The Perfect Hope: More Than We Can Ask or Imagine

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

As Christians in the United States struggle to sustain hope in the face of global economic, environmental, military, and poverty crises, the most popular source of theological hope for preachers and congregations is that of Jürgen Moltmann and the Moltmannian hope that draws on his work. Moltmannian theology eschews close connections with more-canonically established doctrines of hope, claiming instead on a future-based, this-worldly eschatology that hopes in the God who suffers. An exclusive reliance on a Moltmannian theology of hope deprives the church of crucial resources for a robust eschatological hope and its practices. Critical attention to additional streams of of theologial hope, and to applicable discourses within and without Christian theology, provides the church with strength and resilience to sustain a distinctly Christian theological hope through and beyond disaster, despair, suffering, and death. Jesus Christ, the perfect hope, embodies the life — earthly and eternal — of humanity and its eschatological end, a life in which humans can participate, through grace and discipleship.

To make this argument, I survey characteristics of Moltmannian hope and then identify costs of a theological hope that relies exclusively on Moltmannian resources. I review a Patristic and Thomistic grammar of theological hope and its accompanying grammar of God; and I explore possible contributions to theological hope from an assortment of contemporary conversations outside conventionally-identified areas of Christian hope. I conclude with two suggestions for ecclesial formation of Christians in theological hope.
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Soli Deo Gloria
Introduction

“Glory to God whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine: Glory to him from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus forever and ever. Amen.”

Eph 3:20,21; Book of Common Prayer, 102.

Fifteen years ago, I heard a sermon about hope as I sat with my baby girl near the back of our Episcopal church. The preacher urged the congregation to face life’s challenges with hope. He gently criticized the parishioners for their tendency to sit back and let life go by, and he championed instead more active, responsible, and upbeat engagements with the world. He proclaimed the virtue of making a difference in one’s own life and in the world by adopting an attitude of hopefulness. I listened to this sermon from within the depths of an overwhelming bout of depression. I have suffered from chronic depression all my life, and at the time of this sermon I was just beginning the long term treatment and therapy that now helps me function and thrive. At the time, though, I had yet to reap any of the benefits of treatment and therapy. I felt most powerfully a need for hope to make it through the morning, then the afternoon, then the night. The sermon was incomprehensible to me. I could not imagine any way I could participate in the hope described. I could not pull myself up by my bootstraps and take on a life of active hope any more than I could imagine ever feeling anything other than despair. I could not imagine mustering the strength to find and act on a upbeat hope, when all of my strength was devoted to
trying to hold myself together in some semblance of a person who could reasonably care for her child. Instead I felt criticized for my insufficient hopefulness.

As I sat, feeling miserable, inadequate, and utterly alienated, I began to notice who else was sitting at the back of the church. Charlotte was a regular at worship, although her life was shaped by far more suffering than mine was. She had been a successful ballet dancer, wife, and mother, before she was consumed by schizophrenia. She had lost her vocation, her home, and her family. She had great difficulty establishing and sustaining relationships, and she was frequently not able to receive the occasional gestures of welcome and offers of help from church members and the available community resources. She seemed to find some slight continuity of identity and community on the edges of Sunday eucharist and weekday evening prayer, participating silently or sometimes with contributions the rest of us could not understand. I doubted that Charlotte heard words of accessible hope that day. If she could make a difference in her life and the world by rallying some hopeful enthusiasm, she would have done so years ago.

Three years ago, the baby in my lap at the back of the church was a teenager being confirmed. Confirmands and their families from several other nearby congregations had joined the congregation of our parish church (in a different state from the one above) for this annual Confirmation service. All the represented congregations were from communities on the north shore of Chicago, so the confirmands were chiefly upper class, suburban youths. The young men wore chinos, blue blazers, and ties. The young women wore lovely dresses, some of which might have been more suitable for a nightclub than for kneeling to receive the Bishop’s
confirmation, his hands on their heads, one by one. The families carried cameras and
jockeyed for pew positions with a good view.

The preacher for the confirmation, priest of one of the visiting parishes,
spoke of his experience with a particular social ministry event in Chicago, which
involved counting homeless people throughout the city one night. He shared
statistics about the demographics of Chicago’s homeless people (the average age of
homeless people in the city is 9 years old), and he described how moved he was to
make some connections with the homeless people he was counting. He explained to
the confirmands that their mission of ministry was to address the needs of the
homeless. He noted ways that the young people, as they stepped into adult positions
of employment, could use their talents and positions to make a difference in the lives
of the needy. In his conclusion, he told the confirmands that hope for the homeless
now rests in their hands. While I was and still am eager for my daughter to continue
to develop as a disciple of Christ through ministry to the needy, I did wonder what
differentiated this sermon from any number of high school graduation speeches that
proclaim the new graduates as the hope of the future. And I worried that if we were
investing our hope in these upstanding and promising youths, we might be missing
out on hope for ends beyond the challenges of juggling successful careers with
serving the homeless.

As a life-long Episcopalian who has spent many years in seminary
communities, I have heard many sermons. The two sermons I mention here
represent much of what I have heard from the pulpit about hope, and I have often
wondered why the only hope worth preaching about concerns present and near
future improvements in life as we know it, brought about by human determination and effort. Surely there must be more to theological hope. Surely, those who cannot themselves muster upbeat, life-changing hope should have access to a hope not limited by the circumstances of a broken and limited world. Isn't there something more possible in the hope of the Gospel?

I now understand that both preachers were responding at least in part to a problematic presentation of hope they perceived in the church. They were countering an incomplete version of hope that dreams of a heavenly end and ignores participation in hope through active work for God’s justice here and now. They were keenly aware of the well-intentioned Christians who believe that “the poor will always be with us” means that we are not called to improve the conditions of the poor. They had seen church funds spent on new pews rather than on soup kitchens, and they knew well that comfortable visions of eternal life with God can distract Christians from attending to those systemically deprived of comfort in this life. And, they found support and guidance from secular and theological resources that emphasize a responsible, social action narrative and performance of hope.

The theological movement that counters a heavenly hope with a more earthly-oriented hope travels a pendulum swing away from the hope it opposes. That pendulum swing rescues theological hope from one extreme, but risks settling on another extreme. In the process, contributions from alternate accounts of hope fade from view, and the possibility of an integrated, less dualistic account of hope loses priority. And, in the process, reconciliation among those who are divided falls from the realms of current and eschatological hope.
The Anglican Communion currently struggles with painful conflicts among its international body. While it has historically aimed for unity in the midst of differences and strife, present issues and present members seem particularly resistant to compromise. Hope for reconciliation is in short supply. Agreements and arguments alike reveal few explicit references to any specifically Christian accounts of hope. The Anglican Communion resembles more a couple who have decided on divorce than a couple who have begun counseling in order to restore a broken marriage. Whether or not these are the only outcomes remains to be seen.

My experience, albeit limited, suggests that hope focused on improvements people can effect, accomplish, in the foreseeable future is most appealing and accessible to people in positions to effect, accomplish, movements in the foreseeable future. Hope in that which cannot be readily attained is much more difficult to establish and sustain, whether it is hope in healing, justice, and reconciliation now (or soon) or hope in healing and justice in resurrected life in Christ. My interest is in building vocabulary and fluency in a rich and sound theological hope that can stand up in the midst of crisis for those who are plagued by division, depression, disability, and disaster. I am looking for accessible, theological hope resources to help the families of the church work toward health and relationships that reflect hope in eschatological healing and reconciliation.

I am not here offering strategies of hope to the Anglican Communion, to congregations ready to recognize the mentally ill, to those who provide local and global care for the neediest, or to any other specific community looking to Christian theology for guidance about hope. Instead, I am encouraging theologians to continue
critical and creative examinations of the hope they teach, promote, and presuppose; and I am recommending that those examinations include a reconsideration of dismissed traditional doctrine and a readiness to consider current discourses not traditionally consulted for input on theological hope.

The length and breadth of Christian teaching might be pictured as a wide and deep river. Within this river flows Christian tradition. Christians throughout the ages discuss, debate, and teach collective wisdoms of Christianity, and they mark specifics with buoys: “Don’t stray too far toward these rocks;” “watch out for those eddies.” On some points of faith and practice, many Christians share the same assessments of the markers within which Christian doctrine thrives most faithfully. On other points, differing communities of Christians disagree greatly about which route through the rapids is wisest. And, at still other points, Christians may mark certain rough waters as sites where differing currents of Christian tradition meet in passionate and as-yet-unresolved conflict; and yet, this conflict persists within the breadth of the wide streams of Christian buoys. Despite some shifts over time and some conflicts within time about how to mark the river, for the most part, a bird’s-eye view of Christianity’s theological nautical map reveals a recognizable route. Some of the edges vary, and some streams branch off in radically distinct directions, but there is a route on this map that almost all Christians identify as the territory in the river within which Christian theology lives. Streams that lie entirely outside the buoys are
more difficult to recognize as Christian tradition. Geological features outside the river altogether may or may not contribute to the flow and vitality of the traditions.\footnote{As Richard King has helpfully observed, the image of the river of Christian tradition has a number of limitations. It does not, for example, illustrate the extent to which Christianity interacts, overlaps, and separates from other bodies of water (or another appropriate geographical features). I wholeheartedly agree that this image has only a narrow range of applicability, and I am eager to receive recommendations—geographical or otherwise—for alternative metaphors.}

Jürgen Moltmann introduced a theology of hope, almost half a century ago, that captured the imaginations of many theologians looking to respond to atheist dismissals of God after the holocaust while developing an up-to-date theological hope for modern Christians. As Moltmann continued (and continues today) to write about theological topics, his theology of hope has developed and shifted along with his developing positions and cultural shifts. Currently, Moltmann's theology of hope shares presuppositions and sensibilities with a large body of American Christians who might describe themselves as generally liberal in ecclesiology and in politics. I am not attempting here to establish which came first, Moltmann's theological hope or the ideological climate in which it flourishes. In either case, the theology of hope that can be described as a reflection of Moltmann's work resonates with contemporary Christian assumptions about doctrines of God, eschatology, and anthropology to the extent that sharp distinctions are difficult to discern. I call this shared theological hope “Moltmannian hope,” because he has articulated some of the basis for and applications of this now-familiar hope.

Moltmannian hope, the stream of theological hope that approximately reflects (and supports) the work of Jürgen Moltmann, currently functions as normative for many theologians and those whom they influence.
veers away from some of the older streams of tradition and toward some of the boundary buoys. An exclusive reliance on a Moltmannian theology of hope deprives the church of crucial resources for a robust eschatological hope and its practices. Critical attention to additional streams of theological hope, and to applicable discourses within and without Christian theology, provides the church with strength and resilience to sustain a distinctly Christian theological hope through and beyond disaster, despair, suffering, and death. Jesus Christ, the perfect hope, embodies the life—earthly and eternal—of humanity and its eschatological end, a life in which humans can participate, through the grace and discipleship.

To make this argument, I will first sketch a rough picture of Moltmannian hope. Then I will propose some challenges and additions to that discourse, in order to clarify and enrich resources of hope for the church and its mission. For the purposes of this project, I will direct my arguments and observations toward Christian theologians in the United States, especially those who are invested in the theology of hope.

Chapter I reviews some aspects of the theological hope offered by Moltmann, followed by examples of Moltmannian hope, which reflects—but does not necessarily accurately represent—the scope of Moltmann’s theology of hope. I highlight the doctrine of God that determines the hope and the anthropology of hope, of Moltmannian theology. I describe a 2007 conference about eschatology, which celebrated and presented a Moltmannian theology of hope; and I present a book about hope written by a theologian strongly influenced by Moltmann. Chapter 2 identifies some of the features of theological hope that are lost when Moltmannian
hope becomes the dominant ideology of hope. The costs of exclusive reliance on Moltmannian hope include a lack of critical engagement with the doctrines Moltmann rejected when constructing his theological hope. The apparent appropriateness of Moltmannian hope hinders considerations of new contributions to hope. Chapter 3 considers Thomas Aquinas’s presentation of theological hope and 21st century treatments of hope from theologians appreciative of Aquinas’s systematic theology. I provide an overview of Thomas’s theology of hope as presented in the *Summa Theologiae*, and I correct some Moltmannian misunderstandings of Thomistic hope. I add relevant contributions from Pope Benedict XVI, Daniel Castelo, Paul Gavrilyuk, D. Stephen Long, Kathryn Tanner, and Thomas Weinandy. Each section begins with the lyrics of a song from the distinctly non-Thomistic canon of old-timey gospel/blues/bluegrass music about hope and heaven, as evidence of faithful discourses of hope that persevere outside the realm of Moltmannian hope. Chapter 4 briefly addresses five contemporary discourses not conventionally considered as resources for theological hope and suggests how they might contribute to a more intentionally cohesive narrative and performance of theological hope. I look at nihilism, lament, disability theology, feminist theory, and feminist theology; open to any wisdom and clarity they might offer to Christian theological hope. The Conclusion suggests two performances of theological hope for the church to take on in conversation with the resources and critiques provided in the first four chapters.
1. Moltmann’s Hope and Moltmannian Hope

The patron of theological hope in the United States for the past 50 years has been Jürgen Moltmann. His celebrated book, *Theology of Hope,* reinvigorated theological scholarship about hope and still inspires academic and congregational engagements with hope. His account of hope emphasizes God’s experience of crucifixion godforsakeness, Jesus Christ’s promise of resurrection, the future coming of God’s new creation, and the work of hope in this life, now. Moltmann’s theology inspires a body of writing and belief — Moltmannian hope — that approximately reflects his work and functions as normative for a significant number of Christian theologians, church leaders, and lay people. Moltmannian hope tries to resist, on the one hand, the resigned escapism that gives up on this world and dreams of an otherworldy kingdom, and on the other, the superficial hopes of a commodified world. Moltmannian hope offers instead future possibilities for a compassionate God’s new creation of this world.

1.1 Our Only Hope?

In this age of unsatiable desire, the desire for hope and the accompanying proclamations of hope fill news stories, advertisements, and commentaries. Christians wanting to make sense of theological hope, or theologians wanting to convey a message of specifically Christian hope must clear their ways through a flood of distinctly non-theological hope. A casual scan of assorted media reveals a plethora

of claims about the identity of “our only hope,” from a rock/metalcore/pop band,\textsuperscript{3} to spray tanning,\textsuperscript{4} to the Gospel.

Medical candidates for our only hope include stem cells,\textsuperscript{5} Charity hospitals in India,\textsuperscript{6} IVF treatments,\textsuperscript{7} Genetic research,\textsuperscript{8} and the search for a cure for cancer.\textsuperscript{9}

Those concerned about the environment argue that our only hope rests in mother

\textsuperscript{3} \url{http://www.reverbnation.com/ouronlyhope}, accessed March 19, 2011.

\textsuperscript{4} Sandra Thomas describes how spray tanning is the only way she can get a tan without burning her fair skin, in “Spray-Tanning: The Only Hope for People Like Me,” \url{http://ezinearticles.com/?Spray-Tanning—the-Only-Hope-For-People-Like-Me&id=3583769}, accessed March 19, 2011.

\textsuperscript{5} L. Burns proposes that the metaphor for research and use of stem cells shift to “superheroes,” in “You are our only hope”: trading metaphorical "magic bullets" for stem cell "superheroes." Theor Med Bioeth. 2009;30(6):427-42.

\textsuperscript{6} A hospital outside Kalkata that provides inexpensive care for the needy. “Are charity hospitals the only hope for India’s poor?” Sujoy Dhar KOLKATA, India | Sun Feb 21, 2010 10:41pm EST. \url{http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE61L0NC20100222}

\textsuperscript{7} Parents of triplets tell their story: “Cherelle and Thomas Southerland wanted a baby so badly that they couldn’t think of a future without one . . . Four ectopic pregnancies ended in miscarriage. She suffered hemorrhages and had to have both fallopian tubes removed. With each loss, she wanted a baby more. So in 1999, the Southerlands decided to try in vitro fertilization (IVF).

“`It was a little scary because it was our only hope of getting pregnant,’ says Cherelle, who also works at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center. “We didn’t really have the funds, but God made a way.’” “Worth the Wait: Triple Mom Counts Her Blessings,” \url{http://www.cincinnatichildrens.org/health/yh/archives/2010/spring/cherelle.htm}, accessed March 19, 2011.


\textsuperscript{9} \url{http://ellyndavidson.com/tag/breast-cancer-3-day-ambassador/}, accessed 19 March, 2011.
earth, organic food, carbon capture, desalinazation of sea water, the sea itself, or geoengineering. Our only hope for appropriate health care is regulation — or deregulation. In American politics, our only hope might be President Obama’s


13 Ben Jervey, Contributing Editor and Planet Ambassador to the Pepsi Refresh Project, explains that “The tough reality of the world’s increasingly dire water crisis means that desalination isn’t merely an option, but a necessity. The only sensible way to power these processes — without further contributing to one of the main causes of the freshwater shortages — is to do it without greenhouse gas emissions. Without exception, desalination needs to be coupled with clean energy.” MSN: Environment. http://www.good.is/post/seawater-our-only-hope-for-a-drink/, accessed March 19, 2011.

