

THE RELEVANCE OF JÜRGEN MOLTSMANN'S POLITICAL THEOLOGY FOR CHRISTIANS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This work is sold on the idea that Christian theology can be and is relevant to us in the society and that one of the important aspects of the Christian faith, the cross of Jesus Christ, can be the point of departure of a critical and liberating relationship between Christians and the society. The theological submission of Jürgen Moltmann about the meaning and relevance of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross is one that calls us to reflect on the images we have made about God that do not take cross into consideration or that do not go deeper into its meaning. The death of Christ on the cross, helps us to reformulate our perception of God's identity and constantly keep us asking critical questions about the divine pretension of the political class in our country.

Keywords: Political Theology, The Crucified God, Theology of the cross.

Introduction

In Nigeria, the misuse of power is one of the causes of the problems of social injustice experienced by many Nigerians. The exercise of power, currently experienced in Nigeria, is not in line with the democratic system that Nigeria postulates because it is in the hands of a small number of people, who form the government and the elites. Many politicians do not perceive power as an instrument in service to the people, in whom power truly resides, but as a self-serving instrument at the expense of the precarious and deplorable situation of over 200 million people.

The true meaning of power in Christian language does not lie in its concentration in the hands of a privileged group, but in the participation of all to achieve a common good in accordance with human dignity. The meaning of power is only discovered when it is at the service of human dignity and this implies the liberation of victims of oppression and

violence of all kinds, the recognition of the value and importance of each person, a culture of justice that is guided by truth and a society where peace is valued. From the life and mission of Jesus Christ, Christians can draw a theology that politically serves the good of the marginalised, the oppressed, the victims of various kinds of abuse.

One of the theologians who has presented such a political theology is Jürgen Moltmann. In his political theology, one sees the unity and complementarity between the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, between suffering and the certainty of hope for liberation, between faith and praxis. His political theology believes that Christian faith cannot be isolated or detached from politics. He believes that Christian faith in the political sphere helps to install the important and essential elements that make politics more Christian and to make theology recognise its political conscience.¹

In this piece, I intend to present the political theology of the German theologian, Jürgen Moltmann and contextualize some of its points to the situation of Nigeria as it encourages the active participation of not just the Church but also of Christians in creating a political society that respects and values the dignity of all her members.

The Political Theology of Jürgen Moltmann

Moltmann in one of his most famous works, *Theology of Hope*, took off from the position of the resurrection of Christ as the catalyst for hope, because it signifies the fulfilment of God's promise to man. What Moltmann did in this work is an eschatological interpretation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and its significance for the Church and Christians in the society.² While his *Theology of Hope* elicited positive reviews about the relevance of the Christian hope as the catalyst for positive transformation in the society, it was however criticized for lacking concrete terms in which the Church's mission of the world-transformation can be truly felt.³ The need for a political theology that corresponds to the demand of the eschatological hope that Moltmann posits will become manifest in his encounter with Johann Baptist Metz' theological concept that believed that Christian faith should seek to contextualize and see itself within history by viewing the world from

¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *Teología Política. Ética Política*, (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1987), 21.

² Jürgen Moltmann, *Teología de la esperanza*, (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1969), 20. The discourse of Moltmann on the theology of hope starts from the critique of the understanding of eschatology as the doctrine of the last things. For Moltmann, Christian eschatology does not deal with last realities, rather that it deals with the hope of the expected reality that is bound to the resurrected crucified Christ, which is the centre of the Christian kerygma.

³ Richard Bauckham, *Moltmann: Messianic theology in the making*, (Basingstoke: Marshall Morgan and Scott, 1987), 41.

the lens of human experience, worries and accomplishments and making Christian theology faith a public affair in the society instead of being reduced to the private lives of Christians.⁴

How does Moltmann understand political theology? The Christian faith is not a faith that is lived only within the privacy of the lives of Christians, it is rather a faith that demands a public expression in the face of the conflicts in the society. It is a hermeneutic category that seeks to interpret the memory of the messianic message of Christ in the present situation of the society so as to liberate man from the coercion of the society and set the path for the eschatological freedom of the new man.⁵

The political theology of Jürgen Moltmann seeks to theologially criticize the civil religion of our society⁶ and tries to free the Christian faith from the Babylonian captivity of civil religion so that its messianic hope can flourish. Moltmann's political theology tends to do two things: first is to analyse the political and practical situation in which it develops, reflected and deliberated. Secondly, is to include the fundamental conceptions of a Christian ethic in the political sphere; it is a designation for theological reflection on the concrete political practice of Christianity.⁷ According to Moltmann, "Political theology designates the field, milieu, space and setting in which Christian theology must be consciously exercised in our days". Political theology wants to awaken in theology its political consciousness. This theology does not make political questions the central theme of its treatise but wants to be Christian even in the political functions of dogma and to Christianize the political commitment of Christians.⁸

⁴ Johann Baptist Metz, *Teología del mundo*, (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1971) 108-130.

⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, "Political Theology" *Theology Today*, 28, no. 4 (1971): 8.

⁶ Moltmann, "Political Theology", 8-11. The idea enshrined in a civil religion of a society is that which Moltmann refers to as having its origin in the political religious idea of the ancient pagan religions. Political theology or religion is the idea of religious reverence to the gods of the state by the *polis*. The history of Maccabeus tells us of the persecution of the Jews and the religious conflict that came about as a result of the Jews unacceptance of the religious imposition of the foreign power. Jesus' earthly life and ministry evidently was lived in this context of the domination of a foreign political power represented by Caesar. This was the primary reason why Christians were tagged "atheists". To be an atheist is to not participate in the public veneration of these gods. Christianity rose to become the official religion of the Roman empire and with its influence, it Christianized the existing state religions but at same time it became politicized. In today's society, Moltmann believes that there are still traces of political religion in various nations and these are symbolized by nationalistic and/or religious creeds, symbols and myths employed to instill some self-conscious identity of one's society.

⁷ Moltmann, *Teología Política*, 9.

⁸ Moltmann, *Teología Política*, 103 – 104.

The presence of political theology in Jürgen Moltmann's thought rose from the quest of finding a way of being a Christian and politically active in the society without either losing out on the Christian identity or the losing touch with the demands of political participation in the society.⁹ Moltmann's political theology permeates other aspects of his theological thoughts and this is because of his intention to not just present the doctrine of the Christian faith but also to bring it into dialogue with the practical reality that the Christian faith is lived and as far as the society is one of the dialogue partners in Jürgen Moltmann's theological thoughts, it is only logical for the relevance of the Christian faith be perceived in various themes of his work.

The Cross of Jesus Christ in Moltmann's Political Theology

Moltmann's Theology of the Cross

In Jürgen Moltmann's theology, one can observe some important features that permeate his thoughts and one of these features is the cross of Jesus Christ. Moltmann has given an ample space to the understanding and relevance of the cross of Christ in the life of Christians in relation to the ecclesial community and the society in general. Moltmann affirms that "*Theologia crucis* is not a single chapter in theology, but the key signature for all Christian theology".¹⁰ Don Schweitzer has postulated that Moltmann's theology in general be considered a theology of the cross and this he does by examining traces of the presence of the cross in the works of Jürgen Moltmann.¹¹ The cross of Christ is the driving force of the political theology of Moltmann and many authors have come to qualify it as the political theology of the cross. It is important to highlight some of the aspects of the cross for Moltmann before dwelling on its place in his political theology.

Moltmann's theology of the cross is influenced by the *theologia crucis* of Martin Luther and although both of them agree in some aspects, they are quite different in many other areas.¹² Martin Luther's *theologia crucis* affirmed that God reveals himself to us through the cross by which it repudiates arrogant men and women who have turned themselves into proud and unhappy gods. Luther's theological perspective sought to bring down the excesses of the *theologia gloria* held on to by the Church during his time.

⁹ George Hunsinger, "The Crucified God and the Political theology of violence: a critical survey of Jürgen Moltmann's recent thought I" *The Heythrop Journal* 14, no. 3 (1973): 266.

¹⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 103.

¹¹ Don Schweitzer, "Jürgen Moltmann's theology as a theology of the cross" *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 24, no. 1 (1995): 95-107.

¹² For a summarized reading on the similarities and differences between Luther's and Moltmann's theology see Burnell F. Eckardt, "Luther and Moltmann: The theology of the cross" *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (1985) 19-28.

The cross, for Luther, is key to understanding a reality and verifying what a thing is. It is only through the theology of the cross that one gets to know God as he is hidden in suffering. In the cross, man gets to know how to use the gifts from God.¹³ For Martin Luther, as far as the Christian faith is concerned, the cross is the epistemological principle of determining the reality and identity of everything that exists, it is the yardstick of knowing God's intention for man and the measure by which man judges himself in the presence of God and hence the significance of the famous *Crux probat omnia*, the cross is the test of everything and Moltmann takes this statement up in his book *The Crucified God*, affirming that it is the test of everything that deserves to be called Christian and that it is what guarantees the identity and relevance of the Christian faith in our society today.¹⁴

However, the points of divergence between Moltmann's theology of the cross from that of Luther are seen in the criticisms that Moltmann directs at the theology of the cross of Luther. Moltmann criticizes Luther's inability to oppose Aristotle's philosophy of works in such a way that it would lead to *philosophia crucis*, and secondly, the *theologia crucis* of Luther failed by not being a critical and liberating force for the poor against the rich.¹⁵

Moltmann based his theology of the cross on the significance of the death of Christ for God and prefers to think of Jesus' death, primarily, as an event in which Jesus was abandoned by God.¹⁶ Moltmann's theology of the cross posits that Christ's forsakenness on the cross was as a result of the love the Father and the Son both had for us, for God gave up his Son for us (cf. Rom. 8:32) and that the Son willingly gave up himself for us (cf. Gal. 2:20)¹⁷ and that both suffered, differently, the event of the cross. Moltmann's theology of the cross seeks to respond to the place of God in the face of human suffering and this helps in the transformation of the reality of the ecclesial community. This makes Moltmann's theology of the cross to be both historical and existential and not just a systematic-theological enterprise.

¹³ Martin Luther, "Controversia de Heidelberg 1518", in *Lutero Obras*, ed. Teófanos Egido (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1977), § 19-24.

¹⁴ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 1ff.

¹⁵ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 104-105. "A thoroughgoing theology of the cross must apprehend the crucified God in all the three areas in which the ancient world used the term theology, and in which even today men are inescapably religious: in mythical theology, in the form of demythologization; in political theology, in the form of liberation; and in philosophical theology, in the form of understanding the universe as a creation".

¹⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, "The passion of Christ and the suffering of God", *The Asbury Theological Journal* 48, no. 1 (1993) 22.

¹⁷ Schweitzer, "Jürgen Moltmann's theology as a theology of the cross", 98.

The Relevance of the Cross in the Political Theology of Moltmann

As stated in the foregone, the cross of Christ is a vital component of Moltmann's political theology and this flows from the fact that anything that is to be identified as Christian must pass the test of the cross of the crucified God, for this is what distinguishes the Christian faith from other religions, ideologies, unfaith and superstition. The starting point and criterion for a Christian political theology, according to Moltmann, should be the cross.¹⁸ Two important aspects of the function of the cross in Moltmann's political theology is that first of all it rejects political idolatry and secondly, it is the guarantee of liberation in the society especially for those who suffer oppression, abuse of various degrees and marginalization in the society.

When political rule is defined in the terms of divine justification, Moltmann terms it as political idolatry and only the crucified Christ can liberate us from the shackles of this idolatry. Political idolatry, in the thoughts of Moltmann, revolves around the intention of man to claim divine identity for himself in his dehumanized status. When political powers and authorities see themselves as divinely ordained, it leads to political idolatry- a false image of who God truly is. The cross of Christ criticizes this idolatrous reality. God stands and fights for those who have become victims by showing his glory through and in the crucified Christ.¹⁹ In the cross of Christ, the divine glory has been revealed to the believers, not in the person of Caesar and the political religion of Rome, rather in the One who was crucified and in all who suffer oppression.²⁰

Moltmann arrived at this conclusion because he gave a religious interpretation and a political interpretation to the death of Jesus Christ. The religious interpretation had to do with the perception of the Jews and the sanctity of the law by which Jesus was condemned. Moltmann acknowledges that Jesus' death was a consequence of the conflicts between him and the world which surrounded him. The authority with which Jesus preached the kingdom of God and the messianic aura that accompanied him put him in conflict with the law because he placed himself above Moses and the law (Cf. Mt. 5-7). The thrust of Jesus' proclamation was based on God's freedom from the law to show mercy to sinners and his friendship with sinners and tax collectors. The theological perspective of Jesus on God was contradictory to the *status quo* of the religious point of view of his society because he extended God's righteousness to those the law considers unrighteous.²¹

¹⁸ Moltmann, "Political theology", 15.

¹⁹ Moltmann, *Teología Política*, 37-46.

²⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, *La Iglesia fuerza del Espíritu: Hacia una eclesiología mesiánica*, (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1978) 116ff.

²¹ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 182-194.

The political interpretation implicated the role of the Roman authority in the death of Jesus Christ. The crucifixion of Jesus was the Roman capital punishment on crimes committed against the state and its gods. The Romans considered Jesus a zealot and his message was politically interpreted. This misconception of the identity of Jesus as a zealot was influential to the Romans' execution of Jesus because he held some similarities with the zealots. But Jesus was no zealot because unlike the zealots who believed in the use of violence and belligerent method to bring about the kingdom of God, Jesus believed and preached that God's kingdom is founded on the divine principle of grace. He also criticized the radical legalist perception of the law by the zealots. The Roman authority was affected by Jesus' proclamation of God and his Kingdom because it went against the cultic and politico-religious foundations of the Pax Romana that is founded on the deified identity of the emperor. In a world where religion and politics were inseparable, Jesus' crucifixion showed a political dimension that preached the freedom of God in the face of the political religion of the Roman empire.²²

The crucified God represents the desacralization of political powers and this means that the higher justification of political powers from above as God-given can no longer be accepted; rather, it must come from below and must permit the democratization of political rule. This means that the Christian theology must seek to liberate men from the political service of idols, alienation, and loss of rights and seek the promotion of true desacralization, relativization, and democratization of political powers.²³ This will only happen if the Church and Christians hold on to a political theology of the cross that goes between "irrelevant Christian identity and social relevance without Christian identity".²⁴

The clarification on the question of the relevance and identity of the Christian faith is an important theme in Moltmann's theology and he refers to it as the dilemma of Christians in the world today, both of which are complementary.

On the relevance of the Christian faith, Moltmann begins by presenting the situation that called for a renewal in theology. This call was made so that the church does not lose its credibility by its ideology of fundamentalism and dogmatism.²⁵ But most importantly of this call for renewal, was for the Church and Christian theology to become a beacon of hope against oppression and suffering in the society. The renewal of theology also highlights the situation of theology and its relevance to the questions that the pluralist society poses to it. The response to the question of relevance has to begin with seeing

²² Moltmann, "Political Theology", 15.

²³ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 477-479.

²⁴ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 472.

²⁵ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 3.

one's point of view as relative to that of others; it is to think out one's ideas with the thought of others. This is because, in a pluralistic society, one idea cannot be held as absolute. Adopting an absolute point of view is equivalent to having no point at all.

The relevance of the Christian faith in a pluralistic society is not determined by its social and political commitment to the poor or the oppressed, nor rebellion against injustice, what determines its relevance is the ability to take up a non-identity and become unidentifiable to its ancient forms of identity (based on dogmatism, fundamentalism and legalism) or to new forms of identity (social activism). The relevance of the Christian faith is found in its ability to exist for others, in solidarity, by becoming a progressive religion for a better society.²⁶

On what constitutes and guarantees the identity of the Christian faith, Moltmann states that externalities like membership, the creed or experiences of conversion cannot qualify for nor guarantee one's identity as a Christian. The error of holding on to these externalities leads to a decay of faith because it becomes fearful and defensive. According to Moltmann, a fearful and defensive faith will only struggle to keep itself alive through the acts of those who see themselves as the guardians of the faith, generating fearfulness and apathy instead of confidence and freedom.

The consequence of this situation is that those who see themselves as guardians of the faith create a sectarian mentality that is rooted in a rigid and closed tradition. Here, the Church that is supposed to be open by its mission, becomes a closed one. The Church, according to Moltmann, should keep alive the apocalyptic dimension of the coming of Christ but only in a way that it is the coming of Christ that brings about the end of destruction and also see that evangelization and task of social liberation of man are two sides of the same coin. The Christian faith must practically demonstrate that it is aimed at liberation because of its internal identification with the crucified Christ and his cross. This identification with the crucified Christ means "solidarity with the sufferings of the poor and the misery, both of the oppressed and the oppressors".²⁷

The cross, for Moltmann, is the yardstick of determining what should be considered Christian, what should be the truth and the will of God. Its role in his political theology evidently serves as a criticism to the religious consecration of political power or the politicization of Christian message so that it becomes an ideology.

It is important to note that Moltmann's ideas were influenced in a great way by his own experience during and after the second world war and his time as a prisoner of war. The

²⁶ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 4 -17.

²⁷ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 21-29.

question of the relationship between the church and the state is what he has always been faced with. From Moltmann's perspective, since the crucified God cannot be the foundation upon which political powers are consecrated, the Church and Christians must assume a critical position in its relationship with the political society. This means that the Church cannot be a tool and should never allow herself be an agent of oppression in the society either by its silence or active participation. If silence and indifference help perpetuate ungodly elements in power in a society in which the community of the crucified God is found, it means that the messages, homilies and the activities of the church have political relevance. It is on this note that the relevance of the political theology of Moltmann is drawn into the Nigerian context today.

Contextualizing Moltmann's Political Theology in Nigeria

It is quite an obvious fact that Jürgen Moltmann presents his thoughts in such a way that they are not just concerned about their doctrinal foundations but also their practical relevance in the society. Using the angle of Christology, Moltmann believes that it should be done and realized in the *sitz im leben*, situation in life, that it is found. Christology cannot be content with just its abstract elucidation, rather it must also find its place within the community of Christ "with its elemental functions for living, and its task for the world surrounding it". This means that Christology should influence the rise of its corresponding christopraxis, discipleship of Jesus, in the society.²⁸

The situation of Nigeria can be a context in which the political theology of Moltmann can be relevant as it is against political idolatry and the liberation of the those who suffer various degrees of abuse. One way of using the political theology of Moltmann the political idolatry in Nigeria must start from a critical reading of the biblical texts of Romans 13:1-2 and Heb. 13: 17. These texts have been used in various sections of the country to ask for a blind obedient and uncritical attitude to the political office holders in the country. An uncritical assent to political leaders especially from the part of Christians only goes to affirm the famous Marxian dictum that postulates that religion is an opium of the masses that anaesthetizes the revolutionary desire to seek the best from those who represent them in various positions of power.

"Ascetic Christianity called the world evil and left it. Humanity is waiting for a revolutionary Christianity which will call the world evil and change it".²⁹ The revolution

²⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, *The way of Jesus Christ: Christology in messianic dimensions*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 42-43.

²⁹ Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the social crisis in the 21st century: The classic that woke up the Church*, (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 68-72.

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

Nigeria practices a democratic system that requires that people who occupy political positions in the country are voted in by the people themselves (even though the elections are marred by violence and irregularities). These elected officials are not in the office for their own personal benefits, rather for the benefit of the people for and by whom they were elected. However, what is seen to happen does not reflect representation but a situation of both political idolatry and political alienation as Moltmann rightly captures it. By political idolatry it is meant that representatives "go over the head of those whom they are meant to represent and the people now bow to them". Political alienation becomes the logical consequence of such situation in that the people become distanced and separated from the political dignity they possess in deciding their future.³⁰ This is a common experience for most Nigerians who are certain that the politicians' interest in the populace only happens when it is time to canvass and solicit their votes so that they can remain in power.

From the Christian perspective, the ultimate source of power and authority is God, but the exercise of this power and authority that disregards the ultimate cannot be related to God. God cannot be the foundation on which oppression, injustice and violence are built, but in some situations, Christians have been used to consecrate the misuse of power in society, either by their active participation in the installation of oppression or by their silence instead of taking a critical stance towards politicians. A critical reading of power in the life of Jesus and the early Christians presents us with some important points: (a) The exercise of power must be oriented towards the good and health of others. It is relational. (b) Power must guarantee the equality and right of each person. Power has to be exercised in love. (c) Jesus' attitude and his use of parables to explain issues of law and the kingdom of God, rejects the attitude of reserving the fruits of knowledge to a narrow

³⁰ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 477.

section of the people. (d) Jesus, through his life, cross and resurrection teaches us that true power does not require violence to legitimize it and that freedom and hope are not to be found in political powers but in the kingdom of God.³¹

On the question of the liberation of the oppressed and the Church's role in it, we find that the principal reason for the Church to participate in the discussion of social justice in the society is that its message has a political significance and so there is the expectation from people, both believers and non-believers, to know what the Church's position is in a concrete historical moment of a society. The Church's action or inaction has always been scrutinized in decisive moments. For instance, the Catholic Church played an important role, during and after the Nigerian civil war (1967-1970), in the Southeastern Nigeria, in saving lives of children and adults by providing physical and spiritual nourishment to feed a starving people and creating an environment that enhanced a revival in the psyche of the people affected greatly by the war.³² There was an obvious recognition of the Catholic Church in Nigeria for standing against the authoritarian military rule and supporting the democratization of power.³³ The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria took a stand with the protesters during the #EndSARS protests in October, 2020. The list could go on, but what it tries to emphasize is that the Church cannot be apolitical, apathic and indifferent to what happens around her in the society.

From this, the oppressed, the poor and the victimized are all in search of liberation and for their voices to be heard. To amplify these voices, the Church in Nigeria must continually make the resolve to stand with those who are "crucified" every day on the streets of Nigeria, those who have been deceived and left to their misfortune by the autocratic mantras of political leaders who promise to end the sufferings of people only to dash their hopes.³⁴ The Church in Nigeria must never conform to any political ideology but be determined in her mission for the Kingdom of God. It must constantly adopt the political-hermeneutical method of seeing and taking cognizance of the present situation of society in all ramifications, judging and asking after the mind of God and what is in accordance

³¹ Ivoni Richter Reimer and Haroldo Reimer, "El Poder como servicio," *Concilium* 386, no. 3 (2020): 338.

³² Jacinta C. Nwaka, "The Catholic Church, the Nigerian Civil War and the Beginning of Organized Lay Apostolate Groups among the Igbos of Southeastern Nigeria," *The Catholic Historical Review* 99, no. 1 (2013): 78-95.

³³ Ebenezer Obadare, "A Sacred duty to resist tyranny? Rethinking the role of the Catholic Church in Nigeria's struggle for Democracy," *Journal of Church and State* 55, no. 1 (2012): 92-112.

³⁴ Charles Chukwuebuka Ugonwafor, "Jürgen Moltmann's Christology of the Crucified God as a foundation for social justice in Nigeria today," Master's thesis, (Estudio Teológico Agustiniiano, 2022).

with the faith she has professed in the crucified and acting in accordance with the hope of the coming Kingdom of God.

Against the pretense of self-realization championed by the political leaders of Nigeria and the culture of self-marginalization that arises from the hopelessness of the victims of the false image created by the political class in Nigeria, the task of the Church in Nigeria is to disclose to the Nigerian society “the horizon of the future of the crucified Christ”.³⁵ The political and socio-cultural situation of Nigeria does affect the state of the Church and its task of prophetic witnessing and it is commendable to see that the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, the organ that shows the unity and presence of the Catholic Church in Nigeria, has been doing her best to always refer to the state of the nation and insist on the government to own up to its responsibility of offering social justice to all citizens of the country.

But it is not enough to transmit communiqués after various meetings and this is where Christian communities must be disposed to responding to the testimony of what they hope in (Cf. 1 Pet. 3:15), manifesting this hope to other members of the society in love and truth. The worst that will happen to the Christian faith in Nigeria is for Christian communities to remain silent in the face of the oppression that takes place in the country or take the side of the oppressor against the oppressed and the victimized. That the Church is not a charity organization is not an excuse to cease from being charitable and a shelter to those who need it. However, this cannot happen if the Church relegates the crucified God to a second level. It is in him that the Church's identity is revitalized and its mission met with a willing response to the invitation of the coming Kingdom of God.³⁶

Conclusions

Following all that have been stated in the foregone, this paper will now draw some conclusions.

The political theology of Moltmann is a logical consequence of the cross of Christ and seeks to buttress the relevance of the Christian faith. Moltmann arrived at this after realizing that his *Theology of Hope* needed to do better in contextualizing its findings and this contextualization should happen within the society. The Christian hope cannot be fully understood unless it affects the concrete history of man and the society. The political theology of the cross of Jürgen Moltmann is the vehicle that is able to achieve this task

³⁵ Moltmann, *Teología de la esperanza*, 436.

³⁶ Charles Chukwuebuka Ugonwafor, “Jürgen Moltmann's Christology of the Crucified God as a foundation for social justice in Nigeria today.”

since it takes up the conflicts of the society and at same time, proposes and offers the hope that comes from God.

The Crucified God as stated in this work is the main axis on which Moltmann centers his political theology and this is coming from the conviction that it is he, the crucified God, who determines everything that is called Christian and so if there is a Christian political theology, in Moltmann's understanding, it must be connected to Jesus Christ. He guarantees its identity and inspires its relevance. The crucified God rejects political idolatry and promotes liberation in the society. When political societies see themselves in the light of divine canonization or a representation of God in the society, they end up becoming dictatorial and absolutist. They become idols and the direct opposite of who God is. It is in this regard that Moltmann postulates for a democratic society where power does not come from above but from below in which citizens can have an opinion on the future of their societies. This is what Moltmann terms as "responsible participation in the processes of political decision", for he supports a democratic society that is not built on a master-slave dynamic.³⁷

It in this regard we can read the situation of Nigeria, where most political leaders believe they are above the people they are meant to represent. This has generated an apathetic attitude in the minds of a good number of Nigerians who do not want anything to do with participating actively in the political future of the country. But this apathy also has been influenced and sustained by the unsafe and violent manner with which political exercises are carried out in Nigeria. The political theology which Moltmann has proposed is one that can motivate and inspire a more active participation of Christians in the society especially in the question of politics and right interpretation of political power. The idea here is that Christians in Nigeria cannot be continue to be contented with being apolitical or uninterested in political exercises because it is also part of the messianic mission of the crucified God. Christians must be motivated in allowing their faith in the crucified God influence the political proceedings of their society.

In their identification with the crucified God, Christians must make themselves available to seek the good and liberation of all who are marginalized and the voice of the voiceless in the society. It is this attitude that will highlight the value and appreciation of the rights and dignity of each member of the society and this can be done only when Christians refuse to support the *status quo* of political idolatry that is palpable in the streets of Nigeria, where money and selfish interests of a few determine the lot and future of millions of people.

³⁷ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 478.

The Church and Christians by virtue of this political theology of the cross become agents of liberation to people who are in misery. Christians are invited to become the critical voice against political institutions. The political society cannot be allowed to be comfortable in her human securities. The community of the crucified God has to criticize all forms of political idolatry in any place they are found. Church leaders must continue to be uncompromising on what truly matters. This will help the Church not to be a tool in the hands of the “Caesars” of our time. An attitude of resistance that is at the same time peaceful, non-violent and dialogic is what is expected here.³⁸

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³⁸ Charles Chukwuebuka Ugonwafor, “Jürgen Moltmann’s Christology of the Crucified God as a foundation for social justice in Nigeria today.”

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