

READING THE "POLITICAL" IN JÜRGEN MOLTMANN'S THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS THROUGH HANNAH ARENDT'S CONCEPT OF *INTER-ESSE*

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Abstract

This article investigates how the meaning of "the political" in Jürgen Moltmann's theology of the Cross can be reinterpreted through Hannah Arendt's concept of *inter-esse*. Against the backdrop of twentieth-century political violence and the resurgence of political theology, the study situates Moltmann's theology of the Cross as a powerful critique of political monotheism and sacralized authority, while engaging Arendt's philosophical account of politics as a relational space constituted through human plurality, speech, and action. Methodologically, the article employs a critical and constructive hermeneutical dialogue between Moltmann's trinitarian theology and Arendt's political theory, combining close textual analysis with conceptual reinterpretation. The analysis demonstrates that Moltmann primarily understands the political as a divine critique of idolatrous power revealed in the crucifixion as a political execution and Trinitarian event of suffering solidarity. Reading this framework through Arendt's notion of *inter-esse* expands the political meaning of the Cross from a deconstructive critique into a constitutive reality. The article argues that the Cross creates a "cruciform public space" in which human plurality is re-founded through solidaristic action and transformative speech. The study concludes that this cruciform *inter-esse* offers a constructive political vision for Christian praxis, redefining power as relational, participatory, and oriented toward justice and the common good.

Keywords: *political theology, theology of the cross, Jürgen Moltmann, Hannah Arendt, inter-esse, cruciform public space, Trinity and politics, power and solidarity*

INTRODUCTION

Political theology, a subject that has been a constant source of debate, has a rich and complex history. Throughout the medieval Church's history, theology was used to legitimize kingship and state power. However, with the advent of modernity, the secularization of state concepts and the diminishing influence of theology in politics led to a separation between the two. Furthermore, the Enlightenment period, in particular, sought to limit religion and theological reflection to the private sphere, thereby removing it from the realm of politics. This shift reduced theology to matters of personal morality and faith. Consequently, Christian theologians faced a pressing question: Does theology retain its value, or should it continue to address the shape of politics and the world publicly? The terrible devastation of the 20th century—two world wars, the Holocaust, Hiroshima, colonial exploitation, and the rise of totalitarian regimes such as the Nazi Regime and the Auschwitz concentration camp—made this question inevitable and necessitated a new theological shift. How could Christian faith, theology, and identity, which proclaims a just and merciful God, remain silent in the face of political violence, social

injustice, and human suffering? In the urgent context of that period, political theology reemerged as a revolutionary discourse in both politics and theology.

In response to this revolutionary discourse, two distinct and influential approaches emerged to reconfigure and rethink what "the political" means in our times. One direction has its starting point in the theological insights that redefine the concept of politics within it. This direction will be examined fairly through the works of Jürgen Moltmann in this paper. Jürgen Moltmann's theological works stand as a watershed moment among the prominent contemporary political theological works of the 20th century. Deeply affected and shaped by his own experiences as a victim and prisoner of war after World War II, Moltmann's political theology was inevitably developing as one "under the shadow of Auschwitz", which he himself admitted, "My theology began in captivity... I was not looking for God, but He found me. Theology after Auschwitz cannot begin with triumph, but with the cries of the abandoned."¹ His theology sought to reconcile hope with suffering and revolutionized the concept of God as the crucified one in the midst of the oppressed, unmasking the political power and ultimate authority.

In his early book, *"The Crucified God"* (1972), his thoughts revolved around the scandal of the Cross as a catalyst to challenge and critique the oppressive power of the empire, presenting the suffering of the world with which the crucified Jesus is identified. The crucifixion, a Roman instrument of terror, exposes the violence of empire and all sacralized forms of domination.² The Cross is a political transformative power that liberates the state from the political service of idols and men from political alienation and loss of rights. Hence, the political theology of the Cross must seek to demythologize the state and society.³ This perspective poses a challenge not only to Christian theology but also to the Christian Church and its faithful, who are called upon to advocate for justice, peace, and the empowerment of the marginalized in a society marked by injustice and political repression. Undeniably, Moltmann's political theology has contributed significantly to the revolutionizing of Christian theology at that time, bringing it into the political realm through the theology of the Cross. In this perspective, all Christian theology must always be political to be a transformative and liberating praxis.

In contrast, another direction took a distinct path that excluded theological concerns or questions in the realm of politics. Instead of starting from theology, Hannah Arendt's approach to conceptualizing politics is a philosophical and anthropological analysis of the human condition. In her two philosophically famous and influential works, *The Human Condition* (THC)⁴ and later *The Promise of Politics* (TPP),⁵ she developed her concept of the political not from the top down, but from the bottom up, through a phenomenology of the human condition itself, which is characterized by human plurality. In this human plurality, Arendt observes that we live among a multitude of unique individuals, and we are capable of expressing and revealing ourselves, or who we are, only through our speech and

¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *A Broad Place: An Autobiography* (Fortress Press, 2009), 25–31.

² Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, 1st Fortress Press ed (Fortress Press, 1993), 204; *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution of Messianic Ecclesiology*, with Internet Archive (London: SCM Press, 1977), 327, <http://archive.org/details/churchinpowerofsoooomolt>.

³ Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, 327.

⁴ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (University of Chicago Press, 1988).

⁵ Hannah Arendt and Jerome Kohn, *Promise of Politics* (Schocken Books, 2005).

action. For Arendt, to be political is to live *inter homines esse* - to be among people in a 'space of appearance' which is constituted through speech and action.

