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Friendship as a Theological Model: Bonhoeffer, Moltmann and the Trinity

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Friendship has been valued since classical times and is also an important category from a theological perspective; Christians are even called 'friends of God' (Jn 15:15). For a theological reflection on friendship, we will be drawing upon the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Jürgen Moltmann in this contribution. While numerous differences exist in Bonhoeffer and Moltmann's theology, both have written about the Christian community extensively. We will examine friendship as the theological environment in which we learn how to relate to others not only privately, but also in the public arena, seeking the common good. Friendship, we argue, should not remain in an enclosed area within the personal relationship where we remain friends with those who are similar to us. Rather, friendship, as a theological model, is the space where we can practice the attributes of friendship to enable us to live this out within the broader society with those with whom we are not necessarily friends, but with all people. Friendship can form the environment for us to be 'trained' in the characteristics of theological friendship where we are friends in freedom and without hierarchy, and, in so doing, learn to treat all human beings as equal.

Introduction

Friendship has been valued since classical times and is also an important category from a theological perspective; Christians are even called 'friends of God' (Jn 15:15). In his *Manichean ethics*, Aristotle elevated friendship to an ethical ideal and asserted that only humans of virtue and wisdom could be friends. Consequently, he (Aristotle 2006:xxiii) noted that 'the best form of human life must be lived in a social context'. Aristotle (1984:1074) regarded friendship as the most fundamental human activity where the soul and its basic components become fully activated in their intellectual and moral abilities. Ignace Lepp (1966:26) further refers to friendship as the 'most universal of all interhuman relations in the emotional order'. Friendship is therefore something that should also be reflected on theologically.

Reflecting on friendship as a theological model necessitates that we move our contemplation from the private sphere to the public which includes reflection on the common good. Nico Koopman (2017:376) argues that earlier forms of thinking about the common good were what he terms 'thicker versions'. These versions of reflecting on the common good, he (Koopman 2017:376) continues, 'does not refrain from a more fundamental theological substantiating' of this notion. Koopman (2017:367) puts forward that we need to search for ways in which 'thicker versions of the common good in contemporary pluralistic societies' can be built.

Robert Vosloo (2003:66) further indicates the predicament of morality in modernity not only demands peaceful co-existence and tolerance or even an immaterial, abstract appeal for community, but 'for an ethos of hospitality … Hospitality is a prerequisite for a more public life'. One of the risks to a 'more moral public life', is an outlook on identity as sealed, 'protecting my/our identity from what is different and other' (Vosloo 2003:67). Friendship should then not remain in a fenced in, enclosed area where we remain friends with those who are similar to us. Rather, we wish to put forward that friendship, as a theological model, is the space where we can practice the attributes that are developed in this contribution to enable us to live this out within the broader society with those with whom we are not necessarily friends, but with all people. Friendship can form the environment for us to be 'trained' in the characteristics of theological friendship where we are friends in freedom and without hierarchy, and, in so doing, learn to treat all human beings as equal. Where we are reminded of the relational aspects of our createdness in God's image to learn to live in intimate relation to others.

In this contribution, we will be drawing upon the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, followed by Jürgen Moltmann's, in particular his thought on the Trinity, for the theological reflection on friendship.

The research question of this article can accordingly be formulated as: How can Bonhoeffer and Moltmann's theologies, in particular their work on friendship, inform a theological model of friendship in which friends are shaped in order to participate fully in public life, keeping the common good in mind?

There are, of course, a number of differences between the theologies of Bonhoeffer and Moltmann. In discussing them together in this contribution, we are not trying to equate their thoughts or make the argument that they are identical. Bonhoeffer and Moltmann were chosen as two theologians who have both written extensively about the Christian community and friendship and, as such, form an ideal basis from which to construct a theological model of friendship.