14 “However fragmented the world, however intense the national rivalries, it is an inexorable fact that we become more interdependent every day. I believe that national sovereignties will shrink in the face of universal interdependence. The sea, the great unifier, is man’s only hope. Now, as never before, the old phrase has a literal meaning: We are all in the same boat.” Ascribed to Jacques Cousteau, in National Geographic from 1981, by Jill Bailey, Mary J. Leou, Habitats of the World, Volume 1 (Tarrytown, New York: Marshall Cavendish, 2006): 115.


audacious hope,\textsuperscript{18} the hope of his campaign's slogans: “Hope + Belief = Change,”\textsuperscript{19} “Hope, Action, Change,”\textsuperscript{20} or an opposing campaign slogan: “Overrated: No Hope, Just Hype.”\textsuperscript{21} Some argue that our only national hope combines American values and Christianity: our only hope is the radicalization of fellowship preached by Martin Luther King Jr.,\textsuperscript{22} or the distinctive “White Jesus Our Only Hope T-shirt” which shows an illustration of Jesus in the format of the famous Obama poster.\textsuperscript{23}

Each only-hope declaration names or assumes the desired end of that hope; few people are likely to confuse an online gaming quest in World of Warcraft called “Our Only Hope”\textsuperscript{24} with our only hope for saving tigers through the World Wildlife Fund’s work against international trade in endangered species.\textsuperscript{25} Few Christians are

\textsuperscript{19} http://www.zazzle.co.uk/hope_belief_change_obama_08_customised_tshirt-235476764300328824, accessed March 19, 2011.
\textsuperscript{22} “Our only hope today lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism, and militarism.” Martin Luther King Jr., “Why I Am Opposed to the War in Vietnam,” Sermon at the Ebenezer Baptist Church on April 30, 1967, in \textit{A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.}, ed. James Melvin Washington (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 242.
likely to confuse an online game with the only hope in Jesus Christ that Christian scripture, teaching, and tradition have consistently proclaimed. However, when news reports, political propaganda, product advertising, social advocacy, and medical research use the “only hope” trope to express multiple degrees of importance and multiple sorts of hope, Christians may well find it difficult to determine precisely how Christian hope in Jesus Christ is different from all other hopes.

1.2 Two Theological Hopes

Initial inquiries about a specifically Christian hope today frequently meet with two sorts of Christian hope: on the one hand, there is the mistaken hope that looks to an idyllic heaven in a land far away; on the other hand, there is the more responsible hope that looks to the efforts of good people to make a better world today. The older and outdated sort of hope pertains to the less-immediate and somewhat awkward topic of eternal salvation with God. “In the old days,” the story goes, “the church used to care chiefly about hopes for heavenly rest; and in the process it dismissed and denigrated the urgent suffering of people living on this earth. Now we should know better.” The newer and more appropriate hope is practical and calls engaged church members to help the needy improve their material conditions and social positions, through personal aid and through public policy. The primary proponents of practical hope remember (or would like to remember) the 60s, when the church was socially active and cared about issues that really mattered, thereby correcting the previous detached, overly-spiritual, approach of the church.

Now, they argue, the church has lost much of that enthusiastic activism.⁷⁷ Even though the church did not fully live up to this nostalgic vision of hope-filled activism for civil rights and peace fifty years ago, and even though mainstream Christianity has not, on the whole, lapsed into a dreamy belief in a pie-in-the-sky fulfilment of hope, concern for correction remains. Theologians and clergy urge parishioners toward an appropriate commitment to on-the-ground activities of Christian hope instead of succumbing to the distracting influence of fluffy-cloud idyllism or of Rapture-focused apocalypticism.⁷⁸

Practical-hope theology shares many goals and aims that can be addressed in the sphere of United States political action. Federally funded programs and those who champion private sphere incentives both aim to benefit the less fortunate with an on-the-ground focus and a hope that supports theological priorities on the tangible needs of people, now. Thus, a theology of hope can encourage immediate, tangible care for those in the most vulnerable positions through, or in concert with, small and large scale political policies. With less energy spent in speculation about who will and won't end up in heaven, Christians can devote more of their efforts toward the social and political action that could make a difference in present day society; and yet, parishioners who already agree that these are the best expressions of hope still require frequent reminders to move from the pew to tasks in the real

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world. Theological books, essays, and lectures about practical hope offer resources to support the preaching and teaching of concerned church leaders.29

Meanwhile, Christians in America are finding it increasingly difficult to grasp and sustain hope in the face of unrelenting challenges. These challenges come in the form of natural disasters, human-caused disasters, economic downturns, high unemployment, housing crises, and the fact that things do not seem to be getting better every day, as previously expected. People are discouraged by tax hikes, the loss of programs through tax cuts, global terrorism, wars against terrorism, global warming, arguments about how to respond to global warming, and stalemated partisan politics. Victims of systemic oppression and inattention see little hope of relief, those benefiting from the goods of a capitalist democracy see diminished hope for retaining those goods; those who had felt that the American Dream of prosperity (or at least a somewhat more comfortable lifestyle) was almost in their grasp find their hopes dashed by a weakened economy and subsequent layoffs; those who had no hope of participating in the American Dream still have no hope of such participation. Those putting their trust in nationalism feel disappointed in the ways that the nation and its leaders do not live up to their hopes. Those seeking reassurance from the church feel disappointed by institutional incompetence, the weakness of church leadership, irrelevance, trendy change, the closure of church buildings, and money spent on church buildings instead of the poor and needy. Those working to make a difference here and now feel frustrated that their efforts reap

little visible change. Experts of science and reason argue against the bases of Christian hope, while medical research fails to eradicate suffering, death, and the common cold.

The need for hope seems greater than ever, as does the need for clear articulations and teachings of Christian theological hope. Since the 1960s, Jürgen Moltmann has been the name most familiarly associated with theological hope. His work directly and indirectly influences a large body of theological hope resources today.

1.3 Moltmann’s Experience of Godforsakenness and Hope

30 I have not included an engagement with N. T. Wright's work on hope and eschatology in this project. As a much read Anglican bishop and New Testament professor, Wright might have seemed a perfect match for the topic, and he does share several presuppositions and arguments with Moltmann and Motmannian hope. Wright criticizes Rapture- and heaven-based eschatological hope, because they distract from work for the world and its inhabitants here and now. He attributes escapist, spiritual hopes in heaven to the malign influences of Greek philosophy. He expects God's kingdom to come down to this earth, instead of an ascent of the redeemed creation to heaven. He pronounces his exegetical conclusions as the one correct interpretation, as opposed to all other incorrect thought throughout Christianity. However, Wright does not dwell on divine (im)possibility, and he writes from a distinctly English and Anglican position. It appears that Wright and Moltmann have followed somewhat different theological paths to arrive at their doctrines of hope; another project might include a comparative analysis of these theologians. See: N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: Harper One, 2008); *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996); *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003); *Paul in Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005).

31 A few of the theologians influenced by Moltmann include: Rueben Alves, Leonardo Boff, James Cone, Gustavo Gutierrez, Elizabeth Johnson, Catherine Keller, John Polkinghorne, Paul Ricoeur, Letty Russell, Jon Sobrino.
Moltmann grew up in Hamburg, in a secular, academic family. His discovery of God, his vocation, and his theology of hope began near the end of World War II, when he encountered God and the Bible as a prisoner of war.

In the last week of July 1943, Hamburg was destroyed in a firestorm as a result of the British Royal Air Force's “Operation Gomorrah.” 40,000 people perished. With my school class I was in a flak battery in the inner city as an auxiliary. It was wiped out, but the bombs which tore away the schoolfriend standing next to me spared me. In the night, for the first time I cried out to God. “My God, where are you?,” was my question. “Why am I alive and not dead like the others?” During three years as a prisoner of war I looked for an answer, first in the Old Testament psalms of lamentation and then in the Gospel of Mark. When I came to Jesus' dying cry, I knew, “There is your divine brother and redeemer, who understands you in your godforsakenness.”

In prison, Moltmann experienced God's presence not only in divine understanding, but also in the graciousness of the local residents and in the community of prisoners.

The kindness which Scottish miners and English neighbours showed the German prisoners of war who were at that time their enemies shamed us profoundly. We were accepted as people, even though we were only numbers and wore the prisoner's patch on our backs. But that made it possible for us to live with the guilt of our own people, the catastrophes we had brought about and the long shadows of Auschwitz, without repressing them and without becoming callous.

Some of the prisoners were Protestant theologians, and they gathered with Moltmann and other prisoners for teaching and Bible study.

Hence, as a young man, Moltmann was transformed by the horrors of war, the revelation of God's presence in the midst of suffering, the solidarity with prisoners of war, the surprising hospitality of townspeople, and the practice of bible study in


34 Moltmann, How, 13.
community. He reports that “the experiences of the life of a prisoner have left a lasting mark on me: the suffering and the hope which reinforce each other. When one grasps the courage to hope, the chains begin to hurt, but the pain is better than the resignation in which everything is a matter of indifference.”

In 1948, once released from prison, Moltmann went to seminary, where he was greatly influenced by Barth and the Confessing Church. After serving a rural church, he returned to scholarship and published *The Theology of Hope* in 1965. In this and in his many following books (on a variety of other theological topics), he describes an eschatological hope that is affirmed and yet unfinished in Christ until God’s future fulfillment in the world’s new creation. He counters the idea that Christ’s resurrection happened in the past to establish our future. Rather, he argues, we live in the time of not yet, a present time determined by the future that will come to history. Throughout his life, he carries forward his powerful revelation of God suffering with him in godforsakenness, as the future hope of God’s presence in and with the new creation to come.

1.4 The God of Moltmann’s Hope

1.4.1 The Passible God

God suffers. Moltmann’s theology of hope relies on his characterization of God as passible and mutable: God suffers and God changes. God experiences suffering, regret, abandonment, and the effects of human history. This reversal of traditional doctrine about the nature of God so permeates Moltmann’s work that it

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might be possible to argue that his is a theology of divine passibility, with a secondary account of hope. Neal observes that

[any modern treatment of divine (im)passibility has to consider Moltmann, specifically in The Crucified God and The Trinity and the Kingdom of God. That many today speak of God’s suffering without any conceptual or linguistic difficulty is due in large part to Moltmann and the favorable way he has been received by the academy along these lines.]

According to Moltmann, God’s passibility determines the identity, actions, and relationships of God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit — separately and as the Trinity — and God’s passibility allows for the possibility of hope.

Moltmann recounts, in a 1997 essay, how his certainty that God is possible grew out of his experience of 1968.

1968 brought the climax and turning-point in the mood of a new awakening. Military intervention put an end to the Prague Spring. German and Polish troops also marched shamefully into Czechoslovakia. In Rome the encyclical Humanae vitae set a limit to the aggiornamento of the church; Catholic colleagues lost their posts. On 6 April Martin Luther King was shot. The black ghettos burned. We were in America at that time. Rudi Dutschke was shot at a demonstration in Berlin. The student protest became more bitter. For me the political dream of a united Social Democratic Europe collapsed. The end in Prague paralysed me for weeks.

These events raised questions that resonated with the questions Moltmann began considering in prison camp and with the persistent post-Holocaust questions about

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36 Ryan A Neal, *Theology as Hope: On the Ground and Implications of Jürgen Moltmann’s Doctrine of Hope* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2008), 70. Here, as elsewhere, it is impossible to declare with certainty whether a broader shift in doctrinal assumptions precedes Moltmann’s claims. Either way, he articulates a change that many Christians are willing to accept. Richard Goetz writes “The Suffering God: The Rise of a New Orthodoxy,” *Christian Century* 103 (1986): 385-89, and his “new orthodoxy” label has been repeated countless times since. Sturla Stålsett names passibilism “the dominant view, a theological commonplace,” in *The Crucified and the Crucified: a Study in the Liberation Christology of Jon Sobrino* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 490, also 435.

the possibility of hope after God’s apparent abandonment of all those persecuted and murdered.

Israel’s account of God throughout the Old Testament describes a God who creates the world, and establishes order for God’s people. God responds to God’s people when they are needy and when they stray from God’s order to disordered lives. God protects, corrects, and redirects the people toward righteousness, over and over. The stories of this relationship between God and Israel often present God in anthropomorphic terms, as a divine figure — the one God — who responds to Israel’s ungodliness with frustration and with an unwavering faithfulness to the people with convenantal constancy. In these accounts, God sighs, acts out in anger, listens to and heeds the people’s prayers, and delights in the people’s righteousness. At the same time, God remains the one God, who is almighty, steadfast, and undiminished by lesser powers and human frailty.

The earliest Christians developed ways of describing the God of Israel who is also manifest in Jesus Christ and abiding in the Holy Spirit, the narrative of the unshakeable faithfulness of the one God continues. God is impassible, unchanging, undiminishable; and God, in compassion and love, shares in human nature through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ suffers and dies as human and divine, in a way shared by the Trinity, without the death of the Trinity, and without attributing humanness to the Trinity. Thus, God is possible — co compassionately moved by human suffering, strife, and sin — while remaining impassibly perfect. Later
theological and ecclesial wisdom underscores and develops the primacy of God's impassibility which embraces God's passibility.\textsuperscript{38}

Moltmann finds the idea of an impassible God contradictory to the reality of God's love and compassion. He rejects divine impassibility because it conflicts with his eschatological hope in with God's suffering and death on the cross and with God's full presence in the new creation. As mentioned above, Moltmann's first revelation of God occurred in the coincidence of his powerful sense of abandonment — on the battlefield and as a prisoner of war — and his encounter with the Gospel account of Jesus' passion and death. Moltmann recognized the his own abandonment in God's abandonment of Jesus Christ in the garden of Gethsemane and on the cross. Moltmann understood his experience as a reflection of Jesus's experience, and he felt consolation from the presence of God — newly discovered in the Bible he was given — who experienced his abandonment \textit{with} him. A God who is not moved, changed, or wounded in the face of human suffering could not be the compassionate God revealed to Moltmann in prison of war camp.

He cites Elie Wiesel's account from Auschwitz of the boy who is hanged, but dies very slowly, in the midst of great suffering. A man who was standing nearby, with Wiesel, asks, “Where is God?” and Wiesel answers, “He is here. He is hanging there on the gallows. . .”\textsuperscript{39} Moltmann affirms Wiesel's answer and declares:

\begin{quote}
Any other answer would be blasphemy. There cannot be any other Christian answer to the question of this torment. To speak here of a God who could not suffer would make God a demon. To speak here of an absolute God would
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{38} Chapter Three will include a richer discussion of God's impassibility.

make God an annihilating nothingness. To speak here of an indifferent God would condemn men to indifference.\footnote{40 Moltmann, \textit{Coming}, 274.}

Moltmann here responds to those who cannot find God after Auschwitz by placing the suffering God in the midst of death at Auschwitz, and therefore in the midst of all of humanity's suffering and death. He responds to those who claim an impassible God by separating divine absoluteness from divine compassion. The God of hope thus regains relevance in a world of horror and rejects divine power that would inhibit co-suffering with humanity.

\textbf{1.4.2 The Passible God and the One-Natured Christ}

Moltmann supports his account of God's passibility by noting how close early Christianity came to theological error before it was “in a position to identify God himself with the suffering and the death of Jesus.”\footnote{41 Jürgen Moltmann, \textit{The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology}, trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1974), 227.} Moltmann equates docetism, “according to which Jesus only appeared to suffer and only appeared to die abandoned by God: this did not happen in reality,” with claims about God's impassibility. He blames the influence of Greek philosophy on early configurations of Christian theology (and the bulk of Christian doctrine since) for the church's hesitancy to embrace God's real suffering and Christ's passion. Moltmann argues that this non-biblical philosophy separates divinity and humanity into distinct, separated, characters: “God's being is incorruptible, unchangeable, indivisible, incapable of suffering and immortal; human nature, on the other hand, is transitory, changeable,
divisible, capable of suffering and mortal.”  

Moltmann explains that the doctrine of Christ's two natures developed as a way to forge a connection between the impassible God and the human suffering Jesus endured, a connection that Christians hoped would bring them to a salvation of transcendence: “God became man that we men might participate in God (Athanasius).” The problem with this “theistic” hope, according to Moltmann, is that humans want to be immortal with an immortal God, and that hope “makes it impossible to regard Jesus as really being God and at the same time as being forsaken by God.”

Moltmann’s investigation of the early church Fathers leads him to identify Cyril of Alexandria as the most sympathetic to a single-natured Christ. The rest of the Fathers, as well as most of Christian doctrine that follows, fail to understand the limits of divine apatheia that Moltmann brings to light. In his narrative of the church’s rejection of divine passibility, Moltmann describes how Cyril recognized Jesus’ forsakenness on the cross as the cry of the human and divine Christ, but then backtracked to cohere with the position of the church, that God is impassible and only Christ’s human nature was forsaken.

Even Cyril of Alexandria, who more than any one else stressed the personal unity of Christ against those who pressed for the differentiation of the two natures, was not able to remedy the “error” which the whole of early Christian theology demonstrates at this point. As a consequence of his christology of unity he really had to refer the cry of the forsaken Christ on the cross to the complete, divine and human person of the Son. But Cyril cannot manage that.