These different approaches in their starting points aim to redefine the concept of political, one from the theological insights which are rooted in the Crucified Christ, the other from the reality of human plurality and human ability to act and to speak together, and to live in a world with many different people, creating a fascinating tension. My paper takes this tension as an advantage for a critical thought experiment: what happens if Moltmann's understanding of 'political' in theology of the Cross was instead read within Arendt's concept of the political as '*inter-esse*'? What if the 'political' in the theology of the Cross is understood not only as divine solidarity but precisely as the creation of an *inter-esse* as developed in the thought of Arendt?

In this paper, I argue that Hannah Arendt's concept of *inter-esse* expands and transforms the political in Moltmann's theology of the Cross from a model of divine critique to the constitutive foundation of a "cruciform public space" where human plurality performs divine solidarity through speech and action. I will develop this thesis statement into three main sections to support it. Firstly, I will provide a detailed interpretation of the philosophical framework of Arendt's concept of political as *inter-esse*. Secondly, I will analyze Jürgen Moltmann's theology of the Cross to demonstrate how his powerful understanding of the "political" remains primarily a critical tool against idolatrous power, centered on the crucifixion as a political execution and a Trinitarian event of divine solidarity. Lastly, I will critically evaluate reading Moltmann's understanding of the "political" in the theology of the Cross through the lens of Arendt's conception of political as *inter-esse*. By applying Arendt's theoretical framework to re-read Moltmann's understanding of the political, I aim to demonstrate that the Crucified God on the Cross not only embodies divine solidarity with the poor, the oppressed, and the suffering, but also creates an *inter-esse*, namely, the cruciform public space. In this *inter-esse* of the Cross, one is not only called to be Christian but also to be political, which means to learn to live among others, especially the poor and the oppressed, in active solidarity, which is constituted through liberating action and transformative speech.

A Theoretical Framework: Hannah Arendt's Concept of "Political" as *Inter-esse*

In her two remarkable works, *The Human Condition* (THC) and *The Promise of Politics* (TPP), Hannah Arendt redefines the concept of the "political" by separating it from sovereignty, rule, and domination. Instead, she places it within the dynamic realm of human plurality and action. In her early works, Arendt argues that politics revolves around the words and deeds of actors who express their interests (*inter-esse*).⁶ This political theory has two essential elements: the former lies in the capacity of political actors to reveal themselves through speech and action, and the latter is about expressing their interests. Both of these must be revealed among plural persons within the space between them. Therefore, plurality is a crucial condition in defining what politics means. As Arendt thought, the political is to be found in this space in between that exists among political actors. In this space in between people, that is constituted by words and deeds, which show political actors acting together. Hence, to be political is not meant to be a passive state of being located between two individuals or others, but rather an active engagement in building and preserving the "in-between" space that arises through

⁶ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 182–83.

shared speech and action. But what precisely does she mean (not mean) by action and speech in politics and plurality? And what precisely does she mean (not mean) by interests?

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt distinguishes the three fundamental modes of the *vita activa*: labor, work, and action. Arendt's classification begins with labor (*animal laborans*) as the activity, which she thinks corresponds to the biological processes necessary to sustain life for the human body.⁷ She argues that labor is bound to the biological process of the human body, and the repetitive, cyclical nature of this process gives labor its character of futility: nothing permanent remains."⁸ Unlike labor, work (*homo faber*) for her is an unnatural activity for humans, distinct from the natural life cycle. Work creates an artificial world that outlasts individual lives, contributing to human worldliness.

Nevertheless, in contrast to both human conditions, labor, and work, Arendt says that the highest human capacity is action (*praxis*). Unlike labor and work, Arendt observes that action is the sole activity that directly occurs between individuals without involving objects or matter. And if a life without action and without speech, Arendt argues that this is the only way of life that in earnest has renounced all appearance and is literally dead to the world; it has ceased to be a human life because it is no longer lived among men.⁹ What makes us human, according to Arendt, is characterized by our capacity to act in concert with other beings. In fact, we can observe that action takes place not in the private sphere but in the public realm, in the context of plurality. Therefore, Arendt recognized the connection between action and plurality.

However, for Arendt, action is indeed an end in itself, the highest human capacity. Its essential nature, however, is to take the initiative, to begin something new and unforeseeable. Drawing from the definition of the verb "to act" in both interrelated words of the two Greek verbs *archein* ("to begin," "to lead," finally "to rule") and *prattein* ("to pass through," "to achieve," "to finish") correspond the two Latin verbs *agere* ("to set into motion," "to lead") and *gerere* (whose original meaning is "to bear"), Arendt demonstrates though each action were divided into two parts, the beginning made by a single person and the achievement in which many join by "bearing" and "finishing" the enterprise, by seeing it through.¹⁰ Nevertheless, Arendt criticizes that when it comes to political language of using the verb "to act," the *archein* and *agere* came to mean chiefly "to rule" and "to lead," and the meaning of the other side of it, as "to begin" or to set in motion, has been lost. Therefore, she wants to recover the lost meaning of *archein* and *agere* as "to begin" and to set something in motion. For her, it is through our speech and action that we reveal who we are and our own distinctiveness. Through action, every person can initiate or begin something new because "even the smallest act in the most limited circumstances bears the seed of the same boundlessness, because one deed, and sometimes one word, suffices to change every constellation."¹¹ In Arendt's language, the principle of beginning in the human plurality through speech and action is *natality*. The capacity for beginning is fundamental to Arendt's understanding of human plurality and politics. When we come together through action and speech in the public sphere, there lies the potential for a new beginning

⁷ Ibid., 7.

⁸ Ibid., 97–98.

⁹ Ibid., 176.

¹⁰ Ibid., 189.