We will examine friendship as the theological environment in which we learn how to relate to others not only privately, but also in the public arena, seeking the common good. A frequently raised point of critique against the search for common values is that the importance of social arrangements is overemphasised, while the important role that social agents play is often overlooked or neglected. 'Morality is not merely about common values, but about (uncommon) people who embody these values – people who are formed in communities through certain truthful narratives and role models' (Vosloo 2003:65). It is to the friend as role model and one that influences formation that we now turn.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer and friendship

When thinking about Bonhoeffer, there are various topics that come to mind, but friendship may not necessarily be one of the first topics that comes to mind. Eberhard Bethge[1] (1995:80) wrote that Bonhoeffer intentionally decided to engage with a theology of friendship later in his life. He (Bethge 1995:81) explained that, from the beginning, Bonhoeffer showed a particular interest in '*communio* … but always as an ecclesiological issue'. Yet, Bonhoeffer never included writings about friendship in any of his own books[2] (Bethge 1995:81). Bonhoeffer, in his thinking about friendship later in his life, also sought to integrate the theological aspects of friendship with the sociological aspects of friendship within the sphere of 'the four divine mandates of Christian life' (Bethge 1995:82), namely the church, the state, work and family. This has implications for not only the way friendship is viewed, but also for the way community is viewed.[3]

In a letter written to Bethge in 1943, Bonhoeffer wrote: 'You're certainly right in describing marriage as "what remains stable in all fleeting relationships".[4] But we should also include a good friendship among these stable things' (Bethge 1995:91). Bonhoeffer further believed that friendship could not be defined merely in accordance with interests, goals or purposes, but should rather be defined 'only by what binding content exists between two people, for it would be the difference in contents that provides friendship with its own unique characteristics and strength' (Bethge 1995:92). For Bonhoeffer, it was friendship that completed 'the circle of happiness' (Bethge 1995:90) and affirmed the worth of a person (Bethge 1995:90). Friendship was therefore a deeply personal and affirming relationship between people. Bonhoeffer seemed to show a deep appreciation for honest and sincere friendship that contributed to the full flourishing of human life, whether it be through references to the importance of community, by means of letters to friends or through poems that he had written.

Bonhoeffer's notion of friendship in the singular and friendship in the plural

In his personal life, a distinction can be made in how Bonhoeffer viewed friendship. Bethge (1995) described Bonhoeffer's notion of friendship as 'Friends in the plural' (p. 82) and 'Friends in the singular'[5] (p. 85). Both of these conceptions of friendship has a deep appreciation of relationality attached to it. Friendship is therefore understood not as something that is exclusive or individualistic, but rather necessitates relationship, care, community and freedom.

Bonhoeffer's friends in the plural emerged as he moved from his parents' house to Tübingen during 1923 to start his studies (Bethge 1995:83). Bethge (1995:83) wrote that it was not an unfamiliar occurrence for Bonhoeffer to bring friends home. He formed part of a larger group of friends during these years and created a space 'for stimulation, entertainment and competition' (Bethge 1995:83). His studies outside Tübingen also presented him with opportunities to make

1. Preston Parsons (2014) explains that Bethge, in devoting a great part of his life to collecting writings and writing about Bonhoeffer: illustrates a much grander theology of friendship than what he says about his hermeneutical priority … Bethge offers us an instance of a friendship that reveals a person, a world, a particular vision of God, and through that, particular insight into God and God's work in the world (p. 13). The friendship that existed between Bonhoeffer and Bethge was also an exemplary form of what friendship can and ought to be. In working with the correspondence between Bonhoeffer and Bethge, Parsons (2016:16) sees something that he regards to be a theological friendship. He writes: There, we have an example of a theological friendship — a theological friendship that is not so much about caffeinated, or beery, conversations about divine and human agency, the Hulsean lectures, or the Regius Professor's inaugural — it is a *theological* friendship because the friendship is the ground of God's saving work in, with, and through the friend (p. 16).

