



When Christians Suffer? A South African Pentecostal engagement with theodicy and the character of God

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Declaration

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Abstract

This thesis presents a Pentecostal understanding of the character of God in light of Christians suffering sickness, depression and death in South Africa. Given the statistically verifiable prevalence of suffering among the majority Christian South African population, an understanding of God in light of suffering is pertinent. Moreover, the thesis addresses the problem which exists as a result of the perceived inconsistency between what some Christians believe about the character of God and what is experienced on a daily basis by South African believers undergoing suffering. To further narrow the context of the study, the author writes specifically concerning an understanding of God in suffering from a Pentecostal Christian perspective. The research project uses a qualitative-analysis methodology as its principal theoretical framework. The author uses this methodology when assessing selected works from Chris Oyakhilome as a representative of a particular type of Pentecostal theology present amongst South African believers. Moreover, the emerging theology from Oyakhilome is critically evaluated. This evaluation is undertaken by engaging with *the Crucified God* by Jürgen Moltmann and weighing up Oyakhilome's understanding of God in suffering against that of Moltmann, inter alia, other influential approaches to theodicy. Finally, the findings are consolidated and a proposal for a revised Pentecostal understanding of God's character in relation to suffering is offered. This consists primarily of three traits, namely: the good God, the healing God and the suffering God. The study concludes by summarising the findings of the research, making some

proposals for how a South African Pentecostal understanding of God can be further developed, and suggests areas for future research.

Dedication

This project is dedicated to Leendert, my friend; to Mee Sarah, my mom; to Sia, my brother and to Mrs. Motoomull, my teacher. In less than a year, you all passed away. I wish I loved you more when I had the chance to.

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Table of Contents

Declaration	1
Abstract	2
Dedication	4
Acknowledgements	5
Table of Contents	6
CHAPTER ONE: Introduction to the Study	11
1.1 Background and Rationale	11
1.2 Statement of the Problem	21
1.3 Research questions	21
1.4 Contribution and Relevance	22
1.5 Research methodology and goal(s)	23
1.6 An overview of the argument	23
CHAPTER TWO: A Pentecostal understanding of God's character	26
Introduction	26

<i>Section 1: Historical Overview of the Pentecostal Movement</i>	26
2.1 From Azusa Street to South Africa	27
2.2 “Tongues of fire appeared above them...”	28
2.3 Pieter le Roux, Zion and the Apostolic Faith Mission	29
2.4 Zion is Born	31
<i>Section 2: A Critical Case Study of a Pentecostal Theology</i>	34
2.5 Operational Framework	35
2.6 “God is good, all the time!”: the Moral Attributes of God	37
2.6.1 God the Father	38
2.6.2 The Loving God	40
2.6.3 God the Giver of good Gifts	41
2.6.4 Suffering: a Particular Pentecostal Definition	43
2.7 “If God wills”: the Purpose Attributes of God	45
2.7.1 Defining God’s Will	45
2.7.2 Oyakhilome and God’s Will	46
2.7.2.1 The Bible as God’s Will	46
2.7.2.2 Believers as God’s will	48
<i>Section 3: Critical Response to Oyakhilome’s Characterization of God</i>	49
2.8.1 The Moral Attributes	49
2.8.2 Suffering: a Particular Pentecostal Definition	51
2.8.3 God’s Will: A Purpose Attributes	52

Conclusion	53
CHAPTER THREE: Jürgen Moltmann and God's character in suffering	55
Introduction	55
<i>Section 1: Historical Overview of Influential Christian Theodicies</i>	56
3.1 Thomas Aquinas: the Attributes of God	57
3.1.1 The Will of God	57
3.1.2 God's Will and Natural Evil	60
3.1.3 The Goodness of God	62
3.2 Classical Christian Responses to the Problem of Evil	63
3.2.1 Free Will Theodicy and Defence	65
3.2.1.2 Free Will Defense/Theodicy and Christian Suffering	67
3.2.2 Soul-Making Theodicy & Process Theodicy	68
<i>Section 2: The Crucified God</i>	70
3.3 Background of the Crucified God	71
3.4 Divine Impassibility	73
3.5 Moltmann's Definition of Suffering	74
3.6 The Passion of Christ	76
3.6.1 The Deity of Christ	77
3.6.2 Jesus, forsaken by God	79
3.6.3 The Crucified God	82
3.7 Critique of the Crucified God	83

Conclusion	85
CHAPTER FOUR: A proposal for a Pentecostal approach to suffering	87
Introduction	87
<i>Section 1: The Passion of the Christ and the Goodness of God (on the Cross)</i>	<i>88</i>
4.1.1 The Passion of Christ	88
4.1.2 The Emotional Suffering of Jesus	92
4.1.3 Suffering Surrounding the Death of Jesus	96
<i>Section 2: Forsakenness and Abundance</i>	<i>99</i>
4.2.1 “Forsakenness”: Moltmann’s Perspective	100
4.2.2 “Abundance”: Oyakhilome’s Perspective	102
<i>Section 3: Hope: A Pentecostal Understanding of God</i>	<i>105</i>
4.3.1 The Good God	105
4.3.2 The Healing God	107
4.3.3 The Suffering God	110
Conclusion	111
CHAPTER FIVE: Towards A Conclusion of The Study	112
Introduction	112
5.1 A review of the Research Problem	112
5.2 A review of the Research Questions	113
5.2.1 Primary research question	113
5.2.2 Secondary research questions	117

5.3 A review of the research methodology and research goals	119
5.4 A review of the contribution and relevance of the study	120
5.5 Possible areas for further research	121
Conclusion	122
Bibliography	126

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction to the Study

1.1 Background and Rationale

The experience of suffering is one that is common to all people across different cultural backgrounds, language groups, religious affiliations and socio-economic circumstances (Reed, 2017:xi). For this reason, the question of suffering is one that has been grappled with by both men and women for as long as people have lived (ibid.). In wrestling with this universal reality, a plethora of responses have emerged from both religious and non-religious people alike (Reed, 2017:xi). This research project is focused specifically on the Christian experience of suffering in light of the character of God, with special attention given to the South African context and Pentecostal theology.

South Africa as a nation is well acquainted with trauma, sickness, crime, death, poverty and broken relationships among its people, all of which provide the perfect circumstances for suffering to take place. According to data presented by the South African College of Applied Psychology (2018), one in every six South Africans suffer from anxiety, a substance use disorder or depression, 40% of South Africans with HIV have a comorbid mental disorder, 41% of pregnant women suffer from depression, about 6 million South Africans are potentially suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder – this figure includes car accidents and criminal activities as causative factors, while statistically only 27% of South Africans with severe mental disorders will ever receive treatment (SACAP, 2018).

The preceding statistics were obtained prior to the Covid-19 pandemic which has exacerbated the experience of suffering as far as mental health (Rwafa-Ponela et al.,2022:12), the economy (Sucheran, 2022:36) and the household family structure (Adebiji, 2022:234) in South Africa are concerned. The pandemic presented yet another chapter in the troubled history of the South African people who still bear the consequences of the apartheid regime, the AIDS pandemic as well as social and transgenerational trauma (Naidu, 2020:559). The author of this thesis initially set out to grapple with questions about the character of God and suffering in order to both learn and to in some way aid other believers in suffering 'well'. The adjective 'well' can be ambiguous if undefined and to credibly establish such a definition would be an extensive task which would extend beyond the scope of this project. That being said, the research questions being addressed in this thesis were born not out of academic readings, however helpful, but rather out of the lived experiences of the author with sickness, depression and death.

These experiences serve as a fire which interrogates the depths of the author's faith as he tries to understand how some have been healed and delivered, whilst others have been seemingly given over to the savage jaws of death - all by the same good and powerful God. The following is thus a proposal for a systematic theological response to suffering, however, it needs to have existential implications in the life of both author and reader. With great humility and reverence the author dares to grapple with these questions, knowing that many have suffered a great deal more and none more than our Lord Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, approximately 84.2% of the South African population identifies as Christian, making Christianity the biggest religion in the country (Schoeman, 2017:3). This percentage does not represent one particular Christian denomination. Rather, as indicated in the National Census of 2001, the aforementioned statistic accounts for all of the various Christian traditions in the country (Ibid:2). The identified denominations include, in order of most populous; African Independent, Other Christian, Methodist, Reformed, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian/Baptist, Anglican and Lutheran (ibid.).¹ Nevertheless, none of these traditions exist in a vacuum nor do they operate entirely independently of one another. Cross-denominational influence is undeniable in the South African Christian milieu and the reality thereof is epitomised by the impact the Pentecostal movement has had on Christianity as a whole in South Africa (Watt, 2006:381).

The influence of the Pentecostal movement in South African religious life and culture can be summarised using four main aspects proposed by Hollenweger (1980:70). Firstly, the Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal provided a non conceptual framework for engaging theologically through song and story (ibid.). Secondly, although Western medicine remains dominant for the most part, prayer for the sick as a complement to the existing health system can be attributed to the Pentecostal movement (Hollenweger, 1980:70.). Thirdly, a framework for dealing with demon possession and exorcism has been greatly influenced by Pentecostal churches (ibid.). Moreover, it is important to mention here that the Pentecostal movement, particularly in South Africa, from the

¹ In this instance 'African Independent' includes Pentecostal churches as well

onset acknowledged and engaged the realities of African witchcraft and belief in the spiritual realm (Chitando, 2016:288). This was an aspect of African culture that the early missionaries in South Africa failed to address, dismissing indigenous beliefs as superstition even though most converts continued to experience spiritual realities (ibid). Lastly, the liturgical discipline of speaking in tongues and the orality thereof in different church traditions can be attributed to the Pentecostal movement (Hollenweger, 1980:70).

In light of the overwhelming statistics describing a suffering South Africa in which the majority of the population identify as Christian and the clear cross-denominational influence of the Pentecostal Movement, there is an indispensable need to address some contextual theological questions about the character of God and suffering from a Pentecostal perspective in South Africa.

Background of 'the Crucified God' and Definitions

In this project, the author grapples with the primary research question in conversation with *The Crucified God* by Jürgen Moltmann. Born in 1926 in Germany, Moltmann is widely considered to be one of the most influential German Protestant theologians in academic theology, both in the global north and south (Bauckham, 2005:147). Moltmann was a Nazi soldier, fighting for Hitler's Germany in World War Two. In 1945, he surrendered himself to British troops and was a prisoner of war for three years thereafter (ibid.). It was in this time as a prisoner of war that Moltmann was confronted with deep existential questions arising from the collective suffering and guilt of the

German nation following, amongst other war crimes, the atrocities of Auschwitz (Bauckham, 2005:147). The experience of being a prisoner of war served as the foundation for his future theology and involvement with public and political issues (ibid.). *The Crucified God* is the second book in what is considered Moltmann's first theological trilogy and can be catalogued as *dialectical theology*. This series of books, regarded by Moltmann as 'contributions' to theological discussion, present a dialectical interpretation of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Bauckham, 2005:148). *The Crucified God* presents the view that Jesus identified with the reality of the fallen world in that by going to the cross he subjugated himself to the sinful, God-forsaken and temporal nature of the world (ibid:149). Furthermore, *The Crucified God* at various points presents a Christology that has much to say regarding suffering and the character of God - which the author of this study hopes will contribute to resolving some of the main questions of this research project. Moreover, the existential aetiology of Moltmann's theology is significant, given that the telos of this thesis is for whatever conclusions are made to have tangible ramifications in the life of the author and his audience of believers.

However, as captivating as Moltmann's background and theology may be, it is nonetheless rooted in an entirely different socio-historical context than that which this thesis addresses. Nevertheless, given the contribution *The Crucified God* has made in shaping contemporary understandings of the character of God in relation to human suffering in many contemporary contexts and theologies, the author is of the opinion that it has positively contributed towards this research project. Moreover, the author has

found that not only does The Crucified God have something to say in the context of this thesis, but also enriches South African Pentecostal theology in general.

Defining Theodicy

Theodicy is the term used to describe any attempt to resolve the problem arising from the observed existence of evil in the world and the nature of God (Scott, 2015:53). 'Theodicy' is a *neologism*, consisting of two Greek nouns: *θεός* (God) and *δίκη* (justice) (ibid:50). These two words were transliterated into French as *théodicée* by the German polymath Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz in what would become one of the most influential works on theodicy in the modern era, *Die Théodicée*². In light of its Greek etymology, the term theodicy denotes "...the defence of the justice and the righteousness of God in face of the fact of evil" (Hick, 1977:6). The commitment to present such a 'defence' could be understood by some as being impious, given the logical problem arising from judging the acts of God by human standards (ibid.). Nevertheless, theodicy as a subject has been dealt with extensively in both secular and theological disciplines alike. This perpetual grappling with the subject within academia has been greatly aided by philosophers such as David Hume³ and Alvin Plantinga⁴ whose work will be cited in later chapters in this project.

This research thesis is aimed at dealing with the subject of theodicy in a way specific to the South African Pentecostal context and with a well-defined understanding of both

² Leibniz, G. & Jaucourt, L., 1747. *Essais De Théodicée Sur La Bonté De Dieu, La Liberté De L'Homme, Et L'Origine Du Mal*. Amsterdam: Changuion.

³ David Hume. 1948. *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Henry D. Aiken (ed.) New York: Hafner

⁴ Alvin Plantinga. 1974. *God, Freedom and Evil*. New York:Harper & Row

God and evil. The author is of the opinion that the grappling with theodicy is not religiously improper if undertaken with humility and sincerity, with the aim of better understanding God's dealings with humankind. Moreover, it is with this reverential posture that the author has limited the scope of this thesis to dealing more specifically with two aspects of theodicy, namely the understanding of God's character and human suffering arising from the reality of evil. In this way, there is a slight deviation from classical theodicy's question, "...if God is perfectly benevolent and also omnipotent, or almighty, why is there any evil in the world? Why does he permit it?" (Plantinga, 1974:10).

Furthermore, the author has not dealt at length with the question of *why* there is evil in the world. Rather, the primary question that was considered in this research project is the following: in light of suffering in South Africa, to what extent can a Pentecostal understanding of the character of God in suffering be trusted as adequate? Considerable time has therefore been given to understanding a Pentecostal theology of God's character in suffering as well as comparing this to traditional Christian perspectives in order to gauge its adequacy.

The Character of God

The author considers it an irreverent and ambitious enterprise to place under scrutiny the nature of God as revealed, in considerable depth, throughout the Scriptures.⁵ Therefore, what has been brought into question in this project, as far as God's nature is

⁵ Scriptures here refer to both the Old and New Testament as canonised in the Protestant tradition.

concerned, is not the 'nature' in itself but rather a particular Pentecostal Christian understanding of that nature which inadvertently influences how believers respond to suffering.

The understanding of the character of God has, for the purposes of this thesis, been based on the writings of Chris Oyakhilome⁶ amongst other influential Pentecostal ministers. This has been at times supplemented by more systematic literature which has either emerged from within the Pentecostal tradition or has influenced the movements' theology in some way. Furthermore, the understanding of suffering has been specifically limited to certain existential experiences of suffering in order to lessen the scope of the project. This limitation is elucidated more precisely in later chapters. Moreover, the focus of this project falls within the discipline of Systematic Theology by looking specifically at the Christian profession of an entirely good God in the midst of a South African nation historically plagued with suffering and more recently, the Covid-19 pandemic. This profession has been looked at particularly from the perspective of a South African Pentecostal theology.

Although the contextual scope of this project is limited to South Africa, the transnational nature of the Pentecostal movement is such that Pentecostal theologies emerging from certain countries have significantly influenced those in other nations (Biri et al, 2016:417). One such country is Nigeria, with a growing number of Pentecostal churches in South Africa tracing their roots back to influential churches in the West African nation.

⁶ Pastor Chris Oyakhilome (PhD) is a Nigerian preacher and the founder of LoveWorld Inc., known popularly as Christ Embassy. Pastor Chris leads an international ministry with church branches all over the world, including multiple in South Africa

Moreover, the selection of Chris Oyakhilome as one of the conversation partners in this study is due to the significant impact Christ Embassy, the church movement he leads, has had in South African Pentecostalism through multiple local branches (Maluleke, 2017:50).

Towards a Definition of Suffering

Given its broad semantic scope, the word suffering can be used to describe a boundless range of experiences and emotions. Moreover, the study of suffering is often nuanced and can cover a wide array of categories as is the case with a recent study by Pentecostal theologian, Keri Day who speaks of suffering in the context of politics, race and economics (Day, 2022:190). In light of this, it is important at the onset of this project to establish a working definition for suffering within which we are to understand its usage. This working definition is theological in nature and becomes more precise in later chapters, but is located in the broader category of evil for the purpose of this chapter.

Theologically, the human experience of evil can be most simply classified into two main categories. According to Plantinga, “natural” evils refer to natural disasters and virulent diseases which have not been carried out by a moral agent. On the other hand, “moral” evils are evils which are the result of arrogance, cruelty and human stupidity - inflicting suffering as a direct consequence of a moral agent. Murder and all forms of abuse can be placed within this category (Plantinga, 1974:8). Following this definition, the understanding of suffering in this research project is located in the category of natural

evils. Although suffering can generally be defined as any human experience of physical or mental pain (Anderson, 2013:2), suffering has been refined in this study to denote the human experience of physical or mental pain specifically resulting from *sickness*⁷, *depression*⁸ and/or *death*⁹. Moreover, the devastating ramifications of the Covid-19 pandemic have included all three of these facets of suffering as has been published by various psychological journals.¹⁰

The South African population, of which 84,2% profess to be Christian, has been ravaged by both natural and moral evil of all sorts (Schoeman, 2017:3). The prevalence of suffering in a nation where the overwhelming majority of the nation is Christian, inevitably raises contextual theological questions concerning the character of the Christian God. “For the problem of evil does not attach itself as a threat to any and every concept of deity. It arises only for a religion which insists that the object of its worship is at once perfectly good and unlimitedly powerful” (Hick, 1977:4). Hick highlights an important point which justifies the need for a specifically Christian theodicy given what Christians believe about the character of God. Moreover, given the ecumenical impact of the Pentecostal movement in South Africa and existing theologies concerning suffering from the movement - there is a need to revise the said theologies

⁷ Oberholzer, A.E., 2018. What are the different Christian churches teaching children about illness, pain and suffering?. *Pharos Journal of Theology*, pp.2414-3324.

⁸ Trice, P.D. & Bjorck, J.P., 2006. Pentecostal perspectives on causes and cures of depression. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 37(3), p.283.

⁹ Bowling, D.S. 2015. *Does God want me dead? A biblical perspective on pain, suffering, disease and death*. Bloomington: WestBow Press.

¹⁰ Nguse, S. and Wassenaar, D., 2021. Mental health and COVID-19 in South Africa. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 51(2), pp.304-313.

Ioannidis, J.P. 2021. Over-and under-estimation of COVID-19 deaths. *European journal of epidemiology*, 36, pp.581-588.

and make recommendations where they may be lacking within the South African context.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

This research project identifies the problem which exists as a result of the apparent inconsistency existing between what some Christians believe about the character of God and what is experienced in the everyday life of South African believers who undergo suffering. Furthermore, a Christian response to suffering, particularly from a Pentecostal perspective is engaged with the aim of understanding how current theological views on the topic can contribute towards its further development.

1.3 Research questions

Primary Research Question

1. How can a South African Pentecostal response to suffering be critiqued and further developed by critically looking at existing Pentecostal theologies of suffering in South Africa and the character of God in conversation with, *The Crucified God* by Jürgen Moltmann?¹¹

Secondary Research Questions

2. What are some of the dominant Pentecostal doctrines of God evidenced in a typological Pentecostal grouping in South Africa?