¹¹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 190.

to unfold. Moreover, action and speech are internally and intimately related. Action and speech are so closely related because the primordial and specifically human act must at the same time contain the answer to the question asked of every newcomer: "Who are you?" This disclosure of who somebody is is implicit in both his words and deeds.¹²

Action and speech correspond to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world. On the other hand, plurality—the coexistence of numerous individuals—is the fundamental condition for political life and is directly linked to action. Plurality is not just a necessary condition for politics but also the basis through which political life emerges and exists. For Arendt, "while all aspects of the human condition are somehow related to politics, this plurality is specifically the condition not only the *conditio sine qua non*, but the *conditio per quem*- of all political life."¹³ In her later work, *The Promise of Politics*, Arendt explicitly defines politics as being based on the fact of human plurality.¹⁴

Recall Arendt's concept of the political, which is quoted above, that "politics revolves around the words and deeds of actors who express their interests (*inter-esse*), literally means 'in-between'." Arendt derives her understanding of the word "interest" from the etymology of the Latin term "interest" or (*inter-esse*). Indeed, Arendt draws upon this etymology to develop and articulate her belief in the essence of being "political." This "in-between" emerges when individuals come together, act, and speak. Arendt consciously recovers the term's older, richer meaning, which had been narrowed in modern thought to denote primarily economic or material self-interest.

For Arendt, politics is not the property of any individual or institution but a relational reality that exists *between* people. As she elaborates in *The Human Condition*, action and speech "go on between men, as they are directed toward them... and [they] retain their agent-revealing capacity even if their content is exclusively 'objective,' concerned with the matter of the world of things... which physically lies between them and out of which arise their specific, objective, worldly interests."¹⁵ In other words, for Arendt, politics emerges as a shared, relational space—an *inter-esse*—when people gather in speech and action; within this space, they discover and negotiate their common "*inter-ests*," which form the very ground that binds them into a political community.¹⁶

To make it even clearer, in *The Promise of Politics*, she provides an even more foundational formulation: **"Politics arises between men, and so quite outside of man. There is therefore no real political substance. Politics arises in what lies between men and is established as relationships."**¹⁷ This statement assumes a crucial shape in understanding the concept of politics in Arendt's view because it rejects the notion that politics is an inherent aspect of human nature, akin to a "political animal" disposition, as presented in Aristotle's definition of man. Instead, it suggests that politics is a delicate and constructed reality that emerges solely from human interaction. She further argues that "wherever human beings come together... a space is generated that simultaneously gathers them into it and separates them from one another. Every such space has its

¹² Ibid., 178.

¹³ Ibid., 7.

¹⁴ Arendt and Kohn, *Promise of Politics*, 93.

¹⁵ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 182–83.

¹⁶ Ibid., 182.

¹⁷ Arendt and Kohn, *Promise of Politics*, 95.

own structure, particularly in a public context, as evidenced by laws, constitutions, statutes, and the like. **Wherever people come together, the world thrusts itself between them, and it is in this in-between space that all human affairs are conducted.**"¹⁸ The realm of human affairs, strictly speaking, consists of the web of human relationships that exists wherever men live together.¹⁹

As such, I would now like to outline Arendt's understanding of the political. To be political is to be among other human beings, to be *inter homines esse*. In this space of appearance among others, that is constituted through action and speech, people come to act and speak together. The conception of politics of Arendt is thoroughly immanent, as noted by Bernstein.²⁰ It is immanent because it is created by human beings and exists only as long as human beings act together. Hence, the political is to be found only in this "in-between" that exists between actors. In an in-between space constituted by words and deeds, political actors disclose themselves in order to engage in mutual discourse without coercion for the common good of all.

Having thus clarified my understanding of Arendt's concept of political as *inter-esse* through two essential dimensions: action-nativity and plurality-space of appearance, I have now established an interpretive framework that will allow me to explore how Moltmann's understanding of "political" theology of the Cross is operative and can be interpreted within Arendt's concept of the 'political'. Before that, let me introduce how Moltmann understands and redefines the concept of the 'political' in the theology of the Cross, which he believes is the foundation and criticism for Christian theology of political issues.

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Jürgen Moltmann's Understanding of "Political" in Theology of the Cross

The Cross as Political Event and Theological Revolution

The first and most important element in defining and approaching political theology in Moltmann's thought is to look at the historical fact of Jesus' crucifixion. This historical fact reveals that Jesus' death on the Cross is not seen as religious violence but a political execution. And from this point of view, Moltmann's foundational axiom in political theology is to be found only in the history of Jesus, which had its earthly end when he died, abandoned by God, on the Cross.²¹ For Moltmann, "the understanding of the crucified Jesus must be the origin of all christology, for otherwise his death on the cross would mean the end of all christology."²² Thus, in the end, the basic problem and the starting point of Christology is the scandal and the folly of the Cross. In this sense, Moltmann argues: "without the cross, there is no christology, and there is no christology that does not have to demonstrate its legitimation in the cross."²³

However, Moltmann observes that the historical reality of the Crucified Christ on the Cross is not fully explained, mainly due to the religious conflict between Jesus and Jewish leaders who uphold Moses' Torah Law, and as a result, Jesus was accused of blasphemy. It can only be looked at from another angle that

¹⁸ Ibid., 143.

¹⁹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 182–83.

²⁰ Richard J. Bernstein, "Immanence, Plurality, and Politics," *Iyyun: The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly*, (2010), 42–43, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23354434>.

²¹ Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, 119.

²² Ibid., 124.

²³ Ibid., 125.