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42 Moltmann, *Crucified*, 228.
43 Moltmann, *Crucified*, 228.
44 Moltmann, *Crucified*, 228.
45 Moltmann, *Crucified*, 229.
Certainly it is Christ who says that, but it is not his own personal and human need that leads him to it. Anyone who claims that Christ is overcome with fear and weakness here, says Cyril, refuses to confess his God. Christ does not say this in his own name, but in the name of his total nature, because only this and not he himself fell prey to corruption. He is calling to the Father for us, and not for himself. 46

The early church councils describe Jesus Christ as having two natures: in one nature, he is wholly divine; in the other, he is wholly human. These two natures are connected by means of the *communicatio idiomatum*, 47 but God remains fully divine, and Jesus remains fully human and fully divine. The two natures of Jesus Christ narrate the unprecedented and seemingly impossible manifestation of God in human form, while God remains God. The two-natured Christ serves as mediator between God and humanity: Jesus takes on human suffering, sin, and death; God raises Jesus from suffering, sin, and death that the faithful may follow him into resurrected life.

Moltmann strongly objects to the christological doctrine of two natures. His theology of hope depends on the unity of Christ’s nature with God’s, such that what Jesus experiences, God experiences. At the crucifixion, God Godself experiences godforsakeness.

When God becomes man in Jesus of Nazareth, he not only enters into the finitude of man, but in his death on the cross also enters into the situation of man’s godforsakenness. In Jesus he does not die the natural death of a finite being, but the violent death of the criminal on the cross, the death of complete abandonment by God. The suffering in the passion of Jesus is abandonment, rejection by God, his Father. God does not become a religion, so

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46 Moltmann, *Crucified*, 228–9. “This understanding of Christ’s cry of desolation in Cyril is a last retreat before the axiom of *apatheia*. According to Thomas Aquinas, too, the suffering is only a *suppositum* of the divine nature in respect of the human nature which it assumed and which was capable of suffering; it did not relate to the divine nature itself, for this was incapable of suffering.”

that man participates in him by corresponding religious thoughts and feelings. God does not become a law, so that man participates in him through obedience to a law. God does not become an ideal, so that man achieves community with him through constant striving. He humbles himself and takes upon himself the eternal death of the godless and the godforsaken, so that all the godless and the godforsaken can experience communion with him.\footnote{Moltmann, \textit{Coming}, 276.}

Although Moltmann rejects the two natures of Christ, he does presents two aspects of Jesus, but his account of the difference relies on his chronological and eschatological distinction rather than a divine and human distinction. From the perspective of his crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus functions as the temporary Lord, the one through whom God acts in the interim time, “the time from his exaltation until the consummation of his work of salvation.”\footnote{Jürgen Moltmann, “Theology as Eschatology,” in Jürgen Moltmann, et. al., \textit{The Future of Hope}, ed., Frederick Herzog (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 24-5.} Jesus as Lord stands in for God and offers access to God.\footnote{Moltmann, “Theology as Eschatology,” 24.}

God identifies himself with Jesus by receiving the crucified one into his future as mode of his being. If we start with the resurrection, we must say that God in his being does not become identical with Jesus, but identifies with Jesus through an act of his will. God has offered him up to a death at the cross of forsakenness. God has raised him from the dead and exalted him to be the Lord of his coming kingdom. In passing and resurrection God acts in Jesus.\footnote{Moltmann, “Theology as Eschatology,” 24.}

Hope in Jesus as Lord rests not on what he has accomplished through his resurrection, but on what God will accomplish when all have been resurrected by God, eschatologically.
Moltmann recognizes that Jesus Christ might be described as mediator, but he finds the mediator role inadequate, arguing instead for a more direct connection between God and creation. A direct connection allows God to share in human suffering and pain as a promise of the release to come. Moltmann claims a single-natured Christ, such that whatever Jesus experiences, God experiences as well: “In the cross, Father and Son are most deeply separated in forsakenness and at the same time are most inwardly one in their surrender.”

When Jesus prays to God in the garden of Gethsemane, and when Jesus cries out to God on the cross, God does not answer. Moltmann interprets Jesus’ cry, “My God, why have you forsaken me?” to mean that Jesus not only feels forsaken by God but is, in fact, forsaken by God. Moltmann argues here that when Jesus feels that God is absent from him, God truly is absent, and God experiences the godforsakenness that Jesus experiences. While the two-natured Christology retains a real difference between humanity and divinity in Christ, despite the communicatio idiomatum, Moltmann’s single-natured Christ brings God’s divinity closer to humanity. Jesus’ humanity and divinity coinhere, and God shares unreservedly in Christ’s adjoined humanity and divinity. God thus takes on two divinely intensified human experiences of suffering: 1) God suffers as Father when God forsakes his Son and gives him up to death on the cross; 2) God suffers as godforsaken when Christ is godforsaken.

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52 Moltmann, Crucified, 244.
Moltmann affirms the Nicaean critique of Arius that God is not changeable, although he adds a correction to the interpretation of claim, arguing that while God is not changeable the way creatures are, God is not unchangeable either:

But that statement is not absolute; it is only a simile. God is not changeable as creatures are changeable. However, the conclusion should not be drawn from this that God is unchangeable in every respect, for this negative definition merely says that God is under constraint from that which is not of God. The negation of changeableness by which a general distinction is drawn between God and man must not lead to the conclusion that he is intrinsically unchangeable. If God is not passively changeable by other things like other creatures, this does not mean that he is not free to change himself, or even free to allow himself to be changed by others of his own free will. True, God cannot be divided like his creation, but he can still communicate himself. Thus the relative definition of his unchangeableness does not lead to the assertion of his absolute and intrinsic unchangeableness.\(^{53}\)

Early Christian doctrine considers God’s apparent suffering to fall within the umbrella of God’s impassibility. Moltmann sees a distinction between imposed suffering and voluntary suffering; God’s suffering is voluntary and tied to God’s love, which Moltmann marks as the essence of God’s being.

Moltmann labels the doctrine of Christ’s two natures a characteristic of theism, which he criticizes for prioritising the oneness of God instead of the relatedness of the trinitarian persons, and for maintaining an inviolable separation between the divine and the human. “The doctrine of two natures must understand the event of the cross statically as a reciprocal relationship between two qualitatively different natures, the divine nature which is incapable of suffering and the human nature which is capable of suffering.”\(^{54}\) Instead, Moltmann advocates a doctrine of God who is love and who loves always in relationships with the Son and the Holy

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\(^{53}\) Moltmann, *Crucified*, 237.

\(^{54}\) Moltmann, *Crucified*, 245.
Spirit, and whose love will be fulfilled eschatologically in the open Trinity’s relationship with creation. Christ’s suffering on the cross draws God into human suffering through God’s love for creation. God’s suffering love reflects the future new creation when God and creation will be wholly together in trinitarian perichoretical love.

That God, the creator of eschatological relationships, provides hope through God’s own suffering.

God is unconditional love, because he takes on himself grief at the contradiction in men and does not angrily suppress this contradiction. God allows himself to be forced out. God suffers, God allows himself to be crucified and is crucified, and in this consummates his unconditional love that is so full of hope.⁵⁵

God’s embrace of human suffering demonstrates the victory of love over hate. “Thus [God’s love’s] suffering proves to be stronger than hate. Its might is powerful in weakness and gains power over its enemies in grief, because it gives life even to its enemies and opens up the future to change.”⁵⁶ Moltmann argues that the two-natured Christ doctrine freezes Jesus and God into a two-person, non-interactive relationship and leaves the Holy Spirit out all together. Moltmann’s account of the Trinity focuses on the relationships of the persons of the Trinity more than on the oneness of the trinity. Moltmann envisions the Trinity as three subjects in unity, instead of three persons in one.⁵⁷ Both God and creation hope for the inclusion of creation in the Trinity’s perichoretical relationships of love, opened by the cross.

⁵⁵ Moltmann, Crucified, 248.

⁵⁶ Moltmann, Crucified, 249.

⁵⁷ Moltmann, Crucified, 249.
Moltmann narrates the ultimate unity of the believer and the Trinity by charting a path of understanding, experience, and faith, from the crucifixion to human participation in the relations of the Trinity.

If in the freedom given through experience of it the believer understands the crucifixion as an event of the love of the Son and the grief of the Father, that is, as an event between God and God, as an event within the Trinity, he perceives the liberating word of love which creates new life. By the death of the Son he is taken up into grief of the Father and experiences a liberation which is a new element in this de-divinized and legalistic world, which is itself even a new element over against the original creation of the word. He is in fact taken up into the inner life of God, if in the cross of Christ he experiences the love of God for the godless, the enemies, in so far as the history of Christ is the inner life of God himself. In that, if he lives in this love, he lives in God and God in him. If he lives in this freedom, he lives in God and God in him. If one conceives of the Trinity as an event of love in the suffering and the death of Jesus — and that is something which faith must do — then the Trinity is no self-contained group in heaven, but an eschatological process open for men on earth, which stems from the cross of Christ. By the secular cross on Golgotha, understood as open vulnerability and as the love of God for loveless and unloved, dehumanized men, God’s being and God’s life is open to true man.58

Here, hope for the kingdom of God equals hope for participation within the accessible, receptive, and responsive trinitarian God; and this God differs radically from the traditional accounts of God that Moltmann counters.

To correct the theological error of a distant, detached God, Moltmann draws on an assessment of many twentieth century biblical scholars that the true nature of God as revealed in Jesus Christ was corrupted by Greek metaphysical thought. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza describes this claim that Hellenism and Christianity work with conflicting “symbolic systems”:

Biblical categories understand the world as history, have space for God’s act, and maintain an openness to the future. In contrast, Greek categories are said

58 Moltmann, *Crucified*, 249.
to be static, without genuine history, without space for God’s historical acts, and closed to the future, viewing the cosmos as a cycle.  

Moltmann argues that the God manifest in Jesus Christ is not the God of Hellenic philosophy prevalent during early Christianity, whose inaccesible and impersonal attributes usurped the possible God of love.

Since the shaping of Christian dogmatics by Greek thought, it has been the general custom to approach the mystery of Jesus from the general idea of God in Greek metaphysics: the one God, for whom all men are seeking on the ground of their experience of reality, has appeared in Jesus of Nazareth — be it that the highest eternal idea of goodness and truth has found its most perfect teacher in him, or be it that in him eternal Being, the Source of all things, has become flesh and appeared in the multifarious world of transience and mortality. The mystery of Jesus is then the incarnation of the one, eternal, original, true and immutable divine Being.

He adds that the Christian adoption of Greek concept of a single deism wrongly identified God as immutable and impassible, thereby eliminating God’s presence in the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the promised eschaton.

The passibility of God supports Moltmann’s theology of hope by holding together God’s acts of creation, God’s relationship with the earliest people and with Israel, God’s godforsaken experience through Jesus Christ, and God’s future coming into creation made new. In each case, God feels the negative results of limited and limiting created life, to the end that God can most effectively bring about resurrection of all in the the final, perfect, new creation. Although Moltmann primarily underscores God’s passibility, he extends his doctrinal correction of the


60 Moltmann, Theology, 140.

61 Moltmann, Theology, 140.
transcendent God of Greek philosophy to address the other attributes of God previously assumed by Christian theology: immutability, perfection, simplicity, infinity, and goodness. Moltmann frees Christian hope from the constraints of an absolute ruler God, who surveys and judges creation from afar. Instead, he advocates a more relevant God whose passibility moves God to change — out of regret for God’s initial incomplete act of creation — from creator to participant in creation.

Moltmann is certain that Greek-influenced Christianity and the Christian doctrinal traditions that followed cannot “grasp the eschatological future horizon of the Christian mission.”

With his contemporary experiences and his awareness of contemporary circumstances, Moltmann has the perspective to clarify the true nature of God and to correct the processes of Christian teaching to fit hope in the coming God and God’s new creation.

[Every formulation of the Christian tradition according to the standard of classical tradition — and since the days of anti-revolutionary romanticism such formulations have often arisen in Catholicism and frequently in Protestantism — is wrong. Both the Christian tradendum, or object to be transmitted, and the process of tradition in the Christian proclamation break these grounds.]

Moltmann’s confidence that the new creation, which is no longer the end but the beginning, so transforms the past and present history of God with God’s people, that the most prominent markers of Christian identity and teaching must be reconstructed.

Christian proclamation is not a tradition of wisdom and truth in doctrinal principles. Nor is it a tradition of ways and means of living according to the law. It is the announcing, revealing and publishing of an eschatological event.

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62 Moltmann, Theology, 299.

63 Moltmann, Theology, 299.
It reveals the risen Christ's lordship over the world, and sets men free for the coming salvation in faith and hope.\textsuperscript{64}

The gospel proclamation of Jesus thus takes the shape of “eschatological anticipation,” rather than fulfilment of past promises carried through Jewish law and then contained in theological catechesis.

It has a thoroughly proleptic thrust, for Jesus anticipates through his words, his deeds, and his life shared with other persons, what, according to the Old Testament expectancy, can only happen on the last day. He does already today what is supposed to come tomorrow. He lives entirely from the nearness of God's future. He can be properly understood, therefore, as the anticipator of the coming of God and the liberator of a bound humanity.\textsuperscript{65}

According to Moltmann, Jesus himself displays the same relationship to tradition that Moltmann advocates, by leading his life on the terms of the kingdom yet to come.

He announced the kingdom, not as judgment but as joy. He celebrated its arrival in the “banquet for the just” with unjust sinners. He distributed the kingdom in the forgiveness of sins. This is what is so astonishingly new in the message of Jesus. Accordingly, he distanced himself from John the Baptist, from whom he had probably come to know the message of the near kingdom. The eschatology of Jesus is not the preaching of judgment, but the realization of pure grace and freedom. Therefore, his disciples did not fast and, to the continual indignation of many Christians also, he was known as a “glutton and wine-bibber.”\textsuperscript{66}

Moltmann extends his point even further to argue that Jesus detached himself completely from Judaism and Torah:

What right did Jesus have and what power did he use to introduce this astonishing and disarming message of the open and gracious future of God? Obviously, he renounced all the religious institutions of his people and did not

\textsuperscript{64} Moltmann, \textit{Theology}, 299.

\textsuperscript{65} Moltmann, \textit{Experiment.}, 54.

\textsuperscript{66} Moltmann, \textit{Experiment.}, 54.
call on the traditions of their holy history. He relied completely and
exclusively on the future of God, whom he called “my Father.”  

While this last claim may be difficult to support, it does convey the significance of
the future in Moltmann's hope, and how he recasts Jesus, his disciples, and all the
people of God as shaped by the future.

Moltmann works to free Christian theology from early Greek philosophical
influences in order to show the passionate and compassionate God manifest in Jesus
Christ. God does not stand apart from creation, waiting but unmoved by pain,
suffering, and death. God's love for creation is so great that God suffers in God's own
self the most desperate depths of human experience. When Jesus Christ lives the
physical and emotional life of humanity, suffers the exquisite pain of God's
abandonment in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross and then dies, God
lives, suffers, and dies as well. God's passibility demonstrates God's limitless love that
embraces and takes on even the limited, finite life of humans. God's solidarity in
suffering becomes God's promise of the new creation of salvation from suffering,
when understood from the future perspective, looking back at the cross and

67 Moltmann, *Experiment*, 54. Moltmann continues: “With the claim ‘But I say to
you. . . ’ in the antitheses of the Sermon on the Mount, he placed himself above the
authority of Moses as no prophet had done previously. By forgiving sins, he did what
was reserved for God alone. We do not historically know who Jesus considered
himself to be,. But his total appearance shows that someone greater than Moses and
the prophets was intended here, greater also than the figures of apocalyptic
expectations, such as ‘the Messiah’ and the ‘Son of man.’ Otherwise, Jesus could not
have identified the coming kingdom of God with his own person: ‘And Blessed is he
who takes no offense at me.’ This means that his claim to power received no support
from the past, but was totally directed toward confirmation by God in the future.
His right to make such a claim hung, so to speak, ‘in the air.’ He based this claim on
nothing, or rather on God himself.”
resurrection. Through the promise of salvation for all, God's participation in human pain and suffering establishes eschatological hope.

God suffers at the crucifixion so powerfully that God's suffering encompasses all human suffering, and the meaning of God's suffering gives meaning to the suffering of humans. Paul Fiddes notes that Moltmann

...envisages God as an event of suffering in which human beings can take their place. He insists that what is visible at the cross is true of the being of God throughout history; there is an ever-present situation in which a divine Father suffers the loss of a Son, a Son suffers the loss of a Father, and a Spirit of self-giving love and hope flows between them. In his own Trinitarian history of suffering, God opens himself to include the uproar of all human history; oppressed and forsaken people can find themselves within the situation of a suffering God, and so can also share in his history of glorification.68

Jesus Christ brings God to share suffering with humanity so that humanity can hope for the new creation, when all will share in God's glory.