2. Bethge (1995:81) wrote that the sources related to Bonhoeffer and friendship mostly came from Bonhoeffer's time spent in prison from 1943 and onwards. Some of these sources were in the form of fragments of fiction that Bonhoeffer wrote for a drama and a novel, a portion of a letter written to Eberhard Bethge from prison in 1944, secretly coded pencil messages in a book by the Austrian author, Adalbert Stifter which Bonhoeffer read and returned to his parent's house with these encoded message for Bethge, and a poem about friendship written to Bethge for his birthday in August 1944 (Bethge 1995:81–82). There was a fifth source in the form of a 'small literary piece' (Bethge 1995:82) that Bonhoeffer wrote on friendship and told Bethge about, but nothing was ever recovered from this literary piece (Bethge 1995:82). Parsons (2014) writes: Friendship, according to Bethge, in a way reminiscent of his patristic forebears, offers a unique insight into both the life and the theology of his biographical subject. Bethge claims friendship as a mode of knowing another person in which one can speak to the shape of their theological thought, and the friend as the best interpreter of a person's work (p. 3). For this reason, Bethge, as a very close friend of Bonhoeffer, is such a crucial voice writing about Bonhoeffer and the theme of friendship in this article.

3. Mark Vernon (2006:406) explains that the term *friend* would have been regarded as something similar to being called a 'Christian' during the time of the Early Church. Being part of the Christian community would therefore mean that someone would be regarded as a communal friend.

4. Bonhoeffer, when speaking about friendship, often referred to it in relation to marriage. Bethge (1995:90) quotes one of many of these instances where Bonhoeffer relates friendship to marriage: 'A true and upright friend is, next to a loyal wife, the greatest good that a man can have on earth.' The relation between friendship and marriage is one that was often discussed between Bonhoeffer and Bethge.

5. Bethge (1995:81) explained that most of Bonhoeffer's views on friendship tended to focus on singular friendship and not in the wider form of socialisation. This could be because Bonhoeffer may have felt that is was a matter of urgency to address this form of friendship first, as he experienced this form of friendship in generous amounts (Bethge 1995:81).

new friends with whom he would go hiking, traveling, share his love for music and discuss theological topics[6] (Bethge 1995:83). Later in his life, while imprisoned, Bonhoeffer also made friends in Tegel who left a lasting impressing on him (Bethge 1995:83). His relationships with family went further than the expected relationship within families, for his family also became his friends within this pluralistic friendship category. Bethge (1995:84) explained that Bonhoeffer's family relationships created a unity wherein 'family strengthened the friendship element and friendship strengthened the family element' (Bethge 1995:84).

Bonhoeffer's friendship in the singular can be limited to roughly four specific people who became very close and lifelong friends with him. Bethge (1995:85) identified these four people as Hans Christoph von Hase, a cousin who was slightly younger than Bonhoeffer who sent him notes from his first lectures by Karl Barth. Walter Dress, who was a pastor in Berlin and later became a professor, was another singular friend who deserved being mentioned (Bethge 1995:85). This friendship was one that started during Bonhoeffer's first year in Tübingen and later surpassed the boundaries of an academic and scholarly friendship once Dress decided to marry Bonhoeffer's younger sister in 1929 (Bethge 1995:85). The third singular friend mentioned by Bethge (1995:86) was Franz Hildebrandt. Bonhoeffer met him in Berlin while they were both working on their dissertations and often had conversations about Luther's theology (Bethge 1995:86). They both also shared a love for piano and often engaged in 'humorous theological debates' (Bethge 1995:86). Their dialogue provided stimulation and inspiration, while Bonhoeffer was working on *The cost of discipleship* (Bethge 1995:86). The final singular friendship worth mentioning was the friendship between Bonhoeffer and Eberhard Bethge. Bethge (1995:86) wrote that his friendship with Bonhoeffer was 'characterized by the opportunities to live together, of which we took extensive advantage'. Both of them were regarded as illegal theologians and pastors who worked within the Confessing Church (Bethge 1995:87). Bethge also surpassed the boundaries of mere friendship when he decided to marry Bonhoeffer's niece (Bethge 1995:87). Their friendship was kept alive during Bonhoeffer's imprisonment through correspondence that was smuggled in and out of the prison (Bethge 1995:87). Bethge survived after the war and continued the legacy of their friendship by sharing many written works by Bonhoeffer with the rest of the world. It was also in a letter to Bethge that Bonhoeffer wrote about the distinction in friendship between the singular and plural form of friendship[7] (Bethge 1995:87).