Jesus' execution on the Cross was a political event, "For Jesus died, whether rightly or wrongly, a political death as a rebel, on the cross,"²⁴ and his death was crucified by the Roman occupying power. Crucifixion was a political punishment for rebellion against the social and political order of the *Imperium Romanum*.²⁵

The reason Jesus was crucified on the Cross wasn't simply because he was a blasphemer who claimed to be the Son of God or went against the Torah Law, but more fundamentally because Jesus was misperceived as a 'rebel' engaged in political activity against the Roman Empire. His actions and message were seen as a threat to the social and political order of the Empire. Consequently, he was crucified by the Romans and suffered the death of a political criminal. In this context, Moltmann could see how the political Roman occupying power has an essential element in constituting the death of Jesus, though he is no sin, as a cruel and brutal punishment of the Cross. The Cross, then, is not merely the site of personal suffering but a public symbol of imperial dominance and divine protest. By executing Jesus as a political threat, Rome revealed the true nature of its power as fundamentally grounded in violence and domination.

The doctrine of the Trinity in the theology of the Cross and the Political

As previously mentioned, Moltmann emphasized the significance of considering the crucifixion of Jesus on the Cross as a historical event and its origin and starting point for all christological theologies. I also stated that Jesus was crucified and died as a rebel under the Roman Empire's domination and absolute authority. However, in Moltmann's political theology of the Cross, the Roman Empire's domination and absolute power represented not only its brutal and powerful state at that time but, in general sense, he aimed to connect and present that theology of the Cross as a critique to all powerful and brutal states that thought of political monotheism which has been developed and used in order to legitimate domination, from the emperor cults of the ancient world, Byzantium and the absolute ideologies of the seventeenth century, down to the dictatorships of the twentieth.²⁶ This political monotheism portrays the one almighty emperor as the most prominent manifestation of the invisible God. His 'glory' mirrors God's glory, and his rule embodies God's rule. Consequently, the one God is revered within him. He is not merely a regent; he is the true Lord and possessor of the empire. Therefore, the concept of one God, one emperor, one Church, and one empire originated from the notion of unity in God.²⁷ Political monotheism was rooted in the absolutist doctrine of sovereignty in Christian monotheism, which positioned the emperor as God's visible image, with their rule reflecting divine authority.²⁸ This concept has been used as a justification for religious archetypes for the earthly rulers, dictators, and tyrants. However, for Moltmann, this concept of political monotheism has paralyzed Christian theology and the Christian Church in responding to the societal issues and injustices that resulted from it. He argues that throughout history, political powers—whether empires, states, or revolutionary movements—have a tendency to sacralize themselves, presenting their authority, laws, and order as absolute, divine, and beyond criticism. This is the essence of political idolatry: the worship of created political structures as if they were God.

²⁴ Ibid., 69.

²⁵ Ibid., 136.

²⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Fortress Press, 1993), 192.

²⁷ Ibid., 195.

²⁸ Ibid., 195.

In an attempt to combat and demolish political monotheism, Moltmann introduced a novel concept of the political under the theology of the Cross, particularly through its interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity. As he strongly defends criticism of politics in his later work, *Trinity and the Kingdom: the Doctrine of God*, he argues that "it is only when the doctrine of the Trinity overcomes the monotheistic notion of a supreme universal monarch in heaven and his divine patriarchs on earth that earthly rulers, dictators, and tyrants cease to find any valid religious archetypes."²⁹ Moltmann views the cry of Jesus' despair on the Cross, "My God, why have you forsaken me?"³⁰, as revealing a profound rupture in the life of the Trinity. He asserts that the crucifixion of Jesus Christ must be perceived as a Trinitarian event that reveals God's authentic nature, characterized by love, self-sacrifice, humility, and suffering, rather than merely power and glory.³¹ "In the forsakenness of the Son, the Father also forsakes himself... the Son suffers dying, the Father suffers the death of the Son."³² "God allows himself to be humiliated and crucified in the Son in order to free the oppressors and the oppressed from oppression and to open up to them the situation of free, sympathetic humanity."³³ In fact, considering the events leading up to Jesus' death on the Cross, Moltmann insists that it is impossible to form the figure of the omnipotent, universal monarch, as reflected in earthly rulers, out of the unity of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Why? Because, for Moltmann, the Almighty and the glory of the Triune God in the crucified Christ are not the archetype of the mightiest or most powerful beings in this world, as those political religions attempt to associate them with, but rather the Almighty and the glory of love who experienced suffering, powerlessness, and helplessness. As he critically argues that in the face of the crucified Christ, the Triune God is almighty power in the sense of love and solidarity with the suffering and oppressed, not domination and political ruling:

The Almighty in the Cross is not the archetype of the mighty ones of this world, but He is the Father of the Christ who was crucified and raised for us.... he is almighty because he exposes Himself to the experience of suffering, pain, helplessness, and death. But what he is is not almighty power; what he is is love. It is his passionate, passible love that is almighty, nothing else.³⁴ The glory of the triune God is reflected, not in the crowns of kings and the triumphs of victors, but in the face of the crucified Jesus, and in the faces of the oppressed whose brother he became. He is the one visible image of the invisible God. The glory of the triune God is also reflected in the community of Christ: in the fellowship of believers and of the poor.³⁵

Moltmann not only redefined and revolutionized the concept of God, shifting from impassibility to passibility, but also posited that God suffered in solidarity with human suffering. Moreover, placing the doctrine of the Trinity within the theology of the Cross had a profound impact on Moltmann's thought, leading him to propose a new political theology grounded in the theology of the Cross and serving as a critique of political monotheism. As Moltmann developed his ideas, he redefined true politics as not political monotheism or monarchy, which have historically been used to legitimize domination, but as a true theological doctrine of freedom that

²⁹ Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 197.

³⁰ Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, 227.

³¹ Ibid., 235.

³² Ibid., 243.

³³ Ibid., 321.

³⁴ Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 197.