1.5 Moltmann's Theological Hope


1.5.1 Ernst Bloch and Future Hope

Moltmann's account of hope was formed not only by his war and postwar experiences and his new life as a Christian, but also by the work of his contemporary, and sometime neighbor, Ernst Bloch. Bloch's emphases on the "future, the nature of

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God's being, and the question of hope's certainty” sparked Moltmann's interest in the future's transformation of the historical present. This future of possibility reflects Bloch's philosophical development of Marxism, with its emphasis on history and human agency. Upon reading Bloch's *The Principle of Hope*, Moltmann reported that his reaction was, “Why has Christian theology neglected this theme of hope, which is so distinctively its own?” “What is left of the earliest Christian spirit of hope in present-day Christianity?” Moltmann had not found in Christian theology or practice the enthusiasm and liveliness of the unconstrained hope he discovered in Bloch. Moltmann was also picking up on concurrent discussions within New Testament theology, as well as the electrically charged air of potential political change in the Civil Rights actions in the United States. Moltmann appreciates Bloch's presentation of an “ontology of the not-yet-being,” in which “[t]he already real is surrounded by a sea of possibilities and again and again a new piece of reality arises out of this sea.” While recognizing that Bloch offers an atheistic philosophy, Moltmann claims Bloch's philosophy as also “thoroughly religious,” since it reaches beyond the life we know now to an open future, thereby aligning with Moltmann's


74 Moltmann, *Experiment*., 27.
account of religious experience. Moltmann’s Bloch-influenced hope embraces not only human hope in God’s heaven, but also God’s hope hope in humans, on earth. “In such [religious] experiences, man attains the unforgettable impression that he is, together with other people and this whole creation, the utopia of God.”

With the experiment ‘man’ and the experiment ‘world’ God has joined a hope. That gives man an unambiguous certainty of hope precisely at the place and time when he can no longer see any future ahead of him. It simultaneously places him in the open question of how he wants to fulfill, personally and together with society, that hope which God has placed in him and this world.

As Moltmann’s theology develops, he increasingly transforms Bloch’s future of possibilities — good or evil — into a more certain future hope in and of God’s need of creation.

Moltmann draws on Bloch’s future-philosophy to counter both protest atheism and escapist apocalypticism. He refutes the atheistic claim that the horrors of the World Wars and the Holocaust demonstrate the failure and death of God. Moltmann understands that the apparent absence of God leads to the theodicy question, “If God cannot prevent or repair what happens in the world, then how can God be God?”; and he responds by pointing to the future, “which must be

75 Moltmann, *Experiment*, 27.
76 Moltmann, *Experiment*, 27.
77 Moltmann, *Experiment*, 27.
understood as ‘mode of God's being.’” 79 Life according to God's will, the kingdom of God, is coming still, in the future fulfillment of God's promises. Hope is not lost.

...his deity will only be manifest with the coming of his kingdom. Only then will his glory be visible, and this revelation, this becoming visible, is the creation of new reality. God is not the ground of this world and not the ground of existence, but the God of the coming kingdom, which transforms this world and our existence radically. 80

Moltmann steps outside of a debate about whether God is or is not, by claiming an eschatological hope that says, “God's being is coming, that is, God is already present in the way in which his future masters the present because his future decides what becomes of the present.” 81 In this way, Moltmann rebuts the atheist assumption that God is limited to that which happens in the world. The chaotic destruction, pain, and suffering of this world is not evidence against God, but that which God will transform in the fulfillment of promises in God's new creation. History matters, not as proof of God's weakness, but as that which God will renew when God indwells all of creation. 82

Before the promised transformation, God has not distanced Godself from the suffering and death of this world, as it may seem. Through Jesus’ life, godforsakenness, and death God suffers pain, abandonment, and death with creation. In answer to the question, “Where was God in the Holocaust?”, Moltmann replies that God was right there in the death camps, suffering alongside mothers

holding their dead babies and children torn from their parents as they all faced certain death. God’s future coming to creation names God’s suffering presence on the cross and in history as the revelation of the coming resurrection of all.83 “There is no suffering which in this history of God is not God’s suffering; no death which has not been God’s death in the history on Golgotha.”84 God’s suffering presence with human suffering is a fundamental source of hope, when understood from the perspective of God’s future indwelling with the transformed new creation.

With a trinitarian theology of the cross faith escapes the dispute between and the alternative of theism and atheism: God is not only other-worldly but also this-worldly; his is not only God, but also man; he is not only rule, authority and law but the event of suffering, liberating love. Conversely, the death of the Son is not the ‘death of God,’ but the beginning of that God event in which the life-giving spirit of love emerges from the death of the Son and the grief of the Father. 85

Moltmann responds to apocalypticism with less sympathy and more passion than his corrective to atheism. To those who claim that this world will end, Moltmann presents an eschatology of new creation and certain eternal life, which “rejects the traditional apocalyptic view of the coming of God.”86 He sees no place in Christian eschatology for end-time fatalism, which leads to human separation from creation; doomsday expectations distract Christians from responsible care for each other and the world. “The original and authentic Christian expectation of the future has nothing to do with the final destruction of the world God has created and

83 Neal, Theology, 61

84 Neal, Theology, 61; Moltmann, Crucified, 246.

85 Moltmann, Crucified, 252.

Catherine Keller appreciatively observes that the end that Moltmann champions is a future that “reflects back upon the present, to the fragile beauty of life in history.” Unlike contemporary escapist images of avenging angels laying waste to civilisation and the natural world, Moltmann offers “the capacity to cherish this present life amidst death as a test of all eschatology, warning against any apocalypticism that sucks interest from this world by focusing on its ‘end.’” He sees no hope in the end of creation, nor any hope in the present defined by the imminent ruin of life as we know it. “Nothing is as fatal as the expectation of an unavoidable catastrophe.” Instead of fatalistic horror, the new beginnings promised by God and foreshadowed by Christ’s resurrection constitute the hope determined by God’s future new creation.

1.5.2 “Forms of Promise”

Moltmann’s hope presents God’s faithfulness and Christ’s resurrection as future realities that shape the present. Resurrection hope extends the past into the future and contradicts the present with God’s faithfulness, manifest in God’s suffering with those who suffer and in God’s future fulfillment of promises. He works to free eschatological hope from past, present, and future restraints. He criticizes the view that the Old Testament records a series of divine promises and their past


88 Kathryn Tanner, Christ the Key (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 383.

89 Tanner, Christ, 383.

90 Moltmann, “Presence,” 578.

91 Neal, Theology, 127.
fulfillment in the works of God. He affirms that divine promise marks God’s relationship with Israel: the people of Israel began as nomadic people, dependent on the promise of new possibilities in new lands as they traveled, and they carried that promise with them into their new agrarian identity. Israel’s faith, “which lives in forms of promise,” a forward looking faith that keeps them moving forward, helped them “to master the situations of the land settlement and later to master the situations of world history.”92 However, Moltmann extends those divine promises toward a future which is ever open, ever extending, and not yet fulfilled.

While the Israelites may have understood God’s action in their lives as the fulfillment of promises and the basis for hope, Moltmann critiques that understanding as relying on an abstract pattern of promise and premature, insufficient fulfillment; he corrects it with an anticipatory “not yet,” which reads apparent fulfillment instead as a confirmation of greater things to come. The “not yet” of expectation describes the apparent fulfilment of promises in the past and present as the assurance, exposition and liberation of a greater hope to be completed in the resurrection of all. Moltmann reorients promise toward the future, which orients and establishes the present. Ryan Neal explains that, “[i]n Moltmann’s project, the future has priority over the present and the past to such an extent that the future, as it were, draws present forward in a way that avoids any notion of the future being wholly determined by the present or the past.”93

92 Moltmann, Theology, 102.

93 Neal, Theology, 12.
Thus, Moltmann dwells less on God’s fulfilled promises to Israel and more on the eschatological divine fulfillment of all promises in the future. “The continuity with the Abrahamitic promise can therefore be taken neither as a product of historic development nor as a retrospective projection of faith. The continuity of the promise to Abraham exists according to Paul where the promise is eschatologically validated.”

Accordingly, Moltmann argues, the gospel and the “event of Christ” do not fulfill God’s promise to Abraham, but instead recast that promise in relation to God’s future.

Paul discovers the promise to Abraham in the gospel of Christ and therefore recalls along with the gospel of Christ the promise to Abraham as well. This history of law and gospel takes its bearings from the theological problem of the past. The history of promise and gospel, however, takes its bearings from the eschatological problem of the future. Without the relation of the gospel to what was promised in advance, it loses its own bearing on the eschatological future and threatens to transform itself into gnostic talk of revelation. Without relation to the promise in the gospel, faith loses the driving-power of hope and becomes credulity.

Moltmann argues that “with a promise-focused consideration of history, it’s possible to understand God as opening up, rather than residing within, history through future abundance.

If we would use this as a help towards understanding “the expanding and broadening history of promise,” if we ask the reason for the abiding overplus of promise as compared with history, then we must again abandon every abstract schema of promise and fulfilment. We must then have recourse to the theological interpretation of this process: the reason for the overplus of promise and for the fact that it constantly overspills history lies in the inexhaustibility of the God of promise, who never exhausts himself in any

94 Moltmann, Theology, 152.

95 Moltmann, Theology, 152.

96 Moltmann, Theology, 152.
historic reality but comes “to rest” only in a reality that wholly corresponds to him.  

God’s openness to future possibilities opens up opportunities for change and hope otherwise obscured by the apparent constraints of the past and present. “It is the greatness of Ernst Bloch, whom we are basically following here, that he has developed not only a ‘principle of hope’ for man, but also an ontology of the not-yet-being and of possibility in the world process. Without real chances, the hope of man is meaningless.”

Moltmann’s future-determined hope recasts the historical past of God’s relationship with God’s people: “the driving force behind thought and action is not prior condition but hope based on some sense of promise. Hope is a looking toward the future and an acting on the basis of that future.” He develops a theology of hope that resists cultural tendencies toward existential individualism, and he advocates a relational and community understanding and practice of hopeful action in the world. The kingdom of God

does not mean merely salvation of the soul, individual rescue from the evil world, comfort for the troubled conscience, but also the realization of the eschatological hope of justice, the humanizing of man, the socializing of humanity, peace for all creation.

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100 Sturm, “Praxis,” 139.

Moltmann opens up possibilities by stretching out divine promises toward their future, eschatological, completion. When that time comes, God will fulfill the Old Testament promises, Christ will fulfill the law, Christ’s resurrection will be effective for creation, and the Spirit will draw all together in new life. The Spirit is a downpayment, the sign that Christ’s resurrection will be completed in the future resurrection of all creation.\textsuperscript{102} Christ is a guarantor of previous promises still to be realized. Christ’s resurrection does not so much accomplish salvation as it makes the future: “It is the inner necessity of the Christ event itself, the tendency of which is finally to bring out in all things the eternal life latent in him and the justice of God latent in him.”\textsuperscript{103}

Moltmann understands Paul’s declaration that, “In Christ all the promises of God are yea and Amen” (II Cor 1:20), to indicate that, in Christ, God’s promises are renewed, rather than completed: “in him they are confirmed and validated, but not yet fulfilled.”\textsuperscript{104} Thus, Christ’s resurrection from the dead stands as an offering, “a possible object of confident hope,” or “an event which is understood only in the \textit{modus} of promise.”\textsuperscript{105} Drawing on Paul (Rom. 15.4), Moltmann argues that “[w]hat the scripture that was ‘written before our time’ offers must therefore contain possibilities and a future to which present hope can be directed.”\textsuperscript{106}

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\textsuperscript{103} Moltmann, \textit{Theology}, 216.
\textsuperscript{104} Moltmann, \textit{Theology}, 228.
\textsuperscript{105} Moltmann, \textit{Theology}, 190.
\textsuperscript{106} Moltmann, \textit{Theology}, 153; Rom.15.4.
\end{flushright}
In the historical present, Moltmann’s calls for the work of Christians to be counter to the world that conflicts with Christ’s future for Christ and the world. Moltmann directs Christians to a missional response to God’s promises, a response that issues in a commitment to work and wait in hope for the coming fulfilment of those promises. He demonstrates his concern for those whose living conditions now are full of suffering and lack, by advocating an anti-establishmentarian Christian hope that “will therefore endeavour to lead our modern institutions away from their own immanent tendency towards stabilization, will make them uncertain, historify them and open them to that elasticity which is demanded by openness towards the future for which it hopes.”107 To share the good news in words and deeds now, with Moltmannian hope, means to point toward that which God has promised, which Christ has affirmed, and to which the Spirit is drawing the universe. At the time of transformation, God will bring eternity into our time, God will dwell in creation, and God will establish God's kingdom for all of creation. Until then, we live in the transitional kingdom of the present that the future has made possible.

1.5.3 The Hope of the Cross and the Resurrection

Moltmann grounds hope not in God’s past promises and fulfilments, but in the eschatological future, which serves as the beginning for history, suffering and death, the cross, and Christ’s resurrection which leads to the resurrection of all. Sometimes, Moltmann identifies the future as open, unconstrained by the past and the present, something new beyond the time and history we know, toward an open future of possibility requires a resurrection not limited to experienced reality. “The

107 Moltmann, Theology, 330.
real category of history is no longer the past and the transient, but the future.  \(^{108}\)

This is the hope he appreciatively adopts from Bloch. More of the time, Moltmann’s confidence about the resurrection of the world in God’s new creation, that he seems to close off the future. Bloch allows for all possibilities in the future. Richard Bauckham suggests: “For Bloch, hope negates the negative and transcends it by making every ‘not’ into a ‘not yet.’ But Moltmann responds that such hope can sumount only such relative negatives as have within them the possibility of becoming a ‘not yet.’”\(^{109}\) Moltmann’s certainty about universal salvation and the ultimate good of God’s new earth, as it is in heaven, stands in tension with an open future. Moltmann counters theological claims about what has already been accomplished in Christ’s resurrection, pointing instead to the final resurrection. Future hope stands not on what God has done, but on what God will do in the future — a coming future that determines the present. “We do not look then from the present into the future, but from the future into the present. We do not extrapolate the future out of the present; rather we anticipate the future in the present.”\(^{110}\)

Moltmann does not dismiss history in favor of the future; he criticizes utopian views of a heaven that seem to cancel out or downplay creation and its trials in favor of a wholly other and unearthly eternal life.

We do not interpret past history. We do not emancipate ourselves from history altogether, but we enter into the history that is determined by the

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\(^{110}\) Moltmann, *Experiment*, 52.
promised and guaranteed *eschaton*, and we expect from it not only the future of the present but also the future of the past.\(^{111}\)

Moltmann counters the idea that God adds the eschatological divine kingdom as a special bonus at the end of history. The influence of Greek philosophy, according to Moltmann, establishes the modern understanding of history as a cycle of the known, upset by the crisis of the new, which becomes the known which is upset by the next crisis of the new. God's new creation yet to come is not another crisis to upset or cancel out the familiar.\(^{112}\) For Moltmann, the true historicity of history only comes when knowledge is filled with a forward moving sense of mission and growth for the world\(^{113}\); and God's future “is the mode of his being that is dominant in history.”\(^{114}\) Thus, Moltmann affirms Bloch's claim that “the nerve of the true historical concept is and remains the new,”\(^{115}\) and he connects this history of the new with Paul’s Christology.

If it is true that for Paul the lordship of Christ is limited and passing, and merely serves the purpose of giving way to the sole rule of God; if, for Paul, “Christ is God's representative over against a world which is not yet fully subjected to God,” then the history of Christ and the presence of the Spirit must be understood in the light of this future and as moving towards it.\(^{116}\)

Moltmann’s emphasis on the hope of the future shapes the relation between his account of the cross and the resurrection. Christ’s suffering and death on the

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\(^{112}\) Moltmann, *Theology*, 230, 260.


\(^{114}\) Moltmann, *Future of Creation*, 27.

\(^{115}\) Moltmann, *Theology*, 262.

\(^{116}\) Moltmann, *Future of Creation*, 27.
cross serves as a revelation of hope, because Christ shares in human suffering and death, forging an intimate relationship between God and humans. “In surrendering himself to a God-forsaken death, Christ brought God to the God-forsaken.”\footnote{Moltmann, \textit{End}, 70.} By embracing all suffering and death in his own suffering and death, Christ both demonstrates God’s love \textit{and} brings God to those who suffer.\footnote{Moltmann, \textit{End}, 70.} Now, no one need face suffering and death alone, since God’s consoling presence reaches the depths of despair.\footnote{Moltmann, \textit{Theology}, 203.}

In \textit{Theology of Hope}, Moltmann describes the primary source of hope in Christ’s resurrection and its promise of resurrection of all. He applies Bloch’s open future focus to Christian hope determined by the resurrection life that Christ’s resurrection anticipates. In the resurrection, God creates the world anew by joining God’s own presence to and in the midst of creation forever. At the same time, the future of God’s new world in the eschatological resurrection grounds Christ’s resurrection. “[T]he final resurrection is the basis of Jesus’ resurrection. Rather than standing at the Open Tomb and looking forward, we are to project ourselves into the final resurrection. From there the resurrection of Jesus can be legitimatized.”\footnote{David P. Scaer, “Jürgen Moltmann and His Theology of Hope,” \textit{Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society} 13/2 (1970): 73.} Thus, Moltmann argues that the final resurrection of God amidst creation supplies the meaning for Christ’s resurrection as the extension of the divine promises to Israel.
Hence the resurrection of Christ was not understood merely as the first instance of a general resurrection of the dead and as a beginning of the revelation of the divinity of God in the non-existent, but also as the source of the risen life of all believers and as a confirmation of the promise which will be fulfilled in all and will show itself in the very deadliness of death to be irresistible.  

