

Theology Of The Cross And Glory: A Hermeneutic Approach To The Meaning Of Jesus' Suffering

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ABSTRACT

This article examines in depth the meaning of Jesus' suffering in the light of the theology of the cross and glory using a theological hermeneutic approach. In the tradition of the Christian faith, the cross is not only a symbol of suffering, but also the highest manifestation of God's paradoxical love and glory. Through an analysis of key New Testament texts, especially the Gospel of John, Paul's letters, and the Christological hymn in Philippians 2:5–11, this study seeks to understand how Jesus' suffering did not end in humiliation, but instead became a path to divine glory. The hermeneutic approach used in this article aims to connect textual and contextual meanings, so that the message of the cross can be re-read in a relevant way for today's life of faith. The main findings show that Jesus' suffering on the cross was an event of God's revelation not just a human tragedy, but the culmination of the revelation of love that redeemed the world. On the cross, the glory of God is not seen in conquering power, but in self-sacrificing love. This paradox affirms the essence of Christian theology: that true life and true glory are born of self-denial and solidarity with human suffering. Thus, the theology of the cross is not a theology of defeat, but a theology of hope, in which suffering becomes the path to transformation and glory. The results of these reflections make an important contribution to the understanding of the contemporary Christian faith, especially in the face of the realities of suffering, injustice, and humanitarian crises. The theology of the cross and glory invites believers to read suffering not as a sign of God's absence, but as a space of His presence that saves and glorifies.

Keywords: theology of the cross, glory, the suffering of christ, theological hermeneutics, salvation, hope

Introduction

In the history of Christian theology, the cross has become a central symbol that combines the suffering and glory of God in a single saving event. However, the meaning of the cross is never singular. On the one hand, the cross appears to be a symbol of human humiliation, suffering, and defeat; but on the other hand, for the Christian faith, the cross is precisely the place where the glory of God is fully revealed. Martin Luther, in his Heidelberg Disputation (1518) asserted that "God can be known only in suffering and the cross," for it is there that the glory of God is hidden in the paradox of human suffering (Luther, 1960b). This idea became the foundation of what came to be known as *theologia crucis*, a theology that refused to understand God through worldly glory and rationality, but through humility and self-sacrificing love. Jürgen Moltmann (1974) then expanded this understanding by stating that the crucified God is not a God who is far from human suffering, but a God who participates in the suffering of His creation as a form of divine love and solidarity. Thus, the cross speaks not only of Jesus' suffering, but also of God's redeeming self-revelation through suffering (Moltmann, 1974).

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This paradox of the cross also finds deep emphasis in the theology of John and Paul. In the Gospel of John, the cross is understood not simply as an instrument of death, but as a glorified moment (*doxa*) in which Jesus is "exalted" to express the Father's love and glory (Jn. 12:23–32). Raymond Brown, said that the cross in the Gospel of John is the "throne of glory" where God's love is expressed through Jesus' perfect obedience (Brown, 1994). Similarly, Paul wrote that "the saying of the cross is foolishness to the world, but to us who are saved is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18). This confirms that Christ's suffering is not a sign of defeat, but rather a manifestation of God's power at work in weakness (Dunn, 1998b). In contemporary reflection, Balthasar, describes the cross as a drama of glory in which the beauty of God's love radiates precisely through the darkness of suffering (Balthasar, 1963). Thus, the theology of the cross teaches that true glory is not a victory that negates suffering, but rather a victory of love that comes through suffering. This paradox is at the heart of all Christian theology: the glorious God is a God who is willing to suffer for the world he loves (Webster, 2000).

The tension between the theology of the cross (*theologia crucis*) and the theology of glory (*theologia gloriae*) has been a central theme in the reflection of Christian theology from the Reformation to the contemporary period. Martin Luther, in his Heidelberg Disputation (1518), asserted that man tends to seek God in apparent glory, when God reveals Himself in suffering and the humility of the cross (Luther, 1960a). For Luther, the theology of glory relied on human wisdom, while the theology of the cross revealed the wisdom of God hidden in weakness. This idea later became the basis for many modern theologians who view Christ's suffering not as a failure, but as the most authentic event of God's revelation. In this context, Jürgen Moltmann, through his work *The Crucified God*, affirms that Christ's suffering was not just a historical episode, but a theological event in which God himself entered into human suffering in order to redeem and renew the world (Moltmann, 1974). By rejecting the distant image of God, Moltmann introduces a new understanding of a God in solidarity with the wounded world, in which suffering becomes the space of the presence of divine love, not His absence (Moltmann, 1990).

Moltmann's thought broadened the horizons of classical theology by combining the dimensions of suffering and glory in a single theological unity. The glorious God is the God who suffers with His creation a mystery that Hans Urs von Balthasar also highlights, in *The Glory of the Lord*, in which the glory of God is understood as *kenosis*, a loving emptying of the self. Balthasar emphasized that the glory of God is not seen in glory, but in Christ's surrender on the cross, which is the culmination of the drama of divine love (Balthasar, 1963). Richard Bauckham, also asserts something similar in *God Crucified*, that the cross is the point where the identity of God is revealed most clearly: the transcendent God becomes immanent in suffering (Bauckham, 1999). In contemporary studies, Webster explains that the cross is a "revelation of the glory of God," in which Christ's suffering actually shows the glory of saving love (Webster, 2000). This paradox marks the core of the Christian faith that true glory lies not in oppressive power, but in love that is willing to suffer for the redemption of the world. Thus, the cross becomes the face of God's glory hidden in human suffering, rejecting all forms of theology that only glorify power without suffering (Soskice, 2007).