¹¹ Moltmann, J. 1993. *The Crucified God*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press

3. What are some contemporary approaches to the problem of suffering that are presented by a sample of South African Pentecostalism? Why might these be inadequate in dealing with the problem of suffering?
4. How might South African Pentecostal theologies of theodicy be reconsidered in light of Jürgen Moltmann's *The Crucified God*?

1.4 Contribution and Relevance

Pentecostalism is one of the biggest protestant movements in the world. Research shows that at least 26% of the global protestant population is Pentecostal (PewForum, 2011). However, given the high premium placed on experience within the movement, there has been at times a notable neglect in the systematic expression of theological beliefs in its relatively short history. In light of the impact the Pentecostal movement has had and continues to have on the global church, there is a pressing need to seriously consider the denomination's theology and in so doing, contribute towards its further development (Richie, 2020:12).

This thesis has been aimed at contributing towards Pentecostal theology specifically as it relates to the subject of suffering and God's character. There is a myriad of theologies which exist in South Africa, which although do not necessarily address the topic directly - have the potential of influencing how the Christian may respond to suffering. The author therefore saw it fit that a sample of these various theologies be both reviewed and critiqued in the effort of consolidating a theology which would aid the believer in responding to suffering. As highlighted in the previous section, the ecumenical impact of

the Pentecostal movement in South Africa cannot be overstated. It was therefore both necessary and relevant that a Pentecostal theology which influences the average South African Pentecostal's response to the suffering caused by sickness, depression and death was revised and further developed.

1.5 Research methodology and goal(s)

This research project uses a qualitative content-analysis methodology as its theoretical framework. In summary, the research presented in this thesis can be grouped into three categories, all of which have utilised the same methodological approach. Firstly, a critical review of literature related to the nature of God and suffering has been undertaken by drawing on faith-formative literature from the Pentecostal movement as well as other theological traditions. Secondly, the critical conclusions of the selected Pentecostal faith-formative writings have been compared to more traditional Christian views in order to ascertain their overall theological soundness or lack thereof. Finally, several recommendations have been made in light of the conclusions reached in the first two categories with the aim of positively contributing towards how Pentecostal believers respond to suffering.

1.6 An overview of the argument

Chapter 1

The first chapter serves as the introduction to the entire study. In this chapter, several key terms pertinent to the project have been defined and where necessary elaborated upon. Theodicy, as a central theme of the study, has been unpacked and defined in

order to provide a framework within which we have understood 'theodicy' in the context of this study. Furthermore, the background and rationale of the study was outlined, framing the study within the context of South Africa. Moreover, the *research questions, research methodology and goals, literature review and structure of the thesis* have all been presented in this chapter.

Chapter 2

The second chapter was aimed at better understanding a particular Pentecostal theology about the nature of God and suffering and presents a critique thereof. It was shaped primarily by looking at faith-formative literature from Chris Oyakhilome, as representative of a particular type of Pentecostal theology which has been an influential force in the South African religious milieu in recent years. Moreover, this specific kind of theology was surveyed in conversation with broader claims regarding suffering in contemporary Pentecostal theologies.

Chapter 3

The third chapter was focused on assessing the adequacy of the Pentecostal theology discussed in chapter two. This task was approached by weighing the critical conclusions of chapter two against some traditional Christian views about theodicy and the character of God in conversation with Jürgen Moltmann's *The Crucified God*. Furthermore, the chapter unpacked the understanding of God's character in suffering and formulated an argument for why a sound theological understanding thereof is pertinent to a South African Pentecostal theodicy.

Chapter 4

The fourth chapter focused on consolidating a proposal for a South African Pentecostal approach to suffering in light of the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The author sought to better understand what a revised Pentecostal understanding of the character of God contributes towards an existing South African Pentecostal response to suffering. The emerging understanding has been presented as a recommendation for a revised Pentecostal theological approach to suffering and the character of God.

Chapter 5

The fifth and final chapter is the conclusion of the thesis. In this chapter the findings are summarised. The importance of the findings are outlined, the limitations of the research and recommendations for further study are also presented.

CHAPTER TWO: A Pentecostal understanding of God's character

Introduction

The character of God can be described in a plethora of different ways. The goal of this chapter is to look at a particular Pentecostal understanding of the character of God in light of suffering based on a selection of Chris Oyakhilome's faith-formative literature. Although the Pentecostal movement is well known for miracles, signs and wonders, its history is deeply rooted in the lived experiences of human suffering. This chapter will be divided into two sections. Section 1 will provide a brief historical overview of the Pentecostal movement in South Africa with an emphasis on suffering. Section 2 will look at Chris Oyakhilome's understanding of God in trying to consolidate a Pentecostal understanding of the character of God in light of suffering.

Section 1: Historical Overview of the Pentecostal Movement

The Pentecostal movement is widely regarded as one of the most influential and fastest growing Protestant movements to come out of the 20th century (Synan, 2004:153). Although its inception is often contentiously traced back to the United States, the missionary impetus behind the movement quickly led to its decentralisation from a single location to countless locations across the world (Hunter & Robeck Jr, 2009:31-32). The proliferation of the movement has been such that by the end of the 20th century, less than a hundred years since its start, the Pentecostal movement boasted more than 500,000,000 followers (Synan, 2004:153.). This growth was so wide scale that it led to the movement being one of the largest grouping of Christians in the

world, second only to the Roman Catholic Church (ibid.). In this chapter, the origins of this movement will be briefly explored with a specific focus given to its establishment in South Africa. Moreover, a particular Pentecostal theology concerning the nature of God and suffering will be looked at. This will be done in conversation with literature by Chris Oyakhilome as representative of a distinct Pentecostal theology. Finally, a critique of this theology will be made in light of a South African Christian context marred with suffering.

2.1 From Azusa Street to South Africa

In the year 1906 race relations in the United States of America had arguably reached their darkest hour. The Jim Crow laws, enacted from 1881 to 1964, legalising racial segregation in 26 American states, were passed toward the end of the 19th century (Tischauer, 2012:xi). These laws, inter alia, prohibited the corporate gathering of people from different races, normalised lynchings and publically relegated black people to the status of second class citizens (ibid). This socio-political context is important in understanding something of the background of both the Pentecostal movement and the leader of its maiden revival, William Seymour. A man who, by merit of the circumstances surrounding his upbringing, was well acquainted with suffering as were the multitudes he ministered to.

William Joseph Seymour was born on the 2nd of May, in the year 1870 - the son of two slaves in Centerville, Louisiana (Liardon, 2003:126). Seymour was raised in the Deep South during the era known as 'Reconstruction'¹² and was like his black peers, the

¹² See Guelzo, A.C. 2012. *Fateful Lightning: A New History of the Civil War and Reconstruction*. OUP USA.

subject of adverse racism (ibid.). Seymour would go on to join a socially progressive Holiness group which preached racial equality at the height of Jim Crow segregation. It was in this congregation where Seymour would heed the call to ministry and saw his first example of a racially integrated church (Liardon, 2003:127). However, Seymour would resist this call for several years until he came face to face with death after battling smallpox, leaving him blinded in his left eye (ibid.). Following this experience around 1900, Seymour went to Texas and there met a man called Charles Fox Parham whose theology of the baptism in the Holy Spirit and tongues would influence him greatly in years to come (Synan, 2004:157). It was in Texas that Seymour would receive the call to pastor a multiracial group of believers in Los Angeles, California (ibid).

2.2 “Tongues of fire appeared above them...”

On the evening of the 9th of April 1906, William Seymour and his relatively small following were 3 days into a 10 day fast - praying in a believers home to be filled with the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues (Borlase, 2006:114-115). The events that unfolded on that fateful night would irreversibly change the face of Christianity as it had been known up until that point. According to firsthand accounts, what happened next was something akin to the Day of Pentecost in the Book of Acts as many were baptised in the Holy Spirit with the ability to speak in tongues (Liardon, 2003:131). The news of what happened spread quickly and soon there were more people praying and seeking God than the home could accommodate. This led Seymour to move the small but growing multiracial congregation to what was formerly known as

the Stevens African Methodist Episcopal Church at 312 Azusa Street with the first meeting taking place on the 14th of April 1906 (ibid.).

Soon reports filled Los Angeles of manifestations of the Holy Spirit and healings taking place at Azusa Street. This news would spread beyond continental America to the 'ends of the earth' as early Pentecostals, like John Wesley centuries before them, saw the world as their parish and set out for missionary enterprise (Anderson, 2006:110). This belief and sense of missionary calling led to countless missionaries sent from Azusa street specifically as well as from other locations throughout the United States. One such missionary, who becomes important at this stage as we look at the birth of the Pentecostal movement in South Africa, is John G. Lake. In 1908, Lake led a group of Pentecostal missionaries to South Africa where they founded the first Pentecostal church in South Africa, greatly aided by the former Dutch Reformed minister - Pieter le Roux (Synan, 2004:160).

2.3 Pieter le Roux, Zion and the Apostolic Faith Mission

Pieter Louis le Roux was born in 1865 in Wellington, South Africa and was part of Reverend Andrew Murray's Dutch Reformed congregation (Nel, 2005:203). Before committing his life to missions, Roux taught at a school in Oudtshoorn and Jacobsdal, returning to Wellington after his wife died in the birth of their first child (ibid.). Murray mentored le Roux and their relationship would prove significant in the history of the church in South Africa (Nel, 2005:203). Le Roux would go on to remarry and minister for about two years in the mission assembly in Greytown before being ordained as

missionary of the Dutch Reformed Church¹³ in Pietermaritzburg and consequently sent to Wakkerstroom (ibid.). It was during the time in Wakkerstroom in his pastorate at the black assembly of the DRC that le Roux began to take an interest in the subject of divine healing (Nel, 2005:203). This would lead to an unwavering belief in divine healing influenced by books written by Murray as well as John Alexander Dowie's monthly magazine *Leaves of Healing* (ibid.). The turning point came when le Roux wrote a letter to Murray in which he mentioned that he and his wife had vowed to never again use any kind of medicine on grounds of their belief in divine healing (Nel, 2005:203). This is an important point in this short historical account as these early core beliefs of le Roux serve as a foreshadow of what some South African Pentecostal churches would later believe.

Soon after le Roux unequivocally stated to never use medicine again, Murray responded to the young minister that he ought to be careful in his open proclamation of this doctrine of healing as some parishioners were not ready to hear such a message (Nel, 2005:203). It was during this tense series of exchanges that a well known woman of Wakkerstroom received treatment for a psychiatric illness but to no avail (ibid.). Following the woman being transferred to Johannesburg, le Roux advised her family to take her to Johannes B uchler's church - a fellow minister and believer in divine healing. This woman was healed immediately which led to quite a stir upon her return to Wakkerstroom in the local Dutch Reformed Assembly which at best had a very underdeveloped theology concerning divine healing (Nel, 2005:203). In spite of this

¹³ Will henceforth be used interchangeably with DRC

incident, le Roux agreed not to speak on the subject, that is, until his fifteen month old daughter fell seriously ill and her parents would not allow any medicine to be administered to her (ibid.). In a very short period of time, le Roux who would go on to be the president of the first Pentecostal denomination in South Africa, had encountered suffering in the form of the death of his first wife and child, mental illness in a resident of Wakkerstroom and the sickness of his baby daughter.

2.4 Zion is Born

The baby appeared to be dying, especially in the absence of medical care. When le Roux had all but given up, one of his co-workers- Charles Sangweni prayed for the child and she was healed (Nel, 2005:203). Le Roux saw this as an undeniable sign that he should preach openly about healing - leading to a period where he preached only about the giving of tithes, the baptism of believers and against medicine, tobacco and alcohol (ibid:204). In January 1901, le Roux informed the DRC that he would never again minister baptism to babies - understanding very well what estrangement that would cause in his familial and friendship relationships (Nel, 2005:204). Two years later le Roux would officially resign from the Dutch Reformed Church and go on to join the South African branch of Dowie's Christian Catholic Apostolic Church in Zion, taking with him about three quarters of his former assembly (ibid.).

The Le Roux's were socially persecuted for their decision to leave the DRC and to minister in a predominantly black congregation. At one point le Roux wanted to buy a piece of land for his increasingly growing congregation, but was denied by authorities

who argued that it was unlawful for large groups of black people to gather together (Nel, 2005:204). Racial discrimination and segregation were very much a reality at the start of the 20th century in South Africa and has been well documented by South African church historians.¹⁴ In this way, the historical contexts of Azusa Street and the Pentecostal Movement in South Africa share many similarities. It was, therefore, nothing short of controversial that le Roux's Zionist group accommodated traditional African practices and beliefs in their liturgy (Nel, 2005:204). During this time, le Roux played a crucial role in mentoring black ministers who would themselves go on to lead churches of their own.

In 1908, John G. Lake along with a group of missionaries arrived in Johannesburg with the aim of converting native believers to this new message of Pentecost. Their plan was somewhat frustrated as they were initially exclusively involved with white congregations - until they met le Roux who was at that stage a prominent leader among black Zionist Christians (Nel, 2005:205). Le Roux was so impacted by the ministry of Lake and Thomas Hezmalhalch in Johannesburg that he was prepared to assimilate with them and undergo a name change from Zion to Apostolic Faith Mission. However, the black contingent of the Zionist church was unwilling to abandon their name, but readily received the doctrine of the baptism in the Holy Spirit (Nel, 2005:206). This was followed by a short period where black and white believers gathered and worshipped together in the Apostolic Faith Mission (ibid.). However, the harmonious coexistence was short lived as the leaders of the movement soon succumbed to the pressure of

¹⁴ See Elphick, R., 2012. *The equality of believers: Protestant missionaries and the racial politics of South Africa*. University of Virginia Press.

racial segregation which characterised most institutions at the time. This led to a schism in 1909, with some of le Roux's Zulu co-workers leaving the Apostolic Faith Mission and establishing their own groups. This division would be a source of grievance for le Roux for many years to come. Among the leaders le Roux had mentored was a man called Edward Motaung, who was later also an associate of le Roux (Kgatlé, 2022:5). Furthermore, Motaung would go on to greatly influence Engenas Lekganyane who then founded Zion Christian Church¹⁵ which is today the largest organised grouping of Christians in South Africa (ibid.).

In conclusion, the author thought it well to give a brief account of the Pentecostal movement's history in order to highlight the presence of suffering in the lives of the leaders of the movement in both the United States and South Africa. As to not deviate from the main subject of this thesis, the author wrote concisely concerning the start of this movement, however several authors have written at length about the origins of Pentecostalism.¹⁶ Given the transnational history of the Pentecostal movement, it comes as no surprise that theology from the movement in other countries has influenced South African Pentecostalism and the understanding of God in particular. Some of the most influential theologies in recent years have come from Nigeria. In the next section we turn to one of the foremost figures in Nigerian Pentecostalism - whose

¹⁵ Also known as the ZCC,

¹⁶ See Chandomba, L. 2007. *The history of Apostolic Faith Mission and other Pentecostal missions in South Africa*. Central Milton Keynes, England: Authorhouse.

Anderson, A. 2005. The origins of Pentecostalism and its global spread in the early twentieth century. *Transformation*, 22(3), pp.175-185.

HoUenweger, W. 1997. *Pentecostalism: Origins and developments worldwide*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.

theology has unquantifiably influenced the South African ecclesia. In an attempt to arrive at an understanding of what a specific Pentecostal theology says about God and suffering, we now look at select readings from Pastor Chris Oyakhilome.

Section 2: A Critical Case Study of a Pentecostal Theology

Christian Oyakhilome was born on the 7th of December 1963 in Edo, Nigeria and is both the founder and current president of Christ Embassy. The third of seven children, Pastor Chris as he is popularly known, received a scholarship to attend Bendel State University to study Architecture (Falaye, 2015:231). Furthermore, it was during his time at this institution that Oyakhilome started a prayer group which is today seen as the early inception of Christ Embassy (ibid). Officially established in 1987, Christ Embassy also known as LoveWorld Incorporated, has multiple congregations in 5 continents and a far reaching online presence (Falaye, 2015:231). The impact of the ministry is clear to see when looking at some of the statistics provided on the ministries website.¹⁷ For example, *Rhapsody of Realities*, a devotional by Oyakhilome is believed by some to be the number one daily devotional around the world (Falaye, 2015:231). The devotional has been distributed in more than 160 countries in more than 148 languages (ibid).

Oyakhilome's ministry has not been without controversy and his personal life has had its fair share of hardship. In 2014, Oyakhilome's wife at the time, Anita Schafer, filed for divorce on grounds of unacceptable behaviour and adultery (Falaye, 2015:234).

¹⁷ See Christ Embassy. 2023. *About Pastor Chris*. Christ Embassy. [online] Available at: <https://christembassy.org/about-pastor-chris/>.

Moreover, Oyakhilome has also been the subject of social campaigns following his theological endorsement of faith healing as a cure for HIV (Falaye, 2015:232). Furthermore, Oyakhilome was again at the centre of controversy during the Covid-19 pandemic following statements claiming that the pandemic was linked to the 5G network which was being rolled out at the time (Aluko, 2020:119). This section is aimed at gaining an understanding of the theology underpinning Oyakhilome's teachings in order to consolidate a Pentecostal theology regarding suffering and the character of God. Thereafter, this theology will be critically evaluated in terms of other contemporary Pentecostal theologies.

2.5 Operational Framework

Considering the dense literary corpus of Oyakhilome's writings, the author of this research project has selected three books by Oyakhilome which will be qualitatively reviewed in light of two of the secondary research questions of this thesis. Firstly, "What are some of the dominant Pentecostal doctrines of God prevalent among certain Pentecostal believers in South Africa?" Secondly, "What are some contemporary approaches to the problem of suffering that are presented by a sample of South African Pentecostalism? Why might these be inadequate in dealing with the problem of suffering?" These questions will be grappled with by surveying the books by Oyakhilome, *How to Make Your Faith Work* (Oyakhilome, 2005) *None of these Diseases* (Oyakhilome, 2013a) and *Your Rights in Christ* (Oyakhilome, 2013b). These books have been selected from the many Oyakhilome has written due to their subject matter which is in line with the objectives of this thesis.

In order to lessen the scope of the qualitative analysis and consequent critique, the following themes have been identified in the selected writings of Oyakhilome which will frame the content of this chapter. Within theology, the character of God has generally been classified using two categories, namely; the incommunicable attributes of God and the communicable attributes of God (Grudem, 1994:185). The task of describing the character of God needs to be approached with great humility as it is often an unattainable endeavour to say everything the Bible says concerning the attributes of God in a single literary work. It is worth mentioning at this stage that there can be a difference in opinion concerning which of God's attributes are communicable and which are not. In light of this, the current section's understanding of the categorisation of God's character will follow that presented by Wayne Grudem in his highly influential book, *Systematic Theology* (Grudem, 1994) as well as *Systematic Theology* (Horton, 2007) by Pentecostal theologian, Stanley Horton. This research project will therefore only deal with an understanding of the communicable attributes of God most prominent in the writings of Chris Oyakhilome. Concerning the communicable attributes of God, Grudem further categorises them into five subcategories, namely; attributes describing God's nature, mental qualities, moral characteristics, attributes of purpose and summary attributes (Grudem, 1994:221). In this section we will only look at the moral characteristics and attributes of purpose categories.