6.Some of these friendships in the plural included, but was not limited to, Karl Barth, George Bell, W.A. Visser 't Hooft (Bethge 1995:83).

7.Bonhoeffer wrote to Bethge (1995): Our letter on the occasion of today are notably similar in their content. This is surely not coincidence, and confirms that things really are the way it says in the letters. You wished me, among other things, good, stimulating friends. That is a good thing to wish, and today it is a great gift. But the human heart is created in such a way that it seeks and finds refuge in the singular rather than in the plural. That is the claim, the limit and the richness of genuine human relationship, to the extent that it touches on the area of individuality and to the extent that it rests essentially on loyalty. There are individual relationships without loyalty and loyalty without individual relationships. Both are to be found in the plural. But together (which is seldom enough!) they seek the singular, and happy is he who 'succeeds in this great luck' (pp. 87–88).

Bonhoeffer's notion of community and friendship

Bonhoeffer saw community as a crucial part of what it means to lead a Christian lifestyle in the world.[8] In fact, according to Parsons (2016:6), friendship can be regarded as one of the most exemplary forms of community or *Gemeinschaft*[9] that there is. This is evident in many of Bonhoeffer's writings, including his doctoral dissertation, *Sanctorum Communio*. He felt that the church should be so orientated that it displays a visible concern for community. For Bonhoeffer (2003:226), 'a truth, a doctrine, or a religion needs no space of its own. Such entities are bodyless. They do not go beyond being heard, learned, and understood.' His convictions regarding a church community that is visible at all times can be based on the incarnation of the Son of God who become a living human being in relationship with fellow human beings. According to Bonhoeffer (2003:226) the visible relationship that Jesus had with his followers he called is what calls for community to be something that is visible. 'Those who had been called could no longer remain hidden; they were the light which has to shine, the city on the hill which is bound to be seen' (Bonhoeffer 2003:226). Even those who are persecuted or experience suffering and discomfort are not alone, but go through these experiences together as a community (Bonhoeffer 2003:226). Friendship in Bonhoeffer's early works 'serves as an example of a certain kind of community … that can become church' (Parsons 2016:1).

The united body of Christ is the foundation of what it means to be a true community.[10] It was in and through Jesus that people belong to each other (Bonhoeffer 1996:31). In the first instance, this means that 'a Christian needs others for the sake of Jesus Christ' (Bonhoeffer 1996:31). In the second instance, it means that 'a Christian comes to others only through Jesus Christ' (Bonhoeffer 1996:31). Lastly, it means that 'from eternity we have been chosen in Jesus Christ, accepted in time, and united for eternity'. (Bonhoeffer 1996:31). At the same way that sanctification is a gift from God through Jesus, the Christian community can be regarded as a gift from God through Jesus 'to which we have no claim' (Bonhoeffer 1996:38). It is the understanding of the self in relation to the other which forms part of what it means to be a human being. Leahy (2008) explains that, for Bonhoeffer:

> we do not create each other but we are created in relation to one another. The person has to be recognized as a distinct end in itself and as one who is in relation to others and to God. It is only God who creates the other and makes the other become a 'you' to me from whom my 'I' emerges. (p. 39)

8.In his doctoral dissertation, *Sanctorum Communio,* Bonhoeffer's understanding (1996:7) of community was greatly influenced by Martin Luther theology

9.Parsons (2016:7) writes about *Gemeinschaft*, saying that it is a unique kind of community – 'community … [*that*] has an end that is not historically confined, and can be thought of on eschatological and supratemporal terms'; and if this is true, as Bonhoeffer puts it, 'the nature of community is grounded in and willed by God'.

10.Bonhoeffer (Bethge 2000) wrote: You have brothers and sisters in our people and in every people; do not forget that. Come what may, let us never more forget that one Christian people is the people of God, that if we are in accord, no nationalism, no hate of races or classes can execute its designs … (p. 154).