On the other hand, the Gospel of John presents a more subtle paradox: Jesus' suffering on the cross is described as a "glorification" (*doxa*) that began from the moment He was taken up on the cross (Jn. 12:23–32). For John, the cross was not the end of glory, but rather the culmination. This shows that glory from a gospel perspective is not a victory that negates suffering, but rather a victory that is manifested through suffering. This interpretation opens up space for a theological hermeneutic approach that interprets the cross as a symbolic and existential event that contains dimensions of revelation, redemption, and eschatological hope (Wright, 2006).

Studies of the meaning of the cross and Jesus' suffering have been conducted by many contemporary theologians with a variety of approaches. Hans Urs von Balthasar, in *The Glory of the Lord* introduced the concept of theodrama, in which Christ's suffering is part of the cosmic drama of the revelation of God's glory (Balthasar, 1963). Meanwhile, N. T. Wright, in *The Day the Revolution Began* interpreted the cross as an act of redemption that reversed the world's power system, and returned man to the purpose of his re-creation (Wright, 2006). In the context of modern hermeneutics, Paul Ricoeur, sees Christ's suffering as a narrative symbol that opens up space for the interpretation of human existential meaning, in which suffering is no longer absurd, but has a transformative redemptive value (Ricoeur, 1974).

However, in the midst of modern humanitarian crises such as war, social injustice, ecological suffering, and spiritual alienation, the meaning of the cross is often reduced to a passive religious symbol. The Church often emphasizes the aspect of spiritual redemption, but ignores the aspect of social solidarity inherent in Christ's suffering. Therefore, a theological hermeneutic approach is needed that not only interprets the biblical text, but also relates it to the context of modern man (Barth, 1956)(Barth, 1956). This approach enables believers to rediscover the relevance of the theology of the cross as a theology of glory born of suffering, not a glory that avoids suffering (Bauckham, 1999).

Thus, the background of this research departs from the need to reinterpret the meaning of Jesus' suffering through a hermeneutic lens that brings together texts, traditions, and contexts. This approach seeks to answer both a theological and existential question: How can Jesus' suffering be understood as a manifestation of God's glory in the midst of a wounded world? How can the theology of the cross be a source of hope and solidarity for the people today? This article seeks to elaborate on these questions by delving into the theological structure contained in the cross of Christ—as a place where suffering and glory meet in a single saving event.

This research aims to interpret theologically the meaning of Jesus' suffering through a hermeneutic approach to the theology of the cross and glory. The main focus of this research is to analyze the biblical and theological basis of the concept of the cross as an event of suffering as well as the glory of God, as well as to explain the contributions of the thought of great theologians such as Martin Luther, Jürgen Moltmann, and Hans Urs von Balthasar in formulating a deep understanding of the relationship between suffering and glory. In addition, this research seeks to develop a contextual hermeneutic framework, so that the reading of the theology of the cross can remain relevant to the modern world colored by suffering, injustice, and humanitarian crises. In its practical dimension, this study also intends to provide a theological reflection that enriches the spirituality of suffering in the lives of Christians, by affirming that suffering is not the end of human existence, but the path to true transformation and glory in Christ. Thus, this research is expected to broaden the horizons of contemporary theology and deepen the understanding of faith in God who is present and at work in the midst of human suffering, as revealed through the crucified and glorified Christ.

This research uses a theological qualitative approach with the theological hermeneutic method as the main approach. The qualitative approach was chosen because this research does not focus on numerical data, but on the interpretation of meaning and theological understanding of the text and experience of faith. According to Creswell, qualitative research aims to understand phenomena based on the perspective of participants or authors through the social and cultural context that surrounds them. In a theological context, this approach is used to interpret the symbols, narratives, and experiences of faith related to Christ's suffering and glory as revealed in Scripture and the theological reflections of the church (Creswell, 2014).

The theological hermeneutic method is used to explore the theological meanings contained in biblical texts as well as the works of classical and modern theologians. Theological hermeneutics, as explained by Anthony C. Thiselton in *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, seeks not only to interpret the literal meaning of the text, but also to understand the divine message and its relevance to the life of faith today (Thiselton, 2019). Therefore, this study combines biblical hermeneutics with systematic reflection to find the relationship between the cross as a symbol of human suffering and as a revelation of God's glory.

The data sources of this study consist of two types: (1) primary sources, namely the New Testament Scriptures (especially the Gospel of John, Paul's letters, and the Christological hymn in Philippians 2:5–11), as well as the theological works of Martin Luther (Heidelberg Disputation), Jürgen Moltmann (*The Crucified God*), and Hans Urs von Balthasar (*The Glory of the Lord*); and (2) secondary sources, in the form of systematic theology books, scientific journals, and reflective works that discuss the theology of the cross and glory. Data is collected through library research, as recommended by Creswell & Poth (2018) in *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, i.e. by reading, classifying, and analyzing texts relevant to the research theme.

Data analysis is carried out using a descriptive-analytical and reflective-hermeneutic approach, namely by describing theological ideas systematically, then interpreting their meaning reflexively in the context of church life and modern society. The stages of analysis include: (1) identification of key theological themes (suffering, glory, the cross, hope); (2) narrative analysis of Scriptural texts; (3) a dialogical reading between the biblical text and the thought of theologians; and (4) contextual reflections on the implications of cross theology for the spirituality and ministry of the church today.

This method is expected to produce a deep and contextual theological understanding of Jesus' suffering as a revelation of God's glory. The hermeneutic approach allows this research to move from the text to the context of the crucifixion to the reflection of the faith of today's people. Thus, this research is not only theoretical, but also has practical relevance in presenting a theology that is able to speak in the midst of the suffering and crises of modern humanity (Gadamer, 1975).