³⁵ Ibid., 197-198.

must, in turn, point towards a community of men and women without supremacy or subjugation.³⁶ As he contends, if political-religious authorities executed the Christ of God, the higher justification of these authorities is eliminated. Consequently, political rule and power can only be justified "from below," not "from above." Wherever Christianity spreads, the state's concept undergoes a transformation. Political rule is no longer regarded as divinely ordained but as a task that demands constant justification. The state's theory shifts from assertive thought to justifying and critical thought.³⁷ This marks a pivotal moment for Moltmann in comprehending and defining the true nature of politics and its potential for criticism and justification.

The crucifixion of Jesus on the Cross reveals a profound truth: these powers labeled as "godless," "powerless," and "cursed" are actually where God's power and glory are truly revealed. This power should critically and liberally illuminate the state from earthly power. For Moltmann, the crucified Christ has a strong idolatry-critical power for those who follow him.³⁸ The political power of the state must be critiqued and influenced by the power of love, justice, and peace, helping people achieve happiness and the common good for all. Political powerlessness is not about to make any state or nation weak or damaged in a literal sense. Instead, it is a radical transformation from holding ultimate authority and domination to respecting others' dignity and rights, and in solidarity with all men. Political power must cease to mean domination and become participation—a sharing in the life and freedom of others. This radical transformation in the definition of a new political theology in the theology of the Cross has been seen in the comment of George Hunsinger in the political theology of Moltmann, he writes: the cross 'disqualifies sacralized authority—it removes the divine justification 'from above' for oppressive political power and reorients power 'from below,' toward democratization and solidarity.'³⁹ The God who is revealed on the Cross is not the divine guarantor of the *status quo* but its ultimate critic. This revelation redefines the very nature of Christian political engagement. Politics is no longer about sanctifying existing power but is reconceived as a "permanent process of demythologizing idols and democratizing power."⁴⁰

This novel political theology departs from the absolutist or divine right king, instead drawing its foundation from the Cross of the crucified Christ. Consequently, the new and critical political theology must take the forms of desacralization, relativization, and democratization. In the political theology of the Cross, politics is unmasked from its association with power and domination, instead being positioned as powerless in order to foster solidarity with the people. This revelation exposes the truth against political domination and idolatry. The theology of the Cross reveals Jesus' political execution not only as a historical event or state violence but also as a profound meaning of power. True power lies not in political domination or oppression, as expressing ultimate and sovereign rule over people, but in its liberation from forms of rule that make men servile and apathetic, and the political

³⁶ Ibid., 192.

³⁷ Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, 328.

³⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, "European Political Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Political Theology* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 11.

³⁹ George Hunsinger, *The Crucified God and The Political Theology of Violence*, n.d., 384.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 385.

religions that give them stability.⁴¹ A true power of politics lies in its form, which embodies the power of the Cross, standing in solidarity with people experiencing poverty and suffering. This redefinition of the new political in Moltmann dismantles the theological basis of supremacy or absolutism. If divine power is manifested in suffering solidarity, then any human power that justifies itself by invoking divine-like sovereignty—whether that of a monarch, a state, or a leader—is fundamentally unacceptable. This aligns with the broader project of political theology as described by Metz, who argued for a “negative political theology” that interrupts history in the name of the suffering other.⁴²

In essence, Jürgen Moltmann redefines the very essence of the concept of politics through the interplay of the doctrine of the Trinity in the theology of the Cross. By revealing the Cross as a Trinitarian event, where the triune God’s almightiness and sovereignty reached its fullness of almighty love with godforsakenness, suffering, and solidarity with the oppressed, the political religious framework of “political monotheism” must be subdued and dismantled. Moltmann added that the “Cross is our political critic; the Cross is our hope for a politics of freedom. The memory of the crucified Christ is our reason for political theology.”⁴³

In Moltmann’s thought, the monarchy of a ruler or political monotheism doesn’t correspond to the triune God in the crucified Christ; it is the community of men and women, without privileges and without subjugation. The monotheistic God is ‘the Lord of the world.’ He is defined simply through his power of disposal over his property, not through personality and personal relationships. So the almighty Trune God corresponds to a community in which people are defined through their relations with one another and in their significance for one another, not in opposition to one another, in terms of power and possession.⁴⁴ Therefore, the new political, rooted in the Crucified face of Christ on the Cross, must desacralize all forms of idolatrous political authority and domination to the empowering love that manifested in suffering and led to a critical, liberating, and democratizing praxis in societal life. It is a form of political power that manifests itself through political societal participation, solidarity with the marginalized, and an unwavering pursuit of a just community. Only by doing so can the Cross serve as the foundation for a new, transformative political reality.

Jürgen Moltmann’s theology of the Cross defines the “political” primarily as a divine critique of idolatrous power. By analyzing the crucifixion as a political execution and reinterpreting the Trinity through the event of the Cross, Moltmann dismantles the theological foundations of political monotheism. Nevertheless, this critical framework now presents a pivotal inquiry: if the Cross dismantles oppressive politics, what kind of political reality does it positively establish? It is precisely this gap—the expansion and transformation from a deconstructive and divine critique to a constructive paradigm—that the subsequent section will address by interpreting Moltmann through the Arendtian lens of *inter-esse*.

Critical Evaluation

Having thus clarified and established Arendt’s concept of politics as “*inter-esse*” and Moltmann’s understanding of the “political” in the theology of the Cross

⁴¹ Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, 329.

⁴² Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, trans. J. Matthew Ashley (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 69.

⁴³ Moltmann, *European Political Theology*, 11.