Moltmann tempers his early resurrection hope with an emphasis on the hope of the crucifixion in *The Crucified God*. He turns toward Christ’s suffering and death as the source of hope through divine participation in the depths of humanity’s unmitigated abandonment.

It is precisely here that the divine reason for the reconciliation of the universe is to be found. It is not the optimistic dream of a purified humanity, it is Christ’s descent into hell that is the ground for the confidence that nothing will be lost but that everything will be brought back again and gathered into the eternal kingdom of God. The true Christian foundation for the hope of universal salvation is the theology of the cross, and the realistic consequence of the theology of the cross can only be the restoration of all things.

Moltmann asserts that God’s primary identity is love, and there is no love without suffering. Christ’s suffering is the realization of hope because it shows God’s suffering in love and love in suffering: Christ reveals God who suffers and who takes suffering into God’s own divine life. God is revealed precisely in the depths of the opposite of God — “in godlessness and God-forsakenness.” Here, Moltmann exhibits his shift from the resurrection as the basis for Christian hope, to

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121 Moltmann, *Theology*, 197.
122 Moltmann, *Theology*.
124 Moltmann, *Crucified*, 299.
125 Moltmann, *Crucified*, 222.
126 Moltmann, *Future of Creation*, 78.
eschatological hope manifest in the crucified God.\textsuperscript{127} Crucifixion, the death of God on the cross, must be claimed in order for Christians to see and respond to the reality of the world.

It is only when Christian theology gives itself up unconditionally and without reserve to the primal event of faith that it will become a critical and liberating theology, and, becoming painfully conscious of the limitations of its economic, social and cultural conditioning, will go beyond these.\textsuperscript{128}

By the time he writes \textit{The Crucified Christ}, Moltmann’s hope is cross-centered,\textsuperscript{129} and his turn to the cross effects his entire theology:

The death of Jesus on the cross is the centre of all Christian theology. It is not the only theme of theology, but it is in effect the entry to its problems and answers on earth. All Christian statements about God, about creation, about sin and death have their focal point in the crucified Christ. All Christian statements about history, about the church, about faith and sanctification, about the future and about hope stem from the crucified Christ.\textsuperscript{130}

Later, in \textit{Experiment. Hope}, he ties together hope constituted by the cross with eschatological hope in the coming of God in the fulfillment of resurrection. God’s future kingdom establishes the meaning of the cross, as it does the resurrection, but crucifixion hope adds a present connection between those who suffer and God who suffers.\textsuperscript{131} Neal explains that Moltmann connects Christ’s passion with all of creation’s suffering:

[H]e identifies the cross as a source of hope for the outcasts of society, because the cross is a source of hope since it best exemplifies the suffering

\textsuperscript{127} Moltmann, \textit{Future of Creation}, 61.

\textsuperscript{128} Moltmann, \textit{Future of Creation}, 61.

\textsuperscript{129} Neal, \textit{Theology}, 58.

\textsuperscript{130} Moltmann, \textit{Crucified}, 204.

\textsuperscript{131} Moltmann, \textit{Experiment}, 64.
nature of God, who not only suffers in the event of the cross and also allows suffering to enter into the divine community, but is present in all suffering.132

Moltmann argues that crucifixion hope keeps the focus of hope from straying toward utopian visions that obscure the site of suffering, the the location of God’s participation in this world, now. The crucifixion releases humans from escapism and detachment, while providing hope for the hopeless.

The cross of Christ is the sign of God’s hope on earth for all those who live here in the shadow of the cross. Theology of hope is at its hard core theology of the cross. The cross of Christ is the presently given form of the kingdom of God on earth. In the crucified Christ we view the future of God. Everything else is dreams, fantasies, and mere wish images. Hope born out of the cross of Christ distinguishes Christian faith from superstition as well as from disbelief. The freedom generated by the cross distinguishes Christian faith from optimism as well as from terrorism.133

With that freedom, Christians are able to share with God in God’s love. The experience of God’s love now reflects and points toward the reality of future that is coming with God.

[The resurrection of the crucified Christ revealed the kingdom of the coming God as the power of anticipatory love. This love has no conditions placed on it and knows no boundaries. Through the love manifested in the resurrection that which is hateful is rendered lovable. Thus hope is disseminated for the hopeless. The future is inaugurated, not by way of examples and commands, but through the love, the patience, and the sacrifice of God.134

Hope, on Bloch’s terms, faces an open future, whose outcome is undetermined and unknowable, and this hope is necessarily disappointed: hope with too much certainty to be disappointed is not hope. It remains hope, even in the face

132 Neal, Theology, 158.

133 Moltmann, Experiment, 57-8.

134 Moltmann, Experiment, 57.
of disappointment, because of the possibilities that openness provides. Moltmann comments:

Like Bloch's hope, it is not certainty, for it is directed not to the visible, but to what is invisible. Nevertheless, it is not hope in an open possibility, and therefore it does not remain in the suspension of indecisiveness. Since it is hope in the power of God which calls nonbeing into being, it recognizes the beginning in the end. Its way is not the possibility of disappointment, but actual disappointment, for it is a hope which shines out of the denial of all possible hope through the crucifixion of Christ into the Ester appearances.

Moltmann's hope shares with Bloch's the anticipation of the future; however, Moltmann's hope rests not an openness but on what has been begun in the crucifixion. “The hope of which the Bible speaks, on the other hand, is 'hope for what we do not see' (Rom. 8:24-25), 'the conviction of things unseen' (Heb. 11.1).”

Despite the less-open and more determined hope in the coming of God, Christian hope includes inescapable disappointment, since it is through the crucifixion, through the complete loss of hope, that hope can glimpse the future of hope in the kingdom of God.

Moltmann holds the cross and the resurrection tightly together, since neither makes sense without the other. Resurrection hope contradicts present-day brokenness with God's faithfulness, manifest in God's suffering with those who suffer and in God's future fulfilment of promises.

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139 Neal, *Theology*, 127.
unbearable human experiences supplies crucifixion hope in the ultimate indwelling of God throughout creation. The relationship between the cross and the resurrection remains in tension, throughout Moltmann’s work. His presentation of the cross as the revelation of God’s full embrace of suffering and death supports his argument to the atheist objections that God is not absent in catastrophe but present and experiencing all the humans experience. God’s companionship with humans suffering also helps support his argument to Christian apocalypticists, since the presence of God with humans in history deflates the belief that God will come to wipe out creation and history.

The consolation of God’s suffering presence with humans sets up and points toward the future promised by the resurrection; but more importantly, the future fulfillment of the resurrection provides the meaning for the suffering and death that God shares with humans. Moltmann’s understanding of the resurrection overlaps with the Christian doctrine that precedes him the hope of resurrection that overcomes death “by proclaiming the victory of praise and therewith of life over death.”140 From that foundational point, Moltmann adds two claims distinctive to his theology of hope: a) The resurrection victory over death is God’s victory over the very absence of God; b) Christ’s resurrection does not so much accomplish God’s victory over death as it promises victory that is to come.141

a) In Moltmann’s account of Christ’s suffering and death, Christ experiences the ontological absence of God. The suffering and death of human experience is not

simply a matter of perception, in the context of the world's sin and brokenness; it is the actual absence of God. Christ's experience of being forsaken by God on the cross and in death is the actual abandonment of Christ. Since God suffers when Christ suffers, God Godself, is abandoned by God. The resurrection marks God's victory over God's own abandonment, so that humans will no longer be abandoned by God. In the eschatological fullness resurrection the the kingdom of God, God will redress the abandonment of creation — and God — by God by indwelling in this world made new. No longer will there be any separation from God: everything will be in God and God will be present in everything.142 God embraces within Godself the brokenness and godforsakenness of creation through Christ’s suffering and death on the cross. God consoles creation by sharing in the depths of total divine abandonment.

b) Paul describes the kingdom of God effected by Christ’s resurrection as both already and not-yet. Moltmann shares with Paul this characterization of Christ’s resurrection: Moltmann directs hope toward Christ’s coming (rather than toward Christ's second coming) and names Christ's arrival as “a future which is already present, yet without ceasing to be future.”143 But Moltmann emphasizes the not-yet aspect of Christ’s resurrection, the promissory note of universal resurrection to come. 144 The revelation of Christ’s Easter resurrection does not proclaim the completion of the past or the fulfilment of divine promises, but the release of the

142 Moltmann, End, 158.
143 Moltmann, End, 89.
144 Moltmann, Theology, 211.
The freedom of the resurrection is found in openness to the future. Christ’s resurrection affirms God’s promises to Israel and opens history to a future unbound by what has happened, to a future that is truly new. Resurrection is therefore a process, rather than a completed event: “Resurrection doesn’t mean a closed fact. It means a way: the transition from death to life.” And the crucifixion is God’s connection through suffering with creation in suffering, rather than the death of a man or the death of God. Moltmann identifies the crucifixion as an event that has happened and yet is still available for participation. Since the crucifixion, people can continue to experience God’s suffering presence, brought to creation through Christ’s suffering. Christ’s resurrection also happened, but its primary accomplishment is the opening of the future toward the open end of God’s new creation, at which point all of creation will experience the full existence of God interpenetrated with their own lives, and at which point Christ’s resurrection will no longer be necessary as the promise of resurrection, since the resurrection of all will fulfill human and divine eschatological hope. Moltmann recasts Christ’s crucifixion and the resurrection as the affects of God’s not-yet-fulfilled powers and as the opened door to the future new creation that God brings.

1.5.4 Dialectic

As noted above, Moltmann began his theology of hope with the proclamation of the future, opened to God’s new creation. Later, he turned to the hope accessible

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145 Moltmann, Theology, 88.

146 Neal, Theology, 163.

147 Moltmann, Coming, 274.
through God's suffering on the cross. Throughout the rest of his work, he develops both hopes as inseparable; and he negotiates a complicated relationship between the two. Resurrection hope declares an open future, full of possibilities and the confirmation that all of God’s promises will be fulfilled in a glorious endtime.

Hence the resurrection of Christ was not understood merely as the first instance of a general resurrection of the dead and as a beginning of the revelation of the divinity of God in the non-existent, but also as the source of the risen life of all believers and as a confirmation of the promise which will be fulfilled in all and will show itself in the very deadliness of death to be irresistible.\textsuperscript{148}

Crucifixion hope accepts that life is full of suffering and death; it shows God's love for creation in God's participation in the hopelessness of creation, and it perseverance for the way toward God's open future — of the full resurrection.

God in Auschwitz and Auschwitz in the crucified God—that is the basis for a real hope which both embraces and overcomes the world, and the ground for a love which is stronger than death and can sustain death. It is the ground for living with the terror of history and the end of history, and nevertheless remaining in love and meeting what comes in openness for God’s future. It is the ground for living and bearing guilt and sorrow for the future of man in God.\textsuperscript{149}

In order to connect crucifixion hope and resurrection hope, certain hope and open hope, the already and the not-yet, Moltmann uses his own version of the Hegelian dialectic.

In \textit{Theology of Hope}, he presents the cross and the resurrection as oppositional, held together in Christ.

\[T\]he identity of Jesus can be understood only as an identity \textit{in}, but not above and beyond, cross and resurrection — that is, that it must remain bound up with the dialectic of cross and resurrection. In that case the contradictions

\textsuperscript{148} Moltmann, \textit{Theology}, 211.

\textsuperscript{149} Moltmann, \textit{Coming}, 278.
between the cross and the resurrection can neither be reduced to the cross, as showing its meaning, nor can the cross be reduced to the resurrection, as its preliminary. It is formally a question of a dialectical identity which exists only through the contradiction, and of a dialectic which exists in the identity.\textsuperscript{150}

Additionally, Moltmann names the end of God’s kingdom as the site for the resolution of mutually negating and affirming cross and resurrection. He points to 1 Cor. 15:28, to show how Christ’s subjection to God’s authority and God’s gift of authority to Christ find eschatological unity.

What happened between the cross and the Easter appearances is then an eschatological event which has its goal in future revelation and universal fulfilment… Their dialectic is an open dialectic, which will find its resolving synthesis only in the \textit{eschaton} of all things.\textsuperscript{151}

Moltmann’s progression of theological themes moves from the hope of the resurrection, to the hope of the crucified God, and on to the Trinity. In this way, resurrection hope and crucifixion hope neither cancel each other out nor subsume one into the other. The cross reins in resurrection hope, when Christ draws God and creation through the crucifixion toward the anticipation of the eschaton. Then the Holy Spirit carries both hopes, as one hope, ahead as God and creation prepare for the new, complete creation that will fulfill all hopes. Moltmann modulates a dialectical relationship into his theology of the Trinity, in which the Holy Spirit shares God’s presence with creation and includes all of creation in the open Trinity of interpenetrating relationships.\textsuperscript{152} The hope of the cross and resurrection dialectic finds resolution in the new creation’s divine and human trinitarian relationships.

\textsuperscript{150} Moltmann, \textit{Theology}, 200.

\textsuperscript{151} Moltmann, \textit{Theology}, 201.

\textsuperscript{152} M. Douglas Meeks, “Foreword,” in Moltmann, \textit{Experiment}, xi.
Although Moltmann aspires to dialectically balanced resolutions, his account of hope gradually moves away from Bloch’s open future, in which nothing is yet decided, toward a more consistently confident hope, through the cross and the resurrection interpreted by the future.

Christianity is wholly and entirely confident hope, a stretching out to what is ahead, and a readiness for a fresh start. Future is not just something or other to do with Christianity. It is the essential element of the faith which is specifically Christian: the keynote of all its hymns, the dawn colouring of the new day in which everything is bathed.\textsuperscript{153}

The content of that future, the new creation shared by the Creator and creation, establishes the reconciliation of cross and reconciliation and God’s loving justice on earth for all.

\textbf{1.5.5 New Creation}

Moltmann’s eschatological hope ends with the new beginning of the kingdom of God. Ryan Neal observes: “The end of Moltmann’s hope is God’s new creation, and this end is the true beginning.”\textsuperscript{154} That kingdom does not sit high in the clouds, apart from this earth; nor does it stand on its own, apart from God. The end which is the beginning comes when God, the Creator, comes to the earth to be at home with the new creation on earth.

The Creator does not remain detached from his creation. He enters into it, so as to make it his eternal dwelling. The whole creation becomes the temple of the Eternal One. Through this indwelling God interpenetrates everything with his livingsness and his beauty, and all things will thereby be newly formed so that they conform to God and correspond to him in eternity. This new world will then become \textit{God’s eternal home country, ‘on earth as it is in heaven.}\textsuperscript{155}

\textsuperscript{153} Moltmann, \textit{End}, 87.

\textsuperscript{154} Neal, \textit{Theology}, 216.

\textsuperscript{155} Moltmann, \textit{End}, 158.
Moltmann interprets the Lord's Prayer to indicate that God's kingdom will come on earth, and it will be as God's kingdom in heaven. The Lord's Prayer is most commonly understood to be asking God for God's will to be done on earth as God's will is done in heaven. Moltmann counters with a different emphasis. He takes, “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven,” to claim that God's kingdom will come to earth, as it is in heaven. God will inhabit the earth which, made anew, will be the location for the kingdom of God, and this kingdom reflects God's incarnation in Christ.

The model for this view of the kingdom of God is Christ himself, for Christ is “the kingdom of God in person,” as the New Testament emphasizes: ‘In him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily’ (Col 2.9). What we have to expect of the coming kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven is nothing less than the cosmic incarnation of God, in which divinity and humanity interpenetrate one another mutually as they do in the “incarnation” of the eternal Word of God and in the “outpouring of God's Spirit on all flesh.”

Moltmann's account of the new creation fits within his distinction between God’s initial creation and the coming creation for which both God and creation hope, the creation which, from the future, establishes the basis for and the ethics of eschatological hope.

Moltmann reconsiders the creation of the world narrated in scripture and theology, in order to shift hope from a return to the goodness of God's pre-fall world to the anticipated arrival of a new and better creation. He presents an altered version of creatio ex nihilo, revised to cohere with God's passibility, in which God's act of creating is preceded by God's withdrawal of God's self, to make room for creation. Moltmann answers the question, “How can God create out of ‘nothing’ when there

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cannot be such a thing as nothing, since his essence is everywhere and interpenetrates everything?” by arguing that “God’s self-humiliation begins” with creation.157 “God withdrew his omnipresence in order to concede space for the limited presence of the creation. In this way, creation comes into being in the space of God’s *kenosis*.”158 Hence, even though God creates out of nothing, God lessens or diminishes Godself in the process by conceding space and moving aside. “The first act of all is not an act of revelation but one of limitation.”159 From God’s initial withdrawal, God creates a creation born of God’s lack, of a certain incompleteness of God. This creation is less than perfect and turns to the sin and corruption that precedes the great Flood.

According to Moltman, Noah’s story reveals God’s dismay with God’s initial creation. “God ‘was sorry’ for having created human beings and ‘it grieved him to his heart’ (Gen.6.6b).”160 He reads the description of God’s grief at the state of creation to mean that God suffers for God’s mistakes.161

As God sees creation now [before the Flood], it is by no means “very good,” (which was the way he initially saw it according to the end of the first creation account (Gen.1.31). On the contrary; it is very bad. We might say that God’s creation had gone wrong. God suffers from the corruption of what he has created. This grief has rightly been called ‘the divine pain.’ In order to


159 Neal, *Theology*, 80.


surmount it, the Creator revokes his resolve to create, and lets his earthly creation perish. This is God’s ‘repentance’—his act of regret.\textsuperscript{162}

After the Flood's destruction, God’s faithfulness to “his resolve to create” leads God to promise never to destroy creation again.\textsuperscript{163} God recommits to sustaining creation, despite God’s regrets about that creation and despite Creation’s persistent corruption. God’s faithfulness perdures, and even though God must experience the worst of creation so that creation might survive.