Result and Discussion

2.1 Theological and Historical Foundations of the Cross in the Christian Tradition

The theological and historical foundation of the cross in the Christian tradition as the basis for understanding the meaning of the suffering and glory of Christ. Since the beginning of Christianity, the cross has not only been a symbol of punishment and humiliation, but has been a symbol of God's redemption and supreme love for mankind (González, 2010). In the context of church history, the cross underwent a transformation of meaning from a Roman instrument of execution to a center of the Christian faith that revealed the mystery of salvation (A. McGrath, 2011). Theologically, Church Fathers such as Athanasius, Augustine, and later Martin Luther interpreted the cross as an event in which God's justice and love met in Christ's sacrifice (Küng, 1994). Therefore, the theological understanding of the cross cannot be separated from the history of salvation (Heilsgeschichte) and the dynamics of reflection on the faith of the church throughout the ages.

2.2 The Cross in the Historical Context of the Roman Empire and Judaism

In the historical context of the Roman Empire, the crux was the most despicable and fearsome symbol of punishment, used for slaves, rebels, and low-class criminals (Hengel, 1977). Crucifixion is not only intended to kill, but also publicly humiliate the perpetrator through prolonged suffering and the display of the body hanging in front of the public. In the Roman legal and cultural system, the cross symbolized the absolute power of the state over the human body and became a political tool to maintain the imperial order (Cook, 2014). Therefore, the fact that Jesus—a man who was considered legally innocent—died on the cross caused great scandal for the Roman world and became a paradox for His followers. The theology of the cross in this context represents a radical reversal of the meaning of power and honor: what is despised by the world is precisely the means of expressing the glory of God (Wright, 1996).

While in the context of first-century Judaism, the cross also contains a very offensive religious meaning. According to the law, "cursed is he who is hanged on a stake" (Deuteronomy 21:23), so Jesus' death on the cross was seen as a sign of God's curse. To the Jews, the Messiah who died on the cross seemed impossible, because they expected a Messiah who would triumph and liberate Israel from Roman colonization (Sanders, 1993). Early Christian theology, however, interpreted this curse as a manifestation of God's solidarity with sinful man—that Christ bore the curse for the sake of the deliverance of His people (Galatians 3:13). Thus, the cross in historical and religious frameworks serves as a meeting point between suffering and redemption: a symbol of humiliation transformed into a sign of the triumph of God's love and grace for the world (Balthasar, 1988a).

2.3 The Cross as a Scandal and the Power of God (1 Corinthians 1:18–25)

In this section "The Cross as a Scandal and the Power of God (1 Corinthians 1:18–25)" is one of the core points of Paul's theology that reveals the deepest paradox of the Christian faith: that God's power is expressed through weakness, and God's wisdom is through ignorance by the size of the world. In 1 Corinthians 1:18, Paul states that "the saying of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." In the context of the Greco-Roman world, this message seems absurd, since the concept of "power" has always been associated with political, military, and human power (Fee, 1987). Instead, Paul reversed that paradigm: the cross symbolized humiliation and failure, became a symbol of God's power to free man from sin and death (Wright, 2009). Paul's theology opposes a worldly value system that glorifies power, rhetorical wisdom, and human pride, and affirms that salvation is born of sacrificial love, not of domination or power.

Furthermore, Paul uses the term scandal (*σκάνδαλον*) in verse 23 to describe how the cross became a "stumbling block" for the Jews and a "foolishness" for the Greeks. For the Jews, the idea of the Messiah dying on the cross was unacceptable, as the Messiah was expected to come with power and glory to restore Israel (Barrett, 1968). To the Greeks, who upheld rationality and philosophical wisdom, the idea that salvation came through suffering seemed illogical. But that's precisely where the mystery of the theology of the cross lies: God chooses the most despicable way to reveal His love and power (Dunn, 1998a). Thus, the cross not only reveals the redemptive power of God's love, but also serves as a critique of the world's corrupt power and wisdom structures. Paul presents the theology of the cross as an invitation to understand glory through suffering and victory through humility.

Theologically, this passage forms the foundation for all Christian thinking about power in weakness. In Christ crucified, God is present not in the form of conquering power, but as self-surrendering love. This understanding was later developed by theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann, who asserted that the cross is a "revelation in contradiction," that is, the revelation of God hidden in human suffering (Moltmann, 1974). Similarly, Hans Urs von Balthasar in the *Mysterium Paschale*, sees the cross as the pinnacle moment of God's love that reveals glory in the darkness (Balthasar, 1988a). Therefore, 1 Corinthians 1:18–25 is not just an apologetic text, but a transformational theology that changes the way humans understand God's power, suffering, and love. The cross became the hermeneutic center of the Christian faith—the place where God revealed the power of love greater than death itself.

2.4 Patristic Tradition: The Cross as a Mystery of Salvation

Alexandria, and Augustine interpreted the cross in terms of *oikonomia soteria*—God's plan of salvation embodied in the incarnation and redemption of Christ. Irenaeus in *Adversus Haereses* emphasizes the concept of "recapitulation" (*anakephalaisis*), that through Jesus' obedience to death on the cross, the entire broken human history is restored and reconciled to God (Augustine, 1991). Athanasius in *On the Incarnation* adds that Christ's death on the cross was an act of love that overcame the corruption of sin and death itself—an ontological theological triumph. For Augustine, the cross was the place where God's justice and love met: a just God punished sin, but a loving God bore the punishment himself through Christ (Pelican, 1971).

Furthermore, the Church Fathers also interpreted the cross in mystical and liturgical dimensions. In the reflections of eastern theology, for example, John Chrysostom and Gregory of Nazianzus saw the cross as a mystery of the secret of God's love that could not be fully understood by the human mind, but was experienced in the faith and fellowship of the church (Lossky, 1957). The cross became the center of the liturgy and sacramentality of the church, because it was there that the people experienced communion with the sacrificial God. In this patristic tradition, Christ's suffering is not a tragedy, but a path of victory and sanctification of all creation (Louth, 2007). Thus, the cross is understood as a transformative reality: a place where sin is abolished, man is restored, and the world is made new. This understanding forms the basis for all the theology of the cross in the history of the church—that salvation is not achieved through human power, but through divine love incarnate and surrender on the cross.