⁴⁴ Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 198.

as a critique of political monotheism and the rationale for desacralization, relativization, and democratization of politics, I embark on the central critical experiment of this paper in this final section. My aim is not merely to compare Jürgen Moltmann and Hannah Arendt, but to engage them in a constructive and critical dialogue. My aim is not to subsume Arendt's philosophical political theory under theology, but to explore and find how her notion of *inter-esse* might contribute politically to the reconfiguration and clarification of what "the political" means in the intersection of divine suffering in solidarity with peoples and divine critique of idolatrous power (Moltmann's strong point) within the human plurality. Therefore, I intend to present my own critical evaluation of employing an Arendtian theoretical framework to reinterpret Moltmann's concept of political. This reinterpretation aims to bring about a significant conceptual shift. Instead of viewing the "political" in Moltmann's theology of the Cross solely as a critical theological category—a decisive critique of all forms of political power that conceal their violence under the guise of legitimacy—I perceive it as a constitutive-political one. This shift leads to the inauguration of a new kind of political space or relational space, which I term the cruciform public space or the cruciform *inter-esse*. This cruciform *inter-esse* space is characterized not by domination or absolute power, but by a plurality constituted through liberating speech and solidaristic action among others. In the subsequent sections, I will develop this concept through three interconnected arguments. These arguments demonstrate that: a) the Trinity, as the primordial *inter-esse*, serves as the archetype for political *inter-esse*; b) Jesus Christ's entire life, through his speech, deeds, and ultimate act on the Cross, manifests and constitutes cruciform *inter-esse*; and c) the Church, as God's community, is also form of *inter-esse* that exists in time and space. She is called to embody and manifest it institutionally and concretely in her mission through action and speech.

The Eternal Trinitarian Inter-esse: The Divine Archetype for a Kenotic Politics

My initial critical observation is to establish solidly, through the lens of Arendt's *inter-esse*, the potential and possibility for a cruciform political *inter-esse* within the very essence of God, the eternal trinitarian *inter-esse*. Moltmann's undeniably significant contribution lies in the trinitarian participation of the three Divine Persons in the Crucifixion event that critically and fundamentally serves as a decisive and unwavering critique of the political monotheism, which he accurately identifies as the theological foundation of absolutist politics, which is understood to hold the absolute authority, rooted in the concept of Divine Authority, as the representative of God. Moltmann posits the Trinitarian participation in the Crucifixion event, which reveals a God of suffering and powerlessness, contrary to the traditional theological monarchical conception of God, characterized by impassible sovereignty. While I find his theological insights compelling, I assert that his Trinitarian solution gains profound political clarity when interpreted through Hannah Arendt's concept of *inter-esse* or relationality.

In contrast to Moltmann's interpretation of the Trinity as a participation in Jesus' death on the Cross, I propose a perspective derived from Arendtian thought. Through this lens, I perceive the Trinity as the primordial and eternal *inter-esse*. This eternal *inter-esse* portrays God not as a solitary or lonely but as a communion and in-between among Divine persons: the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. They bound together in mutual love and suffering. In this eternal *inter-esse* of the Trinity, one God, though they are distinct from each other in relation, is divinely equal.

Before all creation, the Godhead is not a solitary monarch but a dynamic, perichoretic community of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is a divine life constituted entirely by relationship—a perpetual, loving “in-between” of mutual self-giving and recognition. This communion in the Trinity shows a God of relationality, and each divine person lives eternally in relation to others. It means no matter what, neither suffering nor death of the second divine person on the Cross could separate this eternal relation in the communion of divine persons. The inner life of God is, in essence, a perfect polity of love. If the ultimate reality of power is not solitary domination but relational self-giving, then any human political system that claims a theological foundation must reflect this kenotic and pluralistic relationality.

In my reading and understanding, the Crucifixion event is no longer an anomaly in the life of God but ultimately is the revelation of this eternal *inter-esse*. Moltmann’s powerful insight helps us see that the death of Jesus on the Cross is not only his death alone, but a Trinitarian event in which God the Father also suffered and grieved participatively in the death and suffering of God the Son, Jesus, and God the Spirit is the bond of love between the two in the trinitarian rupturer. Nevertheless, through Hannah Arendt’s concept of *inter-esse*, the trinitarian event is not simply a participation in God the Son’s death on the Cross, but is, deeply and essentially, a revelation of divine trinitarian *inter-esse* in this brutal and tragic scenario. This, the divine eternal “in-between,” is so robust that it can even encompass godforsakenness, suffering, and death without being destroyed. This can not be demolished by any earthly power because in this eternal divine *inter-esse* is not a God who rules from a distance, but a God who is in relation and living among people, and it is a God whose power is made perfect in weakness and whose sovereignty is ruled by love and exercised in solidarity with the sufferings and marginalized.

Consequently, through Arendt’s reading of Moltmann’s work, I contend that the doctrine of the Trinity in Christ’s death on the Cross is not simply about the divine persons in Godhead participating in, but serves as the transcendent archetype of the eternal divine *inter-esse* for a politics that stands in direct opposition to absolutism. This divine *inter-esse* is not only a decisive critique for political monotheism but now sets an archetype. Therefore, a political community that aspires to embody this divine *inter-esse* essence cannot be structured around a singular, sovereign will. Instead, it must be a pluralistic space where power is distributed, where authority is derived from mutual service and recognition of each other, and where the dignity of each individual is grounded in their relational significance to others and leads to the common good for everyone, rather than in their individual power or possessions. The Trinitarian *inter-esse* thus desacralizes the pyramid of political monotheism and sanctifies the web of relational democracy. In this way, the Trinitarian *inter-esse* establishes a critical theological standard by which to evaluate political systems, one that aligns with Arendt’s philosophical insistence that true politics arises between individuals, not over them.

