the promise of a suffering God seriously, as proposed by three theodicies, namely the theodicy of consolation, the theodicy of story, and the theodicy of protest.

5.3 A CONSTRUCTIVE PROPOSAL

In conclusion, I hope to make a brief constructive proposal. Moltmann's contribution to my research has demonstrated that the cross and resurrection event establishes God's promise, and thus hope in the heart of the suffering believer, it reveals a suffering God – the triune God. In addition, Fiddes's contribution has shown that the sufferer needs to take death seriously, so that he or she can take the promise of a suffering God seriously as proposed by three theodicies, namely the theodicy of consolation, the theodicy of story, and the theodicy of protest. The proposal that I will establish will tie theodicy to Promised Presence, in that it is not about answers, promise, or presence – but the promise in God.

This promise is twofold. The first aspect of the promise is that God will eventually eschatologically, as confirmed by the resurrection, end all suffering and death, as Moltmann affirms. Furthermore, a future of open possibilities also awaits us, where those who were dead will recognise one another and those who died young will have the potential of growth, as Fiddes affirms. Long (2011:146,147) summarises this neatly:

If there is to be a genuinely Christian response to theodicy, it must bear witness to the ultimate victory of God, to that time when God “will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more, mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away” (Rev 21:4). But it must also bear witness to what God is doing now, in the midst of history, in the midst of pain and suffering...

We have a future to look forward to, the promise of a world to come, which is according to Hasker (2008:224), a world “of fulfilled human lives, free from suffering, death and evil, and permeated with the knowledge and love of God”.

The second aspect of the promise is that the cross confirmed that God is a suffering God, present with us in our suffering, which is affirmed by both Moltmann and Fiddes. Migliore (2004:134) formulates this second aspect of God's promise of his suffering in a hopeful context of promise as follows:

God's accompanying of creatures in their suffering is sheer grace, unexpected companionship in the depths of affliction. The

presence of another in the experience of suffering is a gift; the presence of the compassionate God in the experience of suffering is a gift precious beyond words. In God's companionship with sufferers, they are affirmed in their dignity and value in spite of the assault on their being by disease or their victimization by others.

Erickson (1998:456) connects this twofold aspect of God's promise into one, which will support my proposal:

God is a fellow sufferer with us of the evil in this world, and consequently is able to deliver us from evil. What measure of love this is! Anyone who would impugn the goodness of God for allowing sin and consequently evil must measure that charge against the teaching of Scripture that God himself became the victim of evil so that he and we might be victors over evil.

The concept of promise may not be detached from the notion of presence, hence the use of the notion of a Promised Presence. This promised "presence of the Spirit is the presence of future glory" which wants to make us "the home of the triune God" (Moltmann, 1981:125). The promise is a promise of Presence, "the inner-trinitarian life of God" (Moltmann; 1981:127). God's presence in human suffering secured at the cross is the past that is brought forth, while God's presence in God's Kingdom for God's people makes up the future that is brought forth. These two aspects of promise, past and future, fill the present reality of human suffering with the promise of God's presence. This is a theodicy of Promised Presence, one where God "not only suffers 'with' but 'as' and 'in' us, in the interweaving relationship of the divine dance" (Fiddes, 2000; 186).

The cross and resurrection event stand centre to theodicy, as the eternal words of Moltmann (1996:339) ring true: "The laughter of the universe is God's delight. It is the universal Easter laughter."

God's promise about the future end of evil is scriptural, hopeful, inspiring and sure. The promise of his presence in the midst of our pain and suffering today has pragmatic meaning to our anthropological situation out of which we cannot see or seem to escape. The promise in theodicy is contained within a Theodicy of Promise. The focus is on Promise, which brings our past suffering and theodicy questions to theological hope in a God that promises His presence in the present, while we are comforted that we have a future in Him.

Therefore, I propose through this research a Theodicy of Promised Presence. A Theodicy of Promised Presence that recognises the promise of God's presence, even in his absence, can provide comfort and hope amidst the painful realities of human suffering. The notion of a Promised Presence thus holds promise for a more adequate engagement with the theodicy question.

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