2.5 The Reformatory View: Luther and *Theologia Crucis*

In the Reformation view, Martin Luther placed *theologia crucis* (the theology of the cross) at the center of all his theological thought, especially as formulated in the *Disputatio Heidelbergensis* (1518). For Luther, the cross was God's way of expressing Himself in contrast to the logic of the world and the theology of glory (*theologia gloriae*). If glory theology seeks God through power, wisdom, and success, then cross theology finds God in Christ's suffering, humiliation, and humiliation (Luther, 1957). In the cross, God conceals himself (*Deus absconditus*) and it is precisely there that he reveals true love and grace. Thus, salvation is not achieved through human works or moral virtues, but solely through the grace of God revealed in the crucified Christ (A. E. McGrath, 1985). Luther's theology of the cross not only opposed a scholastic theology that emphasized rationality and merit, but also dismantled an entire religious system that relied on human power.

Apart from being a soteriological framework, *theologia crucis* also has a deep existential and pastoral dimension. Luther affirmed that the experience of suffering is part of man's encounter with God; suffering is not a sign of condemnation, but a place of true faith formation. In the experience of the cross, man is invited to see reality as it is not through the illusion of glory, but through honesty to the reality of sin and grace (Luther, 1957). Luther's thought became the foundation for modern theology that emphasizes God's solidarity with suffering man, as developed later by Jürgen Moltmann in *The Crucified God* and by existentialist theologians such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer in *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Therefore, *theologia crucis* is not just a doctrine, but a spiritual paradigm that shapes the way the church understands the suffering, faith, and love of God present in the fragile reality of the world (Bonhoeffer, 1971).

2.6 Contemporary Context: The Cross in Modern and Postmodern Theology

In the context of modern and postmodern theology, the cross remains a central symbol, but its interpretation has undergone significant expansion as philosophy, hermeneutics, and the modern human experience of suffering have evolved. 20th-century theology began to emphasize the existential, social, and historical dimensions of the cross, especially after traumatic events such as world wars, genocides, and global humanitarian crises. Jürgen Moltmann, through his work *The Crucified God*, affirms that God is not far from human suffering, but is present in solidarity with the oppressed and wounded. According to Moltmann, the cross is a form of "divine kenosis" of God's emptiness that enters

human suffering to free them from despair. In this view, the glory of God does not lie in the power that dominates, but in the love that is willing to suffer with creation. Moltmann's thought shifted the theology of the cross from a mere soteriological doctrine to a social and political reflection, in which the cross became a symbol of liberation and hope for a shattered world (Moltmann, 1974).

Meanwhile, in postmodern theology, the cross is understood in the horizon of plurality, relationality, and criticism of traditional power structures. Theologians such as Hans Urs von Balthasar in the *Theo-Drama*, interpreted the cross as a divine drama in which the love of God is incarnated in total in human history. Balthasar saw that Christ's suffering was not merely the result of sin, but the deepest expression of God's love that opened itself to the world (Balthasar, 1988c). Whereas in feminist theology and liberation theology, such as those developed by Dorothee Sölle and Leonardo Boff, the cross is read as God's solidarity with the victims of violence and injustice. Sölle, in *Suffering*, rejects the view that suffering must be passively accepted, and asserts that faith in Christ crucified encourages action against oppressive structures. In the postmodern context, the cross is no longer understood as a sign of defeat, but as a symbol of resistance, solidarity, and transformation of humanity (Sölle, 1975). Thus, the theology of the cross in the modern and postmodern era becomes a space of dialogue between faith and contemporary reality, where human suffering is read as a place of revelation of God's love and power at work in the world.

3. Theological Hermeneutics of Jesus' Suffering

3.1 Hermeneutic Meaning: From Text to Context

In theological hermeneutic studies, the meaning of the cross is not only found in the biblical text, but also through the interpretive process that brings the text into the context of the life of the faithful today. Hermeneutics acts as a bridge between the world of the text and the world of the reader, revealing meanings relevant to the historical and existential reality of man. This approach emphasizes that the biblical text is not just a document of the past, but a "living text" that continues to interact with its readers (Gadamer, 1975). In the context of 1 Corinthians 1:18–25, for example, the message of the cross should be read not only as a narrative of Jesus' suffering, but also as an invitation to understand how God works through weakness, paradox, and suffering. This hermeneutic process presupposes the existential involvement of the reader, in which the meaning of the cross is reinterpreted in situations of modern suffering, such as social injustice, poverty, or spiritual crisis (Thiselton, 2006). Thus, theological hermeneutics rejects literalist readings and invites the interpreter to understand the text as a dynamic encounter between divine revelation and human reality.

Furthermore, in the contemporary theological tradition, hermeneutics is no longer seen as an attempt to find the "singular meaning" of the text, but rather as a dialogical process that opens up many possibilities of meaning (polysemy). Paul Ricoeur calls this process "symbolic hermeneutics" in which the meaning of the cross, as a symbol of suffering and glory, has a depth that transcends words. Through symbols, man is invited to enter into the mystery of God working through human history and experience (Ricoeur, 1981). This approach expands the theology of the cross into a contextual and interdisciplinary reflection linking the existence of faith to the cultural, political, and social worlds. Therefore, the hermeneutics of the cross not only reads the text, but also reads the world in the light of the cross. With this approach, theology does not stop at academic interpretation, but rather becomes a praxis of faith that enables the church to live in solidarity with a suffering world, just as Christ was present in the midst of human suffering (Fiorenza, 1984).