The Constitution of the Cruciform Inter-esse: From the Public Ministry to the Cross as a Single Performative Action

Building upon my previous argument that reinterprets the inner life of the Trinity as Moltmann’s thought of Trinitarian participation to the eternal archetype of *inter-esse*—a dynamic “in-between” of mutual self-giving and relationality through an Arendtian lens, I now turn to its historical manifestation in the concrete life and death of Jesus Christ, as revealed through his words and deeds in the human

plural space which demonstrate how the term trinitarian *inter-esse* not only remains transcendent or abstract but as the concrete reality of it in time and space, a living *inter-esse*. Moltmann's powerful and theologically insightful analysis of the historical Jesus of Nazareth goes beyond viewing Jesus merely as a teacher or moral example. Instead, it presents him as a figure whose action and message precipitated a pivotal crisis that led to his crucifixion. By framing Jesus' historical life and death as a foundational and history-making event, Moltmann emphasizes the significance of understanding the entirety of Jesus' life, from birth to death on the Cross, as the starting point for all Christian Christological theology and as a deliberate provocation of the desacralization of dominant religious and political powers. In an Arendtian interpretation of Moltmann, I argue that this significance lies in recognizing that Jesus's entire life is not a series of separate parts or episodes but a single and concretized manifestation of this eternal divine *inter-esse*. It means that this concretization of infinite and divine *inter-esse* finds its most profound and paradoxical expression in the cruciform *inter-esse* not only in the Crucifixion event as in Moltmann's thought of politics, the political execution that unmasks the violent foundations of imperial power, but also, as I critically read through the Arendtian lens, it can be reinterpreted in and through the historical life and ministry of Jesus through his words and deeds, which show how Jesus lived in-between and disclosed of who God is in the life of peoples. Therefore, this reading allows me to argue that the entire life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, his speech, deeds, and relational presences, set an exemplar political *inter-esse* par excellence. From Jesus' first words in Galilee to his final cry in Jerusalem on the Cross, Jesus's words and deeds were not merely about a new politics; they were the very means of constituting a new "in-between"—a cruciform public space—where human plurality is re-founded upon solidarity with the marginalized and the perpetual possibility of new beginnings in the political and Christian life.

From his entry into the world to the ending of his ministry, Jesus's action and speech were not private religious rituals but public, deed-disclosing. His entering into the world as Saint John the Evangelist wrote would show the deepest truth reality of the divine eternal *inter-esse*: "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." (John 1:14) Dogmatically, in the view of Catholicism and Orthodoxy, this biblical verse describes how the divine Word (Logos) became human in the person of Jesus." And yet, anthropologically, in Arendt's concept of *inter-esse*, since Jesus was a truly human person, he lived, experienced, and acted among others; he also learned how to live in-between others through his words and action. Therefore, he was also part of the constitution in the political realm.

His closest action of table fellowship, for instance, was a profoundly political act of in-between with others in the Arendtian sense, discloses who he is, a God of compassion and a God of *inter-esse*, means to be with his people regardless of different boundaries and social status. In sharing meals with tax collectors and sinners (e.g., Matthew 9:10-13, Luke 19:1-10), Jesus was actively creating a new social and public space—an *inter-esse*—, in the Arendtian's thought, that deliberately dismantled the entrenched social and religious boundaries that separated the pure from the impure, the righteous from the outcast and that meal became a tangible, physical "*space of appearance*" where the marginalized were invited to partake and granted a public identity and voice. Similarly, his deeds of healing—touching the leper (Mark 1:40-42) or healing the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath (Mark 3:1-6), restoring the demon-possessed—were not simply curing a disease but public acts of political reintegration and restorations. He was pulling and reintegrating individuals from the shadowy margins of society back into

the web of human relations, a community, restoring their capacity to act and speak among others. Therefore, this act of healing was a constitutive political action—it created a new “in-between” where the outcast could once again appear and act among others. The action of Jesus not only disclose who God is, create an *inter-esse* in love and solidarity, and restore the outcast and excluded into it but also bring in itself the capacity of a new beginning as Arendt’s thought of *natality*, that allows them not only a return community, but initiates them to disclose who they are as a new person constituted through their speech and action that create a new political beginning in human plurality.

Not only Jesus’ action but also his speech, particularly the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12) and other parables, served as a revolutionary manifesto that revealed the true actors of this new plural polity: the poor, the mourners, and the meek, whom the world, the Roman Empire, and the religious authority render invisible and powerless, and no one. Jesus’ speech not only addresses the downward reality of a political society where the privileged and those in higher positions have a voice, but also radically awakens a sense of belongingness from those excluded from society into a new, blessed community, a symbolic foundation for the cruciform *inter-esse* where everyone’s voice and action are treated as political equals and distinctiveness. Furthermore, his teaching and practice of forgiveness (e.g., Matthew 6:14-15, Luke 17:3-4) are exemplary political actions in the Arendtian sense. For Arendt, forgiveness interrupts the predictable cycle of revenge and retaliation, creating a new beginning. By forgiving sins and teaching his followers to do the same, Jesus instantiated a new political reality within the *inter-esse*. This act breaks the chains of past wrongs, liberating individuals to act anew, constituting a foundational practice for the cruciform public space. Therefore, by living among men, Jesus’ words and actions were not merely moral but deeply political. They were constructing a rival community, an *inter-esse* where everyone is invited, regardless of their social and economic status and ethnic identities, to live in-between with others through speech and deeds in solidarity and respect. In a political sense, they must be seen and viewed as a continuous performance of *inter-esse*, a series of foundational political acts that established the core principles and decisive critiques of the cruciform *inter-esse* in contrast to its relation to political power and the upholding of absolutist authority.