Everything that comes and endures after the catastrophe and is not again destroyed issues from God’s pain over the beings he has created, who are ruining themselves. God suffers the world in its contradictions, and endures it in his long-suffering, instead of annihilating it. He takes upon himself the dissonance between the world’s creation and its corruption, so that in spite of its corruption the world may live.\textsuperscript{164}

Much of Christianity has narrated God’s faithfulness in terms of God’s promises and the fulfilment of those promises throughout the history of Israel, the life of Christ, the death and resurrection of Christ, Christ’s ascension and the lives of the earliest Christians, and the presence of the Holy Spirit throughout the history of the church. Moltmann presents God’s faithfulness in terms of God’s promises and affirmations that those promises will be fulfilled. God’s fulfilled promises will constitute the God’s kingdom. God’s faithfulness confirms and extends God’s promises eschatologically, while supporting Christian hope across time and locations. Moltmann explains that God’s faithfulness does not indicate a static, unmerciful God, but God who is constant in faithfulness throughout history. God is the faithful

\textsuperscript{162} Moltmann, End, 39.

\textsuperscript{163} Moltmann, End, 40.

\textsuperscript{164} Moltmann, End, 41.
God of promise (Heb.23; 11.11), and “[h]is essence is not his absoluteness as such, but the faithfulness with which he reveals and identifies himself in the history of his promise as ‘the same.’”\textsuperscript{165}

God of the new creation is the same God of the \textit{creatio ex nihio}, but the new creation will not be a return to the beginning of the first or a repeat of the first creation so far. There is no reason to hope for a return to the conditions of God's initial creation, established as it is through God's incompleteness, when the true and fulfilled creation is yet to come.\textsuperscript{166}

The goal of this history of creation is not a return to the paradisial primordial condition. Its goal is the revelation of the glory of God. It is true that this end “corresponds” to the beginning in the sense that it represents the fulfillment of the real promise implanted in creation itself; but the new creation of heaven and earth in the kingdom of glory surpasses everything that can be told about creation in the beginning.\textsuperscript{167}

Hence, eschatological hope looks toward the future creation in which God will be present within all of creation. In the beginning, God created the world out of a freedom determined by love.\textsuperscript{168}

God’s love is God’s essence, such that God could not be God without needing to create the world. “Creation is a fruit of God’s longing for ‘his Other’ and for that Other’s free response to the divine love. That is why the idea of the world is inherent

\textsuperscript{165} Moltmann, \textit{Theology}, 143.

\textsuperscript{166} Neal, \textit{Theology}, 216.


\textsuperscript{168} Neal, \textit{Theology}, 135.
in the nature of God himself from eternity.”\textsuperscript{169} and “It is in accordance with the love which is God that he should fashion a creation which he rejoices over. . . Not to do this would contradict the love which God is.”\textsuperscript{170} Moltmann recognizes that God’s freedom in creating may be described as necessity, since God’s love requires that God create, but he is more comfortable qualifying God’s freedom than he would be if he were to claim the primacy of God’s free will, untempered by love. Moltmann’s rejection of an impassible includes the rejection of an absolute, utterly independent God.\textsuperscript{171} Moltmann’s understanding of the creation by the possible God “is informed by the confluence of necessity, freedom, and love, which condition the divine nature.”\textsuperscript{172} Moltmann presents the apparently conflicting categories of God’s freedom and the necessity of creation within the context of a dialectical relationship. If God is only free, then God may not have created the world; if creation is only a necessity, God is not free. In either extreme, there is no place for love. Therefore, God’s freedom to create and the necessity of creation rely on each other and on God’s essential character of love; and the new creation will provide God’s true freedom and creation’s true freedom, through God’s love.

What concept of freedom is appropriate for God? If we start from the point of view of the created being, the Creator appears as almighty and gracious. His freedom has no limits, and his commitment to what he has created is without obligation. But if we start from the Creator himself, the self-communication of his goodness in love to his creation is not a matter of his free will. It is the self-evident operation of his eternal nature. The essential

\textsuperscript{169} Neal, \textit{Theology}, 134; Moltmann, \textit{Trinity}, 106.
\textsuperscript{170} Neal, \textit{Theology}, 135; Moltmann, \textit{Trinity}, 58.
\textsuperscript{171} Neal, \textit{Theology}, 136.
\textsuperscript{172} Neal, \textit{Theology}, 137.
activity of God is the eternal resolve of his will, and the eternal resolve of his will is his essential activity. In other words, God is not entirely free when he can do and leave undone what he likes; he is entirely free when he is entirely himself. He loves the world in the surrender of his Son with the very same love which he is, from eternity to eternity (John 3.16; 1 John 4.16).\textsuperscript{173}

Hence, God hopes, along with creation, for the new creation, which will bring freedom for God and for creation. Neal explains: “Eschatological justification does not return creation and humanity to the beginning as it was, but brings about what was never there, a freedom for the divine, instead of oppressing nothingness.”\textsuperscript{174}

Moltmann’s God of hope is not perfect, but needs the perfection that will come when God comes to creation in the midst of the new, completed creation of the fulfilled future. God is not a simple, unified, and self-enclosed entity, because God longs to draw all of created life in to the perichoretical relationship of the Trinity.\textsuperscript{175} The passible God of hope is infinite and subject to creation’s limitations; God will be drawn into the finitude of redeemed creatures at the eschaton. In the end/beginning, the goodness of God enters into the evil and death of the imperfect creation, in order to recreate the entire world in a just and righteous universal salvation. “The consummation of creation is something new over against creation-in-the-beginning.”\textsuperscript{176} At times, Moltmann describes the circumstances of the new creation as the finite enveloping the infinite. At other times, he argues that the new

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{173}{Moltmann, }\textit{God}, 82-3.\footnotetext{174}{Neal, }\textit{Theology}, 216. Here, Neal cites Moltmann: “If we apply this to theology we are not able to speak of a ‘becoming God’ but only of the ‘coming God’ This is the difference between eschatology and process philosophy.” Moltmann, \textit{Experiment}, 52-3.\footnotetext{175}{Moltmann }\textit{Crucified}, 249.\footnotetext{176}{Moltmann, }\textit{Coming}, 265.\end{footnotes}
beginning includes all that comes before: “The important point is to link the 
eschatological category novum. with the anamnetic category of repetition in such a 
way that the beginning is gathered up into the end, and the consummation brings 
back everything that had ever been before.”\textsuperscript{177} Either way, God’s coming in and to the 
new creation renders everything new, good, and intermingled with God.

The coming of God interrupts history and breaks into the repetition of the 
old that can constrain creation.

If we speak of the “coming God,” his future becomes the source of the times. 
His coming constantly creates new time in history. If his creation at the end 
of history means “Behold, I make all things new,” we are able to anticipate in 
it that his grace is “new every morning.”\textsuperscript{178}

Moltmann corrects Christianity’s tendency to embrace a mythological circularity 
about time, since, “[s]trictly speaking, this circle of the Christian drama of 
redemption would have to repeat itself to all eternity.”\textsuperscript{179} Instead, Moltmann argues, 
time begins with creation. Creation is changeable and open, “a temporal one, not yet 
an eternal creation. As a \textit{temporal creation}, it is projected towards a future in which it 
is to become an \textit{eternal creation}.”\textsuperscript{180} The temporal creation we know will be opened to 
its future as the eternal creation of God’s home, here with us.

\textit{1.6 The People of Moltmann’s Hope}

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\begin{enumerate}
\item Moltmann, \textit{Coming}, 265.
\item Moltmann, \textit{Experiment}, 53.
\item Moltmann, \textit{Coming}, 263.
\item Moltmann, \textit{Coming}, 263. Moltmann affirms Augustine’s claim that time begins with 
creation (\textit{Conf. XI, 30, 40}).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
The anthropology that accompanies Moltmann’s theology of hope promises that humanity will reach the coming new life through Christ’s non-punitive judgment that includes all in love. People need not fear Christ’s judgment, and they need not fear the loss of this world, since the new life will be here. Through his suffering and death, Christ has brought God to share suffering and, in the future, to share the world, with creation. The ethics of this hope call for people who have experienced the love God’s godforsakenness in their own godforsakenness, to reach out to those who are suffering and in great need.

1.6.1 Justice for All

Moltmann develops a theological anthropology that leans toward the more confident side of his open-future eschatology of hope. Through Christ’s suffering and death for people, people are freed from history and opened to alternatives. In the alternative future of hope that Moltmann proclaims, God will come to this creation to make it new and God’s judgement will embrace all in love.

Hope requires a release from the limitations of history, so that people can catch a glimpse of the possibilities determined by the future. There is nothing to hope for in more of the same, and Moltmann critiques the common error of extrapolating from the present to the future.

Extrapolation sees the future as an extrapolated and extended present and it hence kills the very future character of the future. The only people who have any interest in prolonging this rule of the present over the future are those who possess and dominate the present. The have-nots, the suffering and the guilty, however, ask for a different future; they ask for change and liberation.181

People who hope see past those who are mired in the present, toward a world not bound by current injustice. “The Christian hope, in so far as it is Christian, is the hope of those who have no future. It is therefore a hope in contradiction of self-satisfied optimists and of equally self-satisfied pessimists.” Moltmann’s hope directly addresses the conditions of those whose lives are constituted by suffering. Christian hope is the hope of those who can see no hope, those who can see no future. Christ’s death and resurrection opens a future beyond the reach of death and beyond the injustice of the present.

The resurrection of the crucified Christ, however, reveals a new justice, which is the justification of the godless. The hope in resurrection within Christianity is therefore no longer ambiguous, but straightforward and clear. It faces without fear God’s future as a joyous hope in the power of divine grace, which even death cannot resist. It is indeed a hope for the hopeless. Through the crucified Christ the future of resurrection and life, of freedom, joy, and justice is opened up to those who live in guilt without hope and who must die in fear without a future.

Just as God transforms Christ from death to glory, so too will God transform the bodies of creation from death to eternal life. The transformation of the crucified Christ affects the political structure of present life. The powerful authorities of government, finance, and the institutional church lose their strength, in the eyes of those who know Christ crucified, and hope now lies with the oppressed, “with a loving solidarity with the dispossessed.” And the hope of the dispossessed, the


183 Moltmann, *Experiment*, 57.

184 Moltmann, *Coming*, 57.

future that the crucifixion opens up, is not only an alternative to the closed present, but a clear future of eternal resurrection life.

Moltmann describes the coming kingdom of the new creation as the kingdom of God's justice, which is rightly understood as the reconciliation necessary for the coming of God. Moltmann counters “the only question asked in the Church's tradition [of the theological doctrine of justification]” — how to punish and justify the guilty — with attention to the victims of wickedness.\(^{186}\) Therefore, God's justice brings comfort to the oppressed and righteousness to the oppressors, without fear of punishing judgment.

“The Last Judgment” is not a terror. In the truth of Christ it is the most wonderful thing that can be proclaimed to men and women. It is a source of endlessly consoling joy to know, not just that the murderers will finally fail to triumph over their victims, but that they cannot in eternity even remain the murderers of their victims. The eschatological doctrine about the restoration of all things has these two sides: God's judgment, which puts all things to rights, and God's kingdom, which awakens to new life.\(^{187}\)

Christ’s judgment to come does not divide people into sheep and goats, sending the worthy to heaven and the guilty to hell. God will not separate and then damn sinful people who do not make the standard of righteousness necessary for salvation. Instead, Moltmann argues, God will destroy the powers of evil that separate creation from God.

What will be annihilated is Nothingness, what will be slain is death, what will be dissolved is the power of evil, what will be separated from all created beings is the power of evil, what will be separated from all created beings is

\(^{186}\) Moltmann, End, 53.

\(^{187}\) Moltmann, Coming, 255.
separation from God, sin. The ground is then prepared for the new creation of all things.\textsuperscript{188}

Christ's judgment, “God’s creative justice,” is not the end; it leads to the new creation.\textsuperscript{189}

Moltmann explains that the people of hope contribute to God’s creative justice by helping God’s own justification. “Through the justice that creates and puts right, God anticipates the justice and righteousness of his coming kingdom through which he will redeem the world, and in this way he justifies himself to the world.” “God justifies us, and we justify God.”\textsuperscript{190} In the coming kingdom, God and humans will live in righteousness together, in a creation free of limitations to God as well as limitations to humans. “Justifying faith is not just a faith through which human beings are justified; it is faith through which God is justified too.”\textsuperscript{191} Here, Moltmann appreciates that Bloch not only opens up the future, but also opens up humans to their God and God to humans. “Ernst Bloch puts it as follows ‘Only the wicked exist through their God, but the righteous — God exists through them, and in their hands is laid the sanctification of the Name, the name of God itself.’ That is our justification of God in the world.”\textsuperscript{192} In God’s kingdom, the justified God will be all in all with the justified creation.

\textsuperscript{188} Moltmann, \textit{End}, 145.

\textsuperscript{189} Moltmann, \textit{End}, 143. Note: “This divine justice is the lead-in to the new creation: ‘Behold, I make all things new’ (Rev.21.5).”

\textsuperscript{190} Moltmann, \textit{End}, 78.

\textsuperscript{191} Moltmann, \textit{End}, 78.

\textsuperscript{192} Moltmann, \textit{End}, 78; No punctuation after “follows” in text.
1.6.2 The New Creation of the Whole World, in the World

The new creation of justified people and justified God embraces bodies and the world. Moltmann critiques Christian eschatology that hopes for the release of souls from bodies and the world.\(^{193}\) His correction to Christian teaching names God as Redeemer and Creator, who necessarily redeems all of creation in a “human and earthly future.”\(^{194}\)

\[\text{[God] would contradict himself if he were not to redeem everything he has made. The God who created the universe will one day be “all in all” (I Cor. 15.28). Why else should he have created everything? Cosmic eschatology is not required for the sake of some ‘universalism’ or other; it is necessary for God’s sake. There are not two Gods, a Creator God and a Redeemer God. There is one God. It is for his sake that the unity of redemption and creation has to be thought.}\]^\(^{195}\)

Thinking the eschatological unity of redemption and all of creation directs people to express their hope through active care for the earth. Moltmann convicts traditional Christianity for its hope for life with God apart from this world, and he charges Christians to more responsible action for this earth and in the leadership of this world. He asserts that “[Christianity] will do this for the sake of a world which is developing toward the future of God,”\(^{196}\) and he suggests that Christianity needs to do this, so that the world will indeed develop toward the future of God.

\(^{193}\) Moltmann, *Coming*, 259.

\(^{194}\) Moltmann, *Coming*, 259.

\(^{195}\) Moltmann, *Coming*, 259.

\(^{196}\) Moltmann, *Experiment*, 41.
Humanity’s future with God includes this earth, God will come to this earth in the redeemed future of hope. Moltmann counters Christian notions of apocalyptic devastation with his vision of a new creation created from this earth.

This earth, with its world of the living, is the real and sensorily experienceable promise if the new earth, as truly as this earthly, mortal life here is an experienceable promise of the life that is eternal, immortal. If the divine Redeemer is himself present in this earth in hidden form, then the earth becomes the bearer or vehicle of his and our future. But in that case there is no fellowship with Christ without fellowship with the earth. Love for Christ and hope for him embrace love and hope for the earth.197

Hope for the new creation of this world includes the material and the living bodies of earth and the historical circumstances and events of this world.

**1.6.3 Practices of Hope**

Moltmann posits that Christ crucified opens this world to the kingdom of God’s coming, so that present history can be shaped, in hope, by the new creation of the future. Christ provides possibilities of newness now for those living in hope, by claiming the world as home and by liberating the oppressed.

The crucified Lord embodies the new humanity which responds to God in the circumstances of inhumanity which oppose God. He incorporates home in the circumstances of alienation, and freedom in the midst of the chains of slavery. But it is just through this that men are empowered to alter these relationships, to make the world more homelike, and to abolish internal and external slavery.198

People empowered by the crucified Christ to live out alternatives can bring about real change here and now.

**Without the hope of faith, there is no ground for hope in action. Without hope in action, there are no results from the hope of faith. Without a**

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197 Moltmann, *Coming*, 279.

presence for peace in the vicious circles, giving an account of our hope remains abstract and of no help to anyone. Without the growth and spread of the hope of faith, however, all programs for peace and campaigns for liberation fall short of their marks, become pragmatic, and quickly succumb to weariness. ¹⁹⁹

Moltmann urges Christians to take action in hope to release people from oppression and to restore the abused earth to health. Without hope, the historical progress toward destruction, chaos, violence, and death seems inevitable. Hope for the resurrection of the world that will come through Christ’s resurrection unlocks history from the powers that enclose it.