3.2 Narrative Analysis of Jesus' Suffering in the Synoptic Gospels

In the narrative analysis approach to Jesus' suffering in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), the main focus lies on how the Passion Narrative is structured to reveal Jesus' identity and mission as the suffering Messiah. These three Gospels feature a narrative structure that leads the reader from Jesus' public ministry to the climax of His suffering and death on the cross. Mark, for example, emphasizes the cross as central to the revelation of Jesus' identity—where the true

confession of who Jesus was only emerged from the mouth of a Roman centurion under the cross (Mark 15:39). This confirms that the glory of Jesus can only be understood through suffering. While Matthew highlights Jesus' suffering as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, emphasizing Jesus' obedience to God's will as a manifestation of true Messianic obedience (Davies & Allison, 1997). Luke, on the other hand, presents the cross in a framework of mercy and forgiveness, in which Jesus still offers salvation even to criminals crucified with Him (Luke 23:43). Thus, the narrative analysis shows that suffering is not just the final episode in the story of Jesus, but becomes the theological center that reveals God's love and the way of salvation of man (Kingsbury, 1983).

Furthermore, the narrative approach opens up the understanding that each Gospel has a unique theological perspective on Jesus' suffering, but they all lead to a testimony of the same faith: that suffering is part of God's plan of salvation. Raymond E. Brown, in *The Death of the Messiah*, emphasizes that the structure of the story of the Passion in the Synoptic shows an intentional unity, that is, to lead the reader to an understanding of the cross as the climax of Jesus' mission. Through literary techniques such as irony, contrast, and repetition, the Gospel writers guide the reader to see that suffering is not a sign of failure, but rather a triumph of love (Brown, 1994). Narrative studies also highlight the role of the figures around Jesus, the disciples, the priests, and those present under the cross as a mirror of man's response to God's revelation in suffering (Rhoads et al., 1999). Thus, Jesus' suffering in the Synoptic Gospel is not just a historical record, but a theological story that invites the reader to enter into the mystery of the cross and experience a true transformation of faith.

3.3 John's Perspective: The Paradox of the Cross and Glory

In the Gospel of John, the cross is not only understood as a place of suffering, but as the pinnacle of Christ's glory. This paradox that God's glory is revealed through suffering and death is a hallmark of John's theology. When Jesus speaks of "exalted" (*hypsōthēnai*), the term has two interrelated meanings: the rapture on the cross and heavenly exaltation (Jn. 3:14; 12:32–33). For John, the moment of the crucifixion was not just a human tragedy, but a moment of divine glorification in which God's love reached its peak. The cross becomes the "throne" of Christ as a sovereign King through sacrificial love (Moloney, 1998). This paradox confirms that glory is not separate from suffering; it is precisely in the darkness of the cross that the light of God's love shines most clearly. Through a theological and symbolic narrative structure, John shows that the crucifixion is the supreme form of revelation of who God is, not God who rules with earthly power, but God who is sovereign through service and sacrifice (Brown, 1966).

Furthermore, John's perspective introduces the spiritual and pneumatological dimensions of the cross. The Holy Spirit is present as a witness and successor to Jesus' glorified work through the cross (Jn. 16:7–15), so that suffering does not stop at death, but opens up space for new life in the Spirit. This theology challenges the paradigm of worldly power and triumph by presenting the cross as a mystery of redeeming love. In the contemporary context, theologians such as Hans Urs von Balthasar, reread this theology of John as a call for the Church to understand glory not in the category of domination, but in solidarity with the suffering of the world. Thus, John affirms that the cross is a theophical event of God who is present, powerful, and glorified in the midst of human suffering. The paradox of the cross and glory in the Gospel of John teaches that the way to eternal life is the way of self-sacrificing love, a message that continues to be relevant to the Christian faith in the midst of the modern world (Balthasar, 1988c).

3.4 Paul and the Cross as the Center of Christ's Work

For the Apostle Paul, the cross was the center of Christ's entire work of salvation and the essence of the preaching of the gospel. In 1 Corinthians 1:18, Paul states that "the saying of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved is the power of God." With this statement, Paul affirms that the cross is not just a historical event, but a revelation of God's way of working not through human power or wisdom, but through weakness and suffering (Dunn, 1998a). The cross became a symbol of the reversal of world values, where defeat became victory and death became the

source of life. In his letters, especially in Galatians and Philippians, Paul emphasized that Christ's death on the cross was an act of redemption that revealed God's grace that overcame the law and the religious system of men (Sanders, 1977). Thus, Paul's theology of the cross contains both a soteriological and existential dimension—believers are called to live in communion with Christ crucified, crucify the ego and live in restorative love (Phil. 3:10–11; Gal. 2:20).

Furthermore, Paul understood the cross as the foundation of a new community that transcended social, ethnic, and religious boundaries. In Ephesians 2:14–16, the cross is a means of reconciliation between man and God and among others. For Paul, Christ's work on the cross was not only individual redemption, but also God's cosmic transformation of reconciling all creation to Himself (Col. 1:20). A number of modern theologians, such as N. T. Wright, interpret Paul's theology of the cross as a form of theology of hope, in which Christ's suffering paves the way for the renewal of the world. Thus, the cross for Paul was not just a symbol of suffering, but a manifestation of God's love, justice, and the power of God that restored creation (Wright, 2007). In this context, the cross is central to the identity of the Christian faith, because it contains the meaning of sacrifice, solidarity, and transformation, a message that remains relevant to a world that thirsts for reconciliation and justice.