Bonhoeffer was convinced that Christians should not take the privilege of living in the midst of other Christians for granted, for Jesus lived among all people, including those who were regarded as his enemies (Bonhoeffer 1996:27). This was another reason why Bonhoeffer believed that Christians and the church ought not to live in seclusion, but as people living among other people – whether it be other Christians or people who may be seen as enemies of Christians. The visible community is, however, not a given, but should rather be regarded as grace,[11] because not all Christians have the privileged to form part of a visible community – some are alone or sick or in prison or live in heathen lands (Bonhoeffer 1996:28).

For Bonhoeffer, friendship played an important part in creating a community. Friendship within this community would constitute freedom.

> Friendship, together with culture, education and play, constitute not so much another mandate – another domain of obedience to God's command – but rather a 'playground of freedom' (*Spielraum der Freiheit*) which surrounds the mandates. In other words, the mandates do not exhaust the dimensions of human life. (De Graaff 2017:396)

The church and Christianity are realms in which friendship can flourish freely. This can often be seen in the ecclesial practices within Bonhoeffer and Bethge's friendship. Bethge and Bonhoeffer would pray for one another, they were confessors for each other and they worked together through a lectionary (De Graaff 2017:401), despite being apart from each other. It seems as if Bonhoeffer and Bethge found a way to sustain their friendship through their, among others, communal Christian faith practices. De Graaff (2017:401) explains that, to Bonhoeffer, the church was the community where friendship had the freedom to flourish.[12] Friendship, according to Bonhoeffer, is therefore an essential part of what it means to be a human society (De Graaff 2017:401).

It is interesting to note that Bonhoeffer refers to friendship on at least three levels: friendship in the singular, friendship in the plural and friendship as community. Each of these levels refers to the relationality of human beings and the human beings' ability to flourish within the realm of friendship. True friendship creates a freedom in which it has the safe space to flourish. Bonhoeffer's emphasises on the notion of freedom in friendship refers to the ability to exceed one's own needs and desires in order to be responsive to the other. 'This surpassing or letting go of self-absorption', Kerney (2007:142) states, 'creates a spirituality of freedom where people can grow together as friends'. Freedom is also especially underlined in Moltmann's reflection on the Trinity as will be examined in the following section.

11.'… it is grace, nothing but grace, that we are still permitted to live in the community of Christians today'.

12.De Graaff (2017) writes: … friendship may be free and reciprocal by its very nature, especially when compared to the mandates; yet it is in the Church – under the rule of Christ, which sets us free to serve one another vicariously after his example (beyond the more determined responsibilities within the mandates) – that friendship can really flourish, as a particularly powerful expression of Christian fellowship (p. 401).

Jürgen Moltmann and friendship

Jürgen Moltmann is one of the most prominent Protestant theologians whose work focuses, among other themes, especially on the Trinity. In *The theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, Richard Bauckham (1995:7), one of the world's leading Moltmann scholars, describes Moltmann's later trinitarianism as characterised by mutual relationships without hierarchy, within the Trinity itself, between the Trinity and creation, and within creation itself. It is especially this aspect of mutual relationship, also within creation, that lends Moltmann's theology especially well to the discussion on friendship as a theological model.

Theologically, Moltmann (1978:55) added the title of friend to the three Christological titles of Jesus as prophet, priest and king. In doing so, he transformed our understanding of Jesus' relationships to others. Barbara Kerney (2007:2) notes that Moltmann 'wanted to use friendship to reveal God's relationship to all humanity'. While Moltmann was certainly not the first theologian in the 20th century to write about friendship, his 're-examination of the relationship came at a time when theologians were struggling with more traditional understandings of God' (Kerney 2007:2). Friendship, Moltmann (2015) remarks:

> is a personal relationship that makes no claims. For 'friend' is not an official category, or a title of sovereignty, or a function that is exercised only for a certain period of time. (p. 118)

Rather, friendship is a 'free human relationship', one that 'arises out of freedom and preserves freedom … Friendship is lived freedom' (Moltmann 2015:119).

Joy Ann McDougall (2005:10) refers to Moltmann's social trinitarianism as an ontology that can serve as a 'divine archetype … for right relationships'. While this notion of social trinitarianism in Moltmann's theology has been said to be anthropomorphic and, as such, has also been controversial, the concept of the Trinity can be flattened if it is used merely as a 'society on which human society can be modelled' (Bauckham 1995:179). In making use of Moltmann's trinitarian theology in this regard, this contribution is therefore aware that it is but one aspect of the Trinity and by no means the only way that the Trinity could or should be conceptualised.