If Jesus’ life and ministry set the foundation for a paradigm of *inter-esse* through his words and deeds, which was about creating a space not only of appearance but also of inclusion and restored relationship, then His death on the Cross must be read and understood, through Arendtian lens, as its most radical and complete manifestation of a cruciform *inter-esse* reality which represents the forces of alienation and political annihilation at their most extreme. Moltmann masterfully analyzes and emphasizes the theological significance of Jesus’ historical death on the Cross, viewing it as a political execution that unmasks the violent foundations of imperial power, as well as the divine critique of political monotheism and the supreme act of God’s solidarity with the suffering and the oppressed. In the time of Jesus, crucifixion was perceived as the ultimate punishment for those who acted against the state. That is why Jesus was accused of being a rebel who went against the government. Hence, he was crucified between two criminals and was shown in a public view, among people, which was meant to be a bad example and a shameful death, in order to scare people at that time, so that people would have to submit totally to the political authority of the Roman Empire. In the eyes of ordinary people, it seemed Jesus was defeated by authority as he died terribly on the Cross as a normal criminal. However, through Arendt’s lens of *inter-esse*, I argue that Jesus’s

public appearance between people through his last words and actions, as he died on the Cross, is the performative constitution of a new political reality that contrasts with the very heart of the old empire's power. It reveals who God is —the true nature of God: a loving and suffering One. More precisely and profoundly, his being with people on the Cross shows a great space of *inter-esse* that gathers all the oppressed, the marginalized, and the "godforsaken" of history with whom the crucified Christ is identified. This *inter-esse* is in a form of crucified that is governed not by any earthly power or governmental domination but in freedom of love and solidarity with one another. It is where human plurality is re-founded upon the Trinitarian model of solidarity with the marginalized.

Moreover, Jesus' death on the Cross unveils the ultimate truth of his sacrificial love, not for himself, but for the well-being of others, the world, and his own ultimate self-emptiness from the powerful Lord to the powerless, forsaken, and suffering One. This reality allowed him to become one among and live with the lowly, the voiceless, and poor people in a world marked by death, power, domination, and political exploitation. Consequently, the Cross establishes a novel political paradigm wherein self-emptying love and radical solidarity with the marginalized are unveiled not as a retreat from politics, but as its most authentic manifestation. This divine act re-establishes political action upon the principle that genuine power is embodied in service and solidarity, rather than in domination.

From the Cruciform inter-esse to the Church as a political inter-esse community

Jesus's entire life, public ministry, and death are not about establishing a new political movement. Instead, they set an example for us on how to live politically and Christianly as human beings in a diverse world. His examples of living in *inter-esse* demonstrate that the absolute political power, domination, or calculation of wealth for some must be eliminated and dismantled and replaced with the power of love, the power of solidarity, and the respect for others in the discourse of diversity. It also shows us how to transition from the concept of exclusion to inclusion, creating a community where everyone is welcomed, heard, and respected politically. This inclusive community is essential for building a good and just society, leading all projects towards the common good of all through our interactions with others in freedom, characterized by loving and peaceful actions and words.

Consequently, living out the cruciform *inter-esse* in a Christian's life is no longer limited to private beliefs or viewing Jesus' death on the Cross as a critique of political issues, injustices, and dominations; it must also be politically active in public matters. It is meant to learn how to live among others politically and Christianly through our action and speech, which must be rooted and mirrored not in ideas of domination, upholding powers, or exclusion but in the very life of Jesus, as he was also a political actor who lived and experienced within this human plurality through his own words and deeds. This is the foundational political reality, a cruciform *inter-esse* that every Church community and Christian is called to embody, live and participate in some way among others in the world of human plurality through its concrete and real, not as spiritual or intentional, liberating action and transformative speech that prioritize the common good and justice of all, especially to the poor, the outcast, the marginalized and oppressed in the unjust society rather than the interests of a select few.

Therefore, to be authentic and tangible, our participation in solidarity with others through action and speech within the human diversity can manifest in various forms: by providing unequivocal and charitable services to welcome them

into a space of appearance where they can truly reveal their identities as human beings with inherent dignity and rights, by taking risks to defend and stand with the oppressed and marginalized amidst persecution and political exploitation through organized rallies in peace and respect, and by boldly proclaiming the truth and justice on their behalf in the form of letters or homily or preaching in classes or Churches. Additionally, by being present and sharing their joys and fears, we can further strengthen our solidarity with them. All this, I think, is real and verifiable, not just intentional, in the cruciform *inter-esse* that is living among men guided by the political cruciform principle.

And in hope and faith, our very liberating action and transformative and prophetic speech rooted in the example of Jesus's life - his actions and words, as we continue to live among others in web human relationships, will become what Arendt called the "miracle" that saves the world from ruin and transforms society into a better one, will become an active new beginning- natality of the cruciform *inter-esse* that transforms and interrupts cycles of violence and oppression, and finally will bring the "glad tidings" for a politics in solidarity, freedom and justice in hope.

CONCLUSION

This paper set out to explore what happens when Jürgen Moltmann's understanding of the "political" in the theology of the Cross is read through Hannah Arendt's theoretical framework of *inter-esse*. The experiment has provided a significant clarification and expansion of Moltmann's project, transforming it from a purely critical tool into a constitutive one. The Crucified God not only critiques political idolatry but actively creates a cruciform *inter-esse*—a public space shaped by solidarity rather than domination. This space finds its divine archetype in the relational life of the Trinity and its historical manifestation in Jesus's life of inclusive words and deeds. Consequently, the Church community is called to embody this reality, performing a politics of liberating action and transformative speech within human plurality. Therefore, to be political in the light of the Cross as cruciform *inter-esse* is to participate in building a community where power is redefined as service and the marginalized are restored to public life. This constitutes a hopeful, tangible praxis for a just society.

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