3.5 Suffering as a Sign of God's Obedience and Love

In Christian theology, Christ's suffering on the cross is understood as a sign of total obedience to God's will and the highest manifestation of divine love. Philippians 2:6–8 affirms that Christ, "who, though in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as a property to be kept, but emptied himself and was obedient unto death, even unto death on the cross." This obedience is not just surrender, but an active choice in love to save mankind. Karl Rahner, called Christ's suffering a form of "divine kenosis" of God's self-emptiment that fully participated in the fragile history of man (Rahner, 1986). In this act, God's love is no longer an abstract concept, but a reality manifested through suffering and solidarity with man. Jürgen Moltmann, adds that Christ's suffering is not only man's suffering to God, but also God's own suffering in His love for the world (Moltmann, 1974). The Cross, thus, became a meeting point between obedience and love, where the divine will and humanity of Jesus came together in the saving sacrifice.

Further, Christ's suffering reveals the pedagogical and relational dimensions of God's love. Through suffering, God teaches man the true meaning of obedience and love that is not for self-gain (Jn. 15:13). Hans Urs von Balthasar, saw the cross as a divine drama, in which God's love is expressed in the most radical form of love that is willing to endure rejection, evil, and death in order to restore creation (Balthasar, 1988b). In a pastoral perspective, Christ's suffering serves as an example of existential obedience for the faithful to endure suffering with hope and love. Contemporary theologians, such as N. T. Wright, emphasized that suffering in the Christian faith is not a sign of weakness, but a participation in God's redeeming love that is working to renew the world (Wright, 2007). Thus, suffering is not the end of love, but the culmination of the revelation of God's obedient and saving love, which calls man to participate in that fellowship of love through a life of sacrifice and service.

4. The Paradox of the Cross and Glory

The paradox of the Cross and Glory is at the core of the Christian faith that brings together two seemingly contradictory things: suffering and glory. The cross that symbolizes humiliation is precisely the place where the glory of God is revealed. Through Christ's humility and obedience, God's love conquers sin and death. Thus, the cross is not just a sign of suffering, but a revelation of the glory of God who brings victory through sacrifice.

4.1 The Cross as a Place of Self-Emphasizing (kenosis)

The concept of the cross as a place of emptiness (kenosis) has its roots in Philippians 2:6–8, where Christ is described as "who, though in the image of God, does not regard equality with God as a property to be kept, but has emptied himself (ἐκένωσεν, *ekenōsen*) and becomes obedient unto death on the

cross." This text forms the basis for theological reflections on kenosis as a divine act that shows God's love and solidarity with man. In the view of Karl Rahner (1986), kenosis is not only a Christological event, but also a revelation about who God is who is a God who is willing to limit himself for the love of creation. Jürgen Moltmann, called the cross a "Trinitarian kenosis," in which God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are involved in the suffering of the world, not as spectators, but as loving participants (Moltmann, 1974). Through this self-emptying, Christ rejects a power-centered form of glory, and instead displays the glory of service love. Thus, the cross becomes a symbol of the transformation of theological values: from domination to service, from majesty to solidarity (Torrance, 1992).

Furthermore, kenosis theology also thrives in contemporary and contextual reflection. Theologians such as John Polkinghorne, interpret kenosis as a pattern of God's existence that invites man to participate in self-giving love (Polkinghorne, 2001). In the Indonesian context, theologians such as Eka Darmaputera and Stevri Lumintang, associate the kenosis of Christ with the church's call to live in solidarity with the suffering, especially in a social context full of injustice (Darmaputera, 1992). Thus, the cross as a place of kenosis contains an ethical and spiritual meaning: the people are called to "empty themselves" of selfishness in order to serve others. Kenosis is not a form of divine release, but the deepest embodiment of God's love that chooses the way of the cross. In a hermeneutic perspective, Christ's emptying of the self reveals the way God communicates with the world not through power, but through sacrificial love, which continues to be the basis for the theology of suffering and the mission of the church today (Scott, 2015).

4.2 The Glory Born of Suffering (Phil 2:5–11)

In Philippians 2:5–11, Paul describes the mystery of glory born of suffering through a Christological hymn that depicts Christ's downward journey: from divine glory, through self-emptiment (kenosis), to being exalted again by God. This verse shows that the way to glory is not through power or glory, but through obedience and suffering based on love. In Gordon Fee's view, this passage contains a paradoxical structure: "humility becomes the path to rapture." Christ was glorified not because he avoided suffering, but because he was obedient to death on the cross, and through that obedience God exalted Him above all names (Fee, 1995). Theologian Karl Rahner, affirms that Christ's suffering is not a defeat, but a form of triumphant redemption of love. Thus, the glory Paul refers to is not earthly, but is a manifestation of God's love on the side of human humility and suffering (Rahner, 1986). The cross becomes the bridge between humiliation and rapture where God transforms suffering into glory through Christ's obedience.

Further, this theology of glory through suffering has a profound existential and pastoral meaning. Hans Urs von Balthasar, sees the text of Philippians 2:5–11 as a "divine drama," in which God's love is expressed in the act of Christ's total surrender to the Father's will (Balthasar, 1988c). In the modern context, Sarah Coakley, interprets this kenosis as a pattern of spirituality that invites humans to experience transformation through suffering not as a punishment, but as a means of encounter with God's love (Coakley, 2013). In Indonesia, theologians such as Eka Darmaputera (2002) and Robert Setio, read this text as a call for the church to emulate Christ who served in suffering and to bear witness to God's love in the midst of a wounded world (September, 2019). Thus, the glory born of suffering is not just a doctrinal theme, but a kenosis spirituality that teaches that true glory lies in self-sacrificing love. Through Christ's suffering, God reveals His redeeming and life-giving glory, making the cross not a sign of defeat, but a sign of the triumph of eternal love.