Additionally, Oyakhilome's definition of suffering will also be looked at. As previously alluded to, the word suffering can be used to describe a wide range of human experiences and can be resultantly difficult to define. In order to narrow the scope of the

definition, suffering within the context of this research project will refer specifically to the Christian experience of sickness, depression and untimely death. Here the word 'untimely' is to be understood as referring to any death which occurs unexpectedly such as certain cases of motor vehicle accidents, the sudden onset of cancer and suicide inter alia. In order to effectively and critically engage with the writings of Oyakhilome, definitions of suffering within his selected work have to be taken seriously and reviewed. We will now look at an understanding of the moral attributes of God as revealed in the selected readings of Oyakhilome.

2.6 “God is good, all the time!”: the Moral Attributes of God

In this section we will be surveying and consolidating a character profile of the God Chris Oyakhilome speaks about. The focus of this segment is not to prove the existence of God. Rather it follows on the assumption that God does exist and consequently seeks to answer the questions which follow, namely; what is God like? Is God like us or different from us? Is God good or bad? Does God have the ability to do whatever God wants? The God which Chris Oyakhilome speaks about reveals himself using primarily masculine language and imagery, using the 'He' pronoun and 'Father' title when referring to God. The author of this research project is aware that gender identity and the use of personal pronouns have been the ground for much controversy in Western academia in recent years, nevertheless, the author concurs with Oyakhilome in this regard.

Although it is true that God is categorically different from humankind, it remains true that we have been created in his image, both male and female according to the book of Genesis. However, the current Western academic debate around the gender of God is amongst other reasons based on the premise that the Bible is *prima facie* a patriarchal document and therefore has to be updated in a sense, to suit the modern context of gender equality and the rights of women (Rashke, 1995:1). However, given the adverse effects of fatherlessness in South African society with only 37% of children growing up with their biological father (van den Berg et al, 2021:15) and the statistics of violent crimes committed by men (Freeks, 2017:91) contributing towards societal suffering within the category of moral evil, the author is persuaded that holding to the traditionally used masculine language in referring to God is not only necessary in staying true to the self-revelation of God but beneficial to the redemption of the broken image of men in the current South African milieu.

2.6.1 God the Father

The highly authoritative Nicene Creed, adopted by the Early Church at the First Council of Nicaea in 325 CE, begins with the following confession, “We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible” (Bray, 2009:ix). Oyakhilome’s theology regarding God as Father falls well within this confession. Paterology within Christian theology refers to the study of the person and work of God the Father (Rippe, 2018:1). Oyakhilome’s paterology emphasises the benevolence of God the Father to his children, “God is your heavenly Father and He wouldn’t give you a serpent for a fish” (Oyakhilome, 2013b:34). The title of ‘Father’ carries with it many presuppositions and

implied responsibilities. As alluded to previously, the absence of fathers in the South African context, coupled with the perpetuation of suffering by some fathers as agents of moral evil has led to a fragmented view of fathers in South African society (Richter & Smith, 2006:155).

According to Oyakhilome, if anyone is born again they are a child of God and God is their Father (Oyakhilome, 2013a:40). Furthermore, to have God as Father means that there is a state of communion and fellowship with him, a strong bond of friendship grounded by the covenant we have with him (ibid.). This claim by Oyakhilome is an important one because it describes a God who is not far removed, but rather occupies the position in a believers life of both Father and Friend. Naturally, these titles alone carry with them certain expectations, even more so when interacting with the topic of suffering and the involvement of God therein. One such expectation which seems logical is that as a Father, God is not indifferent to our pain. Floyd McClung was a significant leader across denominations in South Africa, having been the international director for Youth With A Mission (YWAM) as well as co-founding the missions organisation, All Nations. In his book, *the Father Heart of God*¹⁸, McClung states the following concerning God, “As a Father, He feels our pain more deeply than we do because His sensitivity to suffering is so much greater” (McClung, 2004:21). In a sense, the act of God both recognising and experiencing our pain is a facet of his love for us as a Father.

¹⁸ McClung, F. 2004. *The Father Heart of God*. Harvest House Publishers.

2.6.2 The Loving God

The love of God is central to Oyakhilome's view of God. Similar to many other Pentecostal believers and indeed Christians in general, the love of God is integral to the picture Oyakhilome paints about the nature of God. "There were so many rabbis in Israel but this was one rabbi that was so different. His message was different. All the other rabbis talked about reaching out to God but this rabbi came and said, 'God has already done something for you; God loves you,' but their small minds could not handle this" (Oyakhilome, 2013b:22). This 'rabbi' that Oyakhilome speaks of is Jesus, who heralded a message quite different to that proclaimed by his religious contemporaries at the time (Zuck, 2002:40).

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16, Bible). This is the first time that love is mentioned in the Gospel of John and it is unexpected that the object of God's love would be 'the world' (Michaels, 1971:291). It seems unbecoming to say that God who is both the creator and custodian of law and order would love 'the world' inundated with insurrectionary beings. This is the only instance in the entire New Testament where God is said, in no uncertain terms, to love the world (ibid.). The verb 'to love' that is used here is *Ἀγαπᾶν* which means, "to love out of an intelligent estimate of the object of love" (Vincent, 1887:167). This specific verb for love implies not a feeling but a conscious choice to love (Michaels, 1971:291).

In speaking about God's love, Oyakhilome shares a similar view supporting the notion that God made a conscious choice to love us even when we deliberately acted contrary to his commands. In commenting on Romans 5:8, Oyakhilome says the following, "We're one with God, we're in friendship with Him. We no longer need to be afraid of being in His awesome presence. While we were yet sinners, God confirmed His love towards us by giving up His Son to die for us" (Oyakhilome, 2013a: 40-41). The love of God, among other attributes such as mercy, patience and grace has also been considered as an aspect of the goodness of God although often dealt with as separate characteristics (Horton, 2007:127-129). The theology of Oyakhilome is such that it emphasises giving as a key activity in God's relationship with his children. In the writings of Oyakhilome, not only is God the ultimate Giver but in his giving, God exclusively gives *good* gifts.

2.6.3 God the Giver of good Gifts

In his book, *Your Rights in Christ*, Oyakhilome makes the following statement regarding a particular aspect of God's character, "They taught the people that any situation they found themselves in was somehow ordained by God. But that's not true, for only good and perfect gifts come from God (James 1:17)" (Oyakhilome, 2013b: 20-21). Furthermore, Oyakhilome places great emphasis on 'expectation' in the life of the Christian. Specifically writing concerning born again Christians, Oyakhilome says that there are certain things believers should expect and insist upon in their lives, "Only good and perfect gifts come from God. Sickness is not a good gift, just as lack is not a good gift. Sickness destroys and cripples. God wouldn't do that to any of His children"

(Oyakhilome, 2013a:17). Thus, the expectation that Oyakhilome sets concerning Christians is that they are to expect only good gifts from God, of which sickness and lack are not because “God wouldn’t do that to any of His children” (ibid).

This understanding of the goodness of God is common within the South African context with numerous church leaders teaching their congregations that they are to expect only good things from God. At Boshoff is both the founder and senior pastor of Christian Revival Church and was by merit of his expansive reach, one of the most influential South African Pentecostal/Charismatic church leaders at the time of this study. The following is an extract from one of Boshoff’s sermons, “The first thing you can never say is, ‘God is the cause of my adversity.’ Now remember Satan is a liar and he’s always going to cast doubt on the integrity of God and God’s word” (Boshoff, 2023). Boshoff goes on to speak about the importance of not questioning the integrity of God, making specific mention that there is no trial, test or adversity which comes from God (ibid.).

Moreover, Oyakhilome mentions a commonly held belief about the character of God as it relates to sickness and misfortune. “Some people still say sickness is a way to glorify God. A lady once said to a preacher: ‘God put the sickness on me to make me humble’” (Oyakhilome, 2013b: 21). This is not an unpopular stance regarding sickness and the goodness of God. If God is good, yet sickness and poverty are still a reality even to those who seek after God, then perhaps the only conclusion which makes it possible for God to retain his omnibenevolent status is to say that in some way sickness is good. This idea regarding the purpose of suffering can be categorised within *Soul-Making*

Theodicy discussed briefly in chapter 3.2.2. However, it is a difficult view to accept, especially if you have experienced firsthand the suffering which often accompanies illness. Nevertheless, to say that God is good is to say that he has the authoritative say in approving what is worthy (Grudem, 1994:235). At this point, it will be useful to look at how Oyakhilome defines suffering to aid our survey of Oyakhilome's understanding of the purpose attributes of God.

2.6.4 Suffering: a Particular Pentecostal Definition

As stated in chapter one, the human experience of evil can be classified into two broad theological categories. "Natural" evils denote natural disasters and virulent diseases which take place without the aid of a moral agent. On the other hand, "moral" evils are evils which are the consequence of pride, brutality and human foolishness - inflicting suffering as a direct result of the involvement of a moral agent (Plantinga, 1974:8). The category of human suffering being discussed in this paper is that resulting from "natural" evils, expressed through sickness, depression and death. To this end, Oyakhilome provides us with a broad understanding of suffering which extends beyond the focus of this research project. Nevertheless, it would be prudent to critically look at this definition as it will contribute towards a better understanding of Oyakhilome's theology.

"I want you to understand something: if you're born again, you don't need to suffer another day in your life. You don't have to be sick, broke, frustrated, poor, diseased or infirmed in your body. Put your faith to work! A glorious, prosperous, healthy, excellent, successful and good life is your God-given inheritance" (Oyakhilome, 2005:54).

Oyakhilome's theology of suffering states, in no uncertain terms, that born again believers are categorically exempt from suffering. This is at odds with the traditionally held view that suffering is a universal human experience, irrespective of religious, cultural and socio-economic circumstances (Reed, 2017:xi). However, in light of Oyakhilome's view regarding suffering the question could be asked that given the atoning and redeeming work of Jesus Christ, should the born again Christian's lived experience with suffering differ in any way from the person who is not a born again Christian? It would seem that there is a certain Pentecostal theology held by some believers in South Africa which would argue for the affirmative.

In the second sentence of the aforementioned definition, Oyakhilome goes on to elucidate what he regards as suffering: "You don't have to be sick, broke, frustrated, poor, diseased or infirmed in your body" (Oyakhilome, 2005:54). To explicate this even further, Oyakhilome's definition of suffering consists of three main components: sickness, frustration and poverty. This definition is consistent with the ideals of another type of theology in South Africa, namely, Prosperity Theology. Also known as the Prosperity Gospel, this type of theology is made up of three distinct elements: faith, wealth and health (Kgatle, 2019:2). The basic idea behind this theology, also closely associated with the 'Faith' movement¹⁹, is that health and wealth are the right of every born again Christian and can be accessed through faith as part of salvation because this has been paid for through the atoning work of Jesus Christ (Hunt, 2000:333). It is

¹⁹ The Faith movement may be understood as one of many streams within the Pentecostal movement. Similar to other Pentecostal groups, it emphasises the 'second baptism' (of the spirit), the charismata (glossolalia, prophecy, words of knowledge, etc.), and revival (Hunt, 2000:32).

important to keep this in mind in the following section as we look at an understanding of the will of God as one of the purpose attributes of God.

2.7 “If God wills”: the Purpose Attributes of God

The will of God and the omnipotence of God are attributes which have been discussed for millenia within theology. Following the assertions made by Oyakhilome that God is a Father who is loving and the Giver of good gifts, questions then arise concerning the will of God. Is it correct for us to assume the will of God based on an understanding of his character? Oyakhilome has much to say regarding this question and others like it. In order to maintain consistent definitions and language for concepts, the writings of Wayne Grudem will once again be made use of to situate Oyakhilome’s contributions within the broader context of systematic theology.

2.7.1 Defining God’s Will

The will of God can be defined as “that attribute of God whereby he approves and determines to bring about every action necessary for the existence and activity of himself and all creation” (Grudem, 1994:253). This definition is in accordance with classical Pentecostalism’s teachings regarding God’s absolute sovereignty (Horton, 2007:205). Moreover, there are several distinctions which can be made in aspects of God’s will, such as: necessary will, free will, secret will and revealed will (Grudem, 1994:255-256). For the purposes of this section, the categories of necessary and free will are sufficient in providing a framework within which to ground the understanding of God’s will found in the work of Oyakhilome.

“God’s necessary will includes everything that he must will according to his own nature” (Grudem, 1994:225). By saying that there is a ‘necessary’ will of God, it means that there are certain things that God, by merit of his character, is obliged to do or not to do in remaining consistent with his attributes. “God’s *free will* includes all things that God decided to will but had no necessity to will according to his nature” (Grudem, 1994:255). Within this category of God’s will is found the decision to create the universe along with all the decisions relating to the specifics of that creation, (ibid) which include the decision to heal or not. According to Grudem, all acts of God’s redemption are included in this in that there was nothing in God’s own nature which obliged him to decide to create the world or to redeem humankind from sin (Grudem, 1994:255).

2.7.2 Oyakhilome and God’s Will

The will of God is an indispensable part of Chris Oyakhilome’s theology. Based on selected readings, this section will explore two ideas regarding God’s will according to Oyakhilome. The first of those ideas is the idea that the will of God is revealed through the Protestant Bible.

2.7.2.1 The Bible as God’s Will

“For this reason, it is not proper for a Christian to behave lost and confused because he thinks he does not know God’s will. Why not search His Word? His Word will reveal Him and His will to you” (Oyakhilome, 2013b: 26). According to Oyakhilome, coming to know the will of God is not a complicated exercise. In fact, it is as simple as searching God’s Word and it will be made clear to whoever seeks. Oyakhilome’s definition of suffering as described in the previous chapter classifies sickness, emotional distress (such as

frustration) and poverty all within the category of suffering. In light of this definition the question regarding God's will then becomes, "What is God's will? Or more specifically: what is God's will concerning divine healing?" (Oyakhilome, 2013a:67). True to the idea that God's will is revealed through Scripture, Oyakhilome turns to a Gospel account of Jesus in answering the questions concerning God's will regarding divine healing.

"A man with a skin disease came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, 'if you are willing, you can make me clean.' Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, 'I am willing. Be made clean!'" (Mark 1:40-41, Bible). For Oyakhilome, this is a clear indication that God is always willing to heal sickness. Moreover, this 'willingness' of Jesus to heal the leper is an expression of the love, compassion and acceptance Jesus had toward the leper and, by extension, to everyone who is suffering through sickness (Oyakhilome, 2013a:70). This belief in divine healing is not only held by Oyakhilome in theory but is also put into practice through the Healing School run by Christ Embassy, where scores of people annually report being healed supernaturally (Falaye, 2015:232). In the South African context, this view of God's will pertaining to healing is held by many believers and proclaimed by many Christian leaders in the country.

One such leader is At Boshoff, "I know we have been taught wrong in our religious upbringing that everything is God's will. Well then, God must be very very very confused. Cause if God makes you sick and the doctor makes you whole, who's working against God's will? If God brought the sickness upon you, what are you doing

at the doctor?” (Boshoff, 2023). Through this statement it is clear that Boshoff agrees with Oyakhilome in that he does not believe that being sick is the will of God for the believer. Although the argument Boshoff makes in this specific sermon is more of a logical one in that if one believes that it is God’s will for them to be sick then why seek out healing by going to the doctor? In order to remain consistent, then according to Boshoff in such an instance, the seeker of healing would be working against the will of God.

Both Oyakhilome and Boshoff have, to an extent, linked the *necessary* will of God to divine healing whilst negating the *free* will aspect of God’s will. This is to say that the message being essentially communicated is that God is compelled by his nature to heal, to not do so would be in some way a privation of his own nature. Placing the decision to heal within God’s *free* will, in that God can decide when to heal or not, would seem illogical given the understanding that all sickness has already been atoned for on the Cross (Wright, 2002:283).

2.7.2.2 Believers as God’s will

The role believers play in Oyakhilome’s understanding of God’s will is a crucial one. According to Oyakhilome, believers are the expression of God’s will on earth and their desires will naturally reflect the will of God. “God gives you the right to choose. You can decide what you want. You may say, ‘Supposing I choose something God doesn’t like.’ Never be afraid of that. You’re a child of God and God’s will is revealed in you and to you. You’re the expression of the will of God” (Oyakhilome, 2013b:26). Oyakhilome says this in support of the notion that God has chosen believers to know his will. Moreover, a

believer will know that they are doing the will of God based on their experience of true joy or the absence thereof (Oyakhilome, 2013b:33). Oyakhilome encourages believers not to be afraid of making the mistake of asking for the wrong thing under the impression that it is God's will. Rather, God will bring correction should the request be amiss (Oyakhilome, 2013b:34). In this regard, Oyakhilome places a lot of authority on the believer in terms of knowing God's will. In saying that believers are the expression of the will of God, Oyakhilome presents God's will as being subject to the individual believer's desires and requests.

Section 3: Critical Response to Oyakhilome's Characterization of God

2.8.1 The Moral Attributes

Oyakhilome's characterisation of God as a Father is not foreign to the traditional tenets of Christianity and is one which has significant Biblical backing, particularly in the New Testament.²⁰ However, more could have been said concerning the roles and common associations with fathers in society. Although the understanding of God as Father has been unquestioned within Christendom, it may present barriers to faith for those who have had a particularly bad experience of a father or of men in general.²¹ The author is of the opinion that it would lead to the enrichment of a South African Pentecostal understanding of the character of God in light of suffering to give more attention to the potential pitfalls of the characterisation of God as Father, given the suffering perpetuated by some fathers due to their absence or destructive presence. Moreover, a

²⁰ See 1 Corinthians 8:6, Ephesians 4:6, Matthew 23:9, Psalm 68:5, Isaiah 64:8, Isaiah 63:16

²¹ See Balthazar, P.M. 2007. How Anger Toward Absentee Fathers May Make it Difficult to Call God 'Father'. *Pastoral Psychology*, 55(5), pp.543–549.

more detailed explanation of what exactly is meant by the confession of God as Father would go a long way to aiding a Pentecostal understanding of the character of God.

Oyakhilome goes on to describe God as both loving and giving. However, the claim that believers are to expect only *good* gifts from God (Oyakhilome, 2013b:20-21), is slightly problematic in that Oyakhilome does nothing to qualify what is meant by 'good'. This leaves the reader with a blank canvas which can quickly be painted with a very anthropocentric definition of what good is. Moreover, Oyakhilome places a great deal of authority on the role of believers in 'knowing' God's will and being an 'expression' of God's will (Oyakhilome, 2013b:26). These two ideas combined, have the potential of leading to great disappointment should a believer's expectations pertaining to God's will not be met in the way they had hoped.

Furthermore, Oyakhilome uses James 1:17 in substantiating his understanding of God as the Giver of good gifts. However, Oyakhilome does nothing in dealing with the context of the verse and the overall message of the pericope which it forms part of. In James 1:2-4, the readers are encouraged to 'consider it all joy' whenever they face various trials and to do so because the testing of their faith produces endurance. It seems clear, even from a basic reading, that this specific group of believers were exhorted to embrace trials with joy.

Although not mentioned explicitly, the role of God in bringing forth, allowing or using these trials is implied by the implicit conviction that the suffering of Christians takes

place under the providential control of a God who has the best interests of his people at heart (Moo, 2000:112). In light of James encouraging his readers to embrace trials with joy, the author would propose that any Christian definition of good based on James 1 has to include both the possibility and expectation of trials. However, there is a certain definition of good which is seen in a specific South African Pentecostal theology which excludes trials and hardship altogether as is evident in Oyakhilome's and Boshoff's teachings. The author is of the view that a revised understanding of what is meant by 'good' would go a long way in enriching a Pentecostal understanding of God in light of suffering.