The powers that enclose the world, the mighty of history, have reasons to keep history from radical alternatives. “They have to extend their victorious present into the future in order to augment and consolidate their power. Their future is without an alternative, and devoid of surprises.” ²⁰⁰ Moltmann stands with those who suffer and resist the mighty and their historical reentrenchment of power; “God’s messianic future” breaks into that history and its future bereft of possibilities and reveals perspectives for a future of hope. ²⁰¹

The deadliness of progress towards the economic, ecological, nuclear and genetic catastrophes is recognized; and the modern world’s lack of future is perceived. The way becomes free for alternative developments. I should like to call this the redemption of the future from the power of history in the kairos of conversion. Only that will again make the theological eschatology possible, for through that, hope as a theological category will be redeemed from the ruins of historical reason. ²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ Moltmann, End, 185.

²⁰⁰ Moltmann, Coming, 45.

²⁰¹ Moltmann, Coming, 45.

²⁰² Moltmann, Coming, 45-6.
Hope will then be freed from the constraints of the oppressors and oppressed of
history. The people of hope can see alternatives to the history of power and then take
actions otherwise unimaginable, to steer away from catastrophe and toward life,
peace, and liberation.

But if the world in which we live and hope presents a mixture of realities and
possibilities, then we may not see it as a finished house of being but as an
open process. Then the world becomes not a system with eternally repeatable
structures, but an open history in which something new happens and can be
realized. Then it is not a completed creation but an open creative process and
the world is in itself a great experiment, a laboratorium possibilis salutis (a
laboratory of possible salvation) as Bloch says.203

A world open to possibilities beyond history is a world open to God’s creative justice.

Moltmann presents and ethics of the hope that asks Christians to reflect “the
redemption of the future from the power of history” and to accept the challenges of
living as God’s hope.

Here we realize that God is not simply the point of our hope in heaven, but
that we are his hope on earth. In such experiences man attains the
unforgettable impression that he is, together with other people and this
whole creation, the utopia of God. “God created all things with finality,” says
an old rabbinical commentary on the creation story, “but he created man in
hope.” With the experiment “man” and the experiment “world” God has
joined a hope. That gives man an unambiguous certainty of hope precisely at
the place and time when he can no longer see any future ahead of him. It
simultaneously places him in the open question of how he wants to fulfill,
personally and together with society, that hope which God has placed in him
and this world.204

Here, Moltmann holds open uncertainty together with certain future, and he settles
the uncertainty on how people will engage with God’s certain gift of certain hope.

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204 Moltmann, *Experiment*, 27.
Moltmann names three practices to live out the certainty and openness of this hope in a social and this-worldly focus: “proclamation of the Gospel of the kingdom to the poor . . ; founding of the Christian congregation; . . . creative, battling, and loving obedience ready to suffer in the everyday situations of the present world.”

These practices demonstrate Moltmann’s conviction that Christian hope must not settle into a complacent cooperation with “reality as it is.” Resistance means disrupting, suffering, conflicting with the world as a witness to an alternative to the world’s determined commitment to the same. As a group, gathered in a congregation, Christians can show their hope that is not limited to the terms of society’s current norms and governance. “Only where their resistance shows them to be a group that is incapable of being assimilated or of ‘making the grade’ can they communicate their own hope to this society.”

Christian hope is not visible unless the sharp difference between that hope and “bodily reality” is visible. Those who cling to the way things are cannot see their way to break free of socially closed reality and the powers that try to perpetuate it.

Moltmann narrates the character of baptism in keeping with his arguments about the not-yet nature of Christ’s resurrection. Just as the resurrection affirms

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206 Moltmann, Theology, 21-2.

207 Moltmann, Theology, 324.

208 In contrast to a more sacramental theology, Moltmann argues that the efficacy of both baptism and Christ’s resurrection lie in the future. Note also that Moltmann here refers to adult baptism, instead of infant baptism, which he rejects because he understands it to be involuntary, passive, and a reinforcement of Constantinianism. Presumably, his early years in Germany established this association, as well as his inclination toward free church and against Roman Catholicism. Neal, Theology, 86-7.
the promise of Christ’s completed resurrection in the future resurrection of all, so too baptism promises the future unity of the body of Christ. At present, Christians can follow Jesus’ life in hope through proclamation and obedience as a gathered community of promise. Moltmann urges Christians to turn from internal piety, from “a continual, self-absorbed repentance,” to obedience to God’s will in love and the hope of God’s glory. “[I]n taking his way to the cross, Jesus was also making his own decision: his active love for sufferers becomes his suffering love with sufferers.” Moltmann urges Christians to follow Jesus by loving and suffering with those who suffer. Moltmann argues for a Christian ethics of hope that aims at a balance of independence (to decide freely to counter injustice) and empathetic responses to suffering (to love and stand with those who suffer).

In the midst of all struggle against inhuman and ruinous suffering and experience of pain, there also has to be developed a concept of meaningful human passion and an acceptance of meaningful human conflicts and suffering. An ethic of the pathetic, without destroying the independence of the person, much teach people to allow themselves to be vulnerable, to allow themselves to be affected, and to develop their own spontaneity.

The church can only imagine the coming, new creation when engaged in an “ethic of the pathetic” that resists the powers of slavery (political, economic, military, and egotistic) and shares Jesus’ love for and with the suffering.

Moltmann directs the church to attend to God’s suffering which frees both the oppressed and the oppressors from the past and the present.

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209 Moltmann, End, 56.

210 Moltmann, End, 69.

211 Moltmann, Experiment, 16.

212 Moltmann, End, 117; Man, 104.
Let us look at the image of God's pain. The suffering of God is important both for the victims of sin and for those who are enslaved by sin. To perceive this suffering releases the victims from the torment of remembrance, and frees the enslaved from the power of their repressions. Even God cannot make what is done undone, but he can loose the fetters which bind the present to this past, and open for the present a new future.²¹³

Jesus’ suffering and death manifests God’s suffering love for creation.

Moltmann objects to the church’s understanding of Jesus’ death as self-sacrifice for our sins; his account shifts the focus from sins to people and their need for God’s presence with them in their darkest despair. Jesus’ sacrificial death has often been interpreted to mean that Jesus died as the vicarious victim for our sins, paying off our debts in a heavenly bank, so to speak, and transferring them from us to him. But this is just what it does not mean. Interpretations of this kind are only illustrations — more or less apt images — but they do not touch the heart of the matter. The one who “was put to death for our trespasses” (Rom 4.25) was not the one sacrificed for our sins by God, his Father; he is the one who was sent by his Father to those who had been given up for lost (Rom 1.24, 26, 28), so that God himself might be brought into the pit of godforsakenness and could thereby awaken these godless people for a new beginning. . . . The personal “for us” of Christ is primary; the object “for our sins” is secondary.²¹⁴

Moltmann explains that when the future new creation establishes the basis for hope, then Christ would have nothing new to offer, and there would be nothing new to hope for. Hence, the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ effects not so much the exchange of sins for forgiveness, but the possibility of a new, different, better creation. “The hope of faith in Christ expects more of the end than there was in the

²¹³ Moltmann, *End*, 73.

²¹⁴ Moltmann, *End*, 56. 73-4. “We understand his suffering obedience to God not as his sacrifice for the sins of the world but as his unreserved self-giving to the uttermost for the God-forsaken. Here Jesus reveals a love on God’s part ‘such as was never thought of in any God’, as Bloch said.” Moltmann, *End*, 69.
beginning.”

The people of this hope should therefore not wait for a return to the pre-Fall creation; the end of hope, which is the beginning of God’s kingdom, promises a better, unlimited creation-wide community of incorporation. God will embrace earthly life with God’s presence, and creation will embrace God throughout the world. “The hope of creation, in eschatological terms, is the future indwelling of creation by God, when “the finite is able to contain the infinite.” People living in anticipation of the coming God demonstrate their hope in God’s eschatological creation by protecting and restoring the abused earth, by moving governmental policies toward peace and justice, and by sharing the news of God’s love in and as the church. People waiting for the new creation should worry less about what happens to their sins and love more: the godforsaken, the suffering, their own selves.

1.6.4 Hope for the Godforsaken in the Godforsaken God

Moltmann reaches out to those who cannot see God’s presence in the horrors of the Holocaust nor any reason for hope in God after the Holocaust. He describes God’s love of the godforsaken, demonstrated by God’s adoption of godforsakenness in God’s own being. And he describes the possibilities for hope in the midst of hopelessness. Christ’s acceptance of godforsakenness, in his suffering and death draws God into godforsakenness. The crucified Christ can now accompany the godforsaken as a brother and friend. The godforsaken God can now bring all of


218 Moltmann, *End*, 70.
creation into God's new kingdom, having negated the negation of God's goodness through the experience of hopelessness and through the power of love.

Moltmann explains that someone in an utterly hopeless circumstance, someone who suffers and faces death abandoned by all others — even God — still have grounds for hope. First, God can be known most surely by someone who is in the depths of godforsakenness, because God has experienced that same hopelessness, that same godforsakenness, and is therefore most present. Second, the experience of God's presence in the midst of godforsakenness opens up an alternative to overwhelming, inescapable suffering. Third, that opening is the open future that is the coming kingdom of God. Hope does not depend on hopeful evidence in the physical and social circumstances of one's experience. Hope is not a matter of mustering possible alternatives when there are none. Moltmann names the source of hope as the coming of God's creation; to hope is to be open to the coming God. “Hoping does not mean to have a number of hopes at one's disposal. It means, rather, hoping to be open.”²¹⁹ As an example, Moltmann points to those in Auschwitz who prayed in their hopelessness. “Anyone who later comes up against insoluble problems and despair must remember that the Shema of Israel and the Lord's Prayer were prayed in Auschwitz.”²²⁰ He is not proposing optimism or wishful thinking; Moltmann is talking about an openness to the possibility that God offers life even where death seems to have won.

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²¹⁹ Moltmann, Experiment, 20.

²²⁰ Moltmann, Crucified, 278.
Moltmann champions an eschatological hope that looks beyond the possibilities of history, through the crucified Christ who interrupts history, to the other-than-history new creation that establishes the basis for hope.\footnote{“Christian faith in God is shaped by the experience of the dying and death of Christ, and by the appearances of the Christ who was raised. Resurrection is not a return to this, or another, mortal life. It is entry into a life that is eternal. Christ’s resurrection is therefore not a historical event; it is an eschatological happening to the crucified Christ and took place ‘once for all’ (Rom 6.10).” Moltmann, \textit{Coming}, 69.}

Eschatology is not a doctrine about history’s happy end. In the present situation of our world, facile consolation is as fatal as melancholy hopelessness. No one can assure us that the worst will not happen. According to all the laws of experience: it will. We can only trust that even the end of the world hides a new beginning if we trust the God who calls into being the things that are not, and out of death creates new life.\footnote{Moltmann, \textit{Coming}, 234.}

Moltmann’s picture of hope found in the worst experiences echoes his own experiences of war and prison camp. The hope he describes comes to the hopeless through Christ’s suffering and brings God’s love, and the hopeless person finds some kind of strength to go on. “In the midst of the unbearable story of the passion of the world he discovers the reconciling story of the passion of Christ. This gives him the power to hope when there is nothing more to hope for, and to love, when he hates himself.”\footnote{Moltmann, \textit{Man}, 114.} Moltmann connects Christ’s resurrection — and the coming resurrection of all — with the resilience of the hopeful when daunted. Anticipatory participation in the resurrection grants possibilities beyond those of current history and the strength to carry on.

Christian faith is faith in the resurrection, and the resurrection is literally just that: rising up again. It gives us the strength to get up, and the creative freedom to begin something once more in the midst of our ongoing history,
something fresh. “Incipit vita nova”—a new life begins. That is the truly revolutionary power of hope. It is revolutionary because it is innovative. With it, we leave behind us the fatalism of non-success.\textsuperscript{224}

Hope-inspired people do not succumb to the world of no hope, because they are drawn toward God’s coming success, the truly new and future creation. “Through the power of hope, we don’t give up, and don’t give ourselves up; we remain unreconciled and unaccepting in an unjust and deadly world.”\textsuperscript{225} People of hope are resolute in their persistence toward the success of resurrection and God’s coming kingdom.

\section*{1.7 Moltmannian Hope Today}

Moltmann’s theology of hope was received appreciatively in the 1960s and 1970s by theologians who shared with him the conviction that theology needed to speak directly to the pressing social and political circumstances of the second half of the 21st century. Moltmann has continued to influence theologians, clergy, and lay people since. He has written dozens of books after \textit{Theology of Hope}, and, like most theologians, his positions have shifted and developed across the past 50 years. Also like most theologians, he has not written a comprehensive account of the consistencies, inconsistencies, and changes his work displays. At the same time, a generalized impression of Moltmann-inspired hope has grown, and that impression now characterizes many theologians and members of the church who have not read Moltmann. I am calling this Moltmann-inspired hope “Moltmannian hope.” It does not represent the nuances and more complicated arguments of Moltmann’s work, and it often leans toward more an alliance with secular norms than toward

\textsuperscript{224} Moltmann, \textit{End}, 38.

\textsuperscript{225} Moltmann, \textit{End}, 90.
Moltmann’s critiques of the modern world. To a certain extent, the latter tendency could be connected to the way that Moltmann tried to work with the modern context as well as to critique it. It can be hard for his critiques of the world to win out over the more familiar ideologies of hope.\footnote{226}

To illustrate Moltmannian hope, I will cite a pair of lectures by Moltmann himself, which highlight themes from his theology of hope familiar to Moltmannian scholars, clergy, and church members. A lecture by Barbara Rossing, at the same conference, offers a Moltmannian argument about the dangers of the Rapture movement and its hope. Then, I turn to a book about hope with some Moltmannian characteristics, written by Ellen Ott Marshall about hope that is open to suffering and loss.

\textbf{1.7.1 “God’s Unfinished Future: Why It Matters Now”}

In January of 2007, the annual Episcopal Trinity Institute Conference celebrated the life and work of Moltmann, who, as Lutheran pastor and then theologian, launched this campaign for a restored and relevant theology of hope almost 50 years ago. He still writes and speaks about hope today, and in 2007, he was the key speaker at this conference. When the Rev. Mark Richardson, the director of

\footnote{226 Here and elsewhere I use “ideology” to refer to a system of thought, imagination, and practices that implicitly shapes and constitutes shared truth. On the one hand, ideologies in and of themselves are not positive or negative, but formative and reflective of community identity and conviction. On the other hand, uncritical acceptance of an ideology risks an inability to consider or accept other possibilities. Of course, the position from which one might critique an ideology itself represents another ideology. However, the characterization of a truth system as an ideology makes space for the possibility of explicit claims and critical engagement with ideas previously presupposed to be outside such examination.}
the Institute, introduced Jürgen Moltmann for the two central presentations of the Conference, his introduction highlighted the celebratory nature of the event. The Institute invited Moltmann in 2007, not only because his work on the Conference’s theme makes him best suited to counter Left Behind eschatology, but also because the Institute wanted to honor Moltmann and his long career as theologian, as he turned 80 years old. The Conference gave the organizers, participants, and audience a chance to express their appreciation to Moltmann for all of his work, as well as his contribution to the conversation at hand. In this context, Moltmann’s presentations functioned on two levels: He was delivering lectures on a current topic of much interest to him (Rapture eschatology as a current manifestation of the other-worldly eschatology he has critiqued throughout all of his scholarship); and he was there as the figurehead of Moltmannian hope, a theology he initially articulated, but which has since been broadly accepted as normative. For those present (physically and remotely via telecast), Moltmann embodied and affirmed their theological sensibilities.

The January 2007 Trinity Institute Conference addressed a topic of pressing concern to Episcopal clergy, lay leaders, teachers, and their mainstream Protestant colleagues: how to respond to the assertions about eschatology and hope popularized by the Left Behind series and related Protestant Rapture theologies. Instead of a future marked by imminent world destruction and otherworldly escape for the faithful, this conference championed the in-process, world-affirming future, as illustrated by its title, “God’s Unfinished Future: Why It Matters Now.” The Rapture

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227 He was then a professor at General Theological Seminary; now he is the dean of Church Divinity School of the Pacific.
has not traditionally captured the theological imaginations of Episcopalians; the
lectionary spends relatively little time working through Revelation, and few
Episcopal preachers focus on end-time issues, but parishioners do encounter the
images and ideologies of the Rapture movement throughout their daily lives, outside
of church. The conference aimed to provide the audience with resources to reclaim
Revelation, teach eschatology, and preach hope, in more recognizably Episcopalian
terms and contexts.

Richardson introduced the conference and provided an explanation of
the theme, “God’s Unfinished Future: Why It Matters Now.” He cast the Conference
in the context of Jürgen Moltmann’s life work of scholarship, which began in the
1960s, with attention to the promise of God’s not-yet fulfilled future. Now, forty-five
later, Richardson noted that Moltmann’s work then and since seems all the more
relevant, as we face increased anxieties about the future of the planet and our
civilization, and as some spread fears of an imminent and violent apocalypse.

What we envision about the future tells us something about what we trust as
ultimate—“last things” for people of faith, are really “things that last” “things
worthy of God’s creative transformation” and this is why the stakes we place
in future hope have practical urgency for how we live now. What picture of
the future will motivate us?

He explained that, in contrast to the divisive and exclusive future imagined by the
Left Behind series, this Conference’s speakers would describe the promise of
transformation for all things, which takes hold of us now and leads to an entirely
different kind of religion of and for this world.