4.3 The Existential Dimension: The Cross as the Path of Human Recovery

The existential dimension of the cross reveals that Christ's work is not just a theological event, but also a path of complete recovery of man spiritually, morally, and relationally. The cross is a symbol of reconciliation between God and man, as well as a call for everyone to experience inner transformation through redemptive love. In Paul Tillich's perspective, the cross is the meeting between human alienation and the absolute acceptance of God; There man discovers a new meaning of existence and forgiveness (Tillich, 1957). Dietrich Bonhoeffer, emphasizing that man's recovery is possible only

through participation in Christ's suffering "only those who suffer with Christ know the true meaning of life (Bonhoeffer, 1959)." Asian theologians such as Eka Darmaputera, and Robert Setio, interpreted the cross as a symbol of God's solidarity with a fractured world, where people find hope in the midst of social suffering (Darmaputera, 1992). Thus, the cross points not only to the removal of sin, but also to the restoration of human existence to a true relationship with God, neighbor, and himself, a process of renewal that continues in the restorative love of Christ (September, 2019).

4.4 Theology of the Cross versus Theology of Glory in Church History

Theology of the Cross versus Theology of Glory reflects two major approaches to understanding God's work throughout the history of the Church. The roots of the difference are evident since the reformer Martin Luther in the Heidelberg Disputation (1518), when he opposed the theology of glory (*theologia gloriae*) which emphasized the strength, greatness, and rationality of man in knowing God. On the contrary, Luther affirmed the *theologia crucis* of the theology of the cross as the way in which God reveals himself through suffering, weakness, and the cross of Christ (Luther, 1960b).

Historically, this debate has continued: The Western Church has often been caught up in glorification of power and grandeur, while the theology of the cross reminds that true glory is found in humility and sacrificial love. Jürgen Moltmann, developed this concept by emphasizing that God is not the God who is far from suffering, but the God who suffers on the cross (*The Crucified God*) (Moltmann, 1974). Meanwhile, in the Indonesian context, Sumartana interprets this tension as a reflection on the reality of the church grappling between the spirituality of suffering and the theology of victory (Sumartana, 1999). Thus, the theology of the cross and the theology of glory are not just dogmatic differences, but two paradigms that determine how the church understands the suffering, mission, and glory of Christ in its history.

4.5 Paradoxical Hermeneutics: "In weakness is the power of God"

Paradoxical Hermeneutics: "In Weakness Is the Power of God" reveals the way in which God works in reverse from human logic, where weakness is the vehicle for the manifestation of divine power. Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:9 affirms that "the power of God is made perfect in weakness," marking a hermeneutic principle that rejects the glorification of human power and directs the focus to total dependence on grace. This paradox shows that suffering, failure, and limitations are not signs of God's absence, but rather the space in which His grace works most apparently. From a theological perspective, Jürgen Moltmann, in *The Crucified God*, interprets Christ's weakness on the cross as the supreme revelation of God's redeeming power of love (Moltmann, 1974). Similarly, Miroslav, emphasizes that divine forces do not manipulate or oppress, but rather restore through solidarity with the weak (Volf, 1996). In the Indonesian context, Eka Darmaputera, viewing this hermeneutic of weakness as an ethical foundation for the church to be present in the midst of social suffering, shows that true theology is not born of worldly triumph, but of solidarity with the cross of Christ (Darmaputera, 1992).

5. Implications of Cross Theology for Faith and Christian Life

5.1 The Cross as a Model of Christian Life and Ministry

The cross is the main paradigm for Christian life and ministry, because it reveals the true meaning of love, sacrifice, and obedience to God. Christ, who humbled himself and obeyed to death on the cross (Phil 2:8), was an example for His people to serve with humility and selfless love. Christian ministry is not a quest for power or honor, but an example of Christ emptying himself for the salvation of others (*kenosis*). In a pastoral context, (Bonhoeffer, 1959) affirmed that "true discipleship is a call to bear the cross." Similarly (Moltmann, 1993) seeing that the cross is not only a theological event, but also a life ethic that forms a community of faith that is willing to sacrifice. In Indonesia, Eka Darmaputera (1992) emphasized that the cross should be the lifestyle of the church that is present to serve, not to be served.

5.2 The Ethics of Suffering: Solidarity with a Suffering World

The theology of the cross teaches that suffering is not just a reality to be avoided, but a field of solidarity of God's love with the wounded world. Jesus did not remove suffering instantly, but was present in it as a God who suffers with man (Immanuel in suffering). Then (Volf, 1996), interpreting the cross as a symbol of radical reconciliation that calls Christians to empathize and fight against injustice. In a local context, September, 2019. affirming that the ethics of the cross encourage the Church to be a witness of love on the side of the oppressed. Thus, suffering in the light of the cross is not a curse, but a call to solidarity and service.

5.3 The Church's Call to Bear the Cross

The Church as the body of Christ is called to bear the cross, not only symbolically, but in the praxis of daily life—to be a witness of love and truth in the midst of a world that rejects the Gospel. (Bonhoeffer, 1959) affirming that "when Christ calls a man, he calls him to come and die." This thinking shows that the true church is one that lives in Christ's suffering for the sake of the world. In a global context, (Newbigin, 1989), affirms that a missionary church is a church that is willing to bear the consequences of the truth it proclaims. In Indonesia, (Sumartana, 1999), emphasizing the importance of contextual churches that dare to "shoulder the social cross" in the nation's struggles.

5.4 The Meaning of Glory as Participation in God's Love

Glory in the theology of the cross is not the result of success or power, but rather participation in God's self-sacrificing love. Christ was glorified not because He avoided suffering, but because He was obedient unto death and showed perfect love (John 17:1–5). (Balthasar, 1988b), viewing the glory of Christ as *gloria crucis*—the glory that emanates from love that is willing to empty itself. Through this participation in love, believers experience an existential transformation: from selfishness to sacrifice, from suffering to glory. In the reflections of Asian theology, (Yong, 2012), affirms that true glory is present in solidarity and service to others, not domination over them.