The Trinity and friendship

The Trinity has featured prominently in the work of Moltmann since the very beginning. Already in the first chapter of his very first publication, *Theology of hope*, Moltmann (1993c:43) discusses revelation as not only what God has done, but who God is. Moltmann's construction of the crucifixion event is an integration of his incarnational and trinitarian theology where all three of the Persons of the Trinity take part in the suffering of the cross event. This is based on the biblical record where the relationship between the Father and Son is emphasised (Jn 14:11; 17:21). This stands in contradiction to much of the Protestant thought where the

doctrine of the Trinity is understood as little more than 'a theological speculation with no relevance for life, a kind of higher theological mystery for initiates' (Moltmann 1974:237).

In terms of Moltmann's discussion of doctrine in general, the Trinity appears in all other aspects, starting at the doctrine of creation. Moltmann begins by grounding the Christian understanding of creation in the revelation of God's salvation of the world in the history of Jesus Christ and regards it as the messianic interpretation of the Israelite understanding which was shaped by the revelation of God's salvation through the exodus, the covenant and the promise of land. Christ is seen as the ground of redemption for the whole creation and therefore also the ground for the existence thereof. As a result of the eschatological salvation of the whole of creation through Christ, it can be deduced that the protological creation also had its foundation in Christ as can be seen in various New Testament statements about Christ as the 'mediator of creation' (Moltmann 1993b:94–95).

As noted earlier, Moltmann (1993b) argues that the revelation of Christ determines the trinitarian doctrine of creation:

> because Jesus was revealed as the Son of the eternal Father, the Wisdom and the creative Word which are identified with the Son also take on a personal and hypostatic character they lack in the Old Testament testimonies, although those testimonies also show tendencies in this direction. (p. 95)

He (Moltmann 1993b:95) then proceeds to link the outpouring and the experience of the Spirit in the Christian community to the eschatological experience in redemption: 'The powers of the Spirit are the powers of the new creation.' This power is then described as the creative power of God, the power that justifies sinners and raises the dead, and through which a new divine presence is experienced in creation where God the Creator dwells within his creation. Experiencing this eschatological reality of the Spirit leads Moltmann to conclude that this is the same Spirit in whose power God, as the Father, created the world through the Son and safeguards it against nothingness. This, in effect, means that the power of God the Creator and the power that 'quickens created beings' is the Spirit itself, creative and not created (Moltmann 1993b:95–96). 'Through the presence of his own being, God participates in the destiny of his own creation' (Moltmann 1993b:96). In God's Spirit, God suffers and sighs with his creation, as the Spirit is the power of the love that creation has issued from and through which it is continued and sustained. In this participation and fellowship within the Trinity, that is of extreme importance for Moltmann's understanding of human relationships, including friendship.

For Moltmann, the doctrine of the Trinity can be conceived only dialectically. He attempts to define God's oneness solely by means of perichoresis and suggests that the three divine Persons are three subjects or centres of activity and, thereby, rejecting Barth's notion of God as a self-identical Subject consisting in three modes of being. In Moltmann's opinion, the unity of the triune God is eschatological rather than Barth's notion of perfectly eternal (Hunsinger 2011:309–311). Moltmann (1991a) describes this in the following way:

> If we search for a concept of unity corresponding to the biblical testimony of the triune God, the God who unites others with himself, then we must dispense with both the concept of the one substance and the concept of the identical subject. All that remains is: the unitedness, the at-oneness of the triune God ... the concept of God's unity cannot in the trinitarian sense be fitted into the homogeneity of the one divine substance, or into the identity of the absolute subject either; and least of all into one of the three Persons of the Trinity. It must be perceived in the *perichoresis* of the divine Persons. (p. 150)