228 Richardson’s Introduction to the conference. God’s Unfinished Future. (2007; New
York: Trinity Television and New Media), DVD.
Trinity Institute occupies a unique position in the Episcopal church, as the most visible and accessible provider of current theological scholarship for the church. Since 1967, the Institute has been presenting conferences on theological topics. Churches throughout the country offer viewings of the event, so that people can listen together and then discuss the material. In the past few years, geographically-disparate audience members have been able to submit questions right along with those listening in Trinity Church. The speakers provide substantive resources from own scriptural interpretation, theological study, and cultural gleanings, in ways that church leaders can use in their own teaching and preaching to congregations. Some recent topics include: The Church in a Postmodern Age, 1987; The Art of Conversation: Speaking of God in a Pluralistic Age, 1993; Ordered Freedom: An Anglican Paradox, 1997; Radical Abundance - A Theology of Sustainability, 2009.

The January 2007 Conference came at a time when Episcopalians were becoming increasingly aware that the consecration of an openly gay bishop in the Diocese of New Hampshire raised problems not only among diverse Episcopalians, but also between the Episcopal Church and the global Anglican Communion, on an unprecedented scale. The issue of ecclesial identity and particularity formed a backdrop for the conference’s renewed appreciation of Moltmannian hope. Trinity Institute’s conference, “God’s Unfinished Future: Why It Matters Now,” not only counters the *Left Behind* world with Moltmannian themes of eschatological hope grounded in this world, the Conference also illustrates a prominent ideology of hope as presented in Episcopal pulpits.
Conference participants include the Presiding Bishop Katherine Jefferts Schiori, James P. Carroll, opening preacher; Barbara Rossing, a Lutheran pastor and New Testament professor; Moltmann; and Peter Gomes, closing preacher. To give a sense of the Moltmannian hope displayed at the conference, I will note briefly Carroll’s sermon, I will list the main themes of Moltmann’s keynote lectures, and I will describe Barbara Rossing’s lecture.²²⁹

The Conference opened with a eucharist, celebrated by Presiding Bishop Katherine Jefferts Schiori, at which James P. Carroll preached.²³⁰ Carrol was ordained a Roman Catholic priest, worked as a chaplain at Boston University, and then left the priesthood to pursue a writing career. He is well-known as an author of poetry, plays, social commentary, and a weekly op-ed column for the Boston Globe; he is also recognized as a public theologian. Carroll drew from his literary sources an extra-biblical critique of the church’s long-standing hope in salvation from God through Jesus Christ. He explained that Jesus came not to save us but to reveal to us that God is tied to us in an unfinished creation. God is here in and of this world, and our future is unfinished forever, because God’s future is unfinished and we are like God. Carroll grants that we are not likely to receive this as good news, claiming that Jesus had to hide from his disciples because they were not pleased. According to Carroll’s vision, hopes that look toward the eternal Sabbath with God and the perfection of

²²⁹ Peter Gomes’ closing sermon offered a broader, less Moltmannian-focused, engagement with the designated readings. Although his was a fine example of the gospel well preached, it does not directly pertain to the subject matter, and I was unable to include a treatment of it here.

²³⁰ The description and quotations are drawn from the video recordings of the conference on God’s Unfinished Future.
creatures and creation are misguided escapism. God wants us to know that this “unfolding, evolving, ever-changing cosmos” is the good news; rightly ordered hope can liberate us from the illusion that there is anything more than this already-godly ongoing and unfinished creation.231

Carroll’s sermon leads off the conference with some creative exegesis and unorthodox exhortation, championing future hope in a very this-worldly creation. While his conclusions are not necessarily indicative of Moltmannian theology in general, he reflects its interest in reconfiguring hope for today.

The morning after the opening eucharist, Richardson introduced the speakers.232 He first explained that the Conference assumes a direct connection between our visions of the future and our present actions, and it reflects on how faith in Jesus’ resurrection informs our expectations for the future of history and the cosmos. “We will be asking if the future of hope is able to comprehend and liberate us from the cynicism and anxiety of our age.”233 Acknowledging that the Conference participants are all leaders, “front line theologians in our respective congregations,” he noted the pressing need for new ways to express the central images of God’s future coming out of Christianity in the United States.234 As the popular books of the religious right fill the shelves of bookstores with apocalyptic visions of end times,

231 My notes from God’s Unfinished Future.


“One can only wonder how this feeds a wartime frenzy, interpreting the present as setting the stage for holy battle.”

1.7.2 Moltmann: The Final Judgment.

Moltmann’s first lecture, “The Final Judgment: Sunrise of Christ’s Liberating Justice,” feature two themes characteristic of his theology of hope: judgment is universally inclusive and indestructibly positive; the end is the beginning. Moltmann critiques the characterization of eschatology as the site of God’s final judgment, and he challenges the assumption that divine judgment involves condemnation, wrath, and punishment. He explains that people who expect an ultimate separation between good and bad necessarily see everyone now on divisive terms, thereby furthering conflict and violence. He cites as examples the tendency of the Left Behind movement to see the world divided into believers and unbelievers and the G. W. Bush administration’s apparent division of the world into terrorists and antiterrorists. Politics shaped by the friend vs foe images of judgment-oriented people accompanies an end-time fascination, sometimes aligned with the Armageddon of Rev. 16:16. In this view, God will finalize the division between good and bad with the global destruction of the godless. “The expectation of an exclusive final judgment justifies the exclusion of those who do not belong to us. Whoever is not for us or like us is against us—and we against them.” At the same time, Moltmann objects to views that place the responsibility for righteousness in the


hands of humans, who can either follow or turn away from God's planned salvation for all. He argues that these images reflect the curruption of true Christian belief by ancient Egyptian expectations of Osiris’ judgment and Roman law’s criminal court system. Here he echoes his lifelong efforts to promote a theology of hope governed neither by mistaken tradition nor by modernity’s perverted desires.

It’s high time to Christianize our traditional images and perceptions of God’s final judgment and to evangelize their present effects on our lives and worldviews, so we may greet the coming judge with joy: “Maranatha, come Lord Jesus, come soon” and may live already here and now in the sunrise of God’s justice on earth (Rev. 21:20).

Moltmann agrees that some kind of final judgment is necessary, in order to grand peace to victims and rest to perpetrators. Jesus is the judge, but not an avenging judge. Moltmann dismisses as unrecognizable those images of Jesus the coming Judge in medieval paintings in which Jesus appears physically strong, an Olympian figure, a heroically powerful conqueror of death. That figure “couldn’t be Jesus of Nazareth.” “Michelangelo’s Jesus in the Sistine Chapel” has nothing to do with the crucified Christ.” Moltmann explains that Christ’s justice, rightly understood, establishes “God’s creative justice which brings the victims justice and puts the perpetrators to right.” Victims and perpetrators of evil will all be born again to new life, having been cleansed in the fire of God, which saves the people in love while burning away

240 God’s Unfinished Future.
everything “in contradiction to God.”  

Although this judgment involves fire, cleansing and annihilation, Moltmann argues that it is not so much negative as the negation of the negative, and hence positive, saving, and fulfilling. Sin and death are destroyed, not the people consumed by them. “If death is no more and hell destroyed, the question of whether all or only a few shall be saved is irrelevant.”  

Moltmann argues that the universalism of Christ’s judgment excludes no one, the Christian response should embrace all as believers, regardless of their belief or faith, while at the same time practicing preferential treatment of the poor and oppressed. This preferential treatment will demonstrate our hope in God’s coming new creation, in which inequities are corrected and wrongs are righted.

Moltmann resists what he perceives as the limitations and closure of final, eternal judgment. The divine judgment he proclaims is simply “the end of the old age,” which is really the beginning. “In my opinion, it was a fatal mistake of Christian tradition in doctrine and spirituality, to look only at final judgment and not through to new creation, not believing in new beginning of this end.” God is still curious, he argues, looking forward to new generations, waiting to see what will

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244 Moltmann, “Final Judgment,” 575.


An inappropriate rush to final judgment, the end of the world, misconstrues God’s judgment as an assessment of the past, rather than as the establishment of a new creation that embraces everyone, victim and oppressor, believer and nonbeliever, in a new life of reconciliation and mercy for all. In this way, Moltmann counters Rapture theology — and any theology and scriptural interpretation — which dwells on the divine discernment of good and evil as an eternal division. He underscores the Moltmannian expectation that the new beginning (wrongly viewed as the end) extends this world through to its new creation; and he demonstrates the Moltmannian assumption that God is not so perfect as to know what will happen in the future.\textsuperscript{248}

\textbf{1.7.3 Moltmann: The Present Future}

Moltmann’s second lecture, “The Presence of God’s Future: The Risen Christ,”\textsuperscript{249} continues his discussion of the God’s new beginning and considers the nature of resurrection hope. He picks up again the contemporary fascination with endtime, noting that it reflects our desires to be released from the pain and suffering and anxiety of this world. Images of global destruction may appeal to our need to know that what oppresses us will end, but those images do not illustrate Christian anticipation of God’s future. Christian future, Moltmann argues,

\textsuperscript{247} God’s Unfinished Future.

\textsuperscript{248} The \textit{Anglican Theological Review} versions of the Moltmann and Rossing presentations appear to have been edited not only for length, but for content in a way that excludes all references to panentheism, God’s suffering, God’s need for creation for God’s own completion, and God’s hope and curiosity.

\textsuperscript{249} Moltmann, “Presence,” 577-88.
has nothing to do with the final destruction of the world God has created and loves. Its focus is not the end, the end of life, the end of history, the end of all things. It is, rather, the beginning, the beginning of true life, the beginning of God's kingdom, the beginning of the new creation of all things.  

Hope begins with the resurrection of Christ, “the presence of God's promised future.” Life after the resurrection of Christ is transformed life, and life now means living against death. Our hope in the resurrection of all fleshly bodies fills us with a new spirit and life power already before death” and a new sensitivity to suffering.

Moltmann explains that this salvation of souls and bodies will occur here on earth, arguing that Jewish and Christian belief looks to redemption of, not from, the world we already inhabit. “Christ doesn’t lead people in the afterlife of religious escapism or flight from the world, but gives them back to the earth as her faithful people.” Christ was born, lived, died on earth, therefore we should expect transformation of life here.

Moltmann’s second lecture emphasizes the earthly centered focus of his later books. While he still champions the future-oriented interpretation of past and present established in his earlier work, Moltmann now locates the future here, in these bodies, on this earth. Moltmann differs from Carroll in that he does still anticipate God's continued activity Moltmann does not claim that revelation is the sum of redemption, he expects a Kingdom of God noticeably different from the

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250 Moltmann, “Presence,” 577-78.
251 Moltmann, “Presence,” 585.
current status quo, and he has specific hopes for the character of God’s unfinished future. However, Moltmann shares with Carroll the conviction that looking for God and God’s future elsewhere than here reflects foolish escapism. Moltmann shares with Rossing the assumption that escapist hope necessarily leads to the neglect and abuse of the earth we now inhabit, the poor stewardship of God’s gifts of creation, which are the means with which we will receive the future.

1.7.4 Barbara Rossing: Reclaiming Hope

The Rev. Dr. Barbara R. Rossing, a New Testament professor and ordained Lutheran pastor, with a background in natural science. Rossing has written a book that rebuts the Rapture movement series with an alternative reading of Revelation, *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation*.\(^{255}\) In the book, Rossing traces the history of the Rapture movement, which she describes as a racket, invented in the 19th century, evolved through dispensationalism in the early 1900s, revived by Hal Linsday’s *Late Great Planet Earth* in the 1970’s, and now popularized in the *Left Behind* books by Lahaye and Jenkins. Her book focuses on an interpretation of Revelation as a text of hope and reconciliation, not devastation.

Rossing’s talk, “Prophecy, End-Times and American Apocalypse: Reclaiming Hope for Our World,”\(^{256}\) begins with thanks to Carroll’s homiletic vision of God’s Unfinished Future and with deep appreciation for Moltmann’s body of work, especially his theological engagement with environmental concerns. She dismisses


\(^{256}\) *God’s Unfinished Future.*
*Left Behind* theology as “Nuts!”, while acknowledging that a sense of “end” does permeate our culture. In response to concerns about continued life on this planet, Rossing sets out to reclaim the Bible and the Apocalypse, “a diagnosis of the sickness of our imperial world, and as an urgent wake-up call about the future — a vision of hope for this planet earth and every one of us.” The major components of her argument include a) reconfiguring sin as illness, b) looking for the end of empire rather than the end of the world, c) attending to the long-term health and life of the world, and d) welcoming God to the New Jerusalem which is our healing earth.

a) Illness. Rossing draws a powerful connection between humans and all of creation by naming *illness* as the one crisis that infects all of creation. She notes that while the grammar of sin, guilt, and repentance may still be important, she and many others prefer a theology of illness and healing. A focus on sickness highlights the healing which all of creation needs, and which scripture addresses through the healing stories of the Gospels.

b) Empire. According to Rossing, the empire causes the illness that consumes all of creation. She argues that we, like the earliest Christians, must “try to envision a way of life beyond empire” — the Roman Empire which threatened their world, and the imperialism which pervades and sickens our world today. Rossing analyzes the three Greek words often translated as “world,” (*gê, kosmos,* and *oikoumenê*) and proposes that the New Testament uses *oikoumenê* negatively, to represent the

257 God’s Unfinished Future.


259 Rossing shares with Moltmann a conviction to narrate judgment non-punitively.
domination of world powers; in Revelation, *oikoumenē* refers to the Roman Empire and its eschatology of an eternal imperial world order, *Roma aeterna*, attained and sustained through the capture and torture of other peoples and lands.\(^{260}\) In Rossing’s reading, Revelation repudiates this empire and proclaims the end of its age. Thus, Rossing argues, the end that Revelation proclaims is the end to this age, and the whole book leads up to the “city of beauty, welcome, ecological renewal, with enough for everyone.”\(^{261}\) The New Jerusalem image illustrates Rossing’s Moltmannian “earth-centered vision of hope for this world.”\(^{262}\)

c) Healing the world. Rossing identifies the long-term health of the creation as the final word of the Bible and the central message of Revelation: God’s will is not to destroy our world, but to heal us, and that healing comes “not directly from God but from the leaves of a tree, from the creation.”\(^{263}\) Healing comes from “the leaves of the tree of life,” an image that is common to so many of the world’s religions, so it can be an image that unites all as God’s people.\(^{264}\)

d) Welcoming God to the earth. Rossing’s Revelation centers on a vision of hope for this world, and not on a world-clearing Rapture. Representing Moltmannian hope in the continuation of this earth, she suggests it might make more sense to consider that Revelation offers “a vision of God being ‘raptured’ down to earth to dwell with


\(^{261}\) Rossing, “Prophecy,” 560.

\(^{262}\) Rossing, “Prophecy,” 560.

\(^{263}\) Rossing, “Prophecy,” 561.

\(^{264}\) *God’s Unfinished Future.*
us on earth (Rev 21), to dwell with us in what is called New Jerusalem.”265 She stresses the ethical ramifications of this vision, calling for human efforts to protect and save the world before it is too late.

Rossing offers the above tools for reclaiming in order to show that, despite the claims of Left Behind theology, the idea of the apocalypse may indeed play a healing role in our culture. She can imagine that this might be the case, especially if someone can write a novel to counter the Left Behind series, a novel about people of the world, living with ecological care and protecting the earth’s resources. This novel’s heroes could be living in sustainable communities, maybe practicing Permaculture gardening—sharing in the river of life, tending the nation-healing tree of life. Such a story could be just as thrilling as the Left Behind story—but instead of carrying guns to battle the Antichrist and his forces, our little band of heroes carries seedlings, or solar panels; they rescue farmers about to be bulldozed by developers; they foil the evil forces of polluters and greenhouse gas emitters—today’s most dangerous manifestations of the Antichrist. In defense of her reading, and against the Rapture-focussed exegesis of Revelation, Rossing declares, “It’s all there in the Bible! I’m not making it up!”266 It is a story of “a world that will not be left behind.”267

Rossing offers an empassioned, angry, but rational this-worldly response to the passionate — and popular — biblicism of the apocalyptic Christians she

265 Rossing, “Prophecy,” 560.

266 Rossing, “Prophecy,” 562.

describes. Her position as mainstream seminary professor, her authorship of a book that debunks the “Rapture Racket,” her background in real science, her hermeneutical alternatives to unsophisticated literalism, and her references to Greek etymology all establish her as a solid resource to which church leaders can turn to counter their parishioners’ possible attractions to the *Left Behind* movement. She warns against the mainstream Christian tendency to avoid Revelation whenever possible, noting that it is a part of the Bible and a part of public rhetoric. “We may try to ignore it, but the fundamentalists came in with a vengeance to teach our parishes what it really means!”\(^{268}\) Rossing provides the ammunition needed for anti-Rapture congregations to reclaim Revelation and eschatological hope.

1.7.4.1 Moltmannian Objections to Rapture Hope

Moltmannian hope critiques eschatology that distracts from the realities of this world and fails to appreciate the goods of this world. Rapture eschatology is currently the most obvious form of the otherworldly hope that Moltmannian hope resists. The ethical force of Moltmann’s and