5.5 The Eschatological Dimension: The Cross and the Hope of the Coming Glory

The cross not only speaks of the suffering of the present, but also becomes the promise and basis of eschatological hope. In Christ's suffering is stored the promise of the resurrection and restoration of all creation (Rom 8:18–25). Wright, (2003), affirms that the cross and the resurrection are two sides of one saving reality: suffering leads to glory. The theology of the cross thus forms an ethos of active, not passive, hope—believers are called to look forward to the restoration of the world while working for justice and peace. In the context of Indonesian theology, Scott, (2004), affirming that the hope of the cross leads the church to continue to endure in the midst of historical suffering as a sign of the coming Kingdom of God.

6. Theological Synthesis and Reflection

6.1 The Integration of Suffering and Glory in Christology

The integration of suffering and glory in Christology shows that the cross and resurrection are not two separate events but two aspects of a single work of salvation: Christ's self-emptying (*kenosis*) that endures suffering is precisely the path to divine glory; in other words, the glory of God is revealed through the obedience and suffering of the Messiah (Phil 2:5–11). This approach was enriched by patristic readings (Irenaeus, Athanasius) and developed systematically by modern theologians e.g. Balthasar, (1988a), which affirms the *gloria crucis* as the beauty of love, as well as Moltmann, (1974), Moltmann who emphasizes God's solidarity in suffering so that contemporary Christology must read glory through the lens of suffering and reconciliation, not the other way around.

6.2 The Relevance of Cross Theology in the Midst of a Modern Humanitarian Crisis

Theology of the cross offers a highly relevant ethical and pastoral framework for responding to the modern humanitarian crises of war, displacement, structural poverty, and injustice because it places

solidarity, defense of victims, and acts of reconciliation as implications of faith; Not just a theory, the cross calls the Church to act with those who suffer Volf, (1996); In the Indonesian context, contextual theological reflections by local writers affirm the same thing: the theology of the cross demands the social alignment of the church, real pastoral practices, and the formation of a community that bears common suffering for the sake of social recovery Stuart (2019).

6.3 Suffering as the Divine Language of Redemption

The suffering of Christ can be read as a "divine language" not a synonym of failure but a way of God speaking and redeeming in which the suffering experienced by the Son becomes a medium of revelation of love, forgiveness, and human renewal; the theological tradition (Barth, Rahner, Balthasar) sees the cross as a moment in which God's justice, love, and forgiveness meet paradoxically so that redemption occurs through the acceptance of suffering itself Barth, (1956). This hermeneutic reading rejects spiritualization that ignores the social reality of suffering and affirms that redemption is concrete in nature freeing man from the restraint of sin, inter-human reconciliation, and cosmic restoration Wright, (2003b).

6.4 Hermeneutic Implications for Contemporary Bible Reading

Paradoxical hermeneutics—which enables biblical texts to speak to the context of modern suffering—demands a dialectical method of reading: understanding the text in its history but applying it contextually so that the cross becomes the lens through which to read contemporary issues (Gadamer; Ricoeur; Thiselton). This approach encourages theological readers to combine historical-critical analysis with practical reflection (praxis) so that interpretation does not become merely academic but triggers transformational action: comfort, justice, and empowerment for those who suffer (Thiselton, 2006). At the local level, Indonesian contextual hermeneutics demands cultural, political, and economically sensitive reading so that the Bible can bring real hope to communities (Scott, 2004).

Conclusion

First, the results of this study confirm that Jesus' suffering on the cross is the highest manifestation of God's glory. In the crucifixion, God's love and His justice are paradoxically combined: God shows His power not through domination, but through humility and self-sacrifice. The cross is not only a symbol of suffering, but also a symbol of victory over sin, death, and oppressive power. Thus, the theology of the cross places the suffering of Christ at the center of Christology that radiates the saving glory of God. This is in line with Jürgen Moltmann's view that in Christ's suffering, God identifies himself with the suffering world in order for man to experience true redemption.

Second, through a theological hermeneutic approach, this article finds that the paradox "in weakness is the power of God" (2 Cor 12:9) is the key to the reading of the entire crucifixion. This paradoxical hermeneutics reveals that God does not work through the logic of human power, but through life-giving humility and suffering. This view expands the horizon of Bible reading, where suffering is no longer interpreted as a sign of punishment, but as a space of encounter with God's saving love. In this framework, human suffering takes on a new meaning because in it there is a God who is united and actively participates in the struggle of creation.

Third, from a contextual perspective, the theology of the cross has great relevance in dealing with modern humanitarian crises—such as social inequality, violence, disease, and spiritual alienation. The cross became a living model for the church and believers to live in solidarity with the wounded world. The Church is not called to seek glory in worldly splendor, but to imitate Christ who took up the cross in love and service. In this context, the ethics of suffering becomes part of the call of faith, in which followers of Christ are invited to be a sign of love and hope in the midst of human suffering

Fourth, overall, the theological and hermeneutic synthesis in this article confirms that suffering and glory are inseparable in Christology. The two form one unity in God's plan of redemption. The cross is not the end of suffering, but rather the path to universal resurrection and restoration. In an eschatological perspective, the glory to come is a full participation in God's love that has begun through Christ's suffering in the world. Therefore, the theology of the cross must continue to be lived as the basis of spirituality, ethics, and the mission of the church in the midst of a fragile world. This theology affirms that true glory is found only in a love that is willing to suffer—a love that unites God and man in an eternal reconciliation.

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