Moltmann (1991a:63) discusses his own social doctrine of the Trinity against Barth's trinitarian monarchy, indicating how it surpasses Barth's that does not express the 'personal encounter of the Father who loves the Son, the Son who prays to the Father and the Spirit which confesses the Father and the Son'. Barth develops his doctrine from the principle that God is Lord. However, as Moltmann points out, this is not how the New Testament witnesses to God, but rather as the 'Father of our Lord Jesus Christ'. In contrast, Barth refers to the Father who 'rules and commands in exaltation' and the Son who humbly obeys, even though he himself found this 'hard', 'insidious' and even 'offensive' (Moltmann 1991a:130–135). In this regard, McDougall (2005:11) points out that Moltmann, similar to Barth, does not attempt to situate the doctrine of the Trinity in the Bible by appealing to texts from the New Testament that could be described in terms of triadic formulas, for example contending that the doctrine of the Trinity is a 'true and necessary interpretation of the New Testament witness'.

In discussing trinitarian fellowship in *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, Moltmann (1991a) again stresses the absolute equality of the Persons of the Trinity. This means that a human reflection of the Trinity is 'a community of men and women, without privileges and without subjugation' (Moltmann 1991a:198). McDougall (2005:139) explains this by noting that humanity as '*imago Trinitatis* are called to join together in egalitarian structures'. This is especially true of the church community where Moltmann grounds its very existence in the trinitarian fellowship. The unity of the Christian community, he (Moltmann 1991a) states:

> corresponds to the indwelling of the Father in the Son, and of the Son in the Father. It participates in the divine triunity, since the community of believers is not only fellowship *with* God but *in* God too. (p. 202)

The church, as Moltmann (1991b:64) indicates in *History and the triune God*, should therefore be 'the "lived out" Trinity', where 'mutual love is practiced which corresponds to the eternal love of the Trinity'.

In the next section, Moltmann's understanding of Christian fellowship as community and, especially as friendship, will be examined.

Christian fellowship as friendship

In his discussions on the form of the church as fellowship, Moltmann (1993a:315) refers explicitly to a fellowship of friends, noting: 'In the community of brethren there is no more lordship or slavery.' The term *brotherliness* surmounts for Moltmann (1993a:316) the language of power and advantage, but even though it is 'designed to reach further', it 'only extends to the male sex' and, accordingly, he chooses to use the term *friendship* to explain what is meant by Christian fellowship. 'Friendship', he (Moltmann 1993a) states:

> is a free association. Friendship is a new relationship, which goes beyond the social roles of those involved. Friendship is an open relationship which spreads friendliness, because it combines affection with respect. (p. 316)

The openness of friendship also makes it a better metaphor to use for Christian fellowship than *brotherhood* and *sisterhood*. The Christian community is 'really the fellowship of friends who live in the friendship of Jesus and spread friendliness in the fellowship, by meeting the forsaken with affection and the despised with respect' (Moltmann 1993a:316). While brothers and sisters cannot choose one another, the relationship between brothers and sisters cannot be terminated. In contrast, we 'become friends by our own free decision' (Moltmann 1993a:316). While humanly speaking, it is possible for friendships to end, Moltmann (1993a:316) indicates that nothing can destroy the friendship with Jesus, as it is rooted in the 'free giving of his life "for his friends"'. He (Moltmann 1993a) continues to state:

> Those who belong to him remain in his friendship when they themselves become the friends of other people. The freedom out of which this friendship springs is therefore not a private and arbitrary affair; it is the liberation for new life itself, without which all the other freedoms cannot go on existing. The friendship is which this friendship leads is the 'practical concept of freedom' without which all other friendships become powerless. … That is why the concept of friendship is the best way of expressing the liberating relationship with God, and the fellowship of men of women in the spirit of freedom. (p. 316)

Freedom is especially stressed in Moltmann's understanding of Christian fellowship and friendship. In a modern world informed by the West, he (Moltmann 2015:108) remarks as follows: freedom is seen to be 'the right of self-determination enjoyed by every individual. Freedom is the right of the independent individual to dispose over his or her own life and capabilities'. This differs from the perspective found in the Christian faith where God's freedom 'manifests itself as creative power' in the face of nonbeing 'and in the face of death it shows itself as life-giving force' (Moltmann 2015:109). It is in faith that human beings can correspond to the freedom of God. This, Moltmann also is quick to emphasise, does not mean the freedom of choice for good or evil, but something much more profound. He (Moltmann 2015) indicates that:

> Grace frees for this freedom human beings who have lost their freedom and become subject to the bondage of evil … [*T*]o do spontaneously what is right and just accords with God, and is the human freedom that participates in God's eternal freedom. It is freedom in the faith that is forgetful of self … (p. 109)

Moltmann chooses the concept of *freedom* that belongs to the language of community and fellowship – mutual participation in life, communication without lordship or servitude, becoming free beyond the limitations of individuality. 'God demonstrates his eternal freedom through his suffering and his sacrifice, through his self-giving and his patience' whereby God keeps humanity, God's image, God's world and God's creation, free and pays the price for our freedom (1991a:56). This freedom is thus inherently related to Moltmann's understanding of the Trinity by way of participatory as exemplified in the notion of perichoresis mentioned earlier.

This divine freedom or true friendship should be 'forgetful of self'. This is then particularly true when friendship is viewed not just as the personal relationship between individuals, but also as a theological model in which we learn how to behave towards the Other. This Other then includes all of humanity, and the space of friendship teaches us how to behave in a free relationship without hierarchy, to participate in friendship as viewed by Bonhoeffer and Moltmann in order to be able to express these attributes to a wider community in the public sphere.

As Peter Slade (2009) notes, Moltmann:

> issues the challenge of openness to the Church in bold theological terms deeply rooted in his understanding of Jesus and his crucifixion. The Church must open itself not simply to the possibilities of the future but also … to those who are different, particularly those who suffer. (p. 21)

Why? Because this is what God has done through the cross of Jesus Christ (Moltmann 1993a). To conclude this contribution, it is to this notion of the broadening of friendships to include all of humanity that we now turn.

Conclusion

Friendship, as stated in the introduction, is 'lived freedom', according to Moltmann (2015:119). We not only choose whom to be friends with, but one of the elements of friendship as a free human relationship is that we 'do not constantly need to assure ourselves of our friendship, as is generally the case in love. It is enough to know that the friend is there' (Moltmann 2015:119).

Perichoresis reminds us, as previously indicated, that the essence of the Trinity is participatory. So far, this contribution has focused mostly on the relational participation in friendship. To make this pertinent to public life, this participation should be viewed broader as participation not only in our friends and relatives, but participation in the public sphere – participation in the Other. The idea of participation is recurrently utilised by Bonhoeffer who speaks about the 'question of good' becoming participation

'in the divine reality which is revealed in Christ' (Bonhoeffer 2012:163). 'In Christ', Bonhoeffer (2012:167) continues, 'we are offered the possibility to partake in the reality of God and the reality of the world, but not in the one without the other'. Taking part in the world requires that we take part and participate also in the Other.

Moltmann (2015) notes that friendship:

> is the soul of a friendly world. No free *and* just society will come into being without the ethics and the wisdom of friendship. Friendship links personal freedom with social solidarity. (p. 119)

Solidarity with the friend, yes, but also with others. Koopman (2017:377) postulates that a feasible Christian input to the question of the common good and public morality could be articulated as stating that while equality and uniformity are not synonyms, 'it is equality in worth, value and dignity that has its roots in God's equal love for all his people'. This is also true of friendship as a theological model.

Friendship should then not remain in a fenced in, enclosed area where we remain friends with those who are similar to us. Rather, we wish to put forward that friendship as a theological model in the space where we can rehearse the attributes that were discussed in this contribution in order to then enable us to live this out within the broader society with those with whom we are not necessarily friends, but with all people. Friendship can form the environment for us to be 'trained' in the characteristics of theological friendship where we are friends in freedom and without hierarchy and, in so doing, learn to treat all human beings as equal. In this environment, we are reminded of the relational aspects of our createdness in God's image to learn to live in intimate relation to others.

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Authors' contributions

M.K. and C.N. equally contributed to the research and writing of this article.

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