2.8.2 Suffering: a Particular Pentecostal Definition

Oyakhilome's definition of suffering consists of three main components: sickness, frustration and poverty. This definition positively correlates with the ideals of the Prosperity Gospel, a theology based on faith, wealth and health which has found resonance with many South African believers (Kgatle, 2019:2). Although there are certain scholars who have written about the benefits of the Prosperity Gospel, these are outweighed by the harm this teaching has caused.²² Prosperity theology is in many ways at odds with traditionally held Christian beliefs because it is "anthropocentric, rather than Christocentric" (Liroy, 2007:41).

This type of theology places people along with their emotions and desires at the centre of the Gospel message and not Jesus Christ. It is clear from the readings of Oyakhilome

²²Asuquo, O.O. 2021. Pentecostalism and Development: The Role and Prospects of Prosperity Gospel in the Socio-Economic Development of Nigeria. *PREDESTINASI*, 13(1), p.35.

that at the centre of certain aspects of his theology is the born again believer, rather than Jesus Christ - the historical subject of Christian belief. This is evident, for example, in the statement Oyakhilome makes in saying that Christians are the expression of God's will (Oyakhilome, 2013b:26). The author of this project is not against divine healing or the alleviation of poverty. However, the understanding of the Gospel that places humankind at the centre and not Jesus Christ is in many ways heretical and undermines the very essence of Christianity. Unfortunately, this message easily takes root within a socio-economic environment marred by poverty and suffering such as that in South Africa. Nevertheless, it is the view of the author that this particular theology of prosperity has contributed greatly, although at times subtly, towards the inability of some believers to endure suffering and hardships.

2.8.3 God's Will: A Purpose Attributes

Similar to the tenets of the Prosperity Gospel, Oyakhilome's understanding of the will of God places more authority on the believer than on God. This is extremely problematic particularly when dealing with Christians suffering sickness, depression and death. The overemphasis of the role of a believer in what does or does not happen in their life can lead to great despondency when, for example, prayers offered to God in faith do not result in the miraculous. The author of this project is of the opinion that a more unassuming approach to matters of healing and God's will would enrich a Pentecostal understanding of God's character in light of suffering. Oyakhilome would have done well to mention that sometimes the will of God does not happen in our lives as we expect it to and we do not always understand why God does or does not do certain things.

Conclusion

The goal of this chapter was to arrive at an understanding of what a specific Pentecostal theology says about God and suffering, specifically through looking at selected readings from Pastor Chris Oyakhilome. A short overview of the history of the Pentecostal movement in South Africa was looked at in the first section. The second session looked primarily at the understanding of God held by Chris Oyakhilome, derived from selected writings.

In summary, the theology of Oyakhilome is strongly characterised by the doctrines of God the Father, the Loving God, God the Giver of good gifts and an understanding of suffering and God's will reflective of Prosperity Theology. There are teachings of Oyakhilome which are sound and the impact Christ Embassy has had and continues to have in the world is undeniable. Moreover, these teachings have the potential to contribute positively to the resolution of the questions asked in this research project. However, the author of this thesis suggests that in light of the South African context and the broader context of Pentecostal theology, there is more to the character of God and suffering than is evident in the selected readings of Oyakhilome. Moreover, certain aspects of Oyakhilome's understanding of God's character may be inadequate in aiding believers endure suffering within the South African context. We now turn to *the Crucified God* by Jürgen Moltmann in our pursuit of unearthing a fuller and more sufficient understanding of the character of God in light of suffering in South Africa.

CHAPTER THREE: Jürgen Moltmann and God's character in suffering

Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to critically evaluate the conclusions about a particular understanding of God's character made in the previous chapter, following a selected reading of Chris Oyakhilome's work as a representative of a particular Pentecostal theology. In order to do this, a selected number of influential views concerning theodicy in Christianity will be surveyed and weighed against the claims upheld by Oyakhilome's theology. Moreover, this overview of seminal contributions towards theodicy in Christendom will have as its main contributing work, *the Crucified God* by German theologian, Jürgen Moltmann.

Although the kind of suffering being addressed in this study and which was the topic of Oyakhilome's contributions in this regard, may differ at times from the suffering and theodicy dealt with by Moltmann and his contemporaries, they are nevertheless relevant to this research project. This relevance is, inter alia, rooted in the fact that Moltmann's theology of suffering has had a great impact in the global south among the socio-politically oppressed, particularly in the 20th century. Finally, this third chapter will further unpack the understanding of God's character in suffering and argue for why a sound theological stance thereof is pertinent to a South African Pentecostal understanding of God in light of Christians suffering sickness, depression and death. The first section begins by establishing an operational framework, based on that used in

reviewing Oyakhilome's work, in order to make any comparison to other contributors valid by means of a coherent schema.

Section 1: Historical Overview of Influential Christian Theodicies

The ageless question of why God allows suffering is most pronounced when it co-exists with the belief in a God who is omnipotent and omnibenevolent. In the previous chapter, certain claims about the character of God came to the fore as being pertinent to a particular Pentecostal theology prominent in South Africa. In order to gauge the soundness of these professions, this section will compare the aforementioned claims with the attributes of God traditionally held in Christianity. Given the expansive history of Christianity, the 'traditional' attributes of God will be informed primarily by the Italian Dominican friar and priest, Thomas Aquinas who, amongst others, can be seen as a significant historical contributor to the categories of God's character employed by Wayne Grudem and used in the previous chapter. Although Aquinas hails from a Catholic monastic background, his ideas such as those on the *charismata* of the Holy Spirit (King, 1979:51) have contributed tacitly to Puritan and Holiness Movement teaching, which have further influenced Pentecostalism.²³ The attributes of God which will be looked at will be limited to those presented in the previous chapter, namely: God's goodness, God the Father, God's love, God and good gifts, God's ability and God's will.

²³ See Potter, R. ed. 2006. *Summa Theologiae: Volume 45, Prophecy and Other Charisms: 2a2ae. 171-178* (Vol. 45). Cambridge University Press.

3.1 Thomas Aquinas: the Attributes of God

Thomas Aquinas was born around 1225 at Roccasecca, southern Italy (Torrell, 2005:1-2). Aquinas was the last born amongst his siblings and per custom, was dedicated to the Church (Torrell, 2005:4). This would lead to Aquinas' father sending him to the monastery as an oblate when he was about six years old (ibid:5). Aquinas would go on to become one of the most important theologians from antiquity, gaining a reputation even among secular scholars for his theology and philosophy. Several arguments for the existence of God which Aquinas made are still held as authoritative today as well as the attributes of God, which we now turn to.

3.1.1 The Will of God

Aquinas dealing with the subject of God's will involves four related topics, namely: God's will as a divine perfection, God's will towards creation, God's love and joy and finally, God's justice and mercy (Davies & Stump, 2012:164). For Aquinas it is important to elucidate what is meant by 'will' when speaking about creatures and when referring to God as to neglect doing so might lead to a misunderstanding of what is meant by the divine will. In reference to creation 'will' could be understood in at least three ways. Firstly, to will could be "to want something that one perceives as good but which one lacks" (Davies & Stump, 2012:164). Secondly, to will could be "to possess or rest in something that one perceives as good" (ibid.). Thirdly, to will could be "to give a good to another" (Davies & Stump, 2012:164). Given the broad scope of what 'will' may mean, the question of God's will essentially consists of several questions such as whether God wills, what God wills and in what senses God wills certain things (ibid).

Aquinas responds to the aforementioned questions in three points. Firstly, there is no 'will' in God in the sense that God lacks a certain thing and desires it (Davies & Stump, 2012:164). Secondly, the will of possessing or resting in something good exists in God in that God possesses and rests in himself as the highest expression of good (ibid.). Thirdly, in God the will of giving something is found in that God gives being to creatures (Davies & Stump, 2012:164). However, these responses do little in dealing with the question of evil in light of God's goodness. With the understanding of evil as being either natural or moral, the most pressing question to be asked of Aquinas in the context of this research project is, 'Does God will evil?'

Following Oyakhilome's definition of suffering as being "sick, broke, frustrated, poor, diseased or infirmed..." (Oyakhilome, 2005:54) his answer to that question would be a resounding 'no'. Although Oyakhilome does not state this directly, it is implied in the expression of his views concerning divine healing, "Let this be settled in your heart forever: God has the ability to heal you, He wants to heal you and he will heal you" (Oyakhilome, 2013a:70). Moreover, Oyakhilome unequivocally states his belief that only 'good' gifts come from God with an anthropocentric definition of what 'good' may mean (Oyakhilome, 2013b:20-21). However, Aquinas deals with this question in a much more nuanced way. According to Aquinas, everything which can be classified as a being is inherently good as it was created by God who is the highest good and seeks to multiply his own goodness into creation. Evil and the expression thereof, is simply a deviation from the inherent state of goodness possessed by everything in creation. Moreover, this deviation from an initially perfect state of goodness can be seen in everything which

exists and therefore all evil is found in something that is good (Davies & Stump, 2012:168). Furthermore, nothing is entirely evil because if it were, according to Aquinas, it would not exist because the fact that God has allowed it to exist is evidence enough that it contains some good (ibid.). This understanding makes the axiom, 'to will evil' unclear when referring to God.

"It could mean to will what is evil because it is evil, and it could mean to will what is good but which happens also to be evil in some respect. God does not will what is evil because it is evil. No one does. But God does will some things that are good in one respect even though evil in another respect" (Davies & Stump, 2012:168). This is to say that God wills good things that may also contain some bad aspects or some negative side effects (ibid.). An example of this would be to say that God wills for plants to be food, even though the negative side effect of their being food is that they will have to be destroyed. To conclude that God wills for plants to be destroyed, in the above situation, is true by chance and not by initial intention (Davies & Stump, 2012:168).

This can intelligibly be applied in understanding why God permits morally evil choices, even though he does not 'will' them. However, it is important to consider how this principle applies in the context of sickness, depression and death. Is there anything innately 'good' in cancer or in depression or even in death and those who experience the negative side effects thereof are simply going through the privation of goodness in that entity of creation? On this specific subject Aquinas does not give us much regarding God's will concerning natural evil, a category which is dealt with specifically in

this project. Without discarding the views of Aquinas, we now look at the natural category of evil in our pursuit of better understanding the relationship between God's will and evil, and in finally assessing the adequacy of Oyakhilome's viewpoint.

3.1.2 God's Will and Natural Evil

Natural evil can be defined as denoting the pain and suffering which come about as a result of natural events (Scott, 2015:42). It refers to the death, injury and destruction brought about by nature, void of human free will and agency (ibid.). The causes of suffering dealt within this research project, namely, sickness, depression and specific instances of 'natural' death can be classified within this category. However, given the emphasis on the Spirit and the spiritual realm in Pentecostal theology, a third category may be useful in better understanding God's will as it pertains to 'natural' evil. 'Metaphysical' evil refers to the "imperfections and limitations of the universe, which create the possibility for moral and natural evil. It refers to the finite, flawed conditions of the cosmos. Occasionally, metaphysical evil denotes the dark spiritual forces of the world, such as Satan. This type is the most elusive of the three" (Scott, 2015:42).

The doctrine of sin is an important one in the history of Christianity and has been grappled with in detail by many Early Church Fathers. In light of the framework provided by Aquinas within which we may understand evil, the aforementioned categories of sin seem to suggest that there was a historical and structural privation from the initial 'good' and 'perfection' of both the natural and metaphysical world. The question then is, what caused this deviation from initial good and perfection? To this, the majority of Early

Church Fathers would respond, 'the sin of the first man' (Papageorgiou, 1995:2). The majority of Eastern Fathers believed that the sin of Adam directly caused the 'fall' of humankind from the grace of God, brought about the existential realities of death, pain, fear and suffering into the life of humanity as well as all other human privations (ibid.). Although it should be noted that Augustine's understanding of this differed slightly in that he believed that the above-mentioned are consequences of the sin and guilt of Adam being transmitted through the act of procreation and are thus found in every person born, including children (Papageorgiou, 1995:2). Nevertheless, it remains conclusive, at least in its simplest form, that natural and metaphysical evil (to an extent) exists because of the 'original' sin of Adam. Much more has been said about the doctrine of sin and original sin specifically, however the above will suffice for the purpose of this thesis.²⁴

In light of the above explanation for natural and metaphysical evil, the specific causes of suffering dealt with in this thesis, namely, sickness, depression and death can be understood as being a direct consequence of the privation of creation as a result of original sin. Furthermore, following the same line of argument as Aquinas, it can be said that God did not will for these specific expressions of evil, however God did will that Adam and Eve exist and that made them 'good' in essence. At the same time, God did will that humanity should have freewill, which is in essence 'good' although the privation thereof eventuated the cosmological corruption, within which the tripartite of moral,

²⁴ For more on the doctrine of sin see Tennant, F.R. 2012. *The concept of sin*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

natural and metaphysical evil is made possible.²⁵ This understanding of God's will shares common ground with that of Oyakhilome in that there is an acknowledgement in both that the existential experience of evil is a direct consequence of the sin of the primordial couple.

3.1.3 The Goodness of God

According to Aquinas, God's goodness is the 'first goodness' on which goodness in general is dependent (Davies & Stump, 2012:148). Moreover, for Aquinas, goodness and perfection are very closely related and even dependent on one another. In his seminal work, *Summa Theologica*²⁶, Aquinas defines the predicate of 'perfection' in demonstrating that God is not only 'perfect', but is the primary source of perfection which perfects all other remotely perfect things (Davies & Stump, 2012:149). "In the case of the predicate 'good,' 'the being that perfects another thing [*ens perfectivum alterius*]' is called "good" primarily and in principle, while the being that is perfected so "that it achieves its own end [*ductivum in finem*] in virtue of a perfective being is called 'good' in a secondary sense" (Davies & Stamp, 2012:149).

This raises the question whether calling God 'good' in the same way the rest of creation may be called good does not take away from God's transcendence? It is clear from Aquinas' doctrine of God that the understanding of God as good is categorically different from the understanding of anything else that exists as good (Davies & Stamp,

²⁵ It is important to note here that the role of Satan as the spiritual representative, perpetrator and perhaps even the initial cause of metaphysical evil can be further studied and explained in strengthening a Pentecostal understanding of suffering sickness, depression and death

²⁶ Thomas, A.S., Dominicans. English Province and Xiii, L. 2014. *The Summa theologica*. London, England: Catholic Way Publishing.

2012:150). This is because God not only preceded everything which exists in his goodness but is both the source of all existing goodness and God himself, is by definition the 'highest good' (ibid.). Oyakhilome does not make such a distinction as the use of the adjective good in reference to God is equated to its use when referring to humankind.

In reviewing the categories Aquinas speaks of, it becomes clear just how expansively great the God Aquinas speaks of is. The author is of the opinion that Oyakhilome's understanding of God's goodness places too much authority on the role of humankind in interpreting what is good and what is not good. Nevertheless, this leads to further questions for the believer concerning suffering in general and in particular the suffering brought about through the experience of sickness, depression and death. In light of the goodness of God, which is categorically different from any other existing goodness although sharing a similitude, how are Christians to understand experiences of sickness, depression and death? This question and others like it, has been grappled with throughout millennia within the Christian faith. We now turn to some ideas concerning theodicy which have passed the test of time within Christian tradition- some of which are still held by believers today, even if only subconsciously.

3.2 Classical Christian Responses to the Problem of Evil

"In theology and philosophy, the problem of evil refers to the logical tension between belief in divine omnipotence and goodness and the reality of evil. If God is almighty, he would be able to prevent evil, and if God is good, he would be willing to prevent evil.

Whence, then, is evil?" (Scott, 2015:45). In essence, the logical problem of evil arises from a seemingly incompatible set of propositions: "1) If God is good, God would want to prevent evil; 2) If God is omnipotent, God would be able to prevent evil; 3) Evil exists" (Scott, 2015:45). The logical conclusion, therefore, is that either God is not good and/or omnipotent or there must be a justifiable reason for God's allowance of evil (ibid.).

However, as far as scholarly attention is concerned the focus seems to have moved away from the logical problem of evil to the evidential problem of evil (Scott, 2015:46). The evidential problem of evil, simply put, makes the argument that the breadth and depth of evil provides compelling evidence against the existence of God, even if it does not present a logical contradiction thereof (ibid.). Although these two verbalisations of the problem of evil have generally been seen as including all nuanced and contextually specific problems arising from evil, some scholars such as Marilyn McCord Adams have deemed it necessary to further elucidate the problem of evil. According to Adams, there are at least four problems of evil, namely: logical, evidential, practical and existential (Adams, 1990:1-4).

The practical problem of evil refers to how the inundation of evil in the world poses a practical challenge for all living things in general in that they need to grapple in living in coexistence with evil ultimately presenting a threat to our biological survival (Adams, 1990:1). The existential problem of evil refers to the problem evil poses to human emotions, psychology and intellect in that it directly threatens our sense of meaning (ibid.). Moreover, given the different problems which evil presents it is apparent that the

particular problem of evil which is being dealt with will similarly present a particular theodicy in resolution to that problem. As the author argued in chapter 1 (1.1, p7), the South African Christian experience of sickness, depression and death can be rightly classified as part of the existential problem of evil. The four theodicies which follow will therefore be viewed in light of this classification.

3.2.1 Free Will Theodicy and Defence

Theodicy generally attempts to do two things simultaneously: it shifts the blame for evil from God and redirects it somewhere else (Scott, 2015:69). Moreover, there is an incessant pursuit for the origins of evil, implicitly linking causation and moral responsibility (ibid.). Following the case presented by the logical problem of evil, the blame for evil belongs entirely to God (Scott, 2015:70). The God who both created and consequently sustains the universe, must take responsibility for the imperfections and tragedies which beset it (ibid.). The free will defence held by both Augustine and Plantinga is at odds with the logical problem of evil. Germane to the argument made by the Free Will Defence is the claim that humanity and not God is to blame for evil (Davis, 2001:75).

According to Augustine, a large part of why there is evil in the world can be attributed to the free choice of the first human beings in that they acted contrary to God's plan and thus incepted the corruption which has since permeated all of creation (Speak, 2015:206). The 'first human beings' refers to Adam and Eve and their free choice refers to the choice they made to disobey the command of God, leading to the 'fall' of

humanity and bringing about death, sin and the consequences thereof. This approach to the question of evil has been dominant in Christian tradition as it moves the responsibility for evil and its consequences away from God to humankind. At this point it is important to make the distinction between Free Will Theodicy and Free Will Defence.

The difference between a theodicy and a defence is not in their content but rather it is in the purpose for which they were formulated (van Inwagen, 2006:7). The Free Will Defense makes the suggestion that God permits evil for the sake of freedom, arguing that freedom is a morally sufficient ground for God's allowance of evil (Scott, 2015:77). Important to note here is that the defence does not make an absolute claim but only presents this as a possibility, not as truth (ibid.). Moreover, the Free Will Defence can also be understood as an attempt to show that there may be a specific type of good which God cannot bring about without permitting evil (Plantinga, 1977:29). The conclusion then is, "the greater good of freedom constitutes the morally sufficient reason why God might permit evil, which diffuses the threat of the logical problem of evil" (Scott, 2015:80). Furthermore, the Free Will Defence makes the assertion that in the end God's decision would have been wise because the resulting good will outweigh the resulting evil (Scott, 2015:80). Nevertheless, the defence shies away from claiming to absolutely know why God allows evil, rather it dabbles in the realm of possibility. Free Will Theodicy on the other hand, as commonly associated with Augustine claims to know why evil is allowed.

Similarly, to Aquinas who came after him, “Augustine defines evil as the privation of good,” (Evans, 1990:1-2). The problem of evil was a lifelong reflection for Augustine and at the core of this conundrum was the idea of divine justice in light of evil (Scott, 2015:84). This reflection would lead Augustine to conclude two things in the Free Will Theodicy which have characterised the traditional Christian response in many ways. Firstly, God allows evil in order to make human freedom possible (ibid:86). Secondly, all evil will end at the final judgement at the revelation of God’s justice (Scott, 2015:86).

3.2.1.2 Free Will Defense/Theodicy and Christian Suffering

Is the aforementioned answer to suffering adequate in aiding Christians to deal with the reality of suffering sickness, depression and death? There is a particular theological position implied in the work of Oyakhilome which forms a part of a larger Pentecostal theology that would be at odds with the Free Will Defense/Theodicy. The doctrine stating that physical healing has been provided for in the atonement of Jesus is popular and even characteristic amongst Pentecostal believers around the globe (Thomas, 2005:24). The consequent question which arises is then, if it is true - as Pentecostal theology holds - that provision for physical healing has been made available in the atonement, then why do *Christians* suffer sickness, depression and seemingly senseless death? The argument that all of creation has been subjected to suffering and corruption following the free choice of the primordial couple is traditionally accepted by Christians as the reason evil and all its different expressions exist in the world.

Similarly, the atonement is generally understood to include some aspect of redemption which is explained by Grudem as follows, “Because we as sinners are in bondage to sin and Satan, we need someone to provide redemption and thereby ‘redeem’ us out of that bondage. When we speak of redemption, the idea of a ‘ransom’ comes into view. A ransom is the price paid to redeem someone from bondage or captivity” (Grudem, 1994:708-709). In light of this explanation, the question can be asked that if redemption has been made and all those who believe in Jesus have been redeemed from sin which in the context of the fall of humanity can be seen as the principle evil, why then do Christians suffer sickness, depression and untimely death if all those are consequences of the sin which they have been redeemed out of by Jesus’ atonement? We now turn our attention to Soul-Making Theodicy.

3.2.2 Soul-Making Theodicy & Process Theodicy

For hundreds of years, the Free Will Defense was the undisputed authority to the question of evil in Christian theology (Scott, 2015:95). However, the publishing of John Hick’s *Evil and the God of Love*, brought about a paradigm shift in the Christian narrative concerning evil (ibid.).²⁷ Soul-Making Theodicy makes the argument that pain and suffering are necessary for moral, spiritual and intellectual growth (Hick, 2016:259). Many people hold to this view as it seems to make reasonable sense. However, it’s critics have pointed out that it seems a bit harsh and loveless that God would deliberately inflict suffering on his people in order to bring about a certain type of growth. One such critic is Amos Yong, a Malaysian-American Pentecostal theologian

²⁷ See Hick, J. 2016. *Evil and the God of Love*. Springer.

who critiqued Soul-Making Theodicy in the context of disability, commenting on the idea of suffering serving a greater purpose, “Without denying the formative value of experiences of suffering, a disability perspective would caution against instrumentalizing the pain and suffering of a select group of people for the gains of others” (Amos, 2009:60). Moreover, there are many Christians who endure the hardship of suffering and are never relieved of their struggle, but rather experience such trials as the final battle of their lives.

Process Theology views God as not being in complete control of what happens in creation and therefore cannot be held responsible for the suffering in the world (Cobb, 1976). Process Theodicy goes a step further than Soul-Making Theodicy in effort to explain effort, making use of the cosmology of process philosophy to better understand the problem of evil (Scott, 2015:119). This type of theodicy is most closely associated with Alfred North Whitehead and John Cobb who are both known for Process Theology which is defined as theology which operates, “on the one side from the perspective of Christian faith and on the other in the metaphysical context provided by process philosophy and its doctrine of God” (Scott, 2015:124). Process Theodicy refuses all attempts at watering down the reality of genuine evil, that is, suffering which has no redemptive value, positive outcome or theological significance (Scott, 2015:132). Moreover, Process Theodicy makes the claim that God is not omnipotent and therefore cannot prevent evil from existing or taking place (ibid:133). Essentially, Process Theodicy attempts to solve the logical problem of evil by removing from it the component of God’s omnipotence.

This view has not been very popular as it is against a lot of traditional Christian doctrines about the character and attributes of God. Furthermore, the particular Pentecostal theology held by Oyakhilome is also strongly against the notion of God being 'unable' to do all things. This is evident in how Oyakhilome deals with the faith of a believer, "In other words, with your faith - the small measure of faith God has given to you, you should be able to do the impossible. You have in you the power to do anything. You can effect changes and control the circumstances of life to suit you if only you'll put your faith to work" (Oyakhilome, 2005:32). Although not stated explicitly, it is implied that this 'faith' of the believer is in the God who is able to do all things. We will now look at *Cruciform Theodicy*, a type of theodicy which most accurately describes the theology found in *the Crucified God* by Jürgen Moltmann.

Section 2: The Crucified God

The final theodicy which will be looked at in this chapter is what can be called Cruciform Theodicy. The cornerstone of Cruciform Theodicy is the passion of Christ (Scott, 2015:147). Through the *passio*, Jesus made himself subject to the entire range of human sorrow (ibid.). This deep enduring of pain finds its culmination on the cross where Jesus utters the seemingly unimaginable words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46, Bible 2019). This theodicy is characterised by the idea that God does not observe human suffering from the safety of his heavenly domain, rather God gets involved and makes himself subject to the full spectrum of human suffering. This particular type of theodicy has been advocated for by several influential theologians particularly after the events of the two world wars which, by merit

of the sheer abundance of moral evil perpetrated against the helpless, is considered by many to be one of the darkest chapters in collective human history.

One of those theologians is Dietrich Bonhoeffer who from a prison cell, in the midst of a Nazi-led Germany and war ravaged Europe marred with the death of millions, wrote the following which has since become a sort of mantra of Cruciform Theodicy: “Only the suffering God can help” (Bonhoeffer, 2010:479). Bonhoeffer was executed in a Nazi prison, following his staunch resistance of the Nazi regime and his involvement in failed attempts to assassinate Adolf Hitler (Zimmerman, 2016:201). Another theologian and arguably the most influential when it comes to this theodicy is Jürgen Moltmann, the author of possibly the most influential book on the subject of Cruciform Theodicy, *The Crucified God*.²⁸

3.3 Background of the Crucified God

The idea of Cruciform Theodicy, which is at odds with the traditionally held belief about the impassibility of God as a key attribute of the divine, was birthed out of the ruins of the death and destruction of the two world wars (Scott, 2015:146). The *Crucified God* was written within the same post war context. Moltmann cites as his motivation for writing about the theme of divine suffering, the lived experiences of friends living under Stalinism in Eastern Europe and dictatorships in Latin America and South Korea between 1968 and 1972 (Moltmann, 1993:ix). Moreover, Moltmann adds that he experienced a ‘dark night’ in his soul, after seeing pictures of Bergen-Belsen

²⁸ Moltmann, J. 1993. *The Crucified God*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

concentration camp and Auschwitz (ibid.). As a Nazi soldier Moltmann was directly involved as the hands and feet of a government which was responsible for the death of millions across Europe. However, when Moltmann caught a glimpse of the atrocities perpetrated under the banner of Nazism, he surrendered himself to the British troops and was consequently a prisoner of war for three years (Bauckham, 2005:147). This experience of being a prisoner of war contributed greatly to his future theology in general and specifically to that elucidated in the Crucified God.

The Crucified God covers a range of topics with the first chapter devoted to the identity and relevance of faith, the second to the fifth chapters focused on a specific type of Christology. The sixth chapter presents a specific theology about God as 'crucified' and the seventh and eighth chapters look at anthropology with a specific focus on the psychological and political liberation of people. The chapters on Christology and the theology of God will be the primary focus of this chapter as the subject matter discussed in them is most relevant to the objectives of this research project. Furthermore, a specific operational framework will be followed in order to present the content of this book in a way that is beneficial to both the current and previous chapters. The contributions of the Crucified God will therefore be looked at within the following themes: Divine Impassibility, the Passion of Christ and the Death of God. These themes will be followed by an assessment of the relevance of the Crucified God to the questions asked in this project and to the South African context, within which this project is grounded.

3.4 Divine Impassibility

The doctrine of divine impassibility states that God is passionless, that is to say that he does not have passions or emotions (Grudem, 1994:196). This idea of the absence of passions in the divine is affirmed by the second chapter of the Westminster Confession of Faith (ibid.). This confession states that in addition to the 'unchangeableness' of God, God does not even feel emotions or 'passions' (Grudem, 1994:196). This belief is substantiated by the Westminster Confession of Faith through an interpretation of Acts 14:15, which gives account of Paul and Barnabas refusing worship from the inhabitants of Lystra, arguing that they are not deities but simply men of 'like passions with you.' (ibid.). The Westminster interpretation of this verse is that someone who is truly God would not have 'like passions' as people do (Grudem, 1994:196).

Although undisputed for centuries, the doctrine of divine impassibility has been challenged immensely over the past hundred years or so, given the great deal of suffering the Western nations have undergone in the 20th century (Scott, 2015:149). The corporate stance on the subject among theologians has so shifted that some scholars such as Paul Gavriyuk make the claim that belief in divine passibility is held by the majority theologians in contemporary theology (ibid.). One such theologian is Jürgen Moltmann who addresses the subject specifically in the Crucified God. Before looking at Moltmann's argument for the passibility of God we will begin with the definition of suffering he offers as we did with Oyakhilome in the previous chapter.

3.5 Moltmann's Definition of Suffering

Moltmann makes the claim that the early church had a bi-polarised understanding of suffering, with the ability to suffer on the one hand and the inability (*apathea*) to suffer on the other (Moltmann, 1993:230). According to Moltmann, this is the reason that the early church and consequently the believers after them for centuries held to the doctrine of divine impassibility (*ibid.*). Moltmann distinguishes between three types of possible suffering, "There is unwilling suffering, there is accepted suffering and there is the suffering of love" (Moltmann, 1993:230). Based on this categorisation, Moltmann makes the argument that if God were incapable of suffering in any way, then he would be incapable of love which requires one to open up oneself to the possibility of being affected by others (*ibid.*). Moreover, it is important to note here that Moltmann's understanding of the suffering of love hinges on the following presupposition, "If love is the acceptance of the other without regard to one's own well-being, then it contains within itself the possibility of sharing in suffering and freedom to suffer as a result of the otherness of the other" (Moltmann, 1993:230). Thus, the incapability of suffering in this sense is a direct contradiction to the fundamental Christian affirmation that God is love (*ibid.*). "The justifiable denial that God is capable of suffering because of a deficiency in his being may not lead to a denial that he is incapable of suffering out of the fullness of his being, i.e. his love" (Moltmann, 1993:230).

The claim of divine passibility which Moltmann proposes is so radical that it called for a revolution in the understanding of the concept of God (Mostert, 2013:169). In depicting a new understanding of God, Moltmann embarks on a rampage against a view of God

primarily defined by metaphysics and unequivocally asserts that such a perspective of the divine cannot apply to the God who was involved in the death of Jesus (ibid:170). Moreover, Moltmann chooses the God of the Bible over that of the philosophers who find his being primarily in the metaphysical and is thus unaffected by the activities of the natural realm (Mostert, 2013:170). So strong is Moltmann in his assertion of divine passibility that he states the following, "...a God who cannot suffer is poorer than any man. For 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 or shaken by anything. He cannot weep, for he has no tears. But the one who cannot suffer cannot love either. So he is also a loveless being. Aristotle's God cannot love;" (Moltmann, 1993:222). Although Oyakhilome affirms the love of God for his people, he does not in such uncertain terms state that God suffers with them, "While we were still sinners, God confirmed His love towards us by giving up His Son to die for us" (Oyakhilome, 2013a:40-41).

The 'godforsakenness' experienced by Christ on the cross serves as the theological epicentre of Moltmann's position on passibility (Scott, 2015:150). Moreover, in the incarnation, God himself experiences real suffering (ibid:155). This is not a 'pretend' suffering nor is the suffering simply limited to suffering as a substitute for the sin of humanity. Rather, God the Father experiences the death of his Son, and the Son experiences death itself firsthand (Scott, 2015:155).

This view of Moltmann can have significant repercussions for how Pentecostals understand the character of God in light of Christians suffering sickness, depression and death in suffering. What does this understanding have to say to the countless number of believers who have been plagued with questions concerning God's character following seemingly senseless battles with sickness, depression and unnatural death despite their finest display of faith? This question will be returned to with more detail in the following chapter. At this point it is enough to say that based on the literature reviewed, Oyakhilome would agree with Moltmann on the point of divine passibility as the God Oyakhilome describes is not far removed from the suffering of his people and is moved by their experiences of pain, "God is not a despot. He is a good God. He is a loving Father" (Oyakhilome, 2013b:34). We now turn to the centrepiece of Moltmann's theological position on passibility, the passion of Christ.

3.6 The Passion of Christ

In 2004 Mel Gibson directed a movie titled *Passion of the Christ* (2004) which is possibly the most gruesome depiction, at least in the two decades, of the *passio* of Jesus Christ. A moving motion picture, this film was subject to great scrutiny with some critics claiming that there was an exaggeration and over-emphasis on suffering as the overarching theme of the movie (DeGiglio-Bellemare, 2004:2). Nevertheless, Christianity has been correctly described as 'the religion of the cross' (Moltmann, 1993:33). Moltmann notes that the cross and more aptly, the crucified Christ was the main distinguishing factor which separated the Christian faith from surrounding religions in first century Syro-Palestine (ibid). Moreover, the fact that an innocent man was subjected to such a

heinous death both astonishes and offends even non-Christians when exposed to the horrific details of the passion of Christ (Moltmann, 1993:33). However, the extent of Christ's suffering cannot even be remotely grasped without understanding the deity of Christ, the forsakenness of Christ and the 'death' of God. Moltmann deals with these three aspects as both an integral part of his Cruciform Theodicy and in explaining the spectrum of Christ's suffering.

3.6.1 The Deity of Christ

The entirety of the Christian faith exists as a confession of faith in Jesus Christ (Moltmann, 1993:82). Wherever this foundational belief is doubted or distorted then there no longer remains Christian faith (ibid.). Nevertheless, it is necessary to be meticulous as to which Jesus is being spoken about as both Christians and non-Christians have often manufactured a Jesus which is suited to their own desires (Moltmann, 1993:83). Be that as it may, a cursory look at the constantly changing ideas of Jesus in history shows that these understanding of Jesus correspond so much to the needs of their epoch. In light of this, one cannot help but be suspicious that perhaps these different 'interpretations' and 'expressions' of Christ are illusory and artificial (Moltmann, 1993:83).

According to Moltmann, Christian theology is tasked with two imperative duties. Firstly, "it must show what is really meant by the profession of faith that 'Jesus is the Christ'". Secondly, "Christian theology must show how far the Christian confession of faith in Jesus is true as seen from outside, and must demonstrate that it is relevant to the

present-day understanding of reality and the present-day dispute about the truth of God and the righteousness of man and the world” Moltmann goes on to ask the question whether the eternal, unchangeable God was revealed in Jesus. To this Moltmann answers, “the one God whom all men seek in their finitude and transitoriness became man in Jesus” (Moltmann, 1993:88). The mystery of Jesus in this regard is the incarnation of God, the ‘becoming flesh’ of “eternal, original, unchangeable being in the sphere of temporal, decaying, transitory existence, in which men live and die” (ibid.). However, Moltmann recognises the challenge the early church faced in confessing Jesus as God incarnate (with all the divine attributes aforementioned) and at the same time believing that Jesus (one substance with God) was crucified under Pontius Pilate (Moltmann, 1993:89). Nevertheless, it remains an indispensable part of the Christian faith.

Moltmann does not question whether Jesus was actually human, affirming this throughout his Christology. However, what he does raise are questions of modern (Western) Jesuology which bring into question the miraculous and hence, scientifically unexplainable components of Jesus' human life. These aspects include the Virgin Birth as well as the bodily resurrection of Christ from the death- both of which are fundamental tenets of the Christian faith (Moltmann, 1993:97). Moltmann ends his third chapter in the *Crucified God* titled ‘Questions about Jesus’ by stating that Christology is, “essentially unconcluded and permanently in need of revision” (Moltmann, 1993:107). We will now look at what Moltmann means when he speaks about the godforsakenness of Jesus and why this is at the centre of divine suffering.

3.6.2 Jesus, forsaken by God

The Pharisees, the Zealots and the Romans are all key figures in the passion of Jesus condemning him as a 'blasphemer' and a 'rebel' ultimately leading to the crucifixion (Moltmann, 1993:145). However, these inner pain of Jesus' suffering and death go beyond any human roleplayers as instrumental as they may have been (ibid). Important to note here is that Jesus was neither the first nor the last religious figure in history to be executed, despite being innocent. Even since the time of Jesus, there have been many Christian martyrs who on grounds of their confession in Jesus were condemned to death and approached their end in 'hope against hope' (Moltmann, 1994:146). These approached death with bravery and immovable confidence of what was to follow their untimely demise. The same can be said of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who Moltmann cites as having written in one of his letters that, "our joy is hidden in suffering, and our life in death" (Moltmann, 1994:146).

However, Jesus evidently died in a very different way from all those who both preceded and followed him (Moltmann, 1994:146). The death of Jesus was not a 'fine' death (ibid.). The synoptic gospels are in one accord that Jesus was deeply distressed and plagued with trouble, his soul sorrowful even unto death (Moltmann, 1994:146). The author of Hebrews tells us that he died with loud cries and tears (Hebrews 5:7). Mark 15:37 affirms this by saying that Jesus died with a loud, incoherent cry. It is therefore clear through the accounts which serve as the main sources for what we know about Jesus, that he died, "with every expression of the most profound horror" (Moltmann, 1994:146). Juxtaposed with the death of the sages of philosophy and the martyrs of

Christianity, there is clearly something special about Jesus' death (ibid.). This distinction can only be fully understood when viewed not through Jesus' relationship with the powers of the time, but with his God and Father (Moltmann, 1994:146).

Moreover, it is clear that Jesus – the same Jesus who proclaimed that the Kingdom of God was at hand, healed the sick, rose the dead, shared a deep intimacy with his Father throughout his life – died with a profound sense of abandonment by God (Moltmann, 1994:147). The constant referring of Jesus to God as his Father is something which is seen as normal in Christianity today, however for a first century Jewish audience, this was a revolutionary and even offensive characterisation of God. Moltmann understands this characterisation of God as being indicative of a fellowship which was not mediated through the covenant tradition of first century Judaism but rather was a direct fellowship – bypassing all the religious rituals and customs of the time (Moltmann, 1994:147). It is this relational proximity to God as Father, coupled with the miracle-filled life Jesus lived which informs the context within which the deep sense of abandonment Jesus experiences preceding his death (ibid.).

Perhaps this can be, even on a basic level, be compared to the Pentecostal Christian who has for most of their life been faithful to God, prayed for the sick and saw them healed and then loses their mother, also a faithful Pentecostal, to a short bout with cancer. The author of this research project is of the persuasion that even though all humankind has to endure some measure of suffering, there is a specific type of existential suffering which Christians, by virtue of their faith, experience in a unique

manner. This suffering can only exist because of the context of a specific Pentecostal life inundated with testimonies of healings and deep fellowship with the Father. In such a situation, the greatest sense of torment is not so much that things did not go as planned but that God did not act as expected.

The first verse of Psalm 22 says, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?” (Bible, 2019). This prayer from the Old Testament is a lament which has as the subject of its lament not the fate of the speaker but the faithfulness of God which as a righteous man, he defends (Moltmann, 1993:150). The first sentence of Psalm 22 is echoed by Jesus on the cross and similarly, Jesus is not calling for the compassion of God towards himself, rather Christ is calling for the manifestation of the righteousness of the God who vowed “not to forsake the work of his hands”. (Moltmann, 1993:150). “Abandoned by God, the righteous man sees God’s deity itself at stake, for he himself is the faithfulness and honour of God in the world” (Moltmann, 1993:150). By uttering the words, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ Jesus puts at stake not only his own existence but his theological existence and entire proclamation of God (Moltmann, 1993:150). Moltmann concludes this section by expounding on the statement, “The cross of the Son divides God from God to the utmost degree of enmity and distinction” (Moltmann, 1993:152). We now look at the consequences the theology of the crucified Christ has on the concept of God.

3.6.3 The Crucified God

The context within which Moltmann wrote the Crucified God was marked by the shattering of familiar religious notions and many people being unsure how to handle the two slogans; 'God is dead' and 'God cannot die' (Moltmann, 1993:200). In an attempt to resolve this tension some excluded the question of God altogether, whilst others latched on only to Jesus following the 'death of God' argued by some in the modern era (Moltmann, 1993:200). In light of all these developments Moltmann asks the question, "Does the involvement go so far that the death of Jesus can be identified as the death of God?" (Moltmann, 1993:202).

Furthermore, as mentioned previously, in order to understand what happened between Jesus and God on the cross it is necessary to speak in trinitarian terms (Moltmann, 1993:243). "The Fatherlessness of the Son is matched by the Sonlessness of the Father, and if God has constituted himself as the Father of Jesus Christ, then he also suffers the death of his Fatherhood in the death of the Son" (Moltmann, 1993:243). This claim by Moltmann is nothing short of controversial as it goes against much of what traditional Christian doctrine has held concerning the immutability and impassibility of God. Nevertheless, this understanding has had revolutionary consequences for many readers across the world particularly in the global south where this message of a suffering God who is not unmoved by human suffering inspired action against injustice and poverty. However, it is pertinent to the purpose of this research paper that Moltmann's contribution be assessed to gauge its relevance to both the questions being answered and the context in which these questions have been asked.

3.7 Critique of the Crucified God

Jürgen Moltmann's book *the Crucified God* is arguably one of the most influential theological books to come out of 20th century Europe. The ideas elucidated by Moltmann in the book have crossed barriers of culture as well as language to find root in the lives and lived experiences of believers across the world. That being said, it is an inescapable fact that Moltmann is a German theologian, who wrote *the Crucified God* within a context very different from the current South African milieu. Moreover, *the Crucified God* was written in 1972 in response to very specific trends of suffering and, by Moltmann's own admission, largely influenced by the atrocities of the two world wars which preceded it decades before (Moltmann, 1993:ix). To directly appropriate the ideas of the book to the current South African context would be an unfair treatment of both contexts. Thus, whatever contribution Moltmann can make in answering the cry of Christians suffering sickness, depression and death in South Africa has to be a limited one.

Moreover, a significant number of scholars have critiqued Moltmann's theology in *the Crucified God*. One such scholar is Dennis Jowers who is critical of Moltmann's theology of the Trinity in light of the death and resurrection of Christ, "The idea of the Trinity which Moltmann derives from these events, however, undermines central doctrines of Christianity: specifically, the permanence of God's triunity; his impassibility and immutability; and the distinction between Christ's two natures" (Jowers, 2001:245). Furthermore, Moltmann's view of how the Father abandons the Son during the crucifixion has been criticised perhaps more than any other part of his theology

(ibid:246). According to other scholars such as John O'Donnell, Moltmann erroneously attributes the vices of injustice and brutality in emphasising that God the Father forsook Jesus on the cross (O'Donnell, 1983:154).

Furthermore, Moltmann's view of divine passibility has been scathingly criticised and will be summarised here in three points. Firstly, Moltmann does not sufficiently consider God's transcendence (Mostert, 2013:175). God is in every possible way radically different from creation and should therefore not be understood in relation to other things in the universe (ibid.). Secondly, critics argue that Moltmann exaggerates his use of anthropomorphism and anthropopathism (Mostert, 2013:176). An example of where Moltmann does this is when speaking of God suffering in the same way human suffering is spoken about, "...a God who cannot suffer is poorer than any man. For 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 or shaken by anything. He cannot weep, for he has no tears. But the one who cannot suffer cannot love either. So he is also a loveless being. Aristotle's God cannot love;" (Moltmann, 1993:222).

Thirdly, the criticism has been made that Moltmann's understanding of the *apathea* of God is flawed (ibid:177). Proponents of the impassibility of God argue that God's inability to suffer does not mean he is detached and indifferent (Castelo, 2009:15). The Latin term 'impassibility' is generally understood as being synonymous with 'passionless' and implying something that is impersonal and unapproachable (Mostert,

2013:177). However, Castelo proposes that impassibility simply means that God cannot be affected against his will by an outside force (Castelo, 2009:16).

Although the critique against Moltmann is compelling, the impact his theology of divine passibility has had on broader contemporary theology is irrefutable and therefore still merits serious consideration. Furthermore, the need for a distinctly Pentecostal understanding of the character of God as well as a response to suffering has been highlighted by the contributions of this chapter. The following chapter will look at consolidating such a distinct Pentecostal understanding and response to the subject matter of this project as a whole.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter was written with the objective of assessing Chris Oyakhilome's theology as representative of a particular Pentecostal theology against that of broader theological doctrines of suffering. In doing this, the author firstly looked at Thomas Aquinas views concerning selected attributes of God and weighed them against Oyakhilome's contributions. There was more in common between the views than initially anticipated and Oyakhilome's characterisation of God, although not void of its fair share of imperfections, was reasonably sound compared to Aquinas'. The main difference was the definition of the adjective 'good'.

Secondly, the author looked at influential theodicies with the Christian tradition and found that Oyakhilome agrees with the Free Will Theodicy and is at odds with the other

three looked at. Thirdly, the author weighed up Oyakhilome's views against those of Jürgen Moltmann and found that apart from agreeing on God's compassionate involvement in human suffering, the depth used by Moltmann could not be compared to Oyakhilome. This is most likely because Oyakhilome writes to a different audience than Moltmann does. In this regard, Moltmann's contributions, although notably valuable particularly in his delineation of the 'forsakenness' of Jesus, should not be blindly appropriated to the South African context.

Furthermore, the need for a distinctly Pentecostal understanding of the character of God as well as a response to suffering has been highlighted by the contributions of this chapter. The following chapter will look at consolidating such a distinct Pentecostal understanding and response to the subject matter of this project as a whole.

CHAPTER FOUR: A proposal for a Pentecostal approach to suffering

Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to consolidate a proposal for a South African Pentecostal theodicy in light of the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The preceding chapters have shown that the deeply existentially rooted questions being addressed in this thesis are complex and often difficult to definitively answer. Nevertheless, the work of both Oyakhilome and Moltmann has made significant strides towards arriving at, perhaps, a more adequate understanding of the character of God in light of Christians suffering sickness, depression and death in South Africa. This chapter will therefore seek to propose a Pentecostal approach to the question of suffering which integrates the positive aspects of both Oyakhilome's and Moltmann's theology surveyed in previous chapters. Moreover, the aforementioned will be positioned in a broader framework of a particular Pentecostal Christology which has the resurrection of Jesus Christ as its centrepiece. This chapter commences with a narrative retelling of the events of Jesus' crucifixion, drawn from Biblical accounts, while also calling upon the inputs from some scholars who have reflected on these events. Moreover, once the extent of the physical and psychological suffering of Christ has been ascertained, it will be linked back to the broader theological meaning outlined in Moltmann's work reviewed in chapter three. Furthermore, the chapter has been structured into three component parts, namely: the passion of the Christ, 'forsakenness and abandonment' and 'Hope' a Pentecostal Theodicy.

Section 1: The Passion of the Christ and the Goodness of God (on the Cross)

The historical significance of the passion of Jesus Christ cannot be overstated. As highlighted by the previous chapter, the claim of the suffering of God personified in Jesus, caused a paradigmatic shift in both theology proper and Christology. However, what was the exact extent of Christ's suffering? Was it physical or emotional? Following the confession that Christ was fully God and fully human, can he really- in the truest sense, relate to those suffering sickness, depression and death? This section will begin with an in depth survey of the suffering endured by Jesus.

4.1.1 The Passion of Christ

On the evening of the Last Supper, Jesus was unceremoniously arrested by a group of armed men commissioned by the chief priests and led to Jesus by Judas Iscariot. The time period incepted by this event and ending with the crucifixion of Jesus is traditionally referred to as the *Passion* of Christ. Passion is derived from the Latin word, *passio*, which directly translated means 'suffering' (Piper, 2006:12). In the context of a world characterised by sin and suffering, the passion of Christ serves as a type of archetypal event of both sin and suffering in that Jesus was victim to an unjust conviction as well as the subject of one of history's most gruesome forms of execution. Physically speaking, Jesus endured a great deal of suffering in the prelude to the crucifixion with even secular historians of the time attesting to the crucifixion of Jesus.²⁹ However, the

²⁹ See Josephus, F. 1924. *Complete works of Josephus: Antiquities of the Jews, the wars of the Jews against Apion etc (Vol. 4)* New York, Bigelow.
Tacitus, C., 1881. *The annals (Vol. 1)*. G. Bell.

nature of human suffering is such that although it may have a point of entry limited to one biological sense it often extends to affect all components of a human being (Andersen, 2013:4). For the purposes of this chapter, the sufferings of Jesus have been categorised into two parts, namely: physical and emotional. This will be followed by briefly looking at how the disciples experienced the death of Jesus.

4.1.1 The Physical Suffering of Jesus

The first act in the tragedy of Jesus' physical suffering takes place in the garden of Gethsemane with his ambushed arrest by temple officials soon after midnight (Edwards, 1986:1456). At around 1am, Jesus was tried before Caiaphas and the political wing of the Sanhedrin and was consequently found guilty of blasphemy (ibid.). Following this first of two trials, Jesus is blindfolded and spat on by the soldiers as well as repeatedly punched in the face (Edwards, 1986:1456). Soon after sunrise, Jesus is tried before the religious Sanhedrin and is again found guilty of blasphemy (ibid). In the context of the first century Jewish religious cult, blasphemy was a sin punishable by death (Collins, 2004:379). Given that permission for an execution had to come from the Roman authorities who governed at the time, Jesus was taken to the praetorium³⁰ early in the morning (Edwards, 1986:1456). However, when Jesus is brought before Pilate the charge is changed from blasphemy to the claim of kingship which carries with it the threat of an insurrection (ibid.). Jesus faces the inevitable guilty verdict and consequent execution. Although Pilate could not find any grounds for a legal charge against Jesus, fearing that the insistence of the people would lead to an uproar, Pilate eventually gives

³⁰ The 'praetorium' was both the residence and governmental seat of Pilate (Edwards, 1986:1456)

in to the demands of the people for Jesus to be crucified (Edwards, 1986:1457). However, before the crucifixion Jesus was sentenced to be severely flogged as was the customary legal preliminary to every Roman execution (ibid.).

Jesus' physical condition is likely to have been good leading up to Gethsemane, however in the twelve hours between his arrest and the time the flogging is estimated to have commenced, Jesus had already suffered great physical distress (Edwards, 1986:1457). Even prior to being arrested, Jesus experienced great emotional distress to the point that he began sweating blood at a point, a rare physical reaction to extreme stress. Following this, Jesus was arrested and undoubtedly suffered a great measure of trauma and was forced to walk more than 4 km between the sites of the various trials (Edwards, 1986:1457). These physical factors are likely to have left Jesus very vulnerable to the effects of the scourging he was sentenced to (ibid.).

Records of Roman execution practices reveal that the person being scourged was stripped of all clothing and had their hands tied to an upright post (Edwards, 1986:1457). The instrument of choice was usually a short whip with a few single or braided leather thongs of various lengths, in which either small iron balls or sharp shards of sheep bones were tied at certain points (ibid.). The repeated striking of the victim with this instrument would lead to painful bruises and cuts into the skin. As the flogging continued, the wounds would extend into the underlying skeletal muscles and produce, "...quivering ribbons of bleeding flesh" (Edwards, 1986:14587). The resulting

pain, coupled with the blood loss would often lead to circulatory shock which would further lead to cellular death and dysfunction of vital organs (ibid.). In the case of Jesus' scourging, the Roman soldiers found it entertaining that this frail and weakened man had claimed to be a king and thus began to make fun of him by placing a robe on his shoulders, a crown of thorns on his head, and a wooden staff in his right hand (Edwards, 1986:1458). They followed this up by spitting on Jesus, hitting him on the head with the wooden staff and most likely reopening wounds from the scourging by tearing off the robe from his back (ibid.). This is the physical state Jesus was in before the crucifixion took place.

The Crucifixion

The Romans did not invent crucifixion, however, they perfected it as a device of torture and capital punishment (Retief & Cilliers, 2003:938). Crucifixion was one of the most shameful and brutal forms of execution and was often reserved for slaves, foreigners, revolutionaries and the most depraved criminals (ibid.). Furthermore, it was the custom for the condemned person to carry their cross from the flogging post to the crucifixion post and to do so completely naked if permitted by local norms (Edwards, 1986:1459). Due to the weight of the entire cross, about 136 kg, only the crossbar (34 to 57 kg) was balanced along the shoulders of the condemned to be carried. Biblical records are clear that Jesus was no exception to this as is documented throughout the Gospels. In fact, Jesus is said to have been so weak that he could not carry the crossbar to the site of the crucifixion (about 650m away) and Simon of Cyrene had to be summoned to carry Christ's cross (Edwards, 1986:1462).

Once at Golgotha, Jesus was first nailed to the cross before it was erected. The iron spikes used to nail Jesus onto the crossbar are likely to have been between 13 to 18 cm long (Edwards, 1986:1459). After the cross was erected and Jesus' feet were further secured with nails, mocking from the crowd and soldiers ensued, in a literal sense, adding insult to injury (ibid.). Medical professionals have long held that the major pathophysiological effect of crucifixion was a disruption of normal respiration with death occurring as a result of hypovolemic shock and exhaustion asphyxia (Retief & Cilliers, 2003:938). However, given its unique circumstances, the exact cause of Jesus' death remains contentious with some scholars divided between cardiac rupture and cardiorespiratory failure as a cause of death (Edwards, 1986:1463). However, both historical and medical perspectives strongly show that Jesus' died before he was speared on the side by a Roman soldier whilst on the cross (ibid.).

4.1.2 The Emotional Suffering of Jesus

The emotional aspect of Jesus' suffering is often overlooked when contemplating the passion. However, the emotional suffering of Jesus in the context of the passion precedes the physical. Following the Last Supper, Jesus and his disciples went to the garden of Gethsemane. It is there that the account of Jesus' emotional turmoil begins with Biblical records stating that he suffered great anguish in light of his incumbent trials and inescapable death (Edwards, 1986:1456). The distress which Jesus experiences in Gethsemane is so great that he sweats blood, a phenomenon today medically known as

hematidrosis (ibid.).³¹ The intensity of Jesus grappling with the reality of what he was about to endure is highlighted by the uncharacteristic prayer Jesus makes in Gethsemane, “Then he said to them, ‘My soul is deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me.’ And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me, yet not what I want but what you want.’” (Matthew 26:39, Bible). For the first time in the Gospel accounts, readers are confronted with Jesus pleading with his Father to spare him from an impending situation. In this account, the human nature of Jesus comes to the fore in the desperate plea which concludes with a stoic resolution, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me, yet not what I want but what you want” (Matthew 26:39, Bible).

The physical suffering that unravels following Jesus’ arrest makes his prayer in Gethsemane all the more reasonable. However, before the trials began Jesus was further emotionally battered by the betrayal of Judas Iscariot whom he had both disciplined and befriended for the duration of his ministry and earlier that evening, had washed his feet (Guthrie, 1994:1053-1054). Having insider knowledge of where Jesus would be at that hour, Judas Iscariot conspired with temple officials to arrest Jesus and was compensated with thirty pieces of silver (France, 1994:939). Judas led a mob of officials to where the disciples and Jesus were and in an act of poetic irony, kissed Jesus on the cheek as a way of signalling to the officials that he was the man they were to arrest (Bunkers, 2018:6). The deep relational pain this is likely to have caused Jesus cannot be quantified nor is the act of all the disciples deserting him at the start of the

³¹ See Bhattacharya, S., Das, M.K., Sarkar, S. & De, A., 2013. Hematidrosis. *Indian pediatrics*, 50, pp.703-704.

darkest chapter of his life. Although the rest of the disciples through their abandonment of Jesus are guilty in that they failed to be loyal, in essentially delivering Jesus to death- Judas' guilt exceeds that of his counterparts.

According to studies in the field of psychology, one of the main causes for depression as well as other psychosocial disorders is the experience of traumatic life events (van der Kolk, 2003:1). Psychological trauma can be experienced by an entire nation as in the case of the Rwandan genocide which in many ways still haunts Rwandese society (Ordóñez-Carabaño & Prieto-Ursúa, 2021:427). Moreover, psychological trauma can also be experienced on an individual level as was likely the case with Jesus following his betrayal, arrest and scourging. Biblical records show that Judas, in the time following the betrayal of Jesus, underwent severe psychological distress upon the realisation that he had betrayed an innocent man. Judas' regret was so great that he returned the 30 silver coins he was given for betraying Jesus and when the Jewish leaders refused to accept it, Judas threw the money in the Temple and went and hung himself (Koch, 2005:169).

In South Africa today, there are many people who have to endure traumatic events on a daily basis (SACAP, 2018). Given the prevalence of trauma in the South African context, many have been forced to find ways to cope through the shocking events; however, exposure to traumatic events often leaves lasting emotional scars in the form of, amongst others, mood disorders. One of the most common mood disorders among South Africans is depression (SACAP, 2018). Referred to by professionals as Major

Depressive Disorder, depression is a mood disorder that causes a constant feeling of sadness and a lack of interest affecting feelings, thoughts and behaviours (Derubeis & Strunk, 2017:11). The Pentecostal faith tradition has as one of its operational pillars, the supernatural testimonies of its adherents including healing from depression (Stolz, 2011:473). Among these testimonies are credible accounts of people having been healed from depression or delivered from the causative spiritual forces through prayer, faith-declarations and deliverance.³² Nevertheless, there remain some who, despite their most faithful devotion to the Lord, remain unhealed and like Judas - perhaps for different reasons, even end up committing suicide.

The psychological aspect of the suffering of Jesus is unique in that Jesus was not only fully man but fully God and to think of God suffering, as Moltmann rightly pointed out, is something that was unfathomable prior to the 20th century (Moltmann, 1993:230). However, the experience of psychological trauma is as true in 21st century South Africa as it was in 1st century Syro-Palestine. The notion that Jesus' experienced psychological trauma through his abandonment, dehumanising trials and scourging is not necessarily mentioned directly in the Gospel accounts but a denial of trauma as a consequence of these events would in some way diminish Jesus' humanity. The traumatic life events which caused Jesus inconceivable suffering prior to his death, did not at any point lead to him rebelling against his Father. Building on Moltmann's thesis of a God who suffers alongside his people (Moltmann, 1993:49), South African Christians suffering depression as a result of traumatic life experiences or genetic

³² See Trice, P.D. & Bjorck, J.P. (2006). Pentecostal perspectives on causes and cures of depression. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 37(3), pp.283–294.

predisposition can find some measure of comfort in knowing that their beloved Saviour can relate to their experiences. However, what is often overlooked is the trauma that the disciples experienced at the death of Jesus.

4.1.3 Suffering Surrounding the Death of Jesus

The disciples of Jesus were a group of twelve men who were unlearned and who left their lives and livelihoods behind to follow Jesus.³³ As disciples of a rabbi, they followed Jesus everywhere for the duration of his ministry.³⁴ During this time they would have shared numerous meals, sleeping quarters and conversations together. Before he died, Jesus told his disciples that he would come back to life again³⁵. However, fearing for their lives and perhaps still traumatised following the death of their leader who they were convinced was the Son of God, the disciples seem to have not had any expectation that Jesus would rise from the dead. Following the execution of Jesus, the disciples went into hiding on grounds of the reasonable fear that as a result of their close association to Jesus, they might have been next in the line of execution. The death of Jesus evidently affected the disciples in a life altering way. Although the Gospel accounts do not provide a great deal of information regarding the conversations and actions of the disciples in the time immediately following the death of Jesus, there is enough data to construct a composite sketch of what they may have experienced.

³³ See Acts 4:13 and Matthew 19:27-29

³⁴ The duration of Jesus' ministry has traditionally been understood to have been three years, although this has not been without opposition in recent years. See Ogg, G. 2014. *The chronology of the public ministry of Jesus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

³⁵ Mark 9:31

Luke's account of the post-resurrection interaction between Jesus and the two disciples on the road to Emmaus has been the subject of many famous paintings such as those by Altobello Melone (Melone, 1516) and Caravaggio (Caravaggio, 1601). On the day Jesus rose from the dead, two disciples (not of the remaining eleven) were walking to a village called Emmaus when suddenly a man came and started walking with them. The man asked them what they were speaking about and the two disciples stood still and began to look downcast. They told the man the events of the trial and execution of Jesus which had recently taken place and which left them visibly despondent as they recounted the events. The two disciples explained to the man that they had hope that Jesus was the one who was going to redeem Israel. Although they heard that Jesus' body was not found in the tomb he was laid, they did not seem to have a great deal of hope that he was alive.³⁶

However, given the extraordinary life of Jesus one can only hypothesise how difficult it must have been to come to terms with his untimely and unnatural death. The disciples had witnessed Jesus do miraculous things such as restoring sight to those born blind, cleansing lepers and on different occasions raising the dead back to life. Moreover, many of Jesus' teachings and claims of being the Christ, the Saviour of the world were seemingly nullified by his death. From the vantage point of the disciples, the man for whom they forsook their lives and everything knew had died. The man who they believed was the fulfilment of thousands of years old prophecies and expectation had

³⁶ See Luke 24:13-35

just died and even worse, he died having been abandoned by them all. The resulting grief must have been severe.

According to historical records, Jesus was crucified on Friday and was resurrected on Sunday, the first day of the week. Much theology has been written concerning the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, however not as much detail is given in the Gospel accounts regarding the Saturday between these two events³⁷. The Gospel writers, despite their meticulous records of the events that took place, provide little detail as to the state of affairs on the Saturday tensely positioned between the death and resurrection of Jesus. This literary silence is both understandable and noteworthy. It is understandable in that one of the possible emotional responses to the death of a loved one is a bewildered silence.

*Cry, the Beloved Country*³⁸ by Alan Paton is one of the most acclaimed novels in South African literature history. The novel narrates the story of Pastor Stephen Kumalo as he journeys from the rural parts of South Africa to the city of Johannesburg in search of his son. Written in 1948, it is set in the time precluding Apartheid and so is poised with themes of racism, fear, suffering, death and restoration. Upon discovering that a young racial equality activist has been murdered, Kumalo is left speechless, “And he was silent again, for who is not silent when someone is dead, who was a small bright boy?” (Paton, 1948:72). On that same evening of receiving the news of death, Pastor Kumalo

³⁷See Lewis, A.E. 2003. *Between cross and Resurrection : a theology of Holy Saturday*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans.

³⁸ Paton, A. 1948. *Cry, the beloved country*. London: Vintage.

said in response to an invitation to prayer, “There is no prayer left in me. I am dumb here inside. I have no words at all” (ibid.). When confronted with sickness or depression, prayers for the ill may be offered and faith for healing may be exercised. There remains a hope, even if at times faint, that the bed-ridden or psychologically tormented may fully recover. However, given the trauma marred context of South Africa, it is understandable when even Christians are at a loss for words when facing the irrevocable reality of death.

Section 2: Forsakenness and Abundance

In the chapters preceding this fourth chapter, the author looked at two main conversation partners. In the second chapter, selected writings of Chris Oyakhilome were looked at as a sample of a specific type of Pentecostal theology regarding suffering and was found to be beneficial towards resolving the questions in this research project (chapter 2.8.3, conclusion). In the third chapter, Jürgen Moltmann’s seminal work, *the Crucified God* was surveyed and found to make a useful contribution towards the questions addressed in this thesis (chapter 3.7, conclusion). Given Moltmann’s affirmation of the passibility of God looked at in chapter three (Moltmann, 1993:222), it is clear that Moltmann’s theology falls within the boundaries of Cruciform theodicy which has as its cornerstone, the passion of Jesus Christ (Scott, 2015:147). On the other hand, in line with the emphasis on power and the miraculous in the Pentecostal movement as a whole, Oyakhilome’s focus when it comes to suffering leans towards ideas of the benevolence of God (Oyakhilome, 2013a:17) and his willingness to bring about healing (Oyakhilome, 2005:54).

Oyakhilome and Moltmann both provide a theological perspective on suffering and the understanding of the character of God. However, both perspectives can be critiqued and neither of them alone are sufficient in addressing the problem of a Pentecostal understanding of the character of God in light of Christians suffering sickness, depression and death in South Africa. As stated in the introduction, the aim of the current chapter is to consolidate the content of the preceding two chapters into a proposal for a South African Pentecostal approach to suffering. In order to do this, it will be beneficial to summarise the core contributions of both Oyakhilome and Moltmann as a way of illustrating the juxtaposition which exists between the two. This will be followed by the third and final section which will propose a South African Pentecostal understanding of God for the Christian undergoing the suffering of sickness, depression and death. Moreover, this final section will seek to resolve the tension which arises from the contrasting views of Oyakhilome and Moltmann. We now turn to Moltmann's core contribution as far as this thesis is concerned, the 'forsakenness' of Jesus.

4.2.1 "Forsakenness": Moltmann's Perspective

The idea that Jesus was forsaken by God is one of the core ideas in Moltmann's Cruciform theodicy. Jesus' last breathing moments were characterised by a deep feeling of forsakenness by God (Moltmann, 1994:147). Moreover, Moltmann makes the important point that the sense of abandonment Jesus experienced was preceded by a life lived in close proximity with God, with Jesus clearly relating to God not only as the subject of first century Jewish religion but as Father (ibid.). It is this deep relational

connection which makes Jesus' passion and consequent death on the cross which the abandonment by God all the more shocking. However, it is not only Jesus' who experiences suffering during the crucifixion, God the Father also suffers the loss of his one and only Son, "The Fatherlessness of the Son is matched by the Sonlessness of the Father, and if God has constituted himself as the Father of Jesus Christ, then he also suffers the death of his Fatherhood in the death of the Son" (Moltmann, 1993:243). The loss God the Father experiences in the death of Jesus is therefore twofold. Firstly, the Father suffers the loss of his Son and secondly, the Father suffers the loss of his Fatherhood (ibid.).

Moreover, the history of Christianity is well endowed with accounts of Christians who have experienced a deep sense of having been abandoned by God.³⁹ A well known example of such an account is *the Dark Night of the Soul* by Saint John of the Cross.⁴⁰ In this work, Saint John of the Cross describes this 'dark night of the soul' as denoting a time in the life of a Christian, during which the Spirit is at work in such a deeply profound way that it is interpreted as the absence of God (Coe, 2000:293). This perspective perhaps provides useful language in explaining, although to a limited extent, the abandonment which Jesus experienced on the cross - particularly in light of the resurrection and the salvific ramifications of Jesus' atonement. Moreover, the suffering the disciples experienced as a result of Jesus' death and consequently as a result of the persecution which followed their preaching after the resurrection, can also be

³⁹ See Anderson, E. 2020. The Experience of Abandonment by God in Syriac Christian Ascetical Theology. *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality*, 20(1), pp.79–104. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1353/scs.2020.0022>.

⁴⁰ See Saint John of the Cross. 2012. *Dark Night of the Soul*. Dover Publications, inc. Mineola, New York.

understood through the use of the same idea. It is not unreasonable to assume that Pentecostal Christians undergoing the suffering of sickness, depression and death would likewise have to endure the 'dark night of the soul' when the expected miracle tarries or fails to arrive all together. There is much encouragement to be drawn from Jesus' experience of forsakenness as well as from the countless disciples who consequently had to endure this suffering.

In Moltmann, the key concept of 'forsakenness' is added to the conversation regarding understanding God in suffering. In many ways, Moltmann does not provide an overly intricate and exuberant answer in addressing the age-old question of theodicy. Rather the response Moltmann contributes towards answering the constellations of questions asked by theodicy is rooted in the event of Good Friday and the scandalous confession that God suffers. Perhaps this is an adequate response in that it, in a deathly stoicism, recognises the reality of human suffering whilst acknowledging divine passibility.

4.2.2 "Abundance": Oyakhilome's Perspective

The idea that God is good and exclusively gives good gifts is at the core of Oyakhilome's theology concerning suffering (Oyakhilome, 2013b:20-21). Moreover, Oyakhilome defines suffering as any form of sickness, frustration and poverty which God, being a benevolent Father, does not desire any of his children to go through (Oyakhilome, 2005:54). This definition is characteristic of Prosperity Theology which teaches that Christians are entitled to live in faith, wealth and health (Kgatle, 2019:2). Theologically, there have been many reasonable arguments made in support of the

ideas of Prosperity Theology, many of which have the core idea that health and wealth should be accessed by the born again Christian by faith as part of salvation (Hunt, 2000:333).

Another idea which is central to Oyakhilome's theology is that God is a Father (Oyakhilome, 2013b:34). The notion of God as Father is not foreign to the South African context, with influential Christian leaders such as Floyd McClung endorsing this teaching.⁴¹ In this regard, Oyakhilome is similar to Moltmann in that he emphasises the fatherhood of God in his theology. However, Oyakhilome's stance concerning the understanding of God in suffering is juxtaposed to that of Moltmann. As a proponent of Prosperity Theology, Oyakhilome has a view of God in suffering which if applied to the overall problem of this thesis, would teach that it is not God's will that believers suffer sickness, depression and death. Instead, as Jesus was willing to heal the leper in Mark 1:40-41, it is God's will to bring healing to all who are suffering through sickness (Oyakhilome, 2013a:70). On the other hand, Moltmann's emphasis lies on the idea that God suffers alongside those who suffer because the inability to do so would mean that God is unable to love (Moltmann, 1993:222).

Whereas Moltmann's contribution towards the topic of this thesis can be summarised as 'Forsakenness', Oyakhilome's contribution can be summarised as 'Abundance'. Oyakhilome's understanding of God is not one of forsakenness, absence or abandonment. Rather, it is about the certainty of the goodness of God and the idea that

⁴¹ See chapter 2.6.1

God gives good gifts which abound even in the face of suffering. The idea of what is good is informed anthropocentrically, excluding any experience of sickness, frustration and poverty. Although similar in several ways, Oyakhilome and Moltmann propose two very different understandings of God in suffering. This contrast is so pronounced that it seems to present a dilemma, forcing the Christian who desires to be faithful to God to choose between the two understandings of God in suffering. Nevertheless, the author of this thesis is of the opinion that these two understandings of God can indeed co-exist.

However, given how antonymous the views are it is important to acknowledge the tension which may arise as a result of adhering to both perspectives. This tension has been called *Responsible Hope* by some scholars such as Ellen Marshall in describing the Christian life, “This is what I mean by a responsible hope. It is a disposition that remains accountable to promise and peril. It unearths beauty and faces tragedy. It celebrates goodness and knows cruelty. It buoys the spirit and steels the spine. This disposition is not a balanced arrangement of these elements, but rather a dynamic and difficult practice of holding them in tension, of being accountable to the resiliency and the fragility of life” (Marshall, 2015:xiv). An in depth look at this ‘tension’ would extend beyond the scope of this research project and given the objectives of this thesis it will suffice to refer to this tension as *the tension of hope*.⁴² The rest of the chapter is aimed at consolidating how Pentecostal Christians may understand God in a worldview in which sickness, depression and death are constantly interacting with healing, joy and life in the theological arena of both *forsakenness* and *abundance*.

⁴² See Marshall, E.O. 2015. *Though the Fig Tree Does Not Blossom*. Wipf and Stock Publishers.

Section 3: Hope: A Pentecostal Understanding of God

It has been clear throughout the course of this study that a single answer to the question of suffering as a type of evil is unattainable. There have been many attempts made to answer the question of evil throughout history and the ones elucidated in the theologies surveyed in this thesis are noteworthy, although admittedly lacking in some respect. Perhaps a single answer is not only unattainable, as far as the lived experiences of Pentecostal believers undergoing suffering is concerned, but also not useful. In looking at the various approaches to the question of suffering as well as the different theologies all presenting a particular understanding of God, it is the view of the author that a South African Pentecostal theodicy be proposed. Given the content of this study, thus far, the best way to approach such a theodicy would be to amalgamate the most useful conceptualisations of God presented by Oyakhilome and Moltmann. Furthermore, it is the aim of the author that this particular understanding of God would aid Pentecostal believers in maintaining their faith when confronted with the tension of hope. The understanding of God presented in this section consists of four parts, namely: the good God, the healing God, the suffering God and the God of hope.

4.3.1 The Good God

The first variable which needs to be determined in light of there being a potentially infinite number of views concerning God, is the answer to the question which follows the acknowledgement of God's existence, "What is God like?". Oyakhilome contributes towards the answering of this question by making the following statement, "God is not a

despot. He is a good God. He is a loving Father” (Oyakhilome, 2013b:34). However, the positive affirmation of the goodness of God, as powerful as it may be, needs to be safeguarded against misappropriation by girding said definition in God’s own being. The definition of the adjective good has to be informed primarily by God and not by the human experience as proselytised by Aquinas (Davies & Stamp, 2012:150). A definition informed from the perspective of God, as elusive as it may be at times, serves to inoculate the theological enterprise against the risk of what Moltmann refers to as a God created in the likeness of people (Moltmann, 1993:83). This leaves the believer with an understanding of God that is anchored in the reality of God himself as being the ‘first cause’ of goodness and therefore the sole determinant of its propriety.

Moreover, this leaves a permanent vacuum only partially filled by Biblical examples of God’s dealing with humankind, leaving room for the unanswered and perhaps finitely unanswerable questions of suffering. This would accommodate the natural existential despair which follows the reality of sickness, depression and death- whilst at the same time reinforcing the peace which comes from knowing that God remains good even when the circumstances of life seemingly fail to reflect that goodness. This is the tension of hope.

In 1948, the National Party under the leadership of D.F Malan came to power following a white only election, inaugurating the oppressive Apartheid regime in South Africa. The National Party governed South Africa for almost half a century with their rule including countless human right violations committed against anti-Apartheid activists (Mittelstadt

& Sutton, 2010:146-147). One such activist was Desmond Tutu, an Anglican priest and one of the most authoritative voices of the anti-apartheid contingent at the time. Despite having been on the frontline of the struggle for democracy as a vocal leader and minister presiding over mass funerals (Tutu, 2007:8), Tutu played a pivotal role in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as an advocate for non-retributive justice. Tutu wrote that without making light of, “the cruelties, hurts and hatreds that poison life on our planet,” people are nevertheless “made for goodness by God, who is goodness itself” (Tutu & Tutu, 2010:8). In a South African context in which sickness, depression and death are a reality it will be useful for Pentecostals to maintain the confession of God’s goodness held by both Oyakhilome and Tutu. It is the unwavering belief that God is good which makes it possible to retain hope, in spite of the experience of deep suffering.

4.3.2 The Healing God

One of the archetypal forms of human suffering is that of sickness and the ministry of divine healing has been one of the most distinguishing features of the Pentecostal Movement since its inception (Warrington, 2003:66). Oyakhilome unequivocally affirms the belief that God is a healing God, “How God wants His people well! This is proved over and over again in our ministry as we take the message of healing to the nations through crusades and healing outreaches and various other arms of ministry” (Oyakhilome, 2013a:7). Moreover, this belief that God is a healing God was held by some influential South African Christian leaders even before the birth of the Pentecostal Movement. One such leader is Andrew Murray (1828 - 1917), who was a full time

minister in the Dutch Reformed Church for fifty eight years and wrote some two hundred and fifty books which went on to be translated into more than twenty languages (Mahne, 1999:369). Murray was a firm believer in supernatural healing even writing a book on the subject titled *Divine Healing*.⁴³

It is clear that the idea that God is able to heal supernaturally has a firm place in Pentecostalism as a broad movement and in South Africa in particular. Although it is true that there are some Pentecostal churches in South Africa which have abused the doctrine of divine healing as well as some other key tenets of Pentecostalism, the teaching remains a key characteristic of South African Pentecostalism.⁴⁴ Therefore, it is the view of the author that any Pentecostal understanding of God in the context of sickness and depression positively reaffirms the belief that God is the healing God. In a similar way to the 'responsible hope' which Ellie Marshall speaks of (Marshall, 2015:xiv), this affirmation of God as being able to heal does not negate the reality that illnesses and mental disorders bring many Christians under the burden of suffering on a daily basis.

Rather, it reaffirms a particular understanding of God characteristic of the Pentecostal Movement in South Africa while maintaining the *tension of hope* brought about by a Christian existential experience in which some are supernaturally healed and others are relieved of their suffering only through death. Furthermore, it should be stated here that the confession that God is the healer should not be understood as meaning

⁴³ Murray, A. 2016. *Divine Healing (Vol. 3)*. Aneko Press.

⁴⁴ See Resane, K.T. 2017. "And they shall make you eat grass like oxen"(Daniel 4: 24): Reflections on recent practices in some New Charismatic Churches. *Pharos Journal of Theology*, 98(1), pp.1-17.

Pentecostals should as a rule refuse to take any form of medicine. Although many early Pentecostals in South Africa such as Pieter le Roux openly renounced the use of medicine (Nel, 2005:203), according to Brown, “Most pentecostals today do not reject modern medicine, but they do insist that God is able to heal even when medicine is unable to help” (Brown, 2011:8).⁴⁵

The healing ministry of Jesus is founded on and is a facet of “the eschatological arrival of the kingdom of God”, a kingdom which Jesus himself embodies (Andersen, 2020:5). Divine healing is a sign of this kingdom which has not yet come in its fullness, but has still arrived in a tangible sense through the ministry of Jesus Christ (ibid.). In line with the tension of hope, there is a sense in the ministry of healing of “an already- and a not yet” (Andersen, 2020:5). On the one hand it is true that the kingdom of God has come through Jesus’ life and ministry marked with supernatural healing and the call to repentance. On the other hand it is also true that the kingdom of God is yet to come in its fullness, predicating any hope for healing as both temporal and eschatological. Although the temporal reality of suffering as a result of sickness, depression and death remains an existential truth it is the view of the author that maintaining belief in the healing God is an acknowledgment of a greater truth in Jesus which has already come and is yet to come.

⁴⁵ It is important to mention here that there are many Pentecostals in South Africa who refused to take the Covid-19 vaccine for various reasons. For more on this see, Kgate, M.S., 2022. Demonology, eschatology and vaccinology in African independent Pentecostalism. *In die Skriflig*, 56(1), pp.1-6.

4.3.3 The Suffering God

In an existential reality inescapably saturated with suffering, the confession that God is not immune to suffering has the potential of comforting those plagued with pain. As Moltmann so meticulously points out, God the Father suffers the death of his son when Jesus died on the cross and Jesus suffers abandonment by his Father (Moltmann, 1993:243). Perhaps the question more pertinent than, ‘Why does God allow suffering in the lives of those devoted to following him?’ is the question, ‘Where is God in the midst of suffering?’ Moltmann responds to this by stating that God is present in the suffering, “So God goes with Israel into the Babylonian exile. In his ‘indwelling’ in the people he suffers with the people, goes with them into prison, feels sorrow with the martyrs” (Moltmann, 1993:273).

The word compassion is a combination of two Latin words *com* (with) and *pati* (to suffer) (Lomas, 2015:168). Compassion involves a shared suffering coupled with the will to resolve the said suffering (Schulz et al., 2007:6). There is explanatory value to be found in this definition when seeking to understand exactly what is meant by confessing that God suffers. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the 20th century German martyr makes the statement, “Only the suffering God can help” (Bonhoeffer, 2010:479). The question which could be asked to Bonhoeffer in his posthumously is, ‘In what way can the suffering God help?’. In a study titled *Paul, Hardships, and Suffering*⁴⁶, Fredrickson makes the following assertion, “Shared suffering is the necessary condition for true friendship. This goes to the heart of traditional teaching on friendship. Christ, Paul, and the church are one

⁴⁶ Fredrickson, D. 2003. “Paul, Hardships, and Suffering.” In *Paul in the Greco-Roman World : A Handbook*, edited by Sampley, J.P. 172–97. Harrisburg, Pa. : Trinity Press International

because they share emotions” (Fredrickson, 2003:182). By affirming that there exists a shared suffering with God, Paul expands the scope of friendship to include God, Christ, the Holy Spirit as well as all of creation (ibid:186). This has the potential of providing comfort to Pentecostals undergoing suffering in that they can be assured in some way that they are not alone, but Christ their Lord and Friend is with them. There has been much research regarding the benefit of shared suffering.

Conclusion

The objective of this chapter was to formulate a proposal for a South African Pentecostal approach to suffering in light of the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The first section looked at the passion of Christ, both its physical and emotional components. Moreover, the suffering which the believers experienced following the departure of Jesus was briefly reviewed. The second section looked at forsakenness and abundance as the main contributions of Moltmann and Oyakhilome to this study. In the third and final section, a three-part Pentecostal response to suffering was proposed. The three component parts are as follows; the good God, the healing God and the suffering God.

CHAPTER FIVE: Towards A Conclusion of The Study

Introduction

This final chapter serves as a conclusion of the research project and will summarise the findings of the study regarding a South African Pentecostal understanding of the character of God in light of suffering. This study has surveyed selected readings from the literary corpus of Chris Oyakhilome in consolidating a particular Pentecostal understanding of God in light of suffering in South Africa. Moreover, this particular Pentecostal theology was evaluated against a select number of classic approaches to theodicy as well as the understanding of God argued for in *The Crucified God* by Jürgen Moltmann. Critique was offered for both Oyakhilome and Moltmann as the principal conversation partners in this project. The proposal for a revised Pentecostal understanding of the character of God made in the penultimate chapter therefore consists of an understanding of both Oyakhilome's and Moltmann's most useful attributes of God, refined by the other contemporary approaches to suffering reviewed. This chapter will also review the research problem, primary and secondary research questions as well as the contributions and relevance of the study in determining whether the goal set at the start of the study has been achieved. Furthermore, the limitations of this particular study as well as recommendations for further study will all be explicated in this chapter.

5.1 A review of the Research Problem

In chapter 1.2, the author stated the problem of this research project as the issue existing as a result of the apparent inconsistency between what some Christians believe

about the character of God and what is experienced in the everyday life of South African believers who undergo suffering. Furthermore, given the influence of the Pentecostal Movement on the South African ecclesial milieu accounted for in chapter 1.1, the resolution of the problem has been approached from a Pentecostal perspective.

5.2 A review of the Research Questions

In light of the research problem identified, there was a primary question as well as three secondary questions engaged with throughout the course of this study. The following is a summation of both the questions and the findings made in this thesis.

5.2.1 Primary research question

The primary research question posed at the beginning of this study in chapter 1.3 was as follows: How can a South African Pentecostal response to suffering be critiqued and further developed by critically looking at existing Pentecostal theologies of suffering in South Africa and the character of God in conversation with, *The Crucified God* by Jürgen Moltmann?

Response to the primary research question

The response to the primary question in this section has been summarised in two parts. Firstly, a particular Pentecostal understanding of the character of God was established by looking at three books by Nigerian pastor and leader of Christ Embassy, Chris Oyakhilome as a representative of a specific Pentecostal theology present in South Africa. The survey of Oyakhilome's theology in chapter 2, section 2 revealed three main

components of Oyakhilome's understanding of God and suffering which were relevant to this study.

Oyakhilome's understanding of the character of God in chapter 2.6 contributed towards identifying a particular Pentecostal understanding of the character of God in light of suffering. In chapter 2.6.1 Oyakhilome's understanding of 'God the Father' is presented (Oyakhilome, 2013b:34). Moreover, it was shown by citing Floyd McClung (McClung, 2004:21), who was an influential interdenominational leader in South Africa, that this view is well supported within the South African context. In chapter 2.6.2 Oyakhilome's view of God as 'the Loving God' was surveyed and found to be important to his theology (Oyakhilome, 2013b:22). In chapter 2.6.3 Oyakhilome's argument for 'God the Giver of good gifts' was looked at (Oyakhilome, 2013b:20-21). The main premise of Oyakhilome's argument was based on James 1:17, which Oyakhilome interpreted as meaning that God *exclusively* gives good gifts to his children (ibid.). This perspective was found to be present in South Africa and contended for by At Boshoff, the founder and senior pastor of the multi campus church, Christian Revival Church (Boshoff, 2023).

Furthermore, in chapter 2.6.4 Oyakhilome's definition of suffering was presented and found to consist of three main components, namely: sickness, frustration and poverty (Oyakhilome, 2005:54). This definition was found to be consistent with the ideals of Prosperity Theology (Kgatlé, 2019:2). Finally, chapter 2.7.2 revealed that Oyakhilome's stance regarding the will of God can be understood as containing two aspects, namely:

the Bible as the primary source for the revelation of God's will (chapter 2.7.2.1) and believers as the expression of God's will (chapter 2.7.2.2).

Secondly, the findings of chapter 2 were compared to contemporary approaches to theodicy (chapter 3.1 - 3.2) and the understanding of God proposed by Moltmann (chapter 3.4 - 3.7). It was found in chapter 3.1.1 that Oyakhilome agreed in principle with Thomas Aquinas' that *giving* is an important activity regarding God's will in relation to creation. However, chapter 3.1.3 showed that Oyakhilome differs from Aquinas in his definition of good in that Aquinas maintains a definition which proposes that God's goodness is categorically different and incomparable to any other form of goodness in creation (Davies & Stamp, 2012:150). Whilst Oyakhilome's definition of 'good' can be best described as anthropocentric as seen in chapter 2.8.

As far as the classical Christian responses to evil looked at in chapter 3.2 are concerned, the Free Will Defense/Theodicy was at odds with the Oyakhilome and the Pentecostal doctrine that physical healing has been provided for in the atonement of Jesus (Thomas, 2005:24). Chapter 3.2.2 looked at the Soul-Making Theodicy and Process Theodicy, both of which were found to be incompatible with Oyakhilome's theology. Although Oyakhilome does not address these two approaches directly, it is clear from quotes such as the following that he would not advocate for them, "You have in you the power to do anything. You can effect changes and control the circumstances of life to suit you if only you'll put your faith to work" (Oyakhilome, 2005:32).

In chapter 3.5, Moltmann's definition of suffering was found to consist of three delineations, "There is unwilling suffering, there is accepted suffering and there is the suffering of love" (Moltmann, 1993:230). Although Oyakhilome agrees with Moltmann in his affirmation of the love of God, he does not state unequivocally that God suffers (Oyakhilome, 2013a:40-41). It was concluded that Oyakhilome's theology was useful although lacking in depth when compared to Aquinas, particularly in the definition of 'good' in referring to God's character and the gifts God gives (chapter 3, conclusion). Moreover, it was concluded that Moltmann and Oyakhilome differed greatly in depth given that they wrote to different audiences in different epochs (chapter 3, conclusion). In chapter 3.7 Moltmann's contribution was also critiqued with the idea of divine passibility in chapter 3.4 coming under considerable scrutiny. Furthermore, the fact that Moltmann's theology is contextually far removed from the realities of South Africa given that it was developed in 20th century Germany was also raised.

In chapter 4, section 3 a three part revised Pentecostal understanding of God in light of suffering was offered. The first part, chapter 4.3.1, proposed maintaining the view of God as 'the Good God' (Oyakhilome, 2013b:34). The definition of the adjective good was informed by the divine and not by the human experience as held by Aquinas (Davies & Stamp, 2012:150). The second part, chapter 4.3.2, argued that an understanding of God as 'the Healing God' be maintained by Pentecostals undergoing suffering seeing that it is one of the cornerstone teachings in Pentecostalism and provides hope to the believer (Brown, 2011:8). In the third part, chapter 4.3.3,

Moltmann's idea of 'the Suffering God' was listed as a key attribute of God in a revised Pentecostal understanding in suffering (Moltmann, 1993:243).

5.2.2 Secondary research questions

1. The first secondary research question posed in chapter 1.3 was as follows: What are some of the dominant Pentecostal doctrines of God evidenced in a typological Pentecostal grouping in South Africa?

Response to first secondary research question

In chapter 2.6, the most dominant Pentecostal doctrines of God prevalent among certain believers in South Africa were provided following an analysis of Oyakhilome's theology. In chapter 2.6.1 the doctrine of 'God the Father' was identified as being important to Oyakhilome's theology (Oyakhilome, 2013b:34) and to certain Pentecostal believers in South Africa (McClung, 2004:21). In chapter 2.6.2 the idea argued for by Oyakhilome of God being 'the Loving God' can be viewed as being amongst the most dominant Pentecostal doctrines of God (Oyakhilome, 2013b:22). Finally, in chapter 2.6.3 the understanding of God as 'the Giver of good gifts' was given (Oyakhilome, 2013b:20-21) and the endorsement of At Boshoff showed this view to be present among some South African believers (Boshoff, 2023).

2. The second secondary research question posed in chapter 1.3 was as follows: What are some contemporary approaches to the problem of suffering that are

presented by a sample of South African Pentecostalism? Why might these be inadequate in dealing with the problem of suffering?

Response to second secondary question

In chapter 2.6.4 it was made clear that the main approach to the problem of suffering derived from a sample of South African Pentecostalism informed by Oyakhilome is synonymous with Prosperity Theology (Kgatlé, 2019:2). This deduction was informed by Oyakhilome's definition and proposed solution to the problem of suffering, "I want you to understand something: if you're born again, you don't need to suffer another day in your life. You don't have to be sick, broke, frustrated, poor, diseased or infirmed in your body. Put your faith to work! A glorious, prosperous, healthy, excellent, successful and good life is your God-given inheritance" (Oyakhilome, 2005:54). The validity of this approach to suffering was critiqued in chapter 2.9 and found to be inadequate in dealing with the problem of suffering because it is anthropocentric, removing Jesus as the centre of the Gospel message and setting the believer up for disappointment in the event that their expectations are not fulfilled in the manner they envisaged them to be (Lioy, 2007:41).

3. The third secondary research question posed in chapter 1.3 was as follows: How might South African Pentecostal theologies of theodicy be reconsidered in light of Jürgen Moltmann's *The Crucified God*?

Response to third secondary research question

In chapter 4.3.3 it was stated that in a world filled with suffering, the confession that God is not immune to suffering has the potential of comforting those undergoing pain (Moltmann, 1993:243). Moreover, Moltmann's understanding of God being present in the suffering of his people positively contributes towards a South African Pentecostal theodicy (Moltmann, 1993:273), in that he proposes that there is a shared suffering which has the potential to lead to an enriched relationship with God (Fredrickson, 2003:182).

5.3 A review of the research methodology and research goals

As stated in chapter 1.5, this research project used a qualitative content-analysis methodology as its theoretical framework. In its simplest form, the research presented in this thesis can be summarised in three categories, all of which will take the same methodological approach. Firstly, a critical review of the nature of God and suffering was undertaken by drawing on faith-formative literature from the Pentecostal movement as well as other theological traditions. Secondly, the critical conclusions of Pentecostal faith-formative writings were compared to more traditional Christian views in order to ascertain their overall theological soundness or lack thereof. Finally, several recommendations were made in light of the conclusions reached in the first two categories with the aim of positively contributing towards how Pentecostal believers respond to suffering.

In chapter 2 a particular Pentecostal view of the nature of God and suffering was established through the analysis of selected faith-formative literature from Chris Oyakhilome. This was placed in the context of broader theological traditions with the aid of Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology* (1994). In chapter 3 the critical conclusions of Oyakhilome's faith-formative literature as representative of a particular Pentecostal understanding of God in suffering was compared to more traditional Christian approaches to the questions of suffering. The classical Christian approaches to suffering looked at were the Free Will Theodicy (chapter 3.2.1) as well as Soul-Making Theodicy and Process Theodicy (3.2.2). Moreover, Thomas Aquinas' work pertaining to the will of God (chapter 3.1.1) and the goodness of God (chapter 3.1.3) was compared to Oyakhilome's views. Finally, three main recommendations regarding an understanding of the character of God in light of the aforementioned contributions were made (chapter 4, section 3). These proposals were namely: the Good God (chapter 4.3.1), the Healing God (chapter 4.3.2) and the Suffering God (chapter 4.3.3).

5.4 A review of the contribution and relevance of the study

In chapter 1.4 the contribution and relevance of the study was argued for. Pentecostalism was recognised as one of the biggest protestant movements in the world with a far reaching interdenominational influence. In light of this, it was deemed both urgent and necessary for a serious consideration of the movement's theology to be undertaken in the effort to contribute towards its further development (Richie, 2020:12). This thesis was aimed at contributing towards Pentecostal theology specifically as it relates to the subject of suffering and God's character. In chapter 2, it became clear that there are distinct professions about the character of God held by some Pentecostal

Christians in South Africa. Moreover, in chapter 2.9 the broader theological framework within which these beliefs are held was identified as Prosperity Theology and consequently found to be inadequate in aiding believers traverse through suffering.

As highlighted in chapter 1.4, the ecumenical impact of the Pentecostal movement in South Africa cannot be overstated. It was therefore both necessary and relevant that a Pentecostal theology which influences the average South African Pentecostal's response to the suffering caused by sickness, depression and death was revised and further developed. Finally, this study was found to be relevant to the South African context given the prevalence of suffering as well as the continued proliferation of a particular type of Pentecostal theology at play in the South African ecclesia.

5.5 Possible areas for further research

This study has been directed towards answering the primary and secondary research questions stipulated in chapter 1.3. However, there are questions which although peripheral to the objectives of this research project are nevertheless important and could perhaps take precedence in future research. The author has identified three possible areas for future research and has summarised them in question form as follows.

1. What is a South African Pentecostal understanding of the role of Satan in the suffering of sickness, depression and death experienced by believers? This question builds on the idea of metaphysical evil (Scott, 2015:42) and the doctrine of sin presented in chapter 3.1.2.

2. What impact does the resurrection of Jesus have on the Pentecostal understanding of God in light of suffering sickness, depression and death? This study focused on the passion of Jesus in chapter 3.6 as a significant event in influencing how Pentecostals might understand the character of God. However, the resurrection of Jesus was not covered given the limitations of this study and the author is of the opinion that a Pentecostal study of the resurrection in light of suffering may make a fruitful contribution to the broader discussion.

3. Why are some in the Pentecostal movement delivered from suffering sickness, depression and death whilst others are not? The tension of hope discussed in chapter 4.3.2 describes the Christian existential experience in which some are supernaturally healed and others are relieved of suffering through death. The author is of the opinion that a study dedicated to further unpacking this apparent tension would contribute greatly towards both Pentecostal theology and the practice of divine healing.

Conclusion

This chapter looked at the research problem, research questions, research methodology, research goals and the contribution, relevance of this study as well as recommendations for further research.

The first chapter served as the introduction to the entire study and is a reworked version of the initial research proposal. In this chapter, several key terms pertinent to the project

were defined and elaborated upon where necessary. Theodicy as a central theme of the study was unpacked and carefully defined in establishing a framework within which suffering was understood in the context of this study. Furthermore, the background and rationale of the study was outlined, framing the study within the context of South Africa. Moreover, the *research questions, research methodology and goals, literature review and structure of the thesis* were all presented in this chapter.

The second chapter aimed to better understand a particular Pentecostal theology about the nature of God and suffering and presented a critique thereof. This was informed primarily by looking at faith-formative literature from Chris Oyakhilome, as representative of a particular type of Pentecostal theology which has been an influential force in the South African religious lieu in recent years. Moreover, the author surveyed this specific type of theology in conversation with broader Pentecostalism's claims regarding suffering.

The third chapter was aimed at assessing the adequacy of the Pentecostal theology discussed in chapter 2. The author did this by weighing the critical conclusions of chapter two against some traditional Christian views about theodicy, in conversation with Jürgen Moltmann's *The Crucified God*. Furthermore, the author unpacked the understanding of God's character in suffering as well as formulated an argument for why a sound theological understanding thereof is pertinent to a South African Pentecostal theodicy.

The fourth chapter focused on consolidating a proposal for a South African Pentecostal approach to suffering in light of the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The author sought to better understand what a revised Pentecostal understanding of the character of God contributes towards an already existing South African Pentecostal response to suffering. The emerging understanding of God in light of suffering was presented as a recommendation for a revised Pentecostal response to suffering and can be summarised as follows: the good God, the healing God and the suffering God.

The fifth and final chapter served as the conclusion of the thesis. In this chapter, a summary was given of what the author did in the thesis, why it is important and recommendations for further study.

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated that there is a particular Pentecostal approach to suffering held among certain believers in South Africa which is represented in the selected work of Chris Oyakhilome. Moreover, this approach was found to be inadequate in some aspects when compared to classical Christian views of suffering such as the different approaches to theodicy surveyed as well as the theology of Jürgen Moltmann found in *the Crucified God*. Nevertheless, some aspects of the particular Pentecostal theology were retained after being critiqued and compared to selected classical Christian approaches to the question of suffering. Furthermore, the contribution of Moltmann to the study was significant in that it introduced the idea of the passibility of God to a particular Pentecostal understanding of God in light of suffering sickness, depression and death.

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