

# A RESPONSE TO EVIL AND SUFFERING: A CAMEROONIAN REFLECTION ON JÜRGEN MOLTMANN'S UNDERSTANDING OF SUFFERING

by

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**DEDICATED TO:**

**Tabe Rebecca Ayuk “Mbandam”**

And

**Cecilia Edibe-Wang**

And to you

**“My Angel Friend”, Engela Buitendag**

“You seem far off, and yet you remain forever so near and dear too”

## SUMMARY

The ordinary local Cameroonian just like people everywhere experiences a lot of evil and suffering in acts such as violence, abuse, murder, poverty, sicknesses, and death. But in Cameroon the experience of suffering seems more intense because of the constant blame on people and other things for causing the pain. This then makes the suffering more painful, provoking negative counter consequences.

This study attempts to explore Moltmann's understanding of suffering in order to apply to the local Cameroonian context and give it a fresh perspective and insight that could possibly inform and/or shape a theologically grounded approach on the issue of suffering; one that could shape the traditional as well as the current theological perspective.

Methodologically, this study will attempt a fresh perspective and approach towards suffering that will enable the local Cameroonian to think and act differently when situations of evil that cause suffering arise. The study will be approached in three different ways. First, we shall probe into the Cameroonian context and be conversant with some of its practical realities; history, religion, culture, and some realities pertaining to suffering. Secondly, we shall attempt a detailed explanation of the concepts of evil and suffering in humanity and the rest of creation and touch on the issue of theodicy that remains an on-going discussion and struggle as long as evil persists in the world. Thirdly we shall delve into Moltmann's reflection on evil and suffering as expounded in his *theology of the cross* as a light that may illumine as well as orient some beliefs in the local Cameroonian context. One such belief concerns the environment. Local Cameroonians are not very conscious of the natural environment, i.e. the soil, wildlife, vegetation and atmosphere. These are treated with absolute dominance due to the notion that they are there to serve human needs. Some of the evil suffering in Cameroon emanates from this view of the environment, resulting in suffering and evil that affects people and nature. As such any study of evil and suffering in the local Cameroonian context will be incomplete unless suffering in the rest of creation is taken into consideration.

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# CHAPTER 1

## 1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

There are many situations that weigh down upon people and bring about intense experiences of pain and sorrow, despair and doubt: serious illness, the death of someone dear, unemployment, serious setbacks in life. Many of us wonder why? This question, 'Why?' is an expression of the existential distress in which sufferers end up in: on the one hand, experiencing disarray, chaos, senselessness, agony, and on the other hand, striving for wholeness, order, integration, meaning in their lives. Suffering is so contrary to what people as meaning-givers imagine in the total perspective of their lives that it sets a process in motion in which the possibilities are sought for to replace this unforeseen, unwanted reality in a meaningful whole. The reality of suffering, especially the undeserved suffering of the helpless and innocent beings upon the cosmos is a puzzling issue. The world time and again has witnessed untold human cruelty that has often led to human suffering which has in turn spilled over to the rest of creation: animals, plants and other natural resources. What may be even more perplexing is the fact that many of those who suffer as a result of cruelty may be innocent people who trust God for their well-being. Often in situations of suffering, pastors and theologians alike have rushed to give quick answers or tried to console and convince the sufferers to accept their predicament as God's will for them by quoting Scriptures. But rightly,

[a]ll grandiose theological systems that purport to have answers to every question are exposed as illusory by the monstrous presence of evil and suffering in the world. Radical evil is the disturbing interruption of all theological thinking and speaking about God and especially the providential rule of God.

(Migliore, 1991, p. 99)

What we are referring to here as evil is not the natural evil that is experienced by humans and animals alike, such as disease, accidents, earthquakes, fires, floods, a young mother stricken with cancer, an infant born with HIV/AIDS, a volcanic eruption

or plane crash that kills many (Migliore1991:101). As long as the world endures, such natural disasters are bound to occur. To wish the world was immune from every form of struggle and every form of suffering would be to wish not to have been created at all. And to wish that believers should be immune from the limits and risks of all creaturely existence would be petty and self-indulgent. So while finitude and mortality constitutes the shadow-side of life as created by God, they cannot be called inherently “evil”. While natural evils may prompt questions from all spheres of life, especially from believers, what is actually baffling is the question of “moral or historical evil” that is evil that leads to suffering inflicted by one human being upon another in the world they inhabit (Migliore 1991:101). For instance the 20<sup>th</sup> century memory of places like Auschwitz, the Holocaust of Jews during the Second World War, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the senseless and modern rape of women and children in India, America and Africa as well as home based acts like the recent brutal killings of pastors, their children and church workers, rape of women before their family, and stabbings.

Just emerging from the experience of Auschwitz in the period after the Second World War as a war prisoner, Jürgen Moltmann was hit hard by such real experience of evil and suffering. Shattered and broken, the survivors of his generation were returning from concentration camps and hospitals to the lecture rooms. And any theology then that would not speak of God in the light of the abandoned, crucified and suffering, and that purported to understand the extent of human cruelty might not have had much impact upon the people (Moltmann 1974:1).

Acts of evil pose a serious problem for the belief that there is an all-powerful, all-knowing God who is perfectly benevolent. Many have wondered: if God can do anything, and has perfect love for us, why would he allow suffering? ...It seems that with all the suffering in the world, there couldn't be any such benevolent, omnipotent God. If there was a God who could do anything, and who loved us perfectly, God would have prevented this suffering. For centuries philosophers have grappled with this problem. It is called the problem of evil (Licon 2013:1). These acts have not been limited to humanity but often extend in untold magnitude to the rest of creation. For instance, the recent B.P (British Petroleum) oil-spill over into the ocean left sea

birds and creatures fighting desperately for their lives after they were soaked with oil beyond breathing. Many of them died slowly and painfully. Hunters in haste to make quick money (and often escape conviction) cut off the tusks of rhinoceroses and leave the animals to move about in pain losing blood before dying. For many human beings who inflict such cruel pain on animals and other creatures, the feeling is that “animals and other creatures do not feel pain”. Instead they think suffering and pain is something rather unique to humans. When we see a hunter killing an antelope with a spear, we remind ourselves that antelopes go into shock, and probably don't feel the razor's sharp claws and the spear's teeth literally tearing the flesh of their bodies.

In my Cameroonian context, animals, plants, birds are treated with very little respect. They are killed at random, parks are invaded frequently to kill those with tusks so that people can make money, trees are brutally cut down and forests are left bare, some seriously destroyed by uncontrolled bush fire. This is now attracting severe and rapid desertification on some regions. In many of his works Moltmann has stated emphatically, that the rest of creation is an integral part of humanity and should be treated with due love and respect. If trees, plants, animals and birds cease to exist today, humanity too would cease to exist. We were meant to be mutually dependent.

In reality, for centuries, humanity has been able to brush these moral pains inflicted on the rest of creation. They have only projected human suffering because of the long held notion that humans are special because they are created in the image of God and the rest of creation are not. Such a notion is not limited to our generation. Human experience of suffering is taken seriously because we are special to God. Animals are soulless, lesser beings and so supposedly do not suffer. Suffering is intrinsic to all life forms with and both humanity and creation should get rid of it. It is in this light that we are delving into the investigation of evil and suffering as experienced by Cameroonians and the rest of creation around them.

## **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

Suffering still puzzles the local Cameroonian to whatever magnitude it is experienced. As a result many are not to be committed to Christianity's monotheistic belief. Suffering is common everywhere, but why are Cameroonians so confused and helpless in dealing with it? One may argue that a proper orientation on how to approach suffering may be absent. This research seeks to offer a fresh perspective on and approach to suffering. The issue then is not the fact that people shuttle between being Christian and being engaging with pagan spiritual realms. It is (the) people's reaction in situations of suffering. One may propose that if Christians understood the origin, manifestations and Christian response to evil and suffering better, they would be better able to handle their situations without turning to multiple sources for help which promotes suffering even further. It is in this light that we intend to study Jürgen Moltmann's reflection on suffering to draw insights for the local Cameroonian context on how to better handle the issue of suffering.

## **1.2 Research Gap**

The question of evil and suffering is one that has received a lot of attention from all periods in history. People have written a lot to the point where one is almost led to the feeling that the topic is exhausted. Yet surprisingly, evil and suffering has persisted to untold magnitudes. Does it mean all that has been taught about suffering is not sufficient or not working? We think a re-interpretation of the concepts is possible at this time. It is not a case of the victims asking God, 'Why?' or of them having a feeling of grief and abandonment, but we are also daring the monsters that are responsible for evil and suffering. This may help them to face and address the monster within.

## **1.3 Research Questions**

This research seeks to offer a new meaning, a re-interpretation of the concepts of evil and suffering for the Cameroonian context using Jürgen Moltmann's comprehension of a theologia crucis. Therefore it shall attempt answers to the following questions:



- Could a proper knowledge of the concepts of evil and suffering be of help to the local Cameroonian context?
- Is Moltmann's understanding of suffering a solution to the Cameroonian experience?

#### **1.4 Objectives of Study**

This research is essentially done in Systematic Theology, yet it remains practical and could be useful to all those who experience untold, unexpected and unexplainable suffering everywhere, to enable them to find new hope in the midst of their suffering. It is also a challenge to take responsibility rather than always shift it to some transcendent force when the suffering and evil are humanly propagated. With ever new occurrences of monstrous acts committed on almost a daily basis and many people and nature suffering innocently, a re-interpretation of the concepts of evil and suffering is necessary.

The main objectives of this study are:

- To probe into the Cameroonian context and bring to light some of its practical realities pertaining to evil and suffering to human beings and the rest of creation.
- To make use of Jürgen Moltmann's 'Theology of the Cross' to inform the local Cameroonian context of the situation of evil.
- To take the situation of suffering in the rest of creation (Cameroon's natural environment) into special consideration since humanity and the rest of creation are bound together.

#### **1.5 Research Hypothesis**

The issue of exposing a theologically grounded reflection that would re-orientate the Cameroonian view of suffering and evil seems plausible. It could inform a new ethic about evil and suffering. That ethic could arguably improve local Christianity and open up new ways of taking responsibility that would even extend to the rest of

creation. Human suffering and pain has at times led to the direct misuse of the natural environment.

The hypothesis of this research is that evil that leads to suffering is not always caused by a force beyond human control as commonly assumed in the local Cameroonian context. Evil is not as a result of transcendental influence that is beyond human control. As such people need to take responsibility for their actions rather than keep saying “it is the work of the devil”. Many people in Cameroon blame the devil for cruel acts they commit. The devil is purported to be more active than human wilfulness in causing people to commit evil. The victims suffer immensely when they see their torturers shifting blame for their cruel actions to some transcendent power beyond their control instead of facing up to their actions. In the face of such helplessness and the purported influence of a transcendent power the victims feel abandoned, even by God. Moltmann’s understanding will shed new light on the place victim as well as the perpetrator in the face evil and suffering. For Moltmann evil is more immanent than transcendent, it is something inherent that can be dealt with without using the devil as a scapegoat. If ‘imago Dei’ is understood correctly, then it is clear that humans are responsible beings. It is biblically unsound to attribute the cause of evil or suffering to a metaphysical power in order to have a scapegoat and avoid responsibility.

## **1.6 Research Methodology**

This research is carried out by means of a literary study. The main focus of the work is on Moltmann’s view of suffering and evil for the Cameroonian context. But this does not exclude important works of other scholars when the context of the theological debate calls for it.

The research is located in the context of the available literature on the subject, in the form of books, articles, reports as well as internet sources. The author is a pastor and minister of religion in Cameroon and so has been engaged in innumerable cases of pain and suffering. The subject matter subsequently is significantly

internalized in the person of the researcher. A personally engaged approach is thus pursued which is manifested in a subtle narrative approach.

### **1.6.1 Significance of Study**

Suffering and double standard Christianity have been part of the Cameroonian church's way of life for a long time. The local Cameroonian reality is full of pain. The call to trust in a powerful God can no longer be taken as opium by the people to soothe their pain. The church in Cameroon presently has not found a balanced way of dealing with suffering. Hence her flock keeps seeking solutions to their pain from varied sources. One may aver that if Cameroonians who suffer could understand that God never left them in the first place, but that God was suffering with them, the issue of suffering could be approached with better understanding.

### **1.6.2 Limitation of the Study**

So much has been written on evil and suffering, so that one may wonder if there is still much to be said let alone written down again. As such the first major limitation would be to explore all materials available on this topic of suffering and evil. Yet consideration of the subject within the defined Cameroonian context may open up a whole new approach on suffering that many in that context may not have known. This study does not give or seek to give practical answers to the issue of evil and suffering affecting the world at large and Cameroonians in particular. It rather seeks to propose new insights from the reflections of a theologian from his own concrete experience of evil and suffering. The time frame is yet another limitation. To carry out a detailed survey of evil and suffering in the defined context would be impossible within the scope of time available for this research. It such an important issue that, if an opportunity is accorded, could be further followed up at a higher level of study. This research therefore does not make definite assumptions that would be better considered by way of further research and on-going discussion in the spirit of on-going learning.

### **1.6.3 Scope of the study**

As far as the scope of this work is concerned, we intend to explore the theology of Jürgen Moltmann with special interest on his comprehension of suffering and evil. Moltmann sees evil and suffering in an immanent perspective; it is something inherent to nature that can be addressed and dealt with. But in the Cameroonian context, evil is seen in a more superstitious light, as something transcendent coming from some power and forced onto humanity against its will. As such, there is always someone (a power, force, the devil) to blame for the evil acts that people commit. From this perspective Moltmann's understanding can be helpful not only for the sufferer but also the perpetrator who both need liberation and reconciliation since the humanity of both is been distorted by evil.

In terms of the spatial perspective, this research is geographically limited to Cameroon and specifically to the local context of villages and towns, which are a reflection of the whole country, which is the field of study. In effect we are interested in seeing how Moltmann's understanding of suffering and evil can be applied to the Cameroonian context to address questions especially among the suffering believing community. We lay special interest in local church settings such as; congregations, pastoral groups, religious educational Institutions as well as the secular society.

### **1.6.4 Proposed Structure**

This research covers five main chapters, beginning with an introduction and an ending with a conclusion. Chapter one shall begin with general information pertaining to the structure of the work. Chapter two exposes us to the Cameroonian belief system to keep us versed with why their suffering is greater. In Chapter three we explore the concepts of evil and suffering in detail. Chapter four deals with Moltmann's theology and his understanding of suffering and evil. Chapter five then attempts a fit of Moltmann's theology to the Cameroonian context, bringing out practical lessons to be learned and new insights to be considered. Lastly, we shall attempt a re-interpretation of evil and suffering for our world today and for the Cameroonian context in particular and offer some recommendations.

## CHAPTER TWO

### 2. SETTING THE SCENE

#### 2.1 The Cameroonian world view.

Religion is part of the African consciousness as a whole, and the Cameroonian like all African people understand their existence as a gift from a transcendental power. This power to them is the Supreme Being whom they know as God, commonly known as *'Diob'*, *'Loba'*, *'Nyikop'* and *'Obasi'* in Bakossi, Duala Bali and Banyangi according to a few of the commonly spoken dialects in Cameroon. These names all denote the great "Father above the sky" for many, if not all Cameroonians.

For Cameroonians in particular, and African for the most part, God is understood to be essentially good (Mbiti 1976:36), and who does no harm to people because God loves, sustains, supplies rain, provides fertility to men and women and even animals. God is also all-powerful; does not harm the people and will not permit them to be harmed. God is supreme and has the power to protect all creation.

Thus for Cameroonians God created the world, and the world when created was good. There was no evil and so God cannot be construed to be the absolute cause or origin of evil events, even though God may be understood to allow some misfortunes.

The missionaries, of the English Baptist Missionary Society under their gifted pioneer Alfred Saker, first preached the gospel in Cameroon in 1845 (Nyansako ni-Nku 1982:10) when they entered Douala. They preached about Jesus Christ whom Cameroonians came to know as God's son. This Jesus who is the Son of God is also one who offers Salvation for all as the Saviour of the world (Col 2:15ff). But since "Salvation" in the traditional African (Cameroonian) context involves a certain view of the realm of spirit power and its effects upon the physical and the spiritual dimensions of human existence (Bediako 2000:22). Every reflection about Christ must speak to the questions posed by such a worldview. One of the greatest of such questions which puzzles the Cameroonian is the question of suffering. People,

especially Christian believers experience ardent suffering though God is their Father, Jesus, God's Son is their Saviour and the world God created is supposed to be good. Yet events that cause suffering take place. God may not be held directly responsible for them because of the belief in a God who is good and does not bring about evil. The Cameroonian therefore searches for the cause or source of their suffering elsewhere. Who is responsible for it? Why has he/she/it caused such suffering? Someone must be held responsible because evil or suffering does not just occur in a world-view that hold God, the greatest transcendent power as being benevolent. Evil then must be caused by someone or something else.

## 2.2 The spirit realm

The Cameroonian strongly believes in the spirit realm under which all human activities and existence depend and are controlled. God is supreme in this realm because God is "Creator and Sustainer of the universe" (Bediako2000:22) which God created good and which God continues to sustain until "thy Kingdom come" (Matt 6:10). Missionary presence in Cameroon shared the benevolent, almighty and sustaining power of God between the Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit whom Cameroonians understand as being all God. Yet, subordinate to God for many Bible believing Cameroonians, are the spirits of the fathers (the ancestors) "*benyame*" as they are known in Bakossi land (Balz 1995:120). They are the spirits of the fathers who have exclusively lived worthy lives and influenced their families, their villages and their entire clans positively. Those who had lived exemplary lives and from whom the community derived some benefits became *benyame*. Those whose lives were not worth emulating were immediately eliminated as ancestors. Though generally good, the ancestors at times could be malevolent. Power and resources for living come from this realm, but the terrors and misfortunes which threaten and destroy life could also come from this realm (Bediako 2000:27). This happens especially if they are not appeased or when they are not happy with the affairs of the living. Then there are 'the spirits' who are evil powers opposing God's benevolent plans for the believing community through the direction of their master the devil (Satan), who masterminds all the evil that causes suffering in particular. A great part

of Cameroonian religious ideas and practices are connected to this realm and the realm is increasingly becoming important for reasons we shall outline later.

Since evil events cannot directly be attributed to God, an evil agent(s) manipulating the spiritual realm is often held responsible for evil and for various reasons. In spite of all the modern scientific explanations for sicknesses and some other natural misfortunes, there is always a spiritual agent purported to be responsible for all suffering. Thus attention is turned towards the ancestral realm to see if they are angry so that they could be appeased. This is because, while God is all-powerful and God's power surpasses all other powers, the ancestors who have a firm grip on the minds of the living can tilt power in their favour and use it benevolently, but also malevolently if they are not happy. But they too like the Supreme Being are often revered and held in honour. John Pobee in his book 'Towards an African Theology' (1979) has outlined the importance of the ancestors in the religious world-view of the Akan of Ghana that is akin to the Cameroonian context. He opines that:

...whereas the gods maybe treated with contempt if they fail to deliver the goods expected of them, the ancestors like the Supreme being are always held in reverence or worshipped. ... By virtue of being the part of the clan gone ahead to the house of God, they are believed to be powerful in the sense that they maintain the course of life here and now and influence it for good or ill. They ... provide the sanctions for moral life of the nation and accordingly, punish, exonerate or reward the living as the case may be.

(Pobee: 1979: 46, 48)

The ancestors therefore play such an important role in the religious life of Christian believers and unbelievers as well as the traditional gods the spirits. They are often held responsible when evil events occur. This has been so from before the missionaries brought Christianity and it is still so today, many years after the missionaries' departure. It is important to note that at first, many Christians did their reverence of or consultations to these sources in a more hidden manner. Some are beginning to practice it openly. A lone child, gotten after fifteen years of marriage is brutally murdered by his classmate in a boarding school; his family in devastation will raise the question "Why" to God and then carry out a Christian funeral. But

immediately after the funeral, or at times even before, they will consult the spirit realm like the cult of the ancestors, or the gods through diviners who will tell them the cause of the death. In many cases a close family member is accused or even one of the parents. This then causes more tension in the already stricken family resulting in accusations and counter accusations, suspicions and rejection thereby causing even more pain and suffering on the family.

### **2.3 Other factors promoting evil and suffering**

With the advent of incurable diseases like cancer, diabetes, HIV/AIDS and others, the situation is worsening. When a young graduate from the university or professional school dies of HIV/AIDS, it is often attributed to a situation called “slow poisoning”. Meaning he/she was mystically bewitched and killed by being poisoned in his/her sleep in a dream. A lady with breast cancer will accuse her uncle who threatened her some years back and another with cancer of the uterus will attribute it to being bewitched by someone she had intercourse with her in a dream at night. This is our world and you cannot easily take people out of it. Hence the situation of Bible believing and professing Christians shuttling between two positions every time an event of suffering occurs is rampant.

Heinrich Balz in his study of traditional religion among the Bakossi in the South West Region of Cameroon noticed in his book ‘Where the Faith has to Live’ that those shuttling between the old religion (tradition) and the new (Christianity) were the majority in the area. This is still very true today not only of Bakossi but almost all ethnic groupings that fill the churches everywhere. Bediako (2000) confirms this when he states that many people are uncertain about how the Jesus (God) of the Church’s preaching saves them from the terrors and fears that they experience in their traditional worldview. For the Cameroonian, it is not as if they are uncertain of God’s saving power. But they feel that God would not harm them in the first place. So when any act of suffering occurs it is from the evil spiritual realm and must be dealt with in the same realm. For Bediako if a proper orientation is not given “many African Christians will continue to be men and women living on two levels (Bediako 2000:23). And that is why in many Cameroonian churches of all denominations and



congregations mostly in the mainline churches the tendency of having half Christians and half traditionalists is increasing. And they will also not fully belong to either. The number of those also belonging to occult groupings abound. Some of them even hold spiritual leadership positions like eldership.

A family experiencing a case of epilepsy will boldly approach the spiritual leader and vent their frustration and pain. Epilepsy in the Cameroonian context is considered a disgraceful disease and it has never been considered natural. As such, immediately after spiritual counselling and prayers, they will say they are going to the village to find out what/who is responsible. That means they are going to consult “*ngambi or divination*” as Heinrich Balz (1995:449) calls it. And no matter how much one tries to convince them against divination, they still go ahead as long as suffering endures. It is only suffering and pain that takes them to these places and nothing else. For that reason a Christian is a fervent Christian only until a painful event strikes. And this attitude is widespread. Some prompted by the saying that “God helps those who help themselves and that one must trust in Him but keep one’s powder dry” (Niebuhr 1951:7) would resort to doing what they need to do and make efforts to search for the cause of their suffering before God will help them know the truth.

Another factor that has heightened such an unstable nature for many is the recent outburst of multiple religious groupings and Pentecostal denominations, what Kofi Appiah calls ‘Indigenous African Christian Churches’ with many factors behind their formation. Kumba alone has above two hundred of them. Their seeing, and casting out demons and evil spirits everywhere and every place is not helping the situation of many Cameroonians. For some, the quest for wealth has led to the commercialization of the gospel and for those Christians who feel shy to openly consult diviners, this is a forum where a “man of God”, or “prophet” can tell them who or what is responsible for their suffering. Here too like at the diviner’s they are sold water, oil or crosses to drink or rub or put in their homes and put on as a means of protection. This then becomes a superior “ngambi” because it is coming from a ‘man or woman of God’. This one is practiced openly and seems to be attracting many since it is associated with God. But the danger is that demons are now attributed to every situation or phenomenon especially sickness. It even happens to some that by

the time they take their sick to the hospital, they are already half-dead. Yet some too will stake their lives on these churches claiming to have gotten a solution to their pain by the use of the items they got from there.

Death for the Cameroonian is the greatest of all tragedies; it is the 'most mysterious and the most puzzling of all misfortunes' (Mbiti 1979:44). People dread death; they see it as the greatest of all tragedies. Death is never natural. Someone must always be held responsible or accused for being the cause of a person's death. In his comment about death in the Mbo Bakossi culture, Hans Ejengele (in Balz 1995:45) states that 'Man's death... is first of all "a punishment by God for man's disobedience" which the Mbo people fear... In the rare case of very old people dying, is God really the cause? In all the other instances of death, the causes have to be sought elsewhere: the spirits of the departed who want others to die; poisonous "medicines" prepared by secret societies; witchcraft or lastly, some persons cause their own death through misbehaviour'. No one wants death to visit their family. This is because the family ties (extended) are often very strong and death often creates a great emotional vacuum. No death is considered natural except that of an aged person. Any other death through accidents, sickness, natural disasters and suicides would often be associated with the evil spiritual realm through the mystical manipulations by people. The accused or suspected people are often treated so shabbily and at times they may openly be lynched before everyone without their guilt or innocence ever being proven. Death is especially abhorred because it entails a lot of financial expenditure which many cannot afford. Family members have to come from various places to console the bereaved and they in turn have to be fed for as long as their stay until the decease is buried.

With all the above, the following two questions come to the fore: (1) Do these people still not fully believe in the saving power of the almighty God that has been preached continuously to them for almost a century? (2) Do they still put so much confidence in the help of ancestors, the spirits and the traditional gods, and medicine men; and are they getting much help from these sources? The answer to both questions may be "no". The problem, one may think, actually lies in the Cameroonian approach to the problem of suffering. Suffering still puzzles the Cameroonian in whatever

magnitude it is experienced. A proper orientation on how to approach the subject of 'evil and suffering' has not been taught. And this is what this research seeks to contribute to. The crucial issue in the research is not the fact that people shuttle between being Christians and also being actively involved in the pagan spiritual realms. It is (the) people's reaction in situations of suffering. Our conviction is that if Christians understood the origin, manifestations and Christian response to evil and suffering better, they would be able to handle their situations without turning to multiple sources for help which cause them even more suffering. It is in this light that we intend to use Jürgen Moltmann's approach towards the matter of suffering to respond to the Cameroonian experience. This may help this context better understand the issue of suffering. But even before we do so, we must first of all attempt an understanding of what evil and suffering are.

## CHAPTER THREE

### 3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE PROBLEM OF EVIL AND SUFFERING

#### 3.1 Introduction

Many people have opined that evil was the root cause of all the world's suffering and pain throughout the ages. For example, humans suffer at the hands of other humans, creation groans at the hands of human beings, both humans and beasts suffer at the hands of nature, and weak beasts suffer at the hands of stronger beasts as they must be preyed upon in order to survive. The endless cycle of pain never ends. Many in this process suffer innocently, their suffering cannot be justified, yet they suffer, as a result of 'evil'. What then is evil? Is it a person, a thing, or a force? The people of Banyang land in the forest region of Cameroon (Malcolm Ruel 1969:1) locally portray evil in a song in their local dialect thus:

*Mo senen à nen nyu nfuh  
a nung ma yi' andong ngam ne nye é  
a nung ma yi kpat kégó  
a bege renge yi nta sot ma*

*é yi anung é  
a nun té an nun kuri anun chógó  
a bégé réngé yi nta sot ma*

The song describes a young bird (*mo senen*) which has been newly hatched by its mother. Every time the mother goes out looking for food, she opens her mouth and waits until the mother comes and drops food in for her to eat. One fateful day, she opens her mouth and waits all day long but the mother does not come. She waited up, then she stooped low, then she sat on the ground with her mouth open and her stomach empty, but her mother did not come. Oh, she did not know that her mother had been caught by a trap, a monster. She had done no wrong to the monster – she

was only looking for food for her young. This monster or beast to the Banyang people is what is referred to as evil. It manifests itself in any undeserved painful act, such as strange sickness that handicaps a loving breadwinner of the family, rape, torture, violence and other such things. But its worst manifestation is death inflicted upon anyone innocently and against his/her will. Every bad event whose cause cannot be understood is attributed to this monster evil.

### **3.2 Evil, what is it?**

What then or who is evil? Coming from the Hebrew word “ra” or “ra’ah” and the Greek “kakos” or “poneros”, the word has as its root meaning, *to spoil, to break into pieces; ‘being broken and so made worthless’* (Marshall 2003:348). These describe essentially what is unpleasant and offensive, profound immorality and wrong behaviour, that which opposes the will of God and distorts the good creation. James Strong in his exhaustive concordance of the Bible uses the word ‘a’ to describe both natural or moral evil, but the word most often refers to moral evil, or bad, with synonyms like adversity, affliction, calamity, displeasure, distress, evil, evil favouredness, evil man or thing, exceedingly great grief, and ill (Strong 2007:1575).

As that which opposes the will of God and distorts the good creation, evil is neither an illusion nor mere appearances nor a gradually disappearing force in the world: “All theories that deny the reality of evil or minimize its power have been exposed as fantastic and worthless” (Migliore 1991:100) by events happening around the globe along the centuries. Evil is the opposite of cardinal virtue such as compassion, moderation and humility, these can be inferred to as the opposite of evil. The Hebrew and Greek words often bind together the evil deed and its hurtful effects and influences. The Greek word *poneros* has been used to indicate unsuitability while *kakos* refers to opposition to God in the human realm (Schwartz 2001:75). Benedict de Spinoza describes evil as follows; “by good, I understand that which we certainly know is useful to us. By evil, on the contrary, I understand that which we certainly know hinders us from possessing anything that is good” (White 1952:424). Saint Augustine of Hippo uses a number of terms to express the concept of evil: *malum* ‘evil’, *peccatum* ‘sin’ as well as *privatio boni* - the ‘privation of good’ are some

of them. *Malum* is the more inclusive term which Augustine identifies with corruption of any existing thing (Stark1982:111). Evil then for him, is nothing else than corruption either of the measure or the form or the order that belongs to nature. As corruption, evil extends to finite, existing things which can be corrupted physically, morally, and intellectually. This corruption involves the corruption of body and soul. All these are evil. Evil then is the corruption of good substance; but it is not a substance in itself. As 'privation of the good' (*privatio boni*) Augustine sees evil as the corruption and privation of a good nature and this has precise ontological implication in that as the corruption continues, the entity loses both the goodness and its proper being. Thus the just man becomes unjust, the brave man cowardly, the healthy body diseased, the beautiful body ugly. Hence in a broad sense, evil is the absence of good and righteousness, it is negation, the absence of holiness and perfection. It is not a created thing or a substance, it is not an entity or being, it is not a force or some floating spirit. It is lack of moral perfection.

### 3.3 Types of Evil

Marshall (1996:349) distinguishes two types of evil, physical and moral. Physical evil for example includes all that causes harm to man, whether by bodily injury, the thwarting of his natural desire or preventing the full development of his powers either in order of nature or through various social conditions under which mankind naturally exists. Physical evil caused by nature includes pain, suffering, sickness, disasters, accidents and death, poverty, oppression and some form of disease. These are instances of evil arising from imperfect social organization. God in His sovereignty tolerates physical evil in the universe according to Marshall (1996:349) though He overrules it and uses it in the ministration of the world. Mental suffering, such as anxiety, disappointment and remorse and the limitation of intelligence which prevent human beings from attaining to full comprehension of their environment are congenital forms of evil which vary in character and degree according to natural disposition and social circumstances.

Moral evil on the other hand arises out of humans' sinful inclinations within. It is the deviation of human volition from the prescription of the moral order and the actions

which result from that deviation. Moral evil arises out of human's constant spiritual conflict with evil powers of desires within human beings, the very embodiment of wickedness. When acts of moral evil proceed solely from ignorance, it is not classified as moral evil, which is properly restricted to motion of the will towards the ends of which the conscience disapproves. The extent of moral evil is not limited to circumstances of life and the natural order, but also includes the sphere of religion by which human welfare is affected in the supernatural order and the precepts of which, depending ultimately upon the will of God are of the strictest possible obligation.

The Catholic encyclopaedia acknowledges natural evil as the limitation of various component parts of the natural world. These include the injury and suffering caused by disease, earthquakes, floods fires (Migliore 1991:101). Through these mutual limitations, natural objects are for the most part prevented from attaining their full ideal perfection, whether by constant pressure of physical condition or by sudden catastrophes. For instance, a young mother mortally stricken by cancer, an infant born with AIDS, a young child killed by a runaway automobile, thousands buried in a mudslide caused by volcanic eruption, or hundreds killed in a plane crash in dense fog. Also in nature itself animals and vegetable organisms are variously influenced by climate and other natural causes, predatory animals depend for their survival on the destruction of life, nature itself is subjected to violent storms and convulsion. Every pastor who makes hospital visitations and counsels with the bereaved knows that the pain and misery caused by such events are sometimes profound (Migliore 1991:101). But such natural evils are an inherent part of human existence because, since human beings are part of the natural order created by God, they are subject to natural laws like every other creature. Pain, grief, failure, incapacity, ageing, birth, freedom, risk, vulnerability and death are all part of this natural order. Challenge, struggle and some suffering form the structure of life. "To wish the world were immune from every form of suffering would be to wish not to have been created at all ... While finitude and mortality constitute the shadowy side of life as created by God they cannot be inherently called evil" (Migliore 1991:101).

### **3.4 Origin of evil**

The question of the origin of evil, second to that of existence itself is the greatest enigma of life and the heaviest cross that has been borne by intellectuals along the ages. The question of evil's origin has occupied the minds of humans in every century and still waits in vain for an answer that is more satisfactory than that of Scripture. The more deeply people penetrate the phenomenon of sin's origin, the more the issue becomes more complicated, because then, one receives variety of answers. In response then to the question of the origin of evil, some have explained in terms of human nature, others free will, Satan and the fall, and yet others in terms of God himself.

#### **3.4.1 Human sensual nature**

In this first category are those who locate the origin of sin in the belief that humans are dominated by matter. Greek philosophy was generally committed to the view that the role of reason was to curb one's sensual urges and passions. Jews assumed the existence in humans of an "impulse toward evil" that in the course of one's physical development steadily gained strength, reached its peak in sexual desire, which while not evil in itself, nonetheless seduced humans into a variety of sins. This notion regularly returns in ascetic movements. Catholic theology even recognized its relative validity when in the case of humans devoid of the controls of the superadded gift they spoke of a natural conflict between flesh and spirit and of a "sickness" and "faintness" of human nature. In modern philosophy and theology, sin is often similarly derived from an original opposition between nature and reason, sensuality and intellect, a lower and a higher self, flesh and spirit, egoistic and social tendencies. Sensuality in this view, though not itself considered sinful, is nevertheless regarded as the occasion and stimulus to sin. All sin, therefore, essentially consists in a person's mind serving his or her sensuality and permitting it to control it; and all virtue consists in humans ruling over nature by their reason and thus developing into free and independent personalities.



### **3.4.2 God as the origin of evil**

Talking about free will Augustine and all his supporters seemed to have overlooked the fact that some evils like diseases earthquake, fatal accidents, strikes, volcanoes cannot be attributed to man's free will or even be associated with man. Also, the argument that human beings given free will by God chose to be evil may be clearly intended to free God from all responsibility about the type of world we live in. Logically, a creator who gave his creatures free will also know that the creature will sometimes use it either to do good or evil. Or except one may believe like the Deists that God created the universe and then walked away. In that case then God is responsible neither for good nor for evil that take place in the world. Or still, if God gave mankind free will then free will could not have been the origin of evil except that God would be giving human beings something that will lead them to evil.

In support to free will as the origin of sin, Sinclair B. Ferguson (1988:242) sees God as the perfect creator of all things. But one thing that God made that still haunts creation is free creatures (free will). For him: "without free choice, neither good nor evil could be chosen. Hence, if man is ever to choose the good, he must have the freedom to choose evil as well". Therefore, since free will is the cause of evil, imperfection (evil) can arise from the perfect through freedom. God created the fact of freedom; man performs the acts of freedom. So God is the origin of evil, because he made evil possible; creatures make evil actual. So God is the origin of evil because of the free will He Himself created and left at human disposal (Ferguson 1988: 242).

### **3.4.3 Satan and the Fall**

Bodie Hodge(2012) presents Satan as the origin of evil. He uses the text of Ezekiel 28:11-14 to explain that Satan was created in absolute perfection (blameless) and he was also a well beloved and favourite creature of God. Satan remained perfect from the day he was created until wickedness was found in him. Before this Satan too was declared 'very good' as the rest of creation during creation week (Genesis 1:31).He states that Satan was the first to sin, his sin originated in desire – Satan's desire to be like God, his pride in his own beauty and abilities overtook him. After

Satan, all other evildoers including the first humans Eve and Adam have been instigated only by their own desire. Therefore, since Satan's own desires caused his pride, the blame for evil's entrance into creation cannot be God. The story of the fall in Genesis 3 is the only clear Biblical explanation given for the fall of man whose fall was directly influenced by Satan. Here we see deceit and disobedience as primary causes of the fall. Lewis(1940: 64) sees the fall in this light: "This act of self will on the part of creature, which constitutes an utter falseness to its true creaturely position, is the only sin that can be conceived as the Fall". Hence he still goes back to the issue of free will (self-will) on the part of the creature as the principal cause of the fall.

There have been varied views and responses about the present condition of evil and suffering in humanity and these views are not going to be harmonized anytime soon as evil keeps persisting in the world. To claim a sole origin or a right one will be like trying to glance through an impenetrable curtain. Yet the impossibility of explaining a common origin of sin (evil) must not be understood as an excuse, a refuge for ignorance. Rather it should be said openly and clearly: we are here at the boundaries of our knowledge. Sin exists, but it may never be able to justify its existence.

### **3.5 Manifestations of evil**

While natural evil may be viewed as part of man's encounter with his natural environment, what has remained a great puzzle to many is moral evil. Radical historical moral evils in the worldwide scene, has portrayed itself in the Holocaust, especially Stalin's extermination of more than three million people, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, starving of children in Ethiopia, Genocide in Rwanda are all historical manifestations of moral evils. Modern manifestations like the bombing of the world trade centre in America, recent atrocities in Syria, the rape of a young women and children in India, many victims of suicide bombings, they abound. Ecological disasters like the recent BP oil spill, torture and ripping off of rhinoceroses' horns in Africa for selfish financial gains, massive deforestation and the release of toxic gasses into the atmosphere are all senseless individual and corporate acts of moral

evil that have put many innocent lives into severe suffering chaos and misery. Migliore (1991:83) even thinks that the brutal human exploitation and destruction of the natural environment has only unleashed destructive forces on nature's side causing such phenomena as cancer, earthquakes, hurricanes, drought and others thereby causing only more suffering.

Some have pointed out that moral evil expressed in acts inflicted by humans on the rest of creation have even been provoked or promoted by religious systems and doctrines, one of which is the Judeo Christian belief that "man has dominion over the rest of creation because he is created in God's image". Lynn White Jr (in Moritz 2011:308) traces the cause of the recent ecological crisis as having religious and philosophical roots coming from this particular Judeo-Christian belief in the superiority of man and not the rest of creation. As such, statements like the following: "animals and people are two different class of created beings and they will never be equal in their worth"; "... we are in God's image, we are the ones in God's image which is why we eat escargot instead of worship them"; "human beings exist between animals and angels" and "animals have physical body but no spirit" (Moritz 2011:310) have led to cruel human treatment of not only animals but the rest of creation including plants and the atmosphere. They have also given Western civilization religious justification for treating brutally and ruthlessly the natural environment. White (Moritz1991:81) even states clearly that "Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt for our present ecological crisis". For him we shall continue to have a worsening ecological crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man. On the other hand, Ewald Frank(1993:161) sees the Christian religion, especially the "Church" as ironically the agent that has inflicted the most heinous types of pain upon the cosmos and its inhabitants along the centuries. He says whoever sees the instruments that were used in the inquisitions will faint. The intolerance the church had on those with different beliefs and the blind fanatical and deadly hatred they were showed was without measure. While many see the persecution and massacre of the Jews in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the work of the Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler and Fascist Mussolini, Ewald describes the whole event as the church using "Germany for its own goal" (Ewald 1993:167).

Evil resides everywhere humans connect. Everyday people commit senseless immoral acts intentionally or otherwise which harm others without fair or reasonable justification as in self-defence. Certain times these acts are overlooked as unavoidable part of human beings. But people get hurt by them and children are wounded for life. If we were species that need to survive by force, by cunning or by violence one would understand. But we are getting to the point where none of these behaviours make sense anymore as they leave many people confused and helpless. The direct consequence of evil then is untold suffering and pain.

### 3.6 Free Will

The Christian answer for many centuries of human pain and suffering as well as the ever-increasing wickedness in humanity is contained in the doctrine of the fall. According to this doctrine, man is now a horror to God and to himself and a creature ill-adapted to the universe not because God made him so but because he has made himself so by the abuse of the free will. Christianity asserts that God is good; and that God made all things good and for the sake of their goodness; that one of the good things God made, namely, the free will of rational creatures, by its very nature included the possibility of evil; and that creatures, availing themselves of this possibility have become evil (Lewis 1940: 55).

One of the greatest proponents of free will as the origin of sin is the great Christian thinker and philosopher Augustine of Hippo (A.D 354-430). The problem of evil was a preoccupation from his youth and most of his writings have some connection to this problem. Augustine makes his whole argument of evil and God's benevolence in this manner: God is all good; God is all powerful; Evil exists. If there existed some being all good and all powerful, evil would not exist. How then evil did enter the world? First, Augustine attributed evil's origin to human abuse of the freedom by which God endowed human beings. In this light he is very straight in his response to the origin of evil "an evil will (*improba voluntas*) is the cause of all evils" (Hick 1997:59). For him man was created by God with a good will, yet this good will was free to become evil. The free will therefore implies the ability to do evil. Agents having free will are capable of performing acts that are free and such acts can be

either good or evil. Angels and human beings freely chose to turn from God to creation and in this way evil was conceived and then came to be. The origin of evil then is free will but the cause according to Hick (1977:59) is “the defection of the will of a being that is mutably good from the good which is immutable”. There was no evil in creation before angelic and human sin. Evil only came to existence, when first the angels and then humans misused their wills by turning from their creator. But as for the cause of this defection Augustine says he knows nothing about it. To even seek such cause for him will be as if one were trying to see the darkness or hear silence. Hence the problem of evil and its origin is one that is wrapped up in mystery; a mystery that one cannot really give an answer to. Lewis explains free will as follow:

Someone or something whispered that they could become as gods and they could cease directing their lives to their Creator ...They wanted, as we say to call their souls their own....They wanted some corner in the universe of which they could say to God ‘This is our business not yours.

(Lewis1940:63-64)

Monica Coleman (2011:18) in her process-theology supports this view when she argues that free-will is the origin of evil. Evil originated out of human freedom. For Coleman, “...to the extent that we use our freedom to diverge from God’s call, there is evil in the world”. Evil then is not an isolated event because of the interdependence of the world. When one of us chooses to behave in a way that is divergent from God’s call, evil occurs and it influences all of us. But evil has to be combated and God is to be involved in the combat. God’s involvement will be in two ways – within God and through God’s activity in the world. When God gathers together the experiences of the world within God self, God finds the value in everything that happens. Sometimes, there is very little good to work with, but God can find that good and preserve it.

## **3.7 The problem of suffering**

### **3.7.1 Introduction**

The reality of suffering, especially that of the helpless or innocent is a problem for anyone who posits the existence of an omnipotent and benevolent Deity (Ferguson 1988:667). Suffering is a painful, never ending reality to everyone in the universe. There have been many events in recent history to which the immediate response was tears followed by the anguish question “Why”? People die every second from infectious diseases, some lose the battle with cancer, and some are cut down with heart disease. These are just a few who die from a few of the world’s incurable diseases afflicting people. Yet apart from this, we know that many people suffer and die from others. We must face the fact that suffering abounds in the world around us today. Think of the young girl who is cajoled and taken abroad by her aunt and sold into prostitution where she is forced to have sex with as many as five to six men a day. Such hard existential realities have made many to question God’s existence or worse of all turn their backs on Him.

When confronted with suffering in our own personal lives, even our most profoundly held beliefs are shaken and at times they are even broken down. Our natural human impulse when suffering strikes is to flee and when there is no escape then doubt and despair set in as suffering shrouds our whole being and ceases the smallest courage we have left. In the local context, people react to suffering in one of the following ways: (1) They are heart-broken and crushed “beyond repair”. They receive the pain in such a personal way that results either in heart disease or consequent death; (2) Some flee from the problem and only return when the pain has subsided;(3) Some move to different churches seeking instant miracles. When the miracles do not happen in their local congregations, then the minister is either ungodly or unspiritual. So they move to others denominations and receive new baptism or they become lukewarm Christians with broken faith; (4) Lastly, others (and these are of the majority) stay but are also secretly or at times openly visiting native doctors and diviners to know the cause of their suffering and to get solutions; they believe their pain to be coming from a source where only diviners can help since only they can easily communicate with the dark spiritual forces that cause evil.

### 3.7.2 What then is suffering?

Wikipedia defines suffering as an experience of unpleasantness and aversion associated with a perception of harm in an individual. Suffering is the basic element that makes up the negative valence in affective phenomena. It is something on a trivial or cosmic scale which is highly unpleasant, which hurts, which upsets our plans and which is against our will. It is an emotional resistance to what is unpleasant, the state of a strong, often chronic emotional discomfort when a system tries to rehabilitate its disturbed balance. Suffering may be qualified as physical or mental, and the degree of suffering ranges from mild to intolerable. Also attitudes towards suffering may vary widely in the sufferer or other people according to how much it is regarded as avoidable or unavoidable. Marshall defines suffering in a biblical sense as 'an intrusion into the created world' (Marshall 1988:1136). For him creation was made and declared "good" (Gen 1:31).

The word suffering may sometimes be used in a narrower sense to refer to physical pain. But more often it has been used to refer to mental or emotional pain and in a broader sense to any unpleasant feeling, emotion or sensation. Suffering therefore is severe physical or mental pain. R.B. Thieme Jr (2002:23) identifies two major operations of suffering that is individual and collective suffering. He says not all suffering under the law of volitional responsibility arises from sin, human good or evil. But occasionally, human suffering originates from nothing more than the poor judgment and wrong decisions of individuals. For him, the very fact that humans are imperfect means that judgment will be flawed from time to time leading to suffering. Despite wisdom and objectivity, humans all have areas of subjectivity and sentimentality that distort thinking. Intelligence is no protection, experience is of little help. Thieme (2002: 22-23) states that "advice from friends or warnings from experts will never keep us from doing the foolish things we set our minds on doing. A great deal of suffering then arises from errors in human judgment. Collective suffering arises out of corporate decision that turns to affect the lives of many other people. For instance a corporation may go bankrupt through the bad decisions of a few company officers and government officials. With so many individuals operating in the world, each with free will, a certain amount of suffering inevitably overflows into one's



life from the decisions of others. Therefore, suffering if not created by one's own volition may result from someone else's decisions. And this has led to a situation where in both the innocent and the guilty suffer since man by nature is a flawed and imperfect creature. Human weakness, ignorance, and arrogance weave a tapestry of inevitable suffering for many people.

### **3.7.3 Origin of suffering**

According to Marshall (1988:1136) the universe that God created was completely void of suffering. All was created and declared "good" (Gen 1:31). But when sin entered the world, suffering also entered in the form of conflict, pain, corruption, drudgery and death. Suffering occurs in the life of sentient beings in numerous manners and often dramatically too. As such many fields of human activity are concerned from their own points of view with some aspect of suffering. These aspects may include the nature of suffering, its processes, its origin and causes, its meaning and significance, its related social and cultural behaviours, its remedies management and uses. The first sufferings were emotional and the immediate consequence of disobedience and as such, were followed by God's curse (Ferguson 1988:667). This curse came with pain, toil and death. Although suffering came as a result of sin, suffering is not itself a moral but a physical (or material) evil, for God is frequently presented in scripture as its dispenser. Here God sends it either as punishment on individuals or on nations as a chastisement.

While Scriptures speaks very little about sufferings of humanity generally, it does speak extensively about the suffering of God's people and it is in respect to the latter only that a theology of suffering may be formulated. Suffering may be a universal phenomenon but when senseless and inexplicable things happen to God's own people as the scripture itself attest mostly, it remains always a puzzle. At such times, "the afflicted are perplexed by their suffering since they can find no explanation.... Even the most spiritually sensitive and mature believers in the Old Testament, though they saw the Lord as their ultimate reward, did not see tribulation as experience in which they should exult" (Ferguson 1988:668). Suffering then in this case was assumed to be caused by God; it originated from Him for the following salient reasons: Firstly, as punishment or chastisement for sins (Jos 23:15, Job 2:10,



Is. 45:7, Jer. 25:29, Micah 2:3) such suffering was a direct consequence of the violation of the Mosaic covenant and such suffering was not mysterious for the people. Secondly, even when there were periods of national faithfulness God's people could still experience suffering. But then it came as a means to discipline and strengthen God's people and they could there benefit rather than abhor such an experience of suffering (Gen. 15:13 – 16, Ps. 94:12). Yet in spite of the above examples, there were instances in scriptures when the wicked within Israel often prospered and the righteous were afflicted, causing the latter's consternation regarding God's purposes. Moreover, apostasy often came to both the wicked and the righteous sometimes and both were swept away by the same calamities and this evoked a feeling of helpless frustration for both (Ps 44).

Another school of thought has attributed the origin of suffering to attachment to transient things and the ignorance thereof. Transient things do not only include the physical objects that surround us, but also ideas and-in a greater sense – all objects of our perception. Ignorance then is the lack of understanding of how our mind is attached to impermanent things. The reasons for suffering as such are desire, passion, ardour, pursuit of wealth and prestige, striving for fame and popularity. And because the objects of attachment are transient, their loss is inevitable, thus suffering will necessarily follow. Objects of attachment also include the idea of the "self" which is a delusion, because there is no abiding self except an imagined entity.

Ferguson (1988:688) divides Christian suffering into two categories; the first is, suffering can be the direct result of grace and this involves being persecuted for Christ's sake. In this case sufferers experience a type of suffering that in its cause and purpose is distinct from the type of suffering the unregenerate suffer. Secondly, Christians suffer as a consequence of sharing in a fallen humanity in a fallen world. And in this case their suffering does not differ from that of the unregenerate. Hence they too can suffer from their errors, experience, sorrow, poverty sickness and death. In all the above, there is none that provoke pain like the type of senseless suffering inflicted upon an innocent person for no justifiable reason except that the person has been provoked by moral evil within.

### 3.7.4 Manifestations of suffering

One of the greatest problems or mysteries is the problem of human suffering and death. There seems to be more pain today than there ever has been on the earth as people 'multiply and fill the earth'. Not only is there more physical, but also more emotional and mental pain than has ever been. It is important to note that, the very fact that we are human exposes us to a certain natural degree of suffering. We catch flu, we may break a leg, and we lose loved ones. But none of these is as puzzling as the meaningless pain inflicted by human beings for no explainable reason as well as the faulty decisions taken by some against others either because of oppressive greed or unwillingness to live justly with others. We are called at times to accept the former, but the latter would always remain a puzzle. Therefore, acts like hunger, poverty, pain, injury, tiredness, old age, economic slavery, homelessness, diseases and eventually death are an integral part of modern civilization. Also, psychological suffering like sadness, fear, frustration and depression abound. Life in its totality is imperfect and incomplete because our world is subject to impermanence. Our lives are lived in the context of human suffering in which our own experience are but a single thread on a vast canvas. Could there be any better illustration of suffering than the ghettos, the slums, the refugee camps, the child labour or the young girls forced into prostitution in our modern times? What of the Nazi extermination camps and occupied Europe during world war two where it is estimated that over 20 million people died in 3000 camps in terror, starvation and degradations. Evil then was let loose and ran wild in a world ruled by hatred.

A glaring case of suffering and oppression in our own modern world is the case of those who suffer from the degrading 'Caste' system in India. In an excerpt taken from the 'Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Commission of Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches', and prepared by the 'Committee of the Ministry of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon' to use for the "Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2013" we read about a situation of poverty, oppression and horrible suffering in the Dalit community in India. The Dalits among the five classes in the caste system in India are the lowest class. They are considered as "outcastes". They are the most polluted and polluting and are placed outside the caste system. Previously they were even called the "Untouchable". They are socially

marginalized, politically under-represented, economically exploited and culturally subjugated, and almost 80% of these Dalits have Christian background. Yet some among those who exploit, oppress and discriminate against them are Christians. The churches in India remain divided along the doctrinal division inherited from Europe and elsewhere. The Caste system which can be compared only to racist forms like apartheid has further worsened the situation of the Dalits. The cry of the oppressed Dalits, women, children who suffer child labour and exploitation and even some economically discriminated men remains an everyday cry by all Christians and believers for life-a cry for dignity.

### **3.8 The Theodicy Problem**

#### **3.8.1 Introduction**

All human beings are hit either softly or hard at one time or another in life by the evil that happens around the world. The question why evil happens to us, our families, friends, and nations intensifies every day. The apparent contradiction in the coexistence of evil and a “good God” is perhaps the commonest charge levelled against theism (Ferguson 1988:241). A number of philosophical systems have tried to resolve the dilemma by offering a different view of either the nature of evil or the nature of God. Some forms of pantheism claim that evil is not real or at least less than real. One form of dualism contends that evil is eternal, like its perpetual war with good. Panentheism asserts that God is either not all-good or not all-powerful or both (Ferguson 1988:241). Several discussions of the issue of the apparent evil in the world and the assertion of a good God who created all things good have been taking place in several circles especially in the Christian Church for many centuries. The term “theodicy” is used to designate such discourse.

#### **3.8.2 The term ‘theodicy’ and its origin.**

Theodicy is a response to the evidential problem of evil, the challenge that the occurrence of evil in the world counts as evidence against the existence of an Omnipotent and Omnibenevolent deity as claimed by some of the monotheistic religions such as Christianity, Judaism and Islam, but especially Christianity.

Theodicies therefore (since they are varied) attempt to justify the existence of God in light of evil, to show that it is reasonable to believe in God despite evidence of evil in the world, and they also offer a framework which accounts for the existence of . Usually, theodicy attempts to show that it is possible to affirm the omnipotence of God, the love of God and the reality of evil without contradiction. Antonio Rosmini (2009:10-11) confirms this when he states that “those who believe in the existence of God cannot be reasonably disturbed by the apparent difficulties seen in the government of providence. On the contrary, they willingly study the difficulties in order to know God’s greatness better”. Yet Kenneth Cauthen (1997) presents a sceptical argument about the presence of radical evil in the world. For him, given the reality of evil, we must sacrifice either the power (omnipotence) or the love (Omnibenevolence, goodness) of God. But he also presents a dilemma in this situation, stating that if we give up the omnipotence of God, it appears that God cannot prevent or overcome evil. If on the other hand we forego the goodness of God, it seems that God will not prevent or overcome evil. Yet as long as evil still exist, the omnipotence and benevolence of God remains constantly at stake.

The term theodicy comes from two Greek words “theos” meaning god and “dike” meaning justice. The term was coined by the German philosopher Gottfried Leibniz in 1710 in an attempt to justify the existence of God in the light of the apparent imperfections of the world. Leibniz did so in his work “Théodicée”, though various responses to the problem of evil had previously been proposed, such as the Augustinian theodicy based on the writing of Augustine of Hippo which we shall see later, Irenaean theodicy from Church Father Irenaeus. In his work, *Evil and the God of love*(1978) the British philosopher John Hick uses extensively these two works, identifying the two major traditions. German philosopher Max Weber on his part saw theodicy as a social problem based on the human need to explain puzzling aspects of the world. Following the Holocaust, a number of Jewish theologians developed a new response to the problem of evil, sometimes called anti-theodicy, which maintained that God cannot meaningfully be justified. Trakakis (2005) in his article proposes three requirements which must be contained within a theodicy; they include:

- Common sense view of the world
- Widely held historical and scientific opinion
- Plausible moral principle.

Without these three for him, an article can hardly be called a theodicy. Bunning and Tsui (2002:481) on the other hand attempt a distinction between theodicy and defence. Their defence attempts to demonstrate that the occurrence of evil does not contradict God's existence but it does not propose that rational beings are able to understand why God permits evil. On the other hand, theodicy seeks to show that it is reasonable to believe in God despite the evidence of evil in the world and theodicy also offers a framework which can account for why evil exists. God's existence remains probable after the problem of evil is posed by giving a justification for God's permitting evil to happen. Hence, defences propose solutions to the logical problem of evil while theodicies attempt to answer the evidential problem of evil.

### **3.8.3 Some arguments in theodicy**

Along the centuries, there have been some arguments for and against God's power and benevolence as well as evil in the world. They take the following form, with their premises based on the usual descriptions of what God is supposed to be:

- A God that is all – powerful would be able to prevent evil and suffering.
- A God that is all knowing would know that preventable evil and suffering happen.
- A God that is all-loving would want to prevent evil and suffering.
- Evil and suffering exist
- Therefore, a God that is all powerful, all knowing, all loving does not exist. Others have phrased the argument in a simpler manner as follows;
- If an omnipotent deity allows suffering to happen, then it is not worth worshipping
- Suffering happens; therefore any existing omnipotent deity is not worth worshipping.

David Chidester (2000:229-231) presents Thomas Aquinas' argument for and against the existence of God and the presence of untold evil in the world. Like

Anselm, Thomas in his “Summa Theologiae” tried to establish rational proofs for the existence of God. He began by asking if there is a God, he proceeded to consider arguments for answering that question with a “no”. First, if God is supposed to be limitlessly good, then the presence of evil in the world entails that God does not exist. Second if, everything in the world can be explained by natural causes, and then there is no reason to suppose that God exists. Turning from “no” to “yes” God exists, Thomas cited Biblical authority to recall that Christian Scriptures present a God that exists and who declares “I am who I am” (Exod. 3:14). Aquinas then gave his famous five ways of proving the existence of God. Thomas himself got his inspiration from and was closely guided by Aristotle.

In all these five proofs, Thomas began with things that could be observed in the natural world and it is important to note that his observations were closely guided by the philosophy of Aristotle and he analysed the relations of cause and effects in the world according to the four types of forms that had been identified by Aristotle. At the end of all his arguments however, Aquinas was only able to answer his first argument that God does not exist because of the existence of evil- by bringing in the authority of Augustine of Hippo to support Aristotle. “Since God is supremely good” Augustine had proposed, “He would not permit any evil at all in all His works, unless He was sufficiently almighty and good to bring good from evil” (Chidester 2000:31). By this logic of faith therefore, the limitless goodness of God was actually affirmed by the fact that God allowed evil in the world in order to draw out good.

Such a notion of God has become increasingly questionable with the events that have taken place along the centuries. For what good would God bring out from the killing of “ninety (innocent) Jewish children who were shot, and thrown into a pit and buried there” in Belaya Tserkov in the Ukraine in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century?(Moltmann 1999:169). Or what good would God bring out from a young four days old baby who survived after being eaten by a dog in a dust bin because its mother dumped it there to die so she can move on with her life of promiscuity undisturbed by childbirth or a little girl who is raped and damaged at the age three?

Pierre Bayle (1647-1706) argued in the 17<sup>th</sup> century that “if God were all good, he would destroy evil. And if God were all powerful, he could destroy evil. But evil is not destroyed. Hence there is no such God” (Bayle in Ferguson 1988:242) So either there is no God, or if He is there then He is the origin of evil. British philosopher and atheist Bertrand Russell in his philosophical essays once commented “No living can believe in a good God if they’ve sat at the bedside of a dying child, evil here is evidence that there is no God unless then such a God is not good”. The unfortunate reality is that the atheist can take no comfort in such a heart rending situation, for in a godless situation suffering is ultimately meaningless. For Russel (1910:38), “brief and powerless is man’s life; on him and all his race the slow and sure doom falls, pitiless and dark”.

Monica Coleman (2011:18-19) identified the theodicy problem as a traditional one. She says process theodicy is known for the way it handles the traditional problem of evil. In process theodicy the classical question of evil is, “If God is all good and all powerful, then why is there evil or why do people suffer? For her, process theodicy does not affirm God’s power as an authoritative or coercive power, instead it offers a response that both supports the freedom and responsibility of creation and God’s concern for the common good. For her, to the extent that we use our freedom to diverge from God’s call there is evil in the world. Evil then is not an isolated event because it affects everyone due to interdependence. “When one of us chooses to operate in a way that is divergent from God’s call it influences all of us” (Coleman 2011:18). Evil then is to be combated and God is involved in this combat. When we use our freedom instead in accordance with God’s vision, then we can negate some aspects of the past that have created evil in the world. God’s call offers us the opportunity to overcome evil and not to keep on tracing or questioning God’s benevolence or omnipotence.

Sandra Lumbarsky (2011:186) also broaches the issue of evil in the world. She begins with the assertion that God is that being who influences all beings; God is omnipresent and omni-influential. Yet she also acknowledges that evil exists. She even quotes Alfred North Whitehead who states that “all simplifications of religious dogma are shipwrecked upon the rock of the problem of evil” (Lumbarsky 2011:186).



For her, process theology's encounter with theodicy begins with the admission that "genuine evil exists" – that there are events without which the world would be better. She tries to answer the question "How is the occurrence of any genuine evil compatible with a perfectly good creator who could have unilaterally prevented all genuine evil while still making possible all good? She then answers the question by way of process theism by stating that because there is freedom and power throughout the created world, God does not act unilaterally. Evil occurs because some degree of self-determination, that is some degree of power exist in beings who are interrelated with God but not fully determined by God's will. Evil then is the metaphysical consequence of the existence of free beings who are limited (among other things) in understanding, vision energy, and sensitivity. Evil happens then not because God allows it as others suggests, but because of the choices that are made by other free creatures who freely choose to ignore or oppose God's will. As such, God should not be charged responsible for the prevailing evil in the world; man's misuse of his freewill is the cause of all evil.

Lumbarsky has been supported in this stance by David Chidester (2000:509) who states that "...the all-good and all-powerful God used his power to create human beings with freedom and responsibility, which represented a greater good than creating them for mechanical obedience, but human beings abuse their freedom by turning from God and acting in irresponsible ways". Therefore some people see the evil in the world as caused or allowed by God, thereby putting His sovereignty and benevolence into question while others blame humanity for abusing the freedom God gave it. But on the other hand, Nancey Murphy (2006:52-54) commenting on the work of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century author Thomas Malthus, though others consider his work as rather a critic on population growth, considers it a theodicy-an attempt to reconcile the goodness of God with evil and suffering. Malthus saw struggle, inequality, suffering and death as basic features of the natural world, a result of divine providence. He saw the character of the natural world as one of "competition and starvation" and for him, this is God's intention for the world and it is providential. Thus "evil produces exertion, exertion produces mind, and mind produces progress. So in the end it is providential that there is not enough food to go around for everyone. Moltmann (1999:172) also has joined others by asking the following



questions about genocides; "...Where was Israel's God when his children (the ninety) were thrown into the pit? Where was the Christian God when people belonging to Christendom turned into these cruel monsters...?"As long as evil endures, the arguments are on-going.

#### **3.8.4 History of theodicy**

The problem of evil as an argument against the existence of a God in the typical Abrahamic sense of God as being all-powerful, all-knowing and all-loving is many centuries old. It has been a puzzle since B.C 300, when the Greek philosopher Epicurus first proposed it. The puzzle involves questions like 'Is God willing to prevent evil but not able? Then He is not omnipotent. Is He able, but not willing? Then He is malevolent. Is He both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil? Is He neither able nor willing? Then why call Him God?'(Epicurus 300 BC).In the Old Testament period, there was an attempt to create a tight one – for – one relationship between sin and death, righteousness and life. Unfortunately, this rarely panned out because the wicked were often found flourishing as they became rich and lived long, happy lives while the virtuous and poor often fell sick and were cut short from the blessings of life. At times the wicked in Israel even prospered as to afflict the righteous, causing scorn for God's purposes (Ferguson 1988:667). This flawed theodicy was applied on a national scale regarding Israel, where the prophets often attributed Israel's defeats to failure to observe God's law.

Earlier Mesopotamians, Greeks, Romans and Egyptians used the problem of evil to support the existence of one particular god over another. This was the way they explained wisdom or a conversion but not to justify the goodness of God. These early religions may have avoided the question of theodicy by endowing their deities with the same flaws and jealousies that plagued humanity. Not all the gods humanity has invented were perceived as being omnibenevolent. Numerous gods had character flaws or some degree of evil inside of them and others were intentionally villainous, while many others were simply indifferent to human situation. No one god or goddess was fundamentally good or evil; and that explained for them that bad things could happen to good people if they angered a deity because gods could exercise the same free will that human kind possessed. Some gods were more

inclined to be helpful and benevolent while others were violent and hateful. So these ancient religions easily blamed the evil gods for misfortunes while the good gods could be petitioned with prayer and sacrifices to make things right. This concept is in line with the traditional Cameroonian concept of the gods, the spirits, ancestors and sacrifices already discussed above.

The term “theodicy”, as we have noted above, came to existence in 1710, coined by the German philosopher Gottfried Leibniz (1734) in his work written in French known as *“Essais de Theodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l’homme et l’origine du mal”* (*Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the freedom of man and the origin of Evil* (1988)). Leibniz’s work was in itself a response to the sceptical protestant philosopher Pierre Bayle who also wrote his book *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique*. Here, Bayle wrote that after rejecting three attempts to solve the problem of evil, he saw no rational solution to the problem. He argued that because the Bible asserts the coexistence of God and evil, this state of affairs must simply be accepted. French philosopher Voltaire after the Lisbon earthquake wrote his ‘Poèm sur le désastre de Lisbonne’ (*Poem on the Lisbon disaster*). Here he criticized Leibniz’s concept of simply accepting God and evil. He suggested that the massive destruction of innocent lives caused by the Lisbon earthquake demonstrated that God was not providing the “best of all possible worlds. In *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (1914), Constantine Kempf states that following Leibniz’s work, philosophers called their work on the problem of evil “theodicies” and since then, philosophy about God was brought under the discipline of theodicy, which included all of natural theology. And theodicy also came to consist of human knowledge of God through the systematic use of reason.

Along the decades since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the problem of evil (theodicy) has occupied so many minds especially Christian and Jewish theologians alike. This is as a result of the terrible manifestations of moral evil that were portrayed during this period. One common concern that has been shared among all of them is to attempt to understand a God who operates in history. Both Jews and Christians believe that God has acted through historical events as well as in human affairs. But the puzzling question was asked by both of them during the events of the Holocaust.

The Holocaust poses the most radical counter-testimony to both Judaism and Christianity... the cruelty and killing raise the question whether even those who believe after such an event dare to talk about a God who loves and cares without making a mockery of those who suffered.

(Chidester 2000:509)

Since the Holocaust and other horrible events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, theologians have returned to the problem of evil with intensity and this in all contexts worldwide. Therefore to summarize it all, evil is real in the world (evil); it is realised in its painful manifestations (suffering); people of all ages have and are still questioning its existence in a world created by a good God (theodicy). The stance of this research is clear, real evil exists and as at now, searching for its origin, or portraying its manifestations or questioning God's role in it is not the important issue since all these will not eradicate it. The important issue will be to seek a better way to understand evil suffering and cope with it in a better manner but especially to attempt to reduce its influence. It is in this light that we are delving into a new understanding of suffering according to the theology of Jürgen Moltmann to suggest how Cameroonians can cope with suffering without compromising their faith.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## 4. MOLTMANN'S THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

### 4.1 Introduction

The entire Europe and America witnessed some soured events in the early and middle parts of the twentieth century that affected the rest of world history dramatically. The First World War had come and gone. But no sooner was it gone than another war broke out. During the Second World War many atrocities were committed that left many people disgusted about the extent of human wickedness and destructiveness. Acts like the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Pearl Harbour, the Concentration Camps, and most especially the events of the Holocaust and Auschwitz left many people in a daze. It was the beginning of a new dawn for much, especially in the field of theology. The aftermath of the war was not in itself smooth worldwide. The student generations were taking to street rebellions, the Vietnam war was continuing, Germany was struggling to rebuilt but still haunted by memories of the Jewish genocide, there were nuclear threats between USA and former USSR, the civil rights movements in America were occupying the streets and gaining world support, African colonies or protectorates were struggling against colonization and demanding independence.

Theology itself was experiencing new revolutions in many places; Latin American theologians were writing a new form of theology called the liberation theology, in Europe the 'death of God' theme was rife. The entire cosmos was experiencing a rapid change brought about by suffering, death, misery and doubts about what future? It is during this challenging moments that theology witnessed the rise of one of the world's most prominent theologians, so because he came up with a new theme in theology about the 'suffering of God', challenging the long held traditions of 'impassibility of God' that had plagued Christendom for long.

Among all his works, the focus of this research shall be on Moltmann's theology of the cross which has been most expounded in his book "The Crucified God". This

happensto be among the best and therefore important of all his works, because in it he expresses his most passionate concern for the alleviation of the world's suffering. In this work, Moltmann clearly portrays that the cross of the risen Christ is the place in which God has shown His most profound concern for human life and well – being especially in the domain of human pain and suffering. This is what makes his theology appropriate for the Cameroonian context of suffering as it may raise the hope of many, both the god forsaken and the godless towards hope in the crucified Christ whom God raised and made the hope of the world. Moltmann himself experienced a lot of suffering in the early years of his life, physical and emotional. As he states, “I was led to the theology of the cross... through personal participation in the sufferings of those years... One begins to suffer with the victims of injustice and violence. One puts oneself on the side of the persecuted and becomes persecuted oneself... At that time, the suffering of friends living under Stalinism in Eastern Europe and under military dictatorships in Latin America and South Korea moved me deeply” (Moltmann 1974:IX).

## **4.2 Moltmann's context**

### **4.2.1 Youth and upbringing**

Jürgen Moltmann was born in Hamburg, Germany on the 8<sup>th</sup> April 1926 in the aftermath of the First World War in which Germany took active part and which also badly affected Germany and many other European nations. As such he and his parents lived in a ‘shared settlement of a few teachers who “...were enthusiasts for the simple life” (Moltmann 2009:3). In this simple settlement away from the grey city walls and also from the housing shortages in Hamburg, Moltmann and his parents and siblings lived a simple life with a garden of their own where they produced and ate from the fruits of their own labour by working continually and steadily in the garden. Though an enlightened family, Moltmann was brought up in a purely secular context from a secular home where work was carried on even on Sunday morning and his father actually called it ‘Sunday work’ (Moltmann 2009:5). As such he himself describes his upbringing as secular with his grandfather being a grandmaster of the Free Masons. As such he had no Christian upbringing or socialization as a youth. By

the age of sixteen, Moltmann turned to idolize Albert Einstein and anticipated studying Mathematics at university. The physics of relativity is where fascinating secrets opened him up to knowledge at the time. Theology as yet played no role in his life.

At the age of 17, in February 1943, Moltmann took entrance to proceed in education but his whole school class was instead conscripted and made air force “auxiliaries” (Moltmann 2009:15). He was later drafted into the German army at the end of 1944 at the age of 18 to fight for the German army in World War II. At the time, he took with him to the war as a gift from his sister Goethe’s poems and Faust as well as Nietzsche’s Zarathustra as his only intellectual nourishment in the miseries of the war. He served as a full German soldier for six months and was ordered to the *Reichswald*, a German forest at the front lines and he finally surrendered in the dark to the first British soldier Buchenwald he met, that is in 1945. For the next few years of his life, from 1945 to 1948, he was confined as a prisoner-of-war (POW) to camps in Belgium, Scotland and England respectively. The first POW camp he was confined in was in Belgium and here the prisoners had less to do. As such Moltmann and his fellow prisoners were tormented by memories and gnawing thoughts. He saw how other prisoners collapsed inwardly, how they gave up all hope, sickening and also dying for the lack of it. He himself claimed to have lost all hope and confidence in German culture because of Auschwitz and Buchenwald – concentration camps where Jews and others whom the Nazi’s opposed were imprisoned, tortured and killed. Even harder to face were the gnawing memories of what the Germans had actually done in the concentration camps. But later in the camp, Moltmann met a group of Christians and was given a small copy of the New Testament and the Psalms by an American Military Chaplain which he started reading behind barbed wire. Though he first started reading out of boredom, he was surprised to find that the words of Scripture fed his imagination and satisfied his dire emotional need. He gradually identified himself more and more with the Christian faith which he came to rely strongly on. The Scripture opened his eyes to the God who is with the broken – hearted even behind barbed-wire. But whenever he tried to profess or grasp this experience of God’s presence, the experience simply evaded him. Yet for Moltmann, “all that was left was an inward drive, a longing which

provided the impetus for hope” (Moltmann 1980:7). After Belgium, he was then moved to a POW camp in Kilmarnock in Scotland where he and other Germans worked to rebuild areas that were damaged in the bombings. Here in the camp, the hospitality of the Scottish residents towards the prisoners left a great and lasting impression on Moltmann who could not believe that they would be treated with such love. In July 1946, he was moved for the last time to Britain into Norton Camp, a prison located in the village of Cuckney near Nottingham. It is in this educational camp that Moltmann first met with many students of theology. His inexpressible experiences led Moltmann to develop great interest in theology and fortunately for him, he was allowed to study in a protestant theologians’ camp there in Norton – an educational camp ran by the YMCA and supervised by the British army. The first book he discovered and read in this camp was Reinhold Niebuhr’s ‘Nature and Destiny of man’. Being the first book of theology he has ever read, Moltmann claimed that this book had a huge impact on his life. But what actually sparked his theological walk and visions were his experiences of pain and helplessness during the war and as prisoner of war. He testifies that:

In the last week of July 1943, Hamburg was destroyed in a firestorm as a result of the British Air Force’s ‘Operation Gomorrah’, 40,000 people perished. With my school class I was in a flak battery in the inner city as an auxiliary. It was wiped out, but the bombs which tore away the school friend standing next to me spared me. In the night for the first time I cried out to God. ‘My God, where are you?’, was my question. ‘Why am I alive and not dead like the others?’ During three years as a prisoner of war I looked for answers, first in the Old Testament psalms of lamentation and then in the Gospel of Mark. When I came to Jesus’ dying cry, I knew, ‘There is your divine brother and redeemer, who understands you in your god-forsakenness’. I sought knowledge to give support to my existence and abandoned my interest in physics and mathematics to find it. Auschwitz and Hiroshima disturbed me deeply.

(Moltmann 1997:13)

These painful experiences gave Moltmann great understanding about human suffering and how this suffering and hope reinforce each other and since then this has left a lasting impression on his theology.

#### **4.2.2 Moltmann's theological development**

Jürgen Moltmann returned to his home town Hamburg in Germany in 1948 and met a ruined country from the impact of the Allied bombings during the war. He began to study theology at the University of Göttingen under teachers who were strongly influenced by Karl Barth's theology. He himself later imbibed thoroughly Karl Barth's dialectical theology. And initially, became a disciple of this great master of dialectical theology. But later on, Moltmann saw the need to move beyond the narrow understanding of Barth and "Barmen Orthodoxy" when he grew critical of Barth's neglect of the historical nature of reality. He wanted then to give positive answers to the political possibilities and cultural challenges of the post-war period. Yet he remained greatly indebted to Barth. Moltmann has also been influenced in his theological walk by many great theologians after Barth. Some of them include; Martin Luther, Bonhoeffer, Ernst Bloch, Hegel, Hans Joachim Iwand, Gerhard von Rad and Ernst Käsemann. But above all, his greatest support came from Otto Weber his mentor, "fatherly friend" and the supervisor of his doctorate, Rudolf Bultmann, Joachim Jeremias, Günter Bornkam, Ernst Wolf, his "most important teacher" (Moltmann 2009:48) and Arnold Van Ruler. Moltmann served as a pastor with the Evangelical church of Bremen in Wasserhorst as his first congregation where he served for five years from 1953 – 1958. Now he is Professor Emeritus of theology at Tübingen University Germany.

#### **4.2.3 Circumstances leading to theology of the cross**

In writing of the theology of the cross, two experiences stand out as the immediate circumstances leading to his writing of this kind of theology according to Moltmann himself.



- The suffering and death of others

When he was only 17, Moltmann experienced not just personal suffering but the mass annihilation of his own country men, when the British at the heart of the second world war attacked his home town Hamburg in 1943 in the famous 'Operation Gomorrah' with a heinous firestorm with the sole aim of inciting German workers to rebel against Adolf Hitler because of the destruction of their homes. More than 40.000 men, women and children were burnt to death, but Moltmann escaped this inferno for no apparent reason he could give. Moltmann himself described these events as follows; "that was not a normal experience of suffering; these were the extreme and excessive burnings of hell" (Moltmann 2009:190) and this shattered his heart and destroyed his spirit for a long time. As such, when he began to personalize the passion narratives again with his own personal experience, he could find himself fully in Jesus' history. Then, some of the most worrying questions that took him towards a theology of the cross included; where was God that night? Was He present in the inferno of those burning nights? Or was He untouched by them, in the heaven of complacent blessedness? Where is God? Determined to find possible and convincing answers to these questions, Moltmann then began to write his theology of the cross.

- His own inner guilt as perpetrator

Coming from a generation that made Auschwitz a reality, Moltmann and all his contemporaries were always tormented by enormous guilt for their own actions. Often he and others could hardly face themselves. Moltmann himself says he wished to sink into the ground under the burden of shame and guilt. He hardly even knew what appropriate words to use to describe the events – whether it was guilt or sin or radical evil or something incomprehensible. Moltmann and his people perpetrated violent acts on fellow human beings. Moltmann began to think that such cruelty and suffering that took place was not only felt by the victims but also by the perpetrators too. God Himself especially, took a very active part in human pain because pain reached the very depth of God Himself because He participated in the death of His own Son on the cross. Moltmann wanted to push forth the eschatological hope that if Christ's suffering reflects God's own suffering, then suffering cannot be infinite and

endless. And also very importantly, Moltmann in this work stressed the fact that 'suffering is not only felt by the victims of evil but also by the perpetrators' who thereafter live in constant hidden guilt. Being a perpetrator himself, he described periods of sleepless nights 'when tormenting memories rose up, I woke up soaked in sweat-when the faces of the dead appeared and looked at me with their quenched eyes... In those nights one was alone and, like Jacob at the Brook Jabbok, exposed to the sinister powers and the destructive forces of darkness' (Moltmann 2009:26). Hence in acts that result in the innocent suffering, not only the victims, but also the perpetrators and most of all God too suffers. As such both the sufferers and the perpetrators need liberation and such liberation can only come from the cross of Christ.

### **4.3 The Cross**

#### **4.3.1 Traditional meaning**

Moltmann took up the theology of the cross as a challenge to the long held traditional theological concepts about the impassibility of God. He took up the crucifixion of Christ where he steadily argued that God in Jesus Christ suffered on the cross and as such suffers with all those who suffer in the world. With all the atrocities committed after the war, it was getting clearer to Moltmann that a theology that only spoke of God being on the side of the powerful, the politicians and not on the side of the one who was abandoned and crucified would have nothing to say to many who had and were still experiencing pain and suffering. Proper knowledge of the cross and the crucified Christ was very vital and even crucial because it is this knowledge that will lead to the survival or demise of the Christian faith (Moltmann 1974:65). No matter how the cross was understood and interpreted, it has always been the centre and symbol of Christian worship for all ages since Christianity came to be and after the death of Jesus of Nazareth. Before the death of Jesus the Christ, the cross was a symbol of rejection and curse. In Israel's understanding, those who were executed on the cross were rejected by their people, cursed by God's law and excluded from the covenant of life. Crucifixion in itself as a punishment for escaped slaves or rebels against the Roman Empire was regarded as the most degrading kind of punishment.

As such Cicero could declare: “Let even the name of the cross be kept away not only from the bodies of the citizens of Rome but also from their thought, sight and hearing” (Moltmann 1974:33). Therefore, worship given to a crucified convict and condemned blasphemer who was venerated as God was considered quite inappropriate both by the Jews and Romans alike. The cross then which Christians came to venerate was purely an object of scandal, suffering and salvation. As such many tried to associate or interpret it in ways that could shield or reduce its scandalous impact. But the cross stood as resistance to any interpretation that made it the “opium for the people”, where the mysticism of the cross’ suffering could be used to sanction unjustified suffering as has often been the case. For instance, Moltmann states:

The Church has much abused the theology of the cross and the mysticism of the passion in the interest of those who cause suffering. Too often, peasants, Indians and black slaves have been called upon by the representatives of the dominant religion to accept their sufferings as ‘their cross’ and not to rebel against them. Luther need not have recommended the peasants to accept their suffering as their cross.

(Moltmann 1974:49)

The cross resisted interpretation as a tool that sanctioned undeserved suffering. Such a mysticism of suffering is a blasphemy; it is a kind of monstrous product of inhumanity. A true meaning of the cross then can never be the cross of the glorious, risen and exalted Christ enthroned in the heavenly realm whose power and dominion is compared only to that of kings and emperors. The true cross is the “really irreligious thing in the Christian Faith. It is the suffering of God in Christ, rejected and killed in the absence of God. It is such a cross which truly qualifies Christian faith as faith and as something different from the projection of man’s desire” (Moltmann 1974:37).

The Church for many centuries had formulated and interpreted texts of the cross to project more the existence of human sinfulness and the need for salvation. The cross was often interpreted on the basis of sin and private immorality and the need for repentance and salvation (soteriology). Believers were mostly “made aware only

of the pains caused to Christ by individual sins and private immorality. Such interpretations soiled every other meaning of the cross and brought to light only miserable human beings trapped in sin and in desperate need of salvation. And it is such interpretation of the cross that provoked Martin Luther to come forth with his theses which later provoked the Reformation.

According to Moltmann, the above interpretations given to the cross do not truly reflect it. A true theology of the cross, which is theology of the crucified Christ who died for the Godless, would distinguish between the following: (1) The apostolic cross of the establishment of the faith in a world full of idols, demons, fetishes and superstition. (2) The cross of the Martyrs, who bore bodily witness to the Lordship of the crucified Christ before the rulers of the world. (3) The suffering of love for the abandoned, despised and betrayed human beings. (4) The 'sufferings of this age', the groaning of enslaved creation, the apocalyptic sorrow of the godless world.

#### **4.3.2 Theology of the cross. What is it?**

It is as Moltmann says, "not a single chapter in theology, but the key signature for all Christian theology" (Moltmann 1974:72). Theologia crucis as a spirit and method of theological thought then cannot be stated in a formula. Yet it may however be recognized when it is heard or experienced, whether in sermon, serious theological writing or artistic expression. Moltmann defines theology as a science giving account of Christian faith with all the intellectual means generally available at a particular time and at the same time the use made of contemporary knowledge by Christian faith. It is the word of God and in this word of God is not only the object of human discourse; but God is the subject who utters God's own word. Theology is speaking about God on the basis of what God says (Moltmann 1974:66). Theology of the cross therefore is the word of God about the crucified Christ. It is "Crucified theology and speaks only of the cross" (Moltmann 1974:69).

Moltmann traces the beginning of theology of the cross to Paul who developed the word of the cross against God's wisdom and the knowledge from that of the world, so that the knowledge of the cross would bring about liberation from the power of the cosmos. It is a theology that takes the situation of dehumanized man seriously.

Dehumanized man is one who pursues his own interest and who cannot let God be God but takes God's place by making himself the unhappy and proud God of his own self, his fellow man and his world. The word of the cross then has as sole aim to liberate such a man from the fatal concern of making himself God by pointing him to the crucified God who is the real reflection of God. This theology then exposes and is a thorough criticism of the self-glorification of dehumanized man and obviously makes way for his liberation too. It is not as if dehumanized man is a tabula rasa, he can have or even has an indirect knowledge of God from creation, history and the soul as Paul states. But being a deified man, and one who must exalt himself because (s)he cannot ensure the self as (s)he is, (s)he instead uses these knowledge and religious insight only in the interest of his/her self-deification thereby making him/her more inhuman. The knowledge of the cross then, is knowledge of God in the suffering caused to him by this same dehumanized man because of all he seeks and tries to attain as God of himself.

But this knowledge does not confirm him as God of himself, instead it destroys him, it destroys the miserable god dehumanized man longs to be and restores him to his abandoned despised humanity. Theology of the cross then exposes a great conflict of interest at work. It is a conflict between God Who has become man and man who wishes to become God. As Moltmann says "It destroys the destruction of man. It alienates alienated man. And in this way, it restores the humanity of dehumanized man" (Moltmann 1974:71).

#### **4.4 Moltmann's theology of the cross**

##### **4.4.1 Introduction**

Throughout his theology of the cross, Jürgen Moltmann consciously reverses the long held anthropocentric view of the cross to a theocentric interpretation by dwelling more on the question "What does the cross of Jesus mean for God Himself" and not what it means for us. He attempts to answer this question through elaboration of a theology of the cross that is Incarnational and Trinitarian (Stringer 2003: iii). Here the death of Christ becomes very vital not just because of what God has done for us but more importantly because of 'Who' the God is, that is revealed in the event of the

cross and the depth of His involvement in the world's sufferings. For Moltmann, Jesus' death was first and foremost a Trinitarian event which involved all the three persons of the Godhead who participated in Christ's identification with and the redemption of the suffering of the world. In the light therefore of all the world's suffering and evil, the three persons of the Godhead participate fully with suffering humanity. God is first of all ultimately involved in Christ's suffering and in so doing takes also the world's suffering upon the God self, involving God's relationship to the suffering of humanity and the entire creation.

#### **4.4.2 A theocentric understanding of the cross**

Moltmann rejects out rightly the language of atonement solely attributed to the cross for many centuries, wherein only the sin of man is stressed and salvation is the main accomplishment achieved by Jesus' death on the cross. This view of the cross has left many Cameroonians to be trapped in a judgmental type of Christianity for long; wherein all evil that happen to people are seen only in the light of their sinfulness. An innocent rape victim is asked to confess her sins for walking out late before the rape and Jesus will forgive her and no one seem to judge the rapist. Moltmann prefers to think of Jesus' death primarily as an event in which Jesus was abandoned by God. Also, Jesus as the second person of the Trinity was abandoned as God on the cross. Here Moltmann exhibits radical kenotic Christology: the Son is rejected by the father and thus becomes utterly destitute on the cross. This event then unites the Son with all the destitute and rejected of the world's humanity and Cameroon in particular. Jesus becomes the God of the destitute by abandoning His divine identity at the cross and identifying Himself with the destitute and all the forsaken, poor, godless and the homeless in the world. As such Moltmann places a different interpretation on the meaning of the cross. Even though he continues using Luther's coinage 'Theology of the cross', yet he superimposes new and altered definition and meaning into it. He tries to expose new trends of theological thinking that understand God's being through the death of Christ on the cross and what this death speaks about God Himself. Theology was beginning to speak about God for Christ's sake, understanding God's through the dying cry of Jesus on the cross "My God, my God why has Thou forsaken me" (Psalm 22:1, Mark 15: 34). Such a trend was in

complete contrast to past theological traditions especially Protestant theology that had considered the cross and resurrection only within the horizon of its soteriological effects. Not that such a view was not true, but according to Moltmann it was not radical enough. The most important questions then for him were instead “What does the cross of Jesus mean for God Himself?” and “how could the death of Jesus’ be a statement about God?” (Moltmann 1974:201). Citing both Catholic and Protestant theologians Moltmann emphasises the fact that Christ’s death expresses God and in fact it was “a statement of God about God Himself” (Moltmann 1974:202).

For Moltmann, the more one understands the whole event of the cross as an event in God Himself, the more any simple concept of God falls apart. The crucified Christ presents a whole revolution in the concept of God. Moltmann (1974:204) states that: “The death of Jesus (then) on the cross is the centre of all Christian theology; it is the entry to all Christian theology’s problems and answers on earth”. All Christian statements about God, creation, sin, death, history, church, faith, sanctification and hope either have their focal point in or stem from the crucified Christ. To think of God therefore in the crucified Christ would be to think of His incarnation only in terms of the cross. His becoming man is in complete contrast with our conception of what man is. He is not the kind of man we want to be; an outcast, accursed or crucified. How can a real man be thus? Even God on the cross is a blasphemy to us. Yet for Moltmann, this is the point at which God in His humiliation opens up and is completely with Himself and also with the “other”, dehumanized man. If we want to know God, Who or What He is, we must see Him from the crucified Christ. God is greater only in His humiliation and glorious only in His self-surrender, powerful only in His helplessness and divine only in His humanity. For when God is weak, then He is strong (1 Cor. 12:10). Therefore, everything that Christian theology says about God should centre on the Christ event on the cross which is obviously the God event. Jesus’ death on the cross is therefore the beginning of Christian theology and all Christian understanding about God. It is not only the death of Christ on the cross but more specifically is also the death in God and God in Jesus’ death. Through this death, we can truly know who or what God really is, a God who suffers with all who suffer especially the innocent.



#### 4.4.3 Trinitarian understanding of the cross

The manifestation of monstrous evil has always been a great challenge to Christian affirmation of a good and omnibenevolent Almighty God. The on-going triumph of evil in the world has been an issue of onward discussion, but at this time the matter needs some urgent attention especially in the Cameroonian context where those who try to embark on right attitudes are instead seen as abnormal. For such a context then, Moltmann argues that, the incarnation must take precedence over purely staurological concerns because one cannot truly comprehend what took place at Calvary without first knowing who it was that hung upon the cross” (Stringer 2003:24). In so doing, Moltmann presents the doctrine of the Trinity which had played a very important role in the ancient world of religion in that it differentiated Christianity from polytheism, pantheism and monotheism. Traditional Christian theism and atheism had a metaphysical conception of God; the divine being was conceived in a metaphysical manner as all that finite beings are not. Traditional theism portrayed God as an all-powerful perfect infinite being in complete contrast to human beings who are completely imperfect, finite and helpless. It eluded attributes that are at man’s expense and in the face of such a God, man was just helpless and alone because he had no relational attachment to suffering man since He cannot suffer. But for Moltmann, a God who cannot experience the pain and suffering that humans experience is no God that humans can reckon with. He is of no use to suffering human beings. To emphasize this he states:

...a God who cannot suffer is poorer than any man. For a God 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 a loveless being.

(Moltmann 1974:222)

Such a God was the God of metaphysics and not the God of the Bible. And if the God of the Bible is to be identified with this impassable God of metaphysics, then the cross is evacuated of any notion of deity because a God who cannot suffer cannot die also (Moltmann 1974:214). Hence for Moltmann, we must understand the cross



in Trinitarian terms as an event which involves relationship between persons who suffer rather than a God who feel nothing for no one. Here, God is delivered up, betrayed, cast out, and killed in His Son on the cross that He may become the Father of those who are delivered up. He does not only become their father but is also forsaken with them since in His forsakenness of His Son, God also forsakes Himself.

Moltmann emphasizes God's Trinitarian relational suffering in that, "The Son suffers dying; the Father suffers the death of the Son. The grief of the Father here is just as important as the death of the Son. The Fatherlessness of the Son is matched by the Sonlessness of the Father, 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 His son"(Moltmann 1974:243). What proceeds from this event between Father and Son is the Spirit which justifies the godless, fills the forsaken with love and brings the dead alive, since even the fact that they are dead cannot excluded them from this event of the cross; the death in God also includes them (Moltmann 1974:244). The cross then in a Trinitarian understanding is an event which involves a relationship between persons who suffer. It is a Trinitarian event between Son and Father who take upon themselves the suffering of the rest of humanity. In this passion, the Son experiences suffering and death out of love for the world, but the Father who sends the Son on His salvific mission also experiences the grief of the beloved Son and from this event of shared suffering comes the Spirit of new life and world transformation. All the suffering of the world is encompassed in the affliction of the Son, the grief of the Father and the comfort of the Spirit who inspires courage and hope to pray and work for renewal of all things. The death of Christ then is the beginning of the God event in which the life-giving Spirit of love emerges from the death of the Son out of the grief of the Father. Moltmann insists that Christian theology must therefore cease to think of God in metaphysical terms as in philosophical theology and henceforth "think of the suffering of Christ as the power of God, and the death of Christ as God's potentiality" (Moltmann 1974:215) This is because in this death lies the possibility that human beings might be freed from the limitations of suffering and death (Stringer 2003:27).

Whereas traditional theism sought to provide protection against the limitation, finitude and vulnerability of mortal beings by means of a divinity which could not suffer or die, Christian faith has conclusively proclaimed that God suffered in the suffering of Jesus, God died on the cross of Christ, so that even we might live and rise again in his future (Stringer 2003:27). For Moltmann therefore, Christian theology has a major challenge, that of differentiating the God of the Bible from the philosophical gods of tradition. God is not to be thought of in absolute terms but rather to understand God's being "in the God forsakenness of Christ. Only when it has recognized what took place between Jesus and His father on the cross, can it speak of the significance of this God for those who suffer and protest at the history of the world" (Moltmann 1974:227). Christ's death and resurrection then is a deadly dialectic between Father, Son, and Spirit which constitutes the decisive revelation of the Divine Trinity. While Moltmann sees the death of Christ as the death of God, he also sees it even more as the start of the God "event" in which the life-giving spirit transpires from the death of the Son and the grief of the Father. Such is great consolation for all suffering Cameroonians to know that God suffers and dies with them.

#### **4.4.4 Moltmann and human suffering**

It is true that pain and suffering are the inevitable accompaniment of human beings and their stay here on earth. They are the common conditions of all people everywhere with no exceptions. To be human is to face the possibility of suffering. Added to this suffering is man's inhumanity as a contribution. In Carson's(1978 :12) words "children born with diseased bodies because of their parents' lose living, the sad wreckage in hospital wards as a result of drunken driving, the pathetic victims of violent crimes and of that supreme example of man's brutality to his fellows-wars...A ruthless criminal evades the law and enjoys in a healthy luxurious surrounding while a district nurse is injured in a car accident and spends the rest of her life almost totally paralyzed". Not only has human suffering been ever so present and real but the magnitude has often seemed to bear no relation to the quality of the sufferer's life. There has been great inequality in the quota of suffering borne by different individuals. Some have inflicted so much pain and yet lived their lives successfully to

the end while others have borne so much and lost their lives prematurely in pain. As Carson states, “if men in general have problems with suffering, the Christian has even greater problems” (Carson 1978:13).

The tendency for many in the face of pain is often to ask “why” or “why me?” But for the Christian especially, the Why “is often wrung out of deep agony of soul... because (s)he believes in a God who is good and who is also almighty”, but who has also permitted much suffering and pain even to the point where men can ravage each other. Who will not be struck by Idi Amin’s Uganda, the killing fields of Cambodia, and the ethnic cleansing of the Balkans and those in Rwanda, or the Jewish holocaust? These incidents and many other acts of human inhumanity expressed towards other human beings, prompted Moltmann to raise the question “how is it possible to engage in theology in the aftermath of Auschwitz, Hiroshima and the Thalidomide children?” (Moltmann 1991:166). Karen Rooms tells of a more recent event of the seven thousand Rwandan Tutsi men, women and children who went into a Roman Catholic Church to seek shelter and protection if not from men but from God Himself in “His own house” as it seems. Yet they were all murdered under the light of stained glasses windows depicting the Risen Christ and Pentecost. “Where was He” she asks “when the militia came? Were these people abandoned, or was He right there with them as they gathered in His Name – as they were killed around the altar because they were different?” (Rooms 2001:26).

Moltmann has great concern over issues of human suffering especially undeserved innocent suffering, a situation in which many Cameroonians are hemmed. Having himself been a sufferer, Moltmann is versed with some of the most vivid portrayal of the most inhuman acts of innocent suffering. He states:

The SS hanged two Jewish men and a youth in front of the whole camp. The men quickly died, but the death throes of the youth lasted for half an hour. ‘Where is God? Where is he?’ someone asked behind me. As the youth still being in torment in the noose after a long time, I heard the man call again, ‘Where is God now?’ and I heard a voice in myself answer: Where is He? He is here. He is hanging there on the gallows.

(Moltmann 1974:273-74)

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And this last sentence 'God is hanging in the gallows' is the heart of Moltmann's theology of suffering. It is what makes him peculiar among many Christian theologians. He refuses to concentrate on a human theodicy approach -suffering and a benevolent God – a fact which Christianity seem so often unable to provide satisfactory answers (Stringer 2003:4). Instead Moltmann opens up a new understanding of what Christian response to suffering ought to be. For him, the Christian response to questions raised by the suffering of the innocent must be centrally Christological in as much as God was reconciling all things in Christ (2 Cor. 5:19).

Christianity, moreover, proclaims a risen Christ who is no less present in the world today than at the crucifixion and no less involved in the redemption of all things than He always was (Stringer 2003:4). Jesus then as the one whom God sent to the world to reconcile the world to Himself is the one whom the Christian church must look for answers to the deeply perplexing questions of human suffering especially the suffering of the innocent (Moltmann 1972:32). These answers have been provided in the events of the cross of Christ. Here Jesus experienced persecution, rejection and crucifixion. "His life and ministry, and in particular his cry of dereliction from Calvary's cross (Mark 15:34), offer a more convincing response to the problem of suffering than any abstract theological speculation since Christianity proclaims that God Himself has entered into the suffering of creation in the person of Jesus of Nazareth" (Stringer 2003:7). Jesus' death on the cross then for Moltmann represents not merely the death of Jesus but also God's identification with all the suffering people of the world in the suffering of Jesus Christ. In Christ's death, God and suffering are no longer contradictions but God is identified with suffering humanity and this is comfort indeed. When people suffer then, especially because of things they cannot understand, they may immediately feel they have been abandoned by God and that God does not love them. God then seems to be this mysterious, incomprehensible God who destroys His own very work. When the sufferer cries therefore, he is echoing Jesus' voice on the cross. Jesus suffered out of love as Moltmann states and God suffered with Him. Therefore suffering brings God close to man and He ceases to be the indifferent God. God suffers because He loves and He is Love (1John 4). Because He suffered the death of Jesus in Love, men who suffer can also

continue to love. Anyone who loves suffers because of love and hence suffers with God and God suffers with him. God then becomes a fellow sufferer and not the absent God who does not care. He is the great companion and fellow sufferer. Such knowledge of God will help even Cameroonian sufferers to understand their own story which is the history of suffering and hope in the history of God.

#### **4.4.5 Divine suffering**

Traditional Christianity for many centuries had grappled with the issue of the immutability and the impassibility of God. That is the fact that God cannot change and cannot suffer. Moltmann uses his theology of the cross to argue against these traditional views of God. He presents this view clearly in his argument against traditional Christology that came very near to Docetism according to which Jesus only appeared to suffer and only appeared to die abandoned by God; but this did not happen in reality. The intellectual bar to this came from the philosophical concept of God, according to which God's being is incorruptible, unchangeable, indivisible, incapable of suffering and immortal; while human nature on the other hand, is transitory, changeable, divisible, capable of suffering and mortal (Moltmann 1974:227).

Moltmann first argues against the doctrine of two natures of Christ, and tries to provide answers to questions such as; was it really impossible to ascribe Christ's suffering to God Himself? Such a question became crucial as well as necessary to dissolve the personal union of the two natures in Christ in His cry of desolation. For Moltmann, first of all though God is not changeable as suggested by Arius the heretic, it does not mean He is not free to change Himself or to allow Himself to be changed by others. He can still communicate Himself. Also, the fact that God opens Himself up to love the other means that God also suffers because the one who is capable of love is also capable of suffering. Hence since His being is love, God also suffers. Moreover, God became man so that dehumanized people might become true humans, and people can become truly human only in the community of the incarnate, suffering human God.

Moltmann also argues against words like “apathea” being applied to God. *Apathea* actually means lack of feeling, concern or interest, especially in the context of suffering. It can briefly be defined as “without suffering”. This is how ancient philosophy, Christianity and metaphysics as well as ancient Judaism understood God. Hence God was incapable of feeling, as in dead things, free of the spirit from inner needs and external damage, unchangeable, insensitive and others. This notion of God was particularly strong during the times of Plato and Aristotle.

The concept of “apathea” as an attribute of God was directly contrasted by Pathos. Pathos refers to the sympathetic nature of God for men. According to pathos, God is affected by events of and human actions and suffering in history. God is affected because He is interested in His creation, His people and His right. This was the sole message of the prophets. For them the divine pathos was expressed in the relationship of God and His people. God takes man so seriously that He suffers under the actions of man and can be injured by them. God is one who suffers when His creation suffers even to the point of self-humiliation. God suffered with Israel in Egypt, during the exile and even in creation, the call of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. God suffers because of love for Israel and for all mankind as a whole. When Israel is liberated, God is liberated also. Therefore for Moltmann there can be no other Christian answer for the question of human suffering than that God suffers in the same way with His people. Citing here the story of Elie Wiesel, he gives a direct answer to the question ‘where is God?’ when His people suffer. The answer is: ‘He is hanging there on the gallows’ with the dying youth and dying with him’. Here Moltmann clearly states that: “Any other answer would be blasphemy. There cannot be any other Christian answer to the question of torment. To speak of a God who cannot suffer would make God a demon. To speak here of an absolute God would make God an annihilating nothingness. To speak here of an indifferent God would condemn men to indifference” (Moltmann 1974:274). And it was this view of an apathetic God that made men themselves monsters on earth. Men like Hitler, Stalin, and others saw themselves like the powerful apathetic God they had created and so treated other humans with cruel apathy. For Moltmann, Only a God capable of suffering can give men true humanity and free men from suffering and all other bondages. Therefore, “God’s being is in suffering and ... suffering is in God’s being

itself' (Moltmann 1974:227). God's being is not in omnipotence but in love and as such He embraces suffering out of the fullness of His being. Walter Kasper supports this view of the suffering Christ only as a symbol of love when he states that:

It requires omnipotence to be able to surrender oneself and give oneself away; it requires omnipotence to be able to take oneself back in the giving and to preserve the independence and freedom of the recipient. Only an almighty love can give itself wholly to the other and be helpless love.

(Kasper 1999:194-195)

God loves from the fullness of His being and suffers because of His "full and free love" (Moltmann 1972:31). This great love for humanity has been portrayed in the death of Christ. This death is a revelation of who God is and what God has done according. God becomes man in Jesus Christ of Nazareth and enters into the finitude of man. But in the death of Jesus He also entered into the situation of man's God forsakenness (Moltmann 1974:276). The history of God therefore is a history of love for humanity in the situation of suffering and God forsakenness. It centres on the fact that it is not man who ascended to God but God who descended and revealed Himself in His own self – emptying in the crucified Christ for the sake of man. And this opens up God's sphere of life to the development of man in God. Through Christ God creates the condition of entering into a relationship of "Pathos" and "sympathea" with man and this He does for those who cannot satisfy the conditions for themselves, such as the godless and those forsaken by God. As such, no relationship can be made between God and man in the absence of the person and history of Christ, because full life will be achieved only through Christ Himself who communicates the Fatherhood of God and the power of the Spirit.

Events like Auschwitz, the world wars, the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Genocides in Rwanda and other places, rapes in Cameroon, India and Africa, the war and nuclear weapons in Syria, the violence against women and children in Cameroon may at first thought contradict the presence of God in His world. Yet even such sufferings too as Moltmann concludes have been taken up to the grief of the Father, the surrender of the Son and the power of the Spirit. Christ will certainly hand



over the Kingdom to the Father, but He will do so only after the resurrection of all the death, the murdered of the world, the gassed and all other sufferers have been healed. Then the sorrow of the Son will finally turn to eternal joy, not only the joy of the Son, but even man's sorrow too will be overcome and this will be the final fulfilment of man's history of hope in the Trinitarian history of God who suffers with man.

#### **4.4.6 The prevalent evil in the world**

Suffering is the direct consequence of radical and prevalent evil in the world. The theodicy question, how to affirm a benevolent God in the world full of evil is a preoccupation of every theologian. Many people reject the existence of a God due to evil and suffering, especially a good God as Christianity affirms. Philosophical and metaphysical theology raised this question through atheism in all its forms; protest, metaphysical, traditional and others. Atheism did not doubt the existence of God, what it doubted was "whether the world of experience is grounded by a divine being" (Moltmann 1974:219), and this because of the prevailing presence of evil and suffering. The question of theodicy became central to Moltmann due to his experiences in and after the Second World War where he saw and experienced the senseless acts of evil propagated by men. Often the thought is, there can be no such good and righteous God in such a world full of evil. Nothing in this world as it is shows the existence of a God. A good God cannot create an evil world and allow evil events such as the two world wars, the war in Vietnam, the annihilation of the Jews and so on. He may be above the sky promising a reward but He is not here on earth with the prevalent evil. And a God who is only omnipotent and above the heaven is Himself an incomplete being, 'a deceiver, an executioner, a sadist, despot, player, director of a marionette theatre or a sleeping, erring bored helpless and clownish God' (Moltmann 1974:221). The atheist cannot bear such God and so dares to provoke him to action by making an attempt to divinize man as against God by emphasizing that a man who can suffer because he loves is better than such a God who cannot or even experience helplessness and powerlessness.

In all these, Moltmann does not take the trend of argument put forth by traditional theodicy. Instead he takes a conspicuous position wherein he does not dwell on the



question “Why evil? But, “Where is God in the midst of all the world’s suffering? He takes a midway, not providing any theistic or atheistic answer because for him there is no satisfying answer to the question of the world’s suffering. He finds an answer only in the dying cry of Jesus on the cross “My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34). Jesus’ experience of God forsakenness and suffering is the only answer to the problem of evil. No other answer for him would satisfy. This cry of Jesus is an open cry, it is a contradiction because “the God of theism cannot have abandoned Him, (Jesus) and in His forsakenness, He cannot have cried to a non-existent God” (Moltmann 1974:225 – 226). The only way then according to Moltmann is to take up a theology of the cross that does not doubt or questions God’s existence in the world but one that understands God as the one who suffers with Christ on the cross and cries out with Him. This is because God’s being according to this cry is in suffering and suffering in God’s being is out of love for forsaken humanity. In His suffering and death, God Himself suffered with Christ in love. Moltmann states that God is not another nature or heavenly person or moral authority, but is in fact an ‘event’. However it is not the event of co-humanity, but the event of Golgotha, the event of love of the Son and the grief of the Father from which the Spirit who opens up the future and creates life. God then is the human God in the crucified Christ and not the absent landlord or “cold” heavenly power above with no concern for man.

#### **4.5 Moltmann’s theology and the rest of creation**

John Haught (2008:153) has painted one of the most recent painful pictures of nature’s predicament as follows:

“All over the earth and especially in the most impoverished lands, sources of freshwater are diminishing, forests are being destroyed, soil is eroding and deserts are spreading. The land, air, and water are being poisoned, and species are disappearing at an alarming rate. Patterns of excessive consumption and the pressure of increasing human numbers are making these problems even worse in many areas...Pollution, global climate change, the thinning of the stratospheric ozone layer, the loss of topsoil and

sources of freshwater and numerous other ills pose unprecedented danger to plant, animal, and other life”.

The direct consequence has been floods, droughts earthquakes, typhoons, hurricanes, monsoons and others. The doctrine of creation has often been given an important place in Christian theology, but mostly, attention has been given to the human species more than the rest of nature which includes plants, animals and the rest of the atmosphere. That there were other beings created by God was certainly acknowledged, but they were often treated ... more like stage props than like important participants in the drama of salvation whose central protagonists were God and humanity (Migliore 1991:80). We may describe John F. Haught’s description of nature’s predicament above as suffering. For long, the rest of creation has suffered intensely at the hands of human beings who have used only as a means of human sustenance without the slightest respect or regret of its destruction. This situation is especially desperate in the Cameroonian context. While laying the blame on modernity, with its rapid scientific and technological development, some have blamed Christianity and its theologians for their lack of interest in the natural environment along the centuries. John Haught (2008:154) again shares this view when he states that:

At least to some extent this is the fault of those of us who are theologians, since until recently we have attended only superficially to nature. In the early modern period, for example, we virtually handed the natural world over to science, reserving for theology the task of pondering matters such as human destiny and the meaning of history. To a great extent theology lost touch with the universe.

In ‘The Crucified God’, Moltmann expounds extensively on human suffering and how Christ’s death on the cross could be viewed as God’s direct solidarity with humanity in the act of suffering especially innocent or undeserved suffering but mentions nothing about the rest of creation. Yet in his later write ups, he picks up the study of nature very strongly. This we see in his book *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of creation* (1985) where the rest of creation is given proper attention. He was immediately provoked by the fact that the entire creation has been secularized and as such was being exploited seriously by humankind. Such exploitation has

taken the form of rapid technological development (sciences) and this has resulted to the serious ecological disasters of our time. These disasters have also been fostered directly by human interests and concerns coming directly from the human will to dominate the rest of creation. This then is what has driven humans to seize power over nature and as such nature too has succumbed to serious undeserved suffering. Therefore Moltmann struggles to create an ecologically and nature minded theology hoping to inspire renewed respect and reverence for the world by reiterating God's presence in the creation and sustaining thereof. The crisis we experience according to Moltmann is not just an ecological one and as such cannot be solved merely by technology since it has been provoked by human selfish handling of nature. Instead, a conversion of conviction and fundamental values as well as a conversion of our attitude to life and life style is very necessary (Moltmann 1999:97).

Moltmann links the ecological disaster experienced by nature to direct human selfishness. And this selfishness has occurred as a result of various reasons. First, Moltmann states that the religion of modern men and women has led to a one sided link of nature directly with men and not with the gods as in pre-modern civilization. Secondly, Christian teachings like "...Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it" (Moltmann 1999:97) have given humanity permission to exploit the rest of creation. Thirdly, "the picture of God" adopted by modern men as "Almighty ... God is Lord, the world is His property, God can do what He likes. He is the absolute determining subject in the world and the world is the passing object of His sovereignty" (Moltmann 1999:98) are all problematic. Such a picture gave God absolute power "Omnipotence" to God, while the world was the transient and passing away universe.

Since God was viewed as Omnipotent, human beings then had to resemble God or act like Him by lording it over the earth in order to be the true image of God. Such of false picture of God then made human beings to resemble God "not through goodness and truth, not through patience and love but through power and sovereignty". Moltmann then advocates a change in the use of nature through the doctrine of 'creatio continua', because our destruction of nature will be a direct disrupted of our relationship to nature, us and God.

#### 4.5.1 'Creatio continua'

Moltmann advocates for a detailed doctrine of *creatio continua* which must see God's historical activity under two aspects: Preservation of the world He has created and the preparation of its completion and perfecting (Harvie 2009:152). With these two aspects of *creatio continua* both the subjective appropriation of history by humanity and the objective existence of history over against human subjectivity exhibit characteristics of Christian hope and divine faithfulness respectively. This on-going creative work of God in the promise creates new history.

The doctrine of 'creatio continua' propagated by Moltmann was to counter the ancient doctrine of the Patristic Fathers who saw God as a transcendent being far removed from human touch and the rest of creation. God is distinct from the world and created the world out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*) God created a world that was different from Himself and does not need pre-existent material to create. He acted as a sufficient cause at the initial moment of creation. God acts by His own power and is not influenced by the world in all that He does. He is the immaterial transcendent almighty creator of the universe. Such a notion of God and the rest of creation was to keep God far from, and independent of the world. God and the world were therefore separate entities over against each other and God could only reach the world in particular moments and not always (Delio 2003:4). Thomas Aquinas also supported this view of God. He did not see God in a Trinitarian manner as Moltmann and others did. But instead, describing God as the 'unmoved Mover', the 'original Cause' of everything that has no cause, the 'Original Necessary Being' that is dependent on nothing else but itself, the 'Absolute Perfection' and the 'Guiding Intelligence' (Chidester 2000:231). Thomas too saw God as an independent being far from reach but as determining all things. Such a God for Moltmann was very different from the One Who revealed Himself in the person of Jesus Christ.

Also Moltmann would not conceive of creation as an expression of God's omnipotence. Instead he believes that the secularization of creation has led to its exploitation by mankind. He exposes an ecological doctrine of creation that emphasizes God's involvement in the creation and sustenance of the world and all life therein. He advocates against distinguishing between God and creation as such

a notion surrendered the world as Godless to its destruction and exploitation by science and humanity. He instead advocates that God be discovered in all the beings He has created and to find God's life-giving Spirit in the community of both creation and humanity. In so speaking, Moltmann has been seen by some as advocating 'Pantheism', that is the doctrine that everything is God. But Moltmann renounces all forms of Pantheism when he writes that "without difference between Creator and creature, the creation cannot be conceived of at all; but this difference is embraced and comprehended by the greater truth which is what the creation narratives really comes down to, because it is the truth from which it springs: the truth that God is all in all. This does not imply a Pantheistic dissolution of creation in God; it means the final form which creation is to find in God" (Moltmann 1985:89). He advocates instead for Panentheism, the doctrine that all things are in God. Moltmann presses forth the fact that God, having created the world also dwells in it, and equally the world which He has created exists in Him (Moltmann 1993:98). His sole aim here is to advance reverence for the life of every living thing into the adoration of God.

*Creatio continua* therefore promulgates God's continuous presence and sustenance of the rest of creation. God is the original Creator of the universe and He continues to create after the initial creation (Psalm 104:30). *Creatio continua* is as David Congdon says, is "God's continuous activity of creation, His moment-by-moment actualization of creation through the Word spoken by God from the beginning...the moment-by-moment act of God that makes it possible for this moment to be the day of salvation" (Congdon 2010:51-52), a desperate call for the immediate salvation of creation. One of the most important texts which Moltmann uses for this creation is Romans 8:19 – 23 and this text links the Christian experience of eschatological spirit with the bondage of hope of the whole creation. The main consequence will be to turn the doctrine of creation into a history of God's relationship to His creation. Therefore, "the divine activity of *creatio continua*, which leads from the initial creation to eschatological consummation of creation, is not only a preserving activity of sustaining the created world, but also an innovative history which anticipates and prepares for new creation" (Bauckham 1995:188).

# CHAPTER FIVE

## 5. THE LOCAL CAMEROONIAN CONTEXT

### 5.1 Some basic information about the country

Cameroon is situated on the Guinea Coast of West Africa. It has a population of more than 19 million and is a multilingual country with two official languages French and English dating back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century (1916-1961), through her relationship with two colonial masters France and Britain, and about 250-300 vernacular languages with distinct cultural groups scattered all over its 10 regions. Cameroon has a national culture and two distinct regional cultures, partly through the influence of colonialism. Of its ten regions eight French are speaking and two English speaking. Ethnic divisions often correspond to geography which is widely divided and varied. Two basic religions – Christianity and Islam dominate the entire nation with religious freedom fully practiced. As a nation Cameroon has experienced suffering through its historical and personal encounters.

After dealing with a brief history of the country as a whole, this research concentrates on issues of suffering that pertain to the Anglophone sections of the local Cameroonian context which gives a broad scrutiny of life and experiences in the entire country. Because of their marginalized status and manipulations, the Anglophone sections of the country are deprived of many basic rights and privileges which make life hard, thereby orchestrating many evil practices that have in turn intensified people's suffering to untold magnitudes at times. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Cameroonians are also responsible for much of the evil and suffering that takes place in the local contexts, either through what they do or what they neglect to. Therefore, this chapter shall be divided into two parts; in the first part we shall see how Cameroon's historical encounters have produced certain experiences of suffering that are still affecting the lives of its citizens negatively up till today. And in the second part we shall see how Cameroonians themselves from the political down to the local level, have acted in ways that have promoted suffering for both humanity and the rest of creation.

### 5.1.1 Historical Context

Like many other African nations, Cameroon as it is today is a creation of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, even though the name “Rio dos Camaroës” had been given to the Wouri Basin by the Portuguese as far back as the 15<sup>th</sup> Century (Ejedepang-Koge 1985:5). Mangula (2006:1-5) traces early European presence into Cameroon as early as the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC when Carthaginian explorers led by Hanno first entered this part of West Africa. They were welcomed by a volcanic eruption coming from one its mountains (Mount Cameroon) and so they named the land “Chariots of the gods”. European presence in Cameroon then continued with the Portuguese explorer Fernando Po in 1472 who named the country “Rio dos Cameroës” (River of Prawns), after the large prawns he saw at the Wouri estuary. They came with the pretext of exploration and trade, as such the local chiefs welcomed them whole-heartedly and received metals, guns, cloths and liquor from them in exchange for human beings whom they named slaves and sold as articles. It was a lucrative trade for the European traders and also the local chiefs as long as their own children were not the ones that were sold. Looking back today more than a century later, one cannot but ponder the millions of lives that were lost and the present repercussion it has left behind in many Cameroonian villages. A visit to these villages exposes some tattered families by the side that are almost abandoned to themselves with no obvious cordial link except nocturnal social contact with the rest of the villagers. The elders tell us they are children, grandchildren and great grandchildren of abandoned slaves who were left behind by the Europeans for being too weak or unhealthy to be carried to the coast for sale. They then became slaves to slave-buyers or chiefs. But their fate was sealed because they could never marry normal villagers nor could their children no matter their level of education. They could only have contact with fellow slaves with whom they shared the lower status. That has remained so to date. Families will curse any child of theirs that gets close to the former slaves and their kin openly. But they can be forcibly impregnated and they dare not say who did it. They live with endless stigma. They are slaves ‘forever’, they and their descendants who understand nothing about the past trade. This is how history has treated them and they have no means or are given no opportunity to change their status.



### **5.1.2 Colonization and Independence**

Lucrative trade along the coast of this West African nation had attracted so many European nations along its shores. During 1877-1881 the local coastal chiefs in Bimbia and Cameroon (Douala) made several attempts to entreat the British Queen to declare a protectorate over them in vain (Ejedepang-Koge 1985:5). Because of this Germany negotiated and signed treaties with the chiefs of Bimbia, Douala and Batanga, thus declaring Kamerun a German protectorate to the shock of many. The Germans stayed in Kamerun from 1884–1916. Their stay came to an abrupt end due to their involvement and defeat during the First World War which broke out in 1914. After Germany was defeated Cameroon was handed to Britain and France and Cameroonians were now subjected to two other types of colonial experiences with problems of adaptation to new languages, new attitudes and cultures- a new start all over again. French and British rule over Cameroon went unhindered from 1922 right to the outbreak of World War II (1938–1945). After the war, the spirit of nationalism penetrated all Africa, Cameroon included. Trade unions were formed, which later developed to political parties that later demanded for independence at times with violence and bloody manifestations which led to the loss of many lives. Cameroon had its independence in 1961 even though it was controversial.

### **5.2 Post-independence Issues**

Since independence, Cameroonians have merely been living and partly living. Colonization was everybody's nightmare and the opposition against it was fierce. Colonisation had its own flaws; nevertheless much development can be attributed to it. But the departure of colonial masters exposed a more painful reality. Post-independence Cameroon may be worse than the colonial masters' Cameroon because of what we have done to our own selves.

At the surface level, life may seem fair as portrayed by some privileged sycophant Cameroonians. But underneath many people's lives, are only pain, anger and frustration. Some of the features that have provoked such heart felt discontent at all levels are as follows:



### **5.3.1 Bribery and corruption**

First the widespread corruption that has rocked the nation for many years is a snare to the whole country. Bribery and corruption is the order of the day. Nothing is done as a civic responsibility, but instead one pays for all services even in order to get better attention in the hospitals. Government officials are corrupt; the police corps, and at times even the church leaders. Appointments into offices follow tribal or regional links and not merit. Almost all the elections both executive and legislative organized in the country from 1992 up till 2010 have been flawed to favour the ruling elites of a single ruling party, the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM). The Catholic priest, Cardinal Christian Tumi once decried the corrupt nature of the country in the following words:

Is it true that examinations for employment sometimes have no meaning either because the questions have been leaked, or because those to be employed have already been selected even before the exams? Is it true that taxi-drivers have to pay bribes on our roads?...Christians who claim very good salaries at the end of the month for doing literally and absolutely nothing? And we do so with, apparently no conscience. Formerly bribes were offered secretly, under cover of dark, as it were, because they were recognized as shady dealings. It seems that they can now be offered and received publicly, without any embarrassment.

(Tumi 2006:5, 7)

The situation has grown worse since then and currently corruption remains the most dangerous canker worm in the country. It has almost become a way of life with everyone involved.

### **5.3.2 Unemployment and 'brain draining'**

Many who graduate from universities and professional schools do not have jobs or job opportunities. General discontent is causing massive brain draining as many young Cameroonians are moving out of the country in search of a better life, what Ngwa and Ngwa (2006:ix) popularly refer to as "Bush Falling". While draining Cameroon of the cream of its youthful population who cannot find a place in their own nation, because old fathers and mothers never leave offices or go on retirement.

They endure the pain of being mistreated or roughly handled abroad even to the point of death causes excruciating pain to “Bush Fallers” and their families back home. They expect a lot from them, but welcome them back home as battered corpses often. Ngwa and Ngwa (2006:145) give a vivid experience of the situation of young Cameroonian asylum seekers abroad as follows:

Forced by circumstances beyond their control to seek a life outside their home countries, prevented from entering legally and from working, denied a fair hearing by the asylum system, excluded from health and safety protection at work, kept from social care and welfare, vilified by media and therefore dehumanized in popular imagination, the hopes and dreams of asylum seekers for another life are finally extinguished. Cases of death during forced deportations continue to abound: The 31 year Cameroonian, Christian Ecole Ebune, died in Hungary. At first, the pilot agreed to take him on board, but when he continued to shout and protest, the pilot refused to go through with the deportation. Ebune was then taken into a service corridor away from passengers where, it appears, he was beaten and his feet wrapped with tape. When one of the offices noticed that he was unconscious, the airport emergency physician was called. Ebune could not be resuscitated.

### **5.3.3 Anglophone marginalization**

It is important to note that from the inception of the unification of the French and British Cameroons, the Anglophone sections have always felt cheated since the 1961 foiled plebiscite. This began with the questions set forth by the British through the United Nations to British Northern Cameroons. They gave as the only option to unite with Republic of Cameroon or Northern Nigeria. Some Northern Cameroonian natives criticized this move and asked for a third option that gave Northern Cameroons a separate administration to no avail. Reunification agreements were finally sealed with Republic of Cameroon on 30<sup>th</sup> September 1961; and sovereignty of the Southern Cameroons was transferred to Ahmadou Ahidjo and it became part of the Federal Republic of Cameroon. In spite of all the political developments that have gone on since 1961, there has always been the apparent discontent for the

marginalization that the Anglophone Cameroonians go through as a minority region in all aspects of public life.

### **5.3 Religion**

Cameroon has two main religions, Christianity and Islam. Christianity as the primary religion came into the country through the early European missionaries such as the English Baptist or Baptist Missionary society (Ngoh 1996:88) with their leader Alfred Saker to spread the “good tidings”. They also built schools. Others include, the Basel Mission (1886), the American Presbyterians (1879), and the Catholic Mission of the Pallotin Fathers (1890). They all championed the cause of evangelization of the territory. Islam is the second major religion in Cameroon; it is the principal religion of Northern Cameroon. The faith took root in Cameroon as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century that is after 1805 when the holy war (Jihad) was waged by Uthman Dan Fodio, a fiery Muslim leader who sought to purify Islam. Christianity has a population of 70%, and Islam has 21%. Traditional indigenous religions make 6 percent while the other faiths such as the Bahai, Orthodox Jews, and about 40.000 people who do not identify themselves with any religion make up the rest of the less than 5%.

Christians and Muslims are scattered all through the country permeating all the ten regions, even though Christianity is mostly concentrated in the Southern and Western regions while Islam is mainly in the North. But in large cities, churches and Mosques may often be built close to each other with both operating quietly. Protestantism is most concentrated in the two Anglophone regions while the other Francophone regions apart from the North are mostly Catholic. In the Muslim dominated north also, the population is fairly mixed with Muslims, Christians and traditionalists. Traditional indigenous religion is mostly practiced in rural areas throughout the country though never done publicly in the urban cities, only in seclusion. This is because most of those who practice traditional indigenous religion are often also Christians or Muslims or from the other smaller religions who may not want their identity to be disclosed.

The Cameroonian constitution provides for full religious freedom and the government generally respects this right and the citizens too are ruled by a high degree of religious tolerance. In a country so religious as Cameroon with almost three quarters of its population acknowledging the presence of a supreme or divine being, one would expect that the rate of moral integrity would be high and the rate of suffering in people's daily lives low. But on the contrary, as the churches, mosques and smaller denominations are increasing, so too are the morals declining. A practical reason is that there is a high desire now for church and mosque expansion because of the high level of financial proceeds often enjoyed and no apparent urgency for evangelization.. Leaders get a lot of loyalties, especially financial, paid to them by the local branches. So church in Cameroon today is more like a business for many than for evangelization. Also, the high level of poverty plaguing the country, unemployment, disease and psychological stress has forced many to become vulnerable. Anything opened 'in Jesus' name' would attract a following. As such churches are opened not necessarily for evangelization but to accommodate the suffering population who come to hear exactly what they want to be told. Today in Cameroon, one may rightly argue that apart from the desire for healing, visions and charismatic preaching, economic hardship has been the primary reason for the outburst of smaller denominations. "Opening a ministry" today in Cameroon with many members attending, is a major achievement for many of the young graduates who roam the streets without jobs. In the shortest possible time, they have obtained the titles of Reverends, Pastors, Rev-Drs, Senior Apostles and Archbishops. With their Charismatic messages, they soon begin to draw sufferers from all sectors of society who are asked to pay tithes and sow seeds which God will multiply. They are almost becoming a "plague" with serious social and economic consequences on all sectors of society. A presidential decree was signed in September 2013 ordering the military to permanently shut down all these denominations in the nation's capital, Yaounde, and the North West Regional capital, Bamenda and about 100 in the other eight regions<sup>1</sup>. What one may note is that the problem is not so much the outburst of these denominations but more, the unstable situation in the country; abject poverty, nightmarish situation of unemployment, high level of bribery and corruption which

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.afrinewsnetwork.com/index-id-africa-2K-375/html> (Accessed on September 16, 2013).

leaves a few elites rich and the rest of the population below poverty level, high prevalence of disease, increase violence and fear have orchestrated the high level of religiosity in Cameroon. Religion is fast becoming opium for the poor in Cameroon.

#### **5.4 Sociological Context**

Generally, since her independence in 1961, Cameroon could be described as a country of peace and stability due mostly to the fact that no major uprisings have plagued the country except the attempted Coup d'état in 1984, the economic crisis and ghost towns of the 1990s and the general protest against rising food cost that affected so many towns in February 2008. In fact we can say that Cameroon has only been “fortunate to have had stability, peace and continuity in her leadership since reunification in 1961 as compared to most other African countries” (Ejedepang-Koge 1985:25).

He was right when he wrote;

“For unity to be achieved, the people must be happy, satisfied and free. And to arrive at satisfaction, citizens and regions must be assured equal treatment on the basis of fairness and rationality. There must be mutual trust and respect and a sense of belonging”

(Ejedepang-Koge 1985:28)

He advocated social justice wherein there ought to be judicious distribution of all the fruits of Cameroon's development amongst all the social classes comprising of peasants, civil servants, traders, bankers labourers, medical and legal people, politicians and all other groups that make up the Cameroonian society. No stratum of society was supposed to be neglected in the country's proceeds (Ejedepang-Koge1985:28). From its inception as a state, one may argue that social justice has never taken root in the country. An honest description of the state would show a picture wherein, a few wealthy are in control of much of the country's resources while the rest of the population is struggling only to meet up with living standards. A 2009 report from the African Development Bank designated Cameroon as a nation plagued with very high level poverty. The country's human poverty index as at 2008

was 31.5%, above the African average of 38.7%. For every 100.000 inhabitants was an average of 18.4 physicians compared to 39.6 for Africa. HIV/AIDS prevalence rate has been rising steadily, 5.1% as compared to 4.5% for Africa as a whole (Country Strategy paper, 2009). Poverty and the fear of it is the greatest threat to the Cameroonian society. It is the root cause of all suffering and it attacks the very foundation of society itself, the family. No family is ever too rich to the level where it can become self-sufficient and this is as a result of the way society is structured.

#### **5.4.1 Suffering in family settings**

In Cameroon the family is the foundation of the society, as in the whole of Africa and the world. For Cameroon every time the term family is mentioned it is the picture of the extended family that immediately comes to mind comprising of children, parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, brothers and sisters who may have their own children, and other immediate relatives (Mbiti1989:104). In areas like the North West Region it may get even more extended to the level where two brothers construct a large compound and bring in their separate families in and live together, often with two or more wives, who also come with their relatives. At certain levels, one can hardly distinguish between them as all refer to themselves as brothers and sisters. The family bond is so strong, sacred and communal to the extent that the saying of John Mbiti of Kenya holds true, “I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am” (Mbiti 1990:209) as though it was spoken from a Cameroonian context. Both pains and joys are shared together. Hence when one member of the family gets rich it is for everyone. As such in a case where a member of the family is privileged to be appointed to a position in the government, it becomes the position of his/her family first, then his/her tribe or ethnic group and then clan and further.

This phenomenon has unleashed a wave of nepotism, favouritism and tribalism throughout the country. Appointments into government positions are done on the basis of “man knows man”<sup>2</sup>, not merits. As such in a particular ministry or government office, immediately one is appointed to office, he/she surrounds

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<sup>2</sup> “Man know man” is a now familiar, but derogatory slogan used by Cameroonians to describe high level of tribalism and nepotism plaguing whole country wherein appointment into offices, success into professional institution are done not according to competence or merits but on the basis of family or tribal or regional links.

him/herself with family members, relatives, and kinsmen. Ejedepang–Koge(1985 :29) uses the saying, “A goat feeds where it is tethered” to describe the phenomenon better and for him, this is the excuse used by top Cameroonians to “cheat through fraudulence and to indulge in corrupt practices, bribery and nepotism”. Since only few families may be privileged to have connection with the ruling elites of a given region or city, the general phenomenon is poverty for most families and hence suffering. Appiah-Kubi’s (1997:66) remark that in Africa “a man is truly a man in community with others”, and John Pobee’s (1992:66) that “to be is to belong and live in a kinship group” may have been appropriate in their time due to the great joy that communality brought. But today, this aspect is a great snare to the entire Cameroonian system, beginning from the political elite to the common person in the street.

#### **5.4.2 Patriarchy/male dominance?**

The modern Cameroonian society has not changed so much, it is, as concerns the question of those who rule it and determine its decisions not very different from the various traditional societies of old. It is still largely hierarchical and it is still clearly patriarchal. That means it is still predominantly men who rule it and determine the order of things (Zimmermann 2002:71). Almost 51% of the population are female. From 2009, there have been only 6.6% women representative members of decision-making bodies in government, 13% in parliament, 8% of them Mayors and 4.4% in state–owned companies. The country from the political hierarchy down to its grass root traditional setup is still largely patriarchal in organization. The traditional world view and religion of the people are still mostly developed along the ideas and views of men. Some of the areas of life where suffering has persisted in the local Cameroonian context as a direct result of patriarchy is at the level of marriage, domestic responsibility and sexuality.

#### **5.4.3 Marriage**

The first aspect about marriage in the whole African traditional setup and Cameroon in particular is that it is a noble institution. It is something that everyone desires to undertake for oneself or for one’s children. When it is taken carefully and held



responsibly, it is a source of joy and pride for the family. A family whose young men do not bring in women in marriage or whose young women do not get married is often considered barren or cursed and thereby given a low status. As such, young women who still live with their parents at the ages of thirty and above are the most desperate women in the society. They are shunned by their families who are their only source of security since many are also often unemployed after university. As a last resort to keep their dignity, many move into the form of marriage that is locally known in Cameroon as “come we stay”<sup>3</sup>. Almost 70% of marriages in local traditional societies today are contracted in this way. Many of the women in this form of marriage are treated with less respect both by their families, husbands and their husbands families. There is no dignity at all in such marriages. Violence in the form of beatings, battering, rape, harassment, sexual abuse and others has often characterized such marriages (Zimmermann 2002:89). But even worse the psychological violence of neglect and abandonment by the men has often led to health hazards and vulnerability on the part of women in and children of this type of marriage.

Another aspect of marriage which has led to suffering as a result of patriarchy is polygamy or precisely polygyny. Many women, if given the opportunity to decide would not give in to polygyny. But they are not often the decisionmakers. Traditionally and legally, the man is. A man decides to go in for monogamy or polygyny and the woman is bound to accept even before the marriage or she loses her marriage. Since society through patriarchy has put a stigma on the unmarried, many women for want of dignity would strongly desire the title “Mrs”<sup>4</sup> even at a dear cost. Firstly, polygamous homes are often plagued with bitter strife and envy mostly coming from the part of the two or more wives. The mutual consent of the first wife is

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<sup>3</sup>“Come we stay” is the term used to describe the relationship between a man and woman who live together in the same house with the pretext that they raise money together and pay the bride price of the woman. Later on the young man come with a few jugs of wine, food and kolanut to declare that he is the one keeping your child, especially in the case of pregnancy. Then the couple can stay for the next 15-20 years without a married certificate. The day the woman begins to ask for legal backing, she is told to pack and go back to her parent’s house empty-handed.

<sup>4</sup>In the Cameroonian society, women with the title “Miss” who have attained marriageable ages and yet are not married are considered free women or worse still prostitutes. Married men forbid their wives from going closer to them because they are believed to have no morals since they can go out with multiple men throughout their lives. Women now are desperate for marriage just to have a respectable status in society and not necessarily out of affection. Hence the title “Mrs” is becoming very important for many.



not often sought for before bringing in the second wife. As such she could have the impression that she was inadequate that is why her husband married a second wife. Hence in such homes, each wife struggles only to please her husband and tries to find favour in the eyes of the husband for herself and her children (Zimmermann 2002:75-76). Secondly, children in polygamous homes are often under- or not educated at all. The father who often takes delight in having many children for status in society leaves the education of his children to the wives who are only able to struggle to take them up to primary education and then give up. These children roam the streets and get into drugs, banditry and prostitution and teenage pregnancy. Often there is bitter rivalry among the children of polygamous homes as to who inherits what, with each mothersiding with her children while the father stands by and watches.

Patriarchy has also provoked suffering in marriage in the domain of sexuality. One thing we must note is that discussions on sexuality are still considered taboo in most local settings. Even in marriage, women are not allowed to negotiate for sex or say how they feel about it. They are supposed to be told when it is needed by the men and they must give in. Surprisingly, this is still happening all over Cameroon. Sexual contact with one's husband is not often an expression of a love relationship but an obligation towards him. The greatest aspect of sexuality where suffering is profound in marriage and which has especially been provoked by patriarchy is the issue of adultery. Adultery was one of the offences that were severely dealt with in traditional African society at large. Consequences could range from being "stoned to death, paying of compensation, head or body mutilation and others (Mbiti 1969:144). But in modern times many of those rules have been modified or even wiped out completely. Adultery remains a taboo, but this time only on the part of the woman not the man. Women could be divorced, beaten, mocked and at times even beaten to death if caught or suspected to have committed adultery. But it is not so with men. The current society tolerates men to commit adultery and "concubinage"<sup>5</sup>, but for women, it is sacrilege.

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<sup>5</sup> "Concubinage" is the extra-marital relationship undertaken by a married man and a single woman wherein the man pays her rents, or builds her a house and keeps her away from his wife with the intention to keep her permanently as a mistress but never to take her as a wife.

If a daughter-in-law reports the husband to his mother for adultery; the mother-in-law will ask if her son provides the wife with money for food and for the children's school fees. If she says yes, she will then retort, "What more do you want then?" A man can immediately divorce his wife for adultery or treat her anyway he wants and society accepts, while the woman only needs the man to say he is sorry, even if he would do it again, and everybody expects her to be calm because he has apologized. And if she remains bitter, the society becomes angry with her for not accepting "up to an apology from her husband". This is because many men would not dare to apologize for adultery. They would prefer to argue and keep on committing it. On the other hand, some women resort to passivity in order to keep their marriage. They would not bother about their husband's adultery, provided he does not bring in the other woman as a wife. They would even become angry with anyone who reveals their husband's secret relationship to them and retort, "Did I send you to go checking on my husband?"

Worse still, when a woman gives birth, her husband is allowed to go out freely in order not to ritually defile the still young child. The immediate consequences for the married state in today's Cameroon as far as adultery is concerned is the contraction of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases by many couples, both young and old. When the women are diagnosed positive during anti-natal clinics, they are shocked and traumatized. But more traumatizing is the fact that they refuse to reveal their status to their husbands, for fear that they would be blamed for having infected their husbands. When the women are asked to invite their husbands over to the hospitals for treatment, the men refuse to come and the matter goes cold. It is a real dilemma. The stigma of HIV/AIDS in Cameroon is as at now still very high and many prefer to die in silence and or attribute their sicknesses to witches and wizards, than to be diagnosed with it and be on drugs. HIV is ravaging families and children as a result of male dominance.

The last aspect in marriage, where we see patriarchy negatively at work and provoking suffering is "genital mutilation"<sup>6</sup>. The ritual was originally meant to be an

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<sup>6</sup> This is the cutting off of the outer skin of the vagina (clitoris) in order to prevent women from getting sexual pleasure that comes with orgasm and as such keep them only as sex objects for their husbands alone and also

initiation to adulthood” of young girls it is described as negative, extremely painful and dehumanizing by Zimmermann (2000:80). But this may slightly be an under-description of the pain. My mother can never bring herself to express what she went through, she simply shrugs and exclaims ‘God, I went through it’ in our local parlance. There are so many things she is proud of about her parents’ generation, but as concerning this, she simply says when asked “They were in their own time”. She tells me, many young girls who were not strong enough bled to death and were only considered to be weak by their community. It is still an on-going practice today. Many young girls’ lives are in danger not because they are weak but because it is done in secret in most of the areas where it is currently practiced. Before some of the girls are rescued, they are beyond recovery. Those who carry out the act most often are untrained and use harsh instruments such as razor blades, scissors and no anaesthesia. Evelyn Mafeni(2013:1) describes the act as “the brutal cutting of girls ... which holds the primitive belief that it controls female sexuality, birth-rate and above all conserves the monogamous status of women”. Her studies reveal that recently, cutting of girls is done as early as two weeks of age. This new phase of cutting young babies is intended to bypass up-coming resistance to cutting enlightened girls and women which only indicates that the practice is increasing in this region and the country at large. Ironically also the women of this region have turned out to be the most notorious men hunters for many decades now. Can one then say they are trying to get some satisfaction which they can never get and so they keep looking for men to give? This then defeats the original purpose of this gruesome act of genital mutilation which was to reduce sexual promiscuity among women. Yet, the raw, pain, severe bleeding, grave damage to the female genitals, infections, life-long depression and even death of some victims is an act that portrays great inequality to the rights and dignity of women and girls. This act is especially intense in Far North Region, notably Logone and Chari, Manyu Division in the South West Region and in the Centre Region, Ekounou and Briqueterie.

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as reproductive tools. My mother is the closest victim I know. And she says if you did not give in at the time you were considered wayward and a prostitute and so stigmatized. This is still done among the Manyu in the South West Region and in the North of Cameroon.

It is important to note that in as much as this act is done to please the men by keeping their women only for them, in most cases; women themselves have been active perpetrators of their own suffering by sanctioning and even performing some of these acts. Many women become collaborators and accomplices in the oppression of their sisters. Zimmermann supports this when he states that “Many traditional practices which were highly discriminatory and oppressive to women, like certain forms of marriage, widowhood rites or female genital mutilation were perpetuated by other women. Women maltreated other women, inflicting intolerable suffering and pain on them for the benefit of men. Women become the enemies of women” (Zimmermann 2002:82).

One glaring aspect of tradition that puts women openly against other women is the custom of widowhood. Here too, patriarchy is the immediate cause, since the same treatment is not given to widowers. A widow is woman whose husband has died and who has remained unmarried. In other words, a widow is a married woman who has been deprived of her legal husband as a result of death (Idialu 2012:6). The situation of poverty in Cameroon, unemployment, hard labour, meagre income and high prevalence of disease is cutting lives short for many Cameroonians. Mortality rate is high. Most men die at early ages, between 40 years and 50, and leave their young or middle age women as widows. This phenomenon is common throughout Africa, as well as the traumatic experience and treatment given to widows. Most of these treatments are geared towards dehumanizing their victims which is always a painful psychological experience that can affect the individual throughout her life time (Idialu 2012:6). As a result of patriarchy in the Cameroonian context, the same treatment is not given to widowers. The torment meted on widows is far greater than widowers who are through with their light traditional rites week or two or even days after the wife’s burial. Then they have the right to live free again and even marry. Yvonne Chi (2010:1) describes the situation of widows in some villages such as Awing, Baba Two, Alatening and others immediately and after their husbands’ death. Most are accused of being their husband’s killers through charm or slow poisoning even if the cause of the sickness is natural as proven medically. They may not have a bath for a week, are made to sleep on a bare floor or on a very thin mattress for as long as the funeral rites last. They eat off plantain leaves, are rubbed with unpleasant

substances, and cannot shake hands with anyone or share any items. They may be expected to have sex with or marry an in-law in order to preserve their husband's property. And in cases of great suspicion they could be made to drink the water that was used to wash the husband's corpse. In the South West Region, it is common to see widows with one black gown on, for as long as two years, even at the church services. You can hardly convince them to go against the rule. The most heinous treatment is often given to those that did not make frequent visits to their husband's villages before they died or who are not of the same ethnicity or region as the husband. Such are accused of eating the husband's money and bringing to the family only his corpse. In such cases, the family would demand heavy financial benefits from the widow.

In spite of much sensitization from both the churches and the government, this unfortunate practice has persisted in most communities and such ill treatment and gross psychological torture has persisted at a time when these women needed to be most comforted by those around them – their own sisters. One possible reason why women are the ones who inflict such pain on fellow women is that “older women who suffered under these inhuman treatments wanted the younger ones to suffer likewise (Zimmermann 2002:82). But one can also argue that this situation on the part of the women is more an unconscious one than a deliberate act. They have been led by the traditional norms mostly structured by men to make themselves comfortable under these oppressive situations rather than acting against it (Zimmermann 2002:82). Men make rules and attribute ancestral, traditional or religious meaning behind the rules to legitimize them. Then they are handed down to the women who do not need to question or challenge or else they are challenging ‘the ancestors, the gods or the Supreme Being’ who made these rules. It is like Mercy Amba Oduyoye (in Zimmermann 2002:83) states “Men make gods and women worship them” or “African men put on masks to play God, and loving their own individual lives ... they survive on women's selflessness”. Hence, while we may continue to pinpoint the patriarchal set of most African contexts, we strongly believe that a lot of teaching still has to be done in the Cameroonian context to sensitize the local Cameroonian families. While it seems as though it is working the progress even in urban areas is slow. Even worse is the situation in the rural areas, the towns and villages where this

research has mostly concentrated. The situation has not changed much as it is still pathetic for many families who make up the society and the local churches and congregations.

The most dangerous feature that has maintained acute suffering in the local Cameroonian context is what I may term “Cameroonian passivity”<sup>7</sup>. Suffering is taken with no resistance at all, especially because it is communal. ‘I am suffering, my friend, sister; neighbour is in same condition as I am, why should I be the one to resist, it’s just normal to suffer, so we all move on’. People who begin to resist the status quo are looked upon with great suspicion. Children turned men and women may live under the same roof with their parents and give birth to their own children and never move out to seek their own abots. Most girls (single mothers) do not tell their parents who made them pregnant nor do they even know them. They just keep giving birth and filling the homes with grandchildren whom the parents painfully accept without resistance. The men on the other hand bring in their girlfriends who give birth and then abandon the children to grandparents to take care of. HIV/AIDS orphans abound because of this loose lifestyle and they are often left with grandparents who themselves are ravaged by great poverty and lack. Sexual promiscuity is high in local Cameroonian towns and villages among youths and adults, everybody does and cherishes it – it is normal even though there are repercussions. Moreover, asked why women tolerate all the things they go through as wives, mothers, widows and oppressors of other women they will readily answer in the local parlance ‘this is how we met it’, meaning that the customs and traditions must be maintained without questioning. The call to preserve one’s own culture is attractive to women because it includes the well-being of the community with which they still are so much concerned. Women in the end always serve the interests of their fathers, brothers or husbands or the community, never their own (Zimmermann 2002:81).

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<sup>7</sup> Cameroonian passivity is the idea that nothing really matters much. People live for the “now” and do not bother much about how the future really must be-it will take care of itself. Provided everyone is found in the same situation, or facing same difficulty, then live is taken as normal.

#### **5.4.4      Cameroonian passivity**

Another situation of passivity where suffering has most been felt than anywhere else is in funeral rite celebration. Death as a result of family attachment remains one of the greatest tragedies faced by Cameroonians, and all Africans. People would do everything to prevent the death of a loved one for several reasons. First as we have stated already, the emotional attachment to family members. The loss of a loved one especially unexpectedly is received with profound grief. Some cases have left relatives affected for life. But the second reason is even more concerned with suffering. Death brings with it great financial expenditure which many families cannot afford but must make or they considered a snare to or source of ridicule in the society. When one's relative dies, people converge from all directions, beginning from the local quarters in the villages to the towns nearby and even the cities. They wail with you and the very next thing is the expectation or you to provide them with food and drinks for as long as the celebrations last. And often, this could take a week or two. People enter into huge debts to carry out these celebrations, even above their yearly income which becomes a snare to pay back. Worse still, economic activities are grounded for the locality for as long as they last, promoting poverty. At times, people weep bitterly for their departed loved ones not because of the emotional separation but because they have no means to fund the celebration. People have testified to having several misfortunes because they did not give enough food and drinks to villagers after the death of their loved one. Some have been abandoned and left alone with the corpse until certain expenses were made. No one wants to experience such misfortune and so people succumb to the pressure to spend beyond their means. There are many situations of suffering that people accept only as a result of this kind of general passivity among Cameroonians. No one wants to change what everyone accepts as normal or what can be tolerated by others. The utopian spirit of local Cameroonians is strong and also contagious and the government too has seen nothing wrong with this.



## **5.5 Economic context**

Looking at Cameroon as a nation today since independence, one can appreciate the country's progress in all aspects of its economy, especially for a country that depends entirely only on two sectors for its survival; that is on oil and agriculture. Much has been done in the opening of industries, development of road infrastructures, agricultural techniques, subsidies to farmers, increase in companies and others. Yet even with all these development, we can say like Ejedepang-Koge (1985:25) that Cameroon has only been "fortunate to have had stability, peace and continuity" since her reunification in 1961. This is because the situation of many local Cameroonians is still one of living below standards.

### **5.5.1 Colonial economic legacy (1916 – 1961)**

Cameroon's economy today is greatly influenced by two main sectors for economic growth; the oil and agricultural sectors. From its inception as a state under colonial rule, especial under her first colonial master Germany, Cameroon depended solely on agriculture, especially plantation agriculture for its sustenance. Cash crops such as cocoa, coffee, rubber, palm and others were and are still the legacies of the German colonial period in Cameroon by the German commercial firms (Ngho 1996:82-83). From 1961 – 1982, agriculture remained the country's backbone economic activity but this time supported by the state through programmes like the Green Revolution, an economic development strategy to boost agricultural productivity – an effective model for higher agricultural yields through intensive use of capital, chemicals, fertilizers, improved seeds and other technological advances as well as the creation of SOCAPALM (Delancey and Mokeba 1990:104-105). Agricultural shows were organized, but the CDC remained still the greatest employer.

### **5.5.2 The economy as a source of pain 1916 till date**

To provide a labour force for the plantations that were opened by the Germans, they resorted to recruiting workers from the local villages all over Cameroon and mostly from the grass field. Fons and chiefs provided workers and received yearly gifts of money. But at times the colonial masters used brute force to recruit workers and



some chiefs who were intransigent to the demands of the colonizers were punished. At times also at the command of Von Puttkamer, the most brutal German administrator whole villages could be reduced to ashes if they did not comply (Ngoh 1996:85) But the area where the native Cameroonians felt the most humiliating pain was in the forced labour the Germans used in plantations. Some plantation owners were barely inhuman in their treatment of the workers. Plagued with disease, loneliness, (as many were taken to strange areas from their villages), low pay, shortage of food, poor shelter, overwork, disease, little or no medical care, there was high rate of mortality. For this reason as Ngoh (1985:85) reports, every plantation was to have its own cemetery. This state of affairs in the plantations has continued till date. Though labour is no longer by force, the C.D.C plantations in Cameroon are the country's main employers. But this time Cameroonians of all ages flock to these plantations with their terrible working conditions not for the love of working there but out of utmost frustration from the hard economic realities. Unemployment remains a major problem and its repercussions range from high crime waves and violence, prevalence of diseases, high mortality rate and brain draining. For several years after independence and during Ahidjo's regime, Cameroon enjoyed economic boom as her agricultural and petroleum products flourished in the world market. But between the years 1985 – 1986, the country experienced serious economic crises. First, its economy went into serious recession and it was just after the drawn up budget. There was brutal drop in revenue from exportation. This then affected petroleum and other primary products. It was a drop of about 329 billion CFA about two per cent of the country's Gross Domestic Product. The entire economy then went on a downward trend. In trying to adjust internally, the government took certain measures; salaries of civil servants were slashed terribly between 1992 and 1993 and other costs of production, standards of living were reduced and the state started to influence and affect the people's life negatively. Debts both internal and external were mounting, and strained relationship abroad. This economic crisis lasted about 10 years and plunged the whole country into economic pain – a situation which is still very present in the country today.

### 5.5.3 Women and the economy

One of the main arms of Cameroonian society that one cannot neglect as far as the Cameroonian economic context is concerned is the women. They play a vital role in the whole development of the nation. As Stella Nana-Fabu (2006:148) states, the Cameroon woman for long has been the economic backbone of the nation and yet she remains largely marginalized in society generally and in the economic sector in particular. The only time women actually enjoyed real economic status that gave them some social and political power was during the pre-colonial period when women were in full control of subsistence agriculture and also managed the household economy. But when the colonial masters came, they changed the largely subsistence economy in Cameroon to a moneyed and capitalist one wherein cash crops were mostly introduced to replace most of subsistence agricultural methods. The European plantation owners then needed only men as work force while women became mostly food providers for this solely male labour force. Since most of the native lands were expropriated for plantation agriculture women lost control of their subsistence life and many had to depend on men for their livelihood. Also because of the low income of many families, boys were mostly given the privilege to go to school and girls were domestically prepared for marriage. If trained at all, they were trained to become better wives and mothers or betters still relegated to jobs like secretaries, primary school teachers, nurses, midwives and others. Today, a vast majority of Cameroonian women are still living under the bottom line of poverty. Class division is still rife both in state and church and is causing devastation on Cameroonian women. The capitalist system is making things worse by rendering a few rich richer and the majority poor poorer. This system is dominated by foreign capital with a small indigenous capitalist class which favours men more. Today, 51% of the population in Cameroon live below poverty line and poverty has an increasingly feminine face, affecting women in particular (UNICEF). This leads many women and young girls into prostitution and exploitation. The situation has been made worse by reduction of women at the decision making positions in the country. Even when they are given ministerial positions, it is often weak ministries that hold no power role. If women were empowered more economically, the economic situation or trend of the country would soar because woman is power at all levels.

#### 5.5.4 Youths and the economic situation

The situation of Cameroonian youths today in the economy is even more pathetic. Thousands happily graduate from universities and professional institutions yearly only to immediately fall into the great nightmare of the Cameroonian youth today – Unemployment. Awah Ndah (2013) describes the situation as ‘Cancerous’ with the primary cause being the corrupt, unfavourable and discriminatory policies of gerontocracy systems with unfettered control over most government branches. The Cameroonian political system leaves the youth completely out of all decision making and any other influence. They are only told what to do and they have nothing to say. Unemployment then makes many to become wayward and corrupt with anti-social consequences ranging from robbery, drugs, prostitution, scamming and “bush falling”, sex slavery, occultism, rape, abduction murder and drug trafficking. It is common to hear the youths in Cameroon always being described by politicians and the ‘old fathers and mothers’ who refuse to retire and give way to youths as “inadequate and not having no professional working experience” (Awah 2013). The current educational system of the country is a major setback to economic development; it is not relevant any longer in today’s competitive global economy where science and technological studies is greatly encouraged. The educational system is not job oriented. If one were to give an honest description of the educational situation of the Cameroonian youth today we can appropriately say lack of concrete education to meet modern challenges, and this because of poverty in family setups, high maternal mortality (many young women drop out of school as a result of early pregnancy gotten while struggling to get daily bread from rich men and many die while giving birth), high prevalence HIV/AIDS and unemployment.

According to Awah Ndah (2013) this is because many young people often lack access to adequate information, schooling, basic social amenities and basic rights and these are often over looked in national development agendas. Therefore, the inclusion of young people in initiatives geared toward any national or international development is crucial to ensure a successful and sustainable outcome for all. Recently the crime wave among the youths is getting to strange magnitudes. Young men get to the level of killing and eating their fathers and younger children for rituals

in other to get quick money to survive. The only explanation they have for their actions is that they were led by the devil. And everyone seems to believe them as this is the new trend of the country wherein no one is taking the blame for anything.

## **5.6 Other sources of suffering**

While much suffering came to us as a result of our historical development along the centuries and decades, we may also dare to say that much of our suffering has been of our own making. Hence, while we blame the tradition of patriarchy that has shaped the Cameroonian world view and determined political, economic and social life of the whole nation for many years, we must also take note of the indigenous faiths, that is the customs, traditions and beliefs of the people as a great source of suffering. We will sum up these customs and traditions or beliefs of the people into three headings; ancestral veneration, superstition and spirits(demons).

### **5.6.1 Ancestral veneration**

People of all cultures worldwide have the belief that the dead are not lost forever, they have not disappeared from the realm of the living but they still live on and are able to exert influence the lives of the living. These living dead then are what Africans and Cameroonians believe to be the ancestors. People believe that these ancestors are able to bless or curse them; as such they are due a lot of respect and fear. It is important to note that among some ethnic groups in Cameroon the ancestors are first of all moral beings, good and benevolent towards their living. This is so especially among the Bakossi of the South West Region (Balz 1995:139). They are good at times even to the extent of being weak in punishing. But at times, these good ancestors can seek power and help from their more dreaded helper “Mwankum”<sup>8</sup> to help them make the living obey their laws (Balz1995:139). Then they are to be feared but not really hated. On the other hand there are some that are just being feared even though they may not be bad. This because generally death is dreaded by Cameroonians as a whole, it is “such a danger and an enemy to the community of the living”. But those whose activities were most dreaded, the doubtful

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<sup>8</sup> “Mwankum” is a mystically dreaded ‘juju’ (masquerade) who is constantly sought for in case there is any evil, injustice or disease in the land to either cleanse the land or punish culprits.

dead, those who were bad while living, that is the wizards and witches. They are a threat of pollution and bad luck for their living relatives and they must be stopped by all physical and spiritual means the living have, from continuing their destructive work as harmful spirits (Balz 1995:139).

In the grass field region of the country, the ancestors are seen here as more powerful and so they are feared more than in the Bakossi land. But generally the ancestral realm is one that all Cameroonians acknowledge and deal with on a daily basis because events that occur in the life of the living community will be linked to this realm especially if they are bad. If they provoke suffering, illness and misfortune the living community must check if the good ancestors have a query with the living- possibly certain commands for the good consulted or revered because though departed they were still considered part of the family and surviving relatives had to keep touch with them through libation, giving of food and drinks (Mbiti 1969:9) as well blood of fowls or sheep (Fochang 2006:38). And then performing of sacrifices is what has actually exposes suffering among Cameroonians as far as ancestors are concerned today. People who are first of all battered by a hard life and poverty have to do all in their power to satisfy the demands of the ancestor cult. Huge sums of money are spend on transport to and from ancestral cites, some on oracles in case there are important decisions to be taken and the ancestors need to be consulted and heavy rites are performed, offerings made or gifts presented in the case where favour is needed from them. There is great psychological disturbance in cases where such rites or rituals have not been performed. In such a situation every trouble in the family or clan is only attributed to the fact that the ancestors are not happy and are inflicting punishment. It is important that both Christians and non-Christians alike give the same allegiance to ancestors and are affected by their seeming activities in same manner.

Among the Bamileke and Grasslanders the veneration of the ancestors is very strong. They are deeply tied to the removal of the skulls of the dead ones and this is a dominant religion even more than Christianity or Islamism. Sacrifices are made to these skulls by the lineage head and when they are not removed from the graves after a year or more in death, all evil occurrences in the family or clan are only

attributed to curses from the unmoved skull. Consequences of curses include bad hunt, poor harvest, sickness, barrenness, loss of privileges for high ranking personalities, hard labour pains for women and eventual death. If a proper funeral is not organized for these dead loved once and the rites and rituals carried out properly, these curses according to the Bamileke are unavoidable (Kuiessie 2013:21).

The Banyang of the South West Region continue to adhere to the strong “Benem”<sup>9</sup> or “Barem” belief as Malcolm Ruel (1969:203) calls it in his study of the traditional associations of the Banyang area. It is the local phenomenon in which the dead are believed to rise after burial and either avenge their death if they were killed, or move out to other places and continue economically and eradicate their family’s poverty situation. It is in this light that the dead are venerated among the Banyang. If they succeed to avenge their death by killing the one who murdered them, they are hailed and feared and loved. When the family begins to prosper financially after the death of a loved one, they attribute the success to their dead one. After the death of a loved one whom they believe will rise again. The corpse is prepared and buried with medicine as well as some personal items of the deceased such as clothes, shoes, money and identity papers. Food is also prepared and kept on his/her grave (Benoni-Wang 2007:13). Many Banyang who still hold firmly to these rites have gone through severe hardship to perform rituals for the deceased to rise and avenge their death or travel to neighbouring countries to seek for riches. More so, families who have Benem as an inherited trait from generational links and who may not like their dead to rise for any purpose whatsoever would have to carry on expensive rituals to keep the one’s spirit suppressed in the grave. Every case of death then in such a family is a call for expenditure. This belief is not an outmoded one among the Banyang. In spite of the spread of Christianity and its condemnation of Benem, the act or belief in it has persisted in many places just as the act of genital mutilation. Today as a native hailing from the Banyang clan, many young men and women suffer self- stigma and are also stigmatized by others as ghost people and some people forbid their children to get married from this clan (Benoni-Wang 2007:iv-v).

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<sup>9</sup> “Benem” is the word used in the local Banyang dialect to describe the phenomenon in which people die and they are believed to come back to life through local mystical manipulations.

### 5.6.2 Superstition and demons

One of the forces which promotes suffering among many Cameroonians is the high level of superstition that has permeated the whole country. There is excessive belief in and reverence for supernatural beings that exist and affect people's life even if they may not have had any personal experiences with them. These beliefs are widely held, but most often they may be unjustified. Superstitions have the potential to affect everything from government, politics, business, public life, family life, travel and even social conduct and interaction.<sup>10</sup> Belief in things like ghosts, spirits, monsters, urban myths, old wives tales, occult practices and charms are capable of influencing people's behaviour and shaping even the way they live. People fear demons, witches, black magic, dreams and the devil beyond anything. Dreams are the most dreaded sources of superstition among Cameroonians. A dream in the night has the potential to spoil people's day leaving them gloomy and miserable and mentally disturbed. Some of the dreams commonly held as deadly by Cameroonians of all contexts are dreams of having sex and eating food especially red meat. This signifies that an evil demon has placed evil water inside the sexual organs to cause deadly incurable diseases such as cancer. People are so threatened by these dreams they can immediately get sick when they have them. On the other hand, when someone dreams of eating food especially meat it is believed that one has been fed in the dream with human flesh. Thus initiation into witchcraft has occurred and demons are directly blamed for it. With such a dream, whoever visit the dreamer first in the morning, be it a family member or friend will be suspected for causing the nightmare. Hence people live in constant fear and suspicion all the time.

Cameroonian roads are deadly and many factors can explain this, the roads connect cities with huge populations and are often narrow and only two lane. Many vehicles do not pass a road safety test but rather pay bribes; drivers do not take school lessons, drivers drink before driving and in excess speed with wrong over taking. But when ghastly accidents occur, the widely held notion is that witches and wizards are thirsty for blood sacrifices and have mystically caused the accident by putting charms on the road. No one sees the role of inexperienced drivers, corrupt law

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<sup>10</sup>[http://www.bestcountryreports.com/Soc\\_Cameroon\\_Superstition.php](http://www.bestcountryreports.com/Soc_Cameroon_Superstition.php) (Date accessed 05-04- 2014).



officers, excess speed and drunk driving and as well as poorly maintained roads as the cause.

Government officials, politicians and those in authority in all sphere of life are often the most hated and suspected for causing these accidents especially when elections are approaching. They are accused of winning only through occultist manipulations, black magic, murder and nocturnal sacrifices to shrines as well as bribery, propaganda, blackmail and death threats. An authority that holds power for 30 years and more is dreaded for his mysterious involvement with occult powers and not respected for his political strategies that maintain him to office. This keeps the citizens constantly in fear and subject to the “mysterious demons” in power that no one can resist but must pay allegiance to. There is so much darkness, so much fear, ignorance and superstition. People are constantly afraid of spiritual attacks and may not trust even their close friends and relatives. Superstition has pervaded the whole society, even people you would think rational such as doctors, lawyers, professors, judges – seem to switch the rational part of their brains when it comes to superstition.<sup>11</sup>

The strong belief in superstition has unleashed a host of spirits or demons as now commonly called by most Cameroonians. The realm of the spirits has always been a conscious part of African reality. According to Mbiti, the spiritual world of African people has always been very densely populated with spiritual beings, spirits and the living dead. The spiritual universe is a unit within the physical, and these two intermingle and dovetail into each other so much that it is not easy, or even necessary, at times to draw the distinction or separate them (Mbiti 1969:74). Attitude towards spirits has often been common in most African communities, Cameroon included; “they are unpredictable, frequently dangerous...cannot be seen, and yet they can strike anywhere and at any time, they are feared” (Gehman 1989:139). This feeling of fear and dread of the spirit has of recent tremendously increased in local Cameroonian contexts. This as a result of the continued increase of smaller Christian denominations in the country. They have also changed the name spirits to

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<sup>11</sup>[http://www.Christ4Cameroon.blogspot.com/2012/11/superstition\\_and\\_Cameroon.html](http://www.Christ4Cameroon.blogspot.com/2012/11/superstition_and_Cameroon.html) (Date accessed 05-04-2014).



the biblical reference “demons”, thereby Christianizing the whole concept of the spiritual realm, even though their activities remain the same...“they appear to attack, molest, destroy and harm the living peoples... Any tragedy like illness, insanity or epilepsy may be blamed on them” (Gehman 1989:139). The activities of demons and their removal or casting them out of people and things has increased to the level where people see demons in almost everything and everywhere. All problems are blamed directly on them. No one takes responsibility for any negative action committed. State officials embezzle huge sums of state funds, youths kill, men rape children and they were all led by the devil or his demons. The same goes for every other offence.

Tele-evangelism has especially increased this phenomenon. One Christian worships in many different denominations and mixes up different teachings and doctrines to the level of utter confusion. And yet their situations are always getting worse. One of the greatest examples of televangelist ministries that have set many Cameroonians on edge is TB Joshua’s channel. Many Cameroonians believe that all the miracles they see daily on this TV are true. And so hundreds of Cameroonians both Christians and non-Christians with all kinds of pain and in spite the abject poverty situations make trips to Lagos in neighbouring Nigeria to his church to get healing and miracles. Many have the impression that there are already “packaged” miracles which they only need to go to get. Many enter into huge debts; make dangerous journeys through land and sea with some dying along the way. TB Joshua has become an idol to some, and “ngambi” to others who do not believe in Christ but know that he has the power to heal them. As for the other smaller Pentecostal denominations, they have used televangelism to proclaim a prosperity gospel that is attractive to many Cameroonians who live in abject poverty like Oral Roberts. Many flock into these churches to put their poverty situations at the feet of their father God who is a “rich Father and cannot afford to see His children suffer”, as preachers hammer all day. Then they are asked to pay tithes and sow seeds which God will bless and multiply. Many have come out from these places more confused, helpless and poorer. Nevertheless some would insist that “they are better off in them because now they can pray, they are no longer afraid, they bold, they are well in body, violent

in Godly things, hot in spirit more than they were in the mainline churches” (Tankwa 2012:20-21).

## **5.7 Suffering in Cameroon’s natural environment**

Twenty nine years ago, Cameroon could be hailed as a microcosm of Africa itself (Ejedepang-Koge 1985:3). Today the picture is piteously different as presented by Ben West (2011:17-37), hunting, overgrazing, deforestation, population pressure, poaching are only a few of its diseases with consequences ranging from droughts to floods, desertification and huge loss of lives and properties. The question one may ask is how did the country degenerate into such a low level of degradation only within the space of three decades? The answer lies in the general conception that Cameroonians have about the natural environment, and the general economic situation of the country that has sent many back to the natural environment for their daily sustenance.

### **5.7.1 Cameroonians and the rest of creation**

Cameroonians like all Africans have always been nature bound and that’s why as Dah (in Talikong 2012:37-38) states, they stand in awe before rocks and mountains, huge trees and forests, deep pools and lakes and luminaries aware of their cosmic powers and even seek their protection of life against death. This has been so from ancestral times and today only traces still remain among some ethnic groups such as the pygmies. Their religious beliefs contributed a lot towards the preservation of our environment “The forest was holy, and treated as the habitat of the gods. As such there was no felling down of trees in the area without a ritual. All animals... were protected from hunters with the exception of carnivorous animals. Waterfalls and lakes received the same religious protection” (Dah 2012:37).

But the situation today has changed drastically and quickly too with natural the environment standing more as a thing to be exploited and used for man’s well-being and sustenance and no longer as a force to be revered and protected. What has caused this change of attitude? Directly or indirectly, we are of the opinion that religion and especially the monotheistic religions that were introduced to

Cameroonians by the missionaries are accountable for this fast drift from the ancestral reverence for the land to one of superiority over nature. It is important to note that the missionaries saw the customs and traditions of all Africans as pagan and spent most of the early periods in condemning and destroying these without taking any time to study and understand what the people were doing with trees, rivers, stones, and soil. John Mbiti(1969:6-10) is one of those African Christians who laments this missionary trends when they could only describe traditional religious professions as animism (belief in many spirits) and polytheism (worship of many gods) or magic, ancestor worship, totemism, fetishism and naturism. The immediate consequence for them especially Christianity which has always been the dominant faith, was to wipe off the ancestral religions and implant faith in an Almighty creator God of the whole universe. With the wiping out of these traditional customs and rituals, reverence for the natural environment too was wiped out. Shrines herbs, birds, trees, rivers, lakes and even some wildlife like lions that were given much divine reverence and awe only came to be treated “more like stage props” (Migliore 1999:80), brutally cut down, killed and used for food.

This was not limited only to the African soil but all over the world where Christianity went. Its theological orientations were often anthropocentric and this is seen especially in its interpretation of the creation narratives in Genesis and its central doctrine of “Imago Dei”, that holds that human beings are created in the image of God and are to exercise dominion over the rest of creation. Christian theology mostly interpreted dominion in terms of subjugation, a position which became worsened with the advent of science and technology (See Moltmann 1997). Our environment as Chewachong (2003:6) states, with which the ecosystem deals, is closely associated with the biological and physical situations around us. It consists of human beings, plants animals and other species, all of which are interrelated within the system. The African ancestors understood this well when they made nature part of their religious world to the point of reverence. Therefore, we may argue that had not the monotheistic religions especially Christianity imposed themselves so strongly on Africans as to condemn and suppressed their reverence for nature, the ecological situation of the whole continent would have been much more different today.

Moreover, colonialism played a great role in contributing to the destruction of the natural environment through the introduction of a cash crop economy. They themselves acquired and at times expropriated large portions of lands from the natives and planted cash crops. In so doing they had to destroy a lot of natural landscape.

Nevertheless, their blame can never supersede that of local Cameroonians themselves who have championed the cause of exploiting their own environment to its demise. 'We are the cause of our own pain', we may dare to say. Many Cameroonians today, almost 70% of the population live through agriculture. While some engage in subsistence agriculture, many Cameroonians are shifting more and more towards cash crop agriculture. In so doing, they are destroying huge sections of the forests reserves, felling big trees that according to them mean nothing, to plant smaller ones that would produce money for sustenance. Hence birds, animals and insects lose their habitats and either migrate or become prey for hunters. Local springs and rivers that used to get their sources from the forests now dry up rendering communities without water.

Another serious problem with Cameroonians as far as the rest of creation is concerned is the problem of indifference. For long Cameroonians have always thought (an attitude still prevalent today) that they can treat the rest of nature as they wish and that has no particular repercussion either long term or short term. Until recently, the problem of "ecological crisis was not a serious problem for us in the poorer countries. It was assumed that our problems were confined to poverty and economic exploitation, and environmental issues were rejected as 'luxury' of the industrialized countries" (Talikong 2012:45). As such in struggling against poverty and well-being and being relatively indifferent to the natural environment, they have instead exploited nature further. What has provoked consciousness about the natural environment for many Cameroonians is only the fact that nature has responded to its brutal human exploitation and destruction by retaliation. Today Cameroonians are experiencing as Migliore (1999:83) puts it, "tragic human suffering at the hands of destructive forces of nature... cancers, earthquakes, hurricanes, droughts", floods, storms and rapid desertification. These are natural phenomena that were only

watched on foreign televisions. Nature has become its own advocate and the indifference is beginning to give way by natural compulsion.

### **5.7.2 How creation suffers**

West (2011:17-37) still gives Cameroon credit for her outstanding geographical and climatic features. And because of this, Cameroon still has some of African's richest and most varied fauna and flora with more than one thousand species of trees alone. Some of the best wildlife reserves in African with birds and mammals of all kinds as well as deserts, swamps, woodlands, rain forests savannah and forests are found in Cameroon. Game parks with spectacular wildlife add to this beauty of nature. But he decries the high rate of hunting, overgrazing, massive deforestation and population pressure that has become a snare to Cameroon's natural environment. He states that Cameroon has a sad picture of her natural world just as the rest of Africa as flora and fauna are close to extinction because they are rapidly depleting and disappearing. Deforestation is carried out both legally and illegally with the destruction of the rainforest in Cameroon leading to droughts in the interior of Africa (West 2011:25) as well as the catastrophic global effects of increase global warming. For West, deforestation is the greatest threat to Cameroon's biodiversity. Timber exploitation tripled in early 1990 as a result of the devaluation of the local currency and a fall in agricultural prices as the backbone of the country's economy.

The result was the cutting down of trees as old as 800 years old in order to boost parquet-flooring and furniture – making markets in Europe and Japan (West 2011:25). These painful predicaments continue even today in Manyu Division in the South West Region (Vliet 2010) experiencing one of the most brutal exploitation processes in the country. It is important to note that attempts at conservation are failing because the government of Cameroon is actively involved in this whole process of deforestation to the maximum. West reports another threat – poaching which has enhanced the sales of smoked meat (bush meat as locally called). For many impoverished villagers, this is their source of income as well as main source of protein while for the rich city dwellers, this meat is a delicacy and they are willing to spend huge sums for it. Hunters make huge sums of money yearly from this trade which in principle is illegal. The trade has flourished because of the high level of

corruption in the country since corrupt law officers and even state officials share the proceeds that come from this black market.

Motuba Celestine(2010:14-16) paints a picture of one locality in the South West Region Cameroon, Bole-Bakundu where human activities on forest land and water is creating great devastating on the natural environment. Here all negative activities are carried out; ancient trees are cut down to make way for cash crops, animals and birds lose their habitats and become pray for hunters. The soil is left bare and invaded by erosion as harsh techniques such as slash and burn are constant. Toxic local pesticides, insecticides and fertilizers, plastic bags are disposed everywhere leading to soil pollution. Concerning water, poisonous chemicals such as calisufan are constantly poured into the river to poison and catch fish easily which kills and hampers growth of other marine organisms. There is the fear that with this attitude of indifference for many Cameroonians both in urban and rural areas, nature may gradually meet its demise. And one wonders what may replace it. Such a thing can never be pleasant as the voice of chirping birds, the joy of fresh flowing streams, beautiful tree breezes and dark forests full of different animal species.

# CHAPTER SIX

## 6. CONCLUSION

### 6.1 Introduction

In our discussion of the Cameroonian context, various aspects of suffering surfaced to varied degrees and magnitudes. These are as a result of flawed morality to the level where "... popular disillusionment is at an all-time high .... Cameroon is a high flyer in global corruption ratings .... Embezzlement and fraud in all its forms has become a way of life in the public sector ... a few senior officials flaunt ill – gotten billions with impunity ... cultism has become the religion of much of the government, beginning with the president ... The picture is of a sick nation desperate for healing" (Epiengome 2007:14). We also noted that the desperation for healing has led many to seek refuge or solutions from diverse sources; diviners, occult, churches and prophets. And in so doing many have ended up worse than before. It is in such a context that we intend to speak to, using Moltmann's theology of the cross as a lamp that may shed light to the prevailing circumstances.

### 6.2 Humans (Cameroonians) need liberation

Moltmann's primary focus in his theology of the cross was to address human suffering and the fact that God is affected by such suffering as well. God is not a type of transcendental being who is unaffected by human pain especially pain that is perpetrated on the innocent. In the Cameroonian context, we can always identify suffering inflicted by evil perpetrators and the helpless victims of this suffering. The general idea of every Cameroonian is that evil perpetrators or oppressors should never go unpunished. And that's why actions like imprisonment of culprits public humiliation and even mob justice (lynching evil perpetrators before the intervention of public security agents) are becoming rampant both in public and private arenas. These acts have not curb evil or reduce suffering. Instead in the case of mob justice, some innocent people have actually lost their lives, leading to more pain and frustration on those actually carrying out such form of justice.

With this in mind, we would delve into Moltmann's view of evil perpetrators and their victims and apply his view to the Cameroonian context. First of all, Moltmann treats both of them as sufferers though for different reasons. While the perpetrator of suffering suffers from the guilt of his/her actions, the victim suffers from the memories of the pain inflicted by the perpetrator. Given his acute sense of the difference between the suffering of the victims and the very different forms of suffering experienced by the oppressors, Moltmann has consistently refrained from universalizing the discourse of sin. For him the Christian message of redemption can only be made cheap where a generalized message of God's forgiveness is proclaimed without distinction between oppressors and their victims (Conradie 2008:80). Such will be a very hard nut to crack for suffering Cameroonians who are always of the opinion that perpetrators of evil and suffering should never be pardoned but must face the consequences of their own actions. Yet such a move has not relieved the country of them but has instead seen an increase in evil perpetrators and suffering in all spheres of society. In his article on 'Christian Universalism', 2009 Moltmann sees the victims and perpetrators of evil all coming under one banner, God's love. They will both be redeemed and this only through the crucified Christ, who comes to the perpetrators and their victims together. Here one may argue that, it seems Moltmann is being unjust to the victims of suffering by taking sides with the perpetrators and at times even pitying them. Yet for Moltmann, the practice and endurance of evil are not always apportioned to different groups of persons. Victims can also be perpetrators. In many persons, the perpetrator side and the victim side of evil are inseparably connected. And this is painfully true for those women in the Cameroonian context who have been brainwashed by patriarchal practices to the point where they are the ones who are now operating patriarchal oppressive structures such as widowhood and female genital mutilation. Having been victims themselves, they have now become perpetrators of these very acts that they are themselves victims. Hence for Moltmann, God's mercy will locate both victims and perpetrators as they will both stand before Him. Both of them are tormented by memories, but the perpetrators depend most on the memories of their victims, they must hear their reports and learn to see themselves with the eyes of their victims even if this is frightening and destructive. But for Moltmann, God's



mercy is shown upon all victims and perpetrators, believers and unbelievers alike. Hence, the God-question has been identified with the cry of the victims for justice and the hunger of the perpetrators for a way back from the path of death (Moltmann 2003:71).

Moreso, the constant use in “The Crucified God” of the terms ‘godless’ and ‘godforsaken’ has especially intensified this criticism (Stringer 2002:69-70). These terms are intended to refer to Christ’s identification with the plight of both sinners and those who are the innocent victims of pointless suffering. Jesus may be identified as standing in solidarity with the powerless and those who suffer. But for Moltmann let Jesus be identified with those sinners who are the perpetrators of violence and injustice is not what anyone can accept easily. Such a criticism will be very plausible for the Cameroonian context as many Cameroonians expect retaliation on perpetrators to the same magnitude that they inflict pain. Yet for Moltmann (1974:246), all the evil in the world, whether suffered or inflicted is transformed and forgiven in being sustained into the being of God. Hence while one may not take sides with perpetrators of evil and suffering it is possible to side with Moltmann, to open even them up to God’s mercy. This is the part of Moltmann’s theology that may not directly fit into or be accepted by Cameroonians easily – mercy for perpetrators. Yet even our traditional proclamation of Christianity has opened up God’s mercy for all sinners. Therefore Cameroonians ought to open up to the liberating love and mercy of God which involves all people.

Still in this address of suffering in the Cameroonian context, we may echo Moltmann’s effort in his theology of the cross in bringing God close to the sufferer and the sufferer close to God. Moltmann’s main argument against classical theism was its projection of a God who is incapable of suffering or being affected by suffering. It is quite consoling for sufferers in all contexts to know that God suffers with them. It strengthens Cameroonians and gives them hope. Yet Moltmann has also been critiqued for elevating divine suffering to the level of glorification. He has so much emphasized on divine suffering as exemplary for persons of faith whereas most of human suffering is involuntary and damaging (Pinnock 2002:133). He is criticized for seeking to make God knowable by removing His omnipotence and

making Him a suffering God when he states that ‘God’s being is in suffering and suffering in God being’ (1974:227). Such a notion of God would destroy the God alone who can save the world (Sproul, Gerstner & Lindsley 1984:98). Moreover, making suffering so appealing would drift people towards sanctioning suffering as a way towards God. Such a view is especially resisted by Brown and Parker (1989:19) when they state that “... by interpreting Jesus’ suffering as a sign that chosen suffering is salvific, the suffering God theology baptizes violence done by people resistant to grace and abundant life, and uses Jesus’ death to invite people to be opened to all of life. This theology is offensive because it suggests that acceptance of pain is often tantamount to love and is the foundation of social action”.

Yet Pinnock (2002:133) sees it differently. In her own view, suffering can be given representative meaning when dedicated to God but only by the agency of the person who suffers. It becomes consoling for her, for the sufferer to know that God suffers with us. When human suffering is related to God, it consoles. For God to be an omnipotent spectator is a moral scandal for Pinnock as far as all suffering is concerned. Looking into the Cameroonian context, where people seek solace from their suffering in all kinds of places, and where moral evil (suffering caused by other humans) is so prevalent it would be quite consoling in the midst of people’s pain to know that God suffers with them. God then is not the helpless sufferer like them as some note, but is the God who holds the ends of the earth in His hands but is still able to suffer at the human history of injustice and force (Moltmann 1974:274). Such a God is a liberating God for all local Cameroonian sufferers.

Furthermore, in a patriarchal context like Cameroon where every aspect of life is male oriented from political setup right down to the local levels of family, some have argued that Moltmann’s theology of the cross would not be a proper tool to address such difficult patriarchal structures. From the beginning of his work Moltmann centres on “Father and Son and Holy Spirit”; but mostly Father and Son. He addresses no feminine attributes of God and in such a context like Cameroon, the whole concept of patriarchy may just find a stronger foothold. Brock (1989:42) states in support of this that “theologically, the patriarchal family has been and continues to be a cornerstone for Christological doctrines especially in Father – Son imagery and in

the unquestioned acceptance of benign paternalism as the norm for divine power”. Yet, we may not all together blame Moltmann because at the time of writing, he sought to address particular issues concerning a particular context that needed to be urgently addressed. He never had any idea that his theology would be used in a context like Cameroon. His theology and his context can never fit exactly into the Cameroonian context where the issues and lifestyles are widely different.

Moreover, female theologians like Mary Dale, Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, Carole Christ and Elizabeth Johnson (Park 2002 211-215) have especially raised the fact that the continuous use of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is patriarchal and androcentric and its exclusive metaphors for God are hurtful to women and must be either totally rejected or balanced with more gender or gender neutral metaphors of God. They have advocated either for a partial or complete nullification of this doctrine on the basis of its patriarchal and less gender and sexist nature. Or still to balance it with female attributes for God. While some theologians think that the formula should be left the way it is, and that it is not sexist, others have not been convinced by such response. Moltmann has accepted this claim as valid and has shown considerable effort to provide a Trinitarian theology that challenges patriarchy, recognizing and promoting the full equality of women and men (Park 2002:241). He does so when he writes that “it goes without saying that there should be criticism of patriarchal and androcentric images of God by women”(Park 2002:242) For him, the success of countering and overcoming patriarchy brings not only liberation of women but at the same time genuine liberation of the men as well (Mann 2002:241).

### **6.3 Cameroonians have a responsibility**

While we are of the opinion that Cameroonians need liberation they also have a responsibility to seek this liberation. Moltmann’s theology of the cross can be of great help to address the issues of evil and suffering in the Cameroonian context, but we are also strongly of the opinion that Cameroonians like all humans can do something to drift towards this change. Lately, Cameroon can still be described as Andrew Webster (In Ron Ayres(ed) 1995:110) states, a ‘traditional society’ as opposed to a modernized one. Traditional societies according to Webster, have characteristics

that render them unable to change from traditional to modernized societies. Three features are crucial in a traditional society, they are as follows: First, the value of traditionalism is dominant: that is, people are oriented to the past and they lack cultural ability to adjust to new circumstances. Secondly, the kinship system is the decisive reference point for all social practices, being the primary means through which economic, political and legal relationships are controlled. And lastly, members of the traditional society have an emotional, superstitious and fatalistic approach to the world: ‘what will be will be’; ‘things have always been this way’. These three features, together with the harsh political, economic and social realities have made Cameroonian perpetrators to keep inflicting suffering unhindered upon the suffering masses at all levels, and Cameroonian sufferers accept and bear the prevailing situations without any resistance of any kind except that “this is the way things have been”. Finally, both the perpetrators and the sufferers have vented their frustration on the rest of creation and here suffering has intensified to untold magnitudes. Hence both the perpetrators and their victims have a responsibility to change their manner of dealing with each other so that the rest of creation can be treated with more respect and dignity for the good of all Cameroonians, and the world at large. To highlight this responsibility, we are true meaning of *Imago Dei* to foster dignity among Cameroonians and the rest of creation around them.

### **6.3.1 A call for Cameroonian relationality**

Terence E. Fretheim (2010:9) states that: “Community and relationship are words in current theological discussions. All creatures of God together constitute a community in relationship. More particularly, human beings are understood, not as isolated creatures of God, but as part of a global community. Our lives touch the life of all other creatures, whether for good or for ill”. With the practical realities of the Cameroonian context, one can hardly talk of any form of genuine relationality. People live by hurting and exploiting each other. Fretheim’s words are clear, as creatures of God, made also in God’s image Cameroonians are bound to be together and let their lives touch each other in complete mutuality. No more individualism that link people only to their particular family, tribe, kin or group of interest. “Cameroonians are not mere individuals” in their respective groups of interest but are

for each other, working for the interest and survival and sustenance of each other. This is what actually makes them “persons” in the words of Moltmann (1997:80). For “a person is not an individual” according to Moltmann, but is “the individual human being in the field of resonance constituted by his or her relationships; I – you – we ... In the network of relationships the person becomes the active subject of taking and giving, hearing and doing, experiencing and touching, perceiving and responding”. This entails enhancing and promoting in full respect, mutuality and love. To be truly human, created in the image of God is also to be relational, meaning that humans ought to “find their true identity in coexistence with each other and with all other creatures... human existence is not individualistic but communal” (Migliore 1991:125). This is because “relatedness” has always been God’s way of dealing with the world He made as stated in scriptures, especially the Old Testament, “indeed everything said about Yahweh is said about Yahweh in relation” (Fretheim 2005:14). Yahweh is in relation with His people and creation. The being of God is a relational being. Such realities as the divine council, the Sons of God and the heavenly messengers witness that Israel’s God is by nature a social being functioning within a divine community (Fretheim 2005:16-17). And pertinent in this relationship in God is the fact that no one hurts or exploits the other for their own advancement. Therefore, Cameroonians are called upon as people created in the image of God to maintain this relatedness to God and one another. Joel B. Green (2008:64) stresses this relatedness to God and the rest of humanity as the true meaning of the image of God. He states that the image of God does not rely on the human possession of the soul as many see in Genesis 1-2 “but rather in the human capacity to relate to Yahweh as covenant partner and to join in companionship within the human family and in relation to the whole cosmos in ways that reflect the covenant love of God”. All people bear this image and they have this capacity to relate if they so will or decide. Cameroonians are thus urged to treat and relate to each other with dignity love and respect, as befitting to the image of God “we” possess.

### **6.3.2 A call for responsibility towards the rest of creation**

Jürgen Moltmann (1997:92-113) advocates for a view of human beings as being in community with the rest of creation. In all his works on creation, he struggles to

counter the prevalent anthropocentrism of modern theologies of creation which often emphasize the difference between humankind and nature. Christian theology for many decades interpreted the doctrine of *Imago Dei* in a manner that gave humanity subjugating rights against the rest of creation. Humans were the ones created in God's image and given dominion over the rest of creation. According to this interpretation, "humanity resembles God in its exercise of power and dominion over other creatures (Migliore 1991:121). And from this premise, all other relationships follow or are construed in a hierarchical manner: God rules over the world, the soul controls the body; men are masters of women; and humanity dominates the other creatures leading to reckless exploitation of nature, patriarchy, racism and colonialism (Migliore 1991:21-22). He then states clearly that for him, "the symbol" image of God describes human life in relationship with God and other creatures", a premise which Moltmann has strongly supported throughout all his writings on creation.

For local Cameroonians, the rest of creation – nature, birds beasts and the atmosphere have no real value since they are used merely for human wellbeing. This has far roots as we noted earlier while studying the Cameroonian context. But the most urgent reason for the exploitation of creation among Cameroonians is poverty and hardship. As such Moltmann's theology can fit in his context (European), addressing countries with resources such as wealth who may decide not to exploit the rest of creation and still survive. But for Cameroonians, especially those in the local contexts, there is no other means of survival except to cut down trees, burn the soils, kill the birds and animals as well as poison the fish and sell them to survive. Nevertheless "they must be stopped, and they must stop" doing all the above, hence they get to a point of no return in their destruction of the natural environment. There ought to be a radical reversal of the living standard of the people, beginning with the stale political setup of the whole country.

Furthermore, Moltmann in his theology of the cross, though he never mentioned anything about the rest of creation was addressing suffering in a particular situation – after Auschwitz, and the horrible situation of the war and its resulting atrocities and damages quickly attracted responses from all over the globe. Cameroon's suffering

resulting from its own corrupt political system, full of stooges and sycophants with poverty stricken traditional setups that are not anxious for any immediate change because they wish to do things the way they were done in the past, may not attract any urgent responses. As such one may state that Moltmann's theology may neither urgently nor completely address the Cameroonian realities. Yet, we must insist that his interpretation of the doctrine of the *Imago Dei* which creates a blurring of the Creator – creature distinction (Nengean 2009:1) is appropriate for the Cameroonian context. Here, Moltmann rejects classical theism and monotheism, the strict adherence to one God that separates God from creation and replaces it with his notion of transcendental immanence, together with Trinitarian Panentheism, accentuated by means of Hegelian dialectics in alignment with the Eastern Orthodox view of the Trinity. In so doing, he makes the Trinity the foundation of all theologies and as such understands the *Imago Dei* as the *Imago Trinitatis* (Nengean 2009:1) Such a monotheistic God of classical theism would be “the apathetic deity who determines everything and is determined by no one, who rules everything and suffers nothing, who can always merely speak and never listen. All absolutist rulers in history have taken the stage on the model of this picture of God, from Genghis Khan to Hitler” (Nengean 2009:2).

For Moltmann then, “likeness to God means God's relationship to human beings first of all and only then, and as a consequence of that, the human beings relationship to God (Nengean 2009:2). Human beings are created for life in relationship that mirrors or corresponds to God's own life in relationship. Such relationship would not only be limited to God and humanity but extends to the rest of creation. As such to have dominion over the earth as Migliore states is “rightly interpreted as a charge to responsible stewardship. To be a steward is to be partner with God in caring for the world that God has created” (Migliore 1997:129). This involves the whole of creation, as all the network of living organisms that provide a viable context and home for the human community, is an outcome of Yahweh's generous, sovereign freedom. It is Yahweh's will that the earth should “sustain all its members, and so that the earth has within itself the capacity for sustenance, nurture and regeneration. This capacity for generosity is no human monopoly (Fretheim 1997:528-529). Cameroonians are



thereby called upon to be stewards; caretakers of creation so that creation can in turn sustain the rest of humanity.

### **6.3.3 God's Image, Jesus Christ as answer for the Cameroonian context.**

The Cameroonian context of suffering has endured and has been accepted too long. And as we have stated above Moltmann's theology of the cross cannot suddenly fit into the context and bring lasting solution to it because of some practical realities that are unique only to this context. Yet we believe that because of the Christocentric nature of his theology, especially on Christ's suffering, his theology of the cross will always remain relevant for the Cameroonian context. This is because; no relationship of immediacy between God and man is conceivable which is separated from this person (Christ) and His history (Moltmann 1974:275). In the context of suffering, Jesus is a brother to all suffering Cameroonians because He sides with the poor and oppressed and is committed to their liberation. The story of the suffering of Jesus Christ reveals a God who identifies with the suffering of his people. Apart from being the one who suffered with men and whose cross, death and resurrection effected liberation for all men, Christ has also been referred to as the true 'Image of God', this especially by the apostle Paul. In 2 Corinthians 4:4(NIV version) Paul refers to the "glory of Christ who is the image of the invisible God" and in Colossians 1:15 he says of Christ, "He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation" (Green 2008:68). According to Green (2008:69) speaking of Christ as the image of God means, "first, that Jesus represents God to creation in the way that the first human beings were called, but failed, to do; and second that he enables other human beings to achieve directedness to God of which their fallenness have deprived them". As such Christ stands like a means through which men may finally be restored to their original likeness of God. Victims will find solace and strength in him and perpetrators will receive their true humanity again, void of the fallenness of sin and domination.

Moreover, in his usage of the terms "image" and "glory", Paul portrays a humanity that is in need of transformation. Humanity has profaned God's glory "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). Such a fallen humanity is bound only for destruction except that Christ the image of the invisible God assures its

restoration. Such restoration to the likeness of God according to Green (2008:70) is the work of the Spirit within the community of God's people, the fellowship of Christ – followers set on maturation in Christ. From this vantage point, “image of God” points ultimately to the transformation of believers in resurrection, a transformation already at work in the creation of a new humanity through the dissolution of barriers dividing human beings from one another along gender, social or ethnic lines (Col. 3:10-11, 1 Cor. 12:12-13, Gal. 3:28). In a completely battered and divided community like ours, this great transformation is beginning and will one day get to maturation.

#### **6.4 General Conclusion and Recommendations**

Finally, we have established that Cameroonians experience a lot of challenges in their daily lives. This began with their contact with European nations at the beginning of their history which landed many to slavery and slave trade; traces of which are still there today in a pitiful manner. There are also their unique colonial encounters, a blessing but that has become such a bane to this nation. Why? Because the old days of colonialism were stained by the brutal exploitation of men and women who toiled in virtual or actual slavery to enrich their European masters. But the departure of the imperialists and the independence of the enslaved have not altered the picture. Now it is people of the same colour who are the masters, but they are just as selfish as the colonialists and they are just as ready to exploit their fellow Cameroonians (Carson1978:15-16). While colonialism has a lot to answer for, some issues of suffering, the Cameroonians themselves at all levels of society have much more to answer for, for the present state of affairs in the nation. The patriarchal setup that has survived from the colonial period has played a great deal on what the country is going through today. It is a country more for the men and the fathers than anyone else. The place of women and young people is still to be established. The churches too have the same reflections. It is an endless cycle of pain and frustration that have left many confused. While some have taken the escapist tendency to run away to other countries, others have resorted to crimes and false religiosity as a way out. Many others have degenerated to mental frustration and resignation. Yet there is hope for the nation because God's love in Christ Jesus embraces sufferers all over the world and gives them hope in the midst of hopelessness.

There is in suffering, hope of recovery as long as people begin to take their responsibility seriously. In all, the work has made an in-depth study and has exposed evil and suffering using, Moltmann's theology of the cross as encouragement for the Cameroonian context. The research does not purport to give answers to the radical evil and suffering in our midst because as long as they endure the discussions and proposals are always on-going. Nevertheless, we are of the opinion that much of the suffering in this context is man-made and could be avoided if the people adopt a new worldview towards life as a whole. Hence, the following appeal:

- Cameroonian perpetrators of evil and suffering are called upon to accept responsibility for the acts of pain that they cause on each other and the rest of creation and debase from such acts rather than keep blaming the devil, the political setup and tradition and customs as the cause of their behaviour. Such is a scapegoat attitude.
- Also, for long victims of evil have taken a position of self-pity and resignation, blaming others for their pain and doing nothing to stop it. Worse still, many victims are becoming themselves perpetrators. All political and traditional structures of pain must be resisted individually and collectively.
- And it is at this point that the church becomes instrumental in helping to empower the sufferers. For long, the Christian 'voice' of the church that would have made the plight of sufferers lighter has been maimed by their resultant schism on doctrinal matters as well as the mad quest for wealth. They are called upon to take up their prophetic role by raising their prophetic voices against all structures of evil and pain especially those against the rest of creation. This shall be done through proper preaching of the word – rebuking the oppressor, empowering the victim and uniting both into the love of Christ which engulfs both humanity and the whole of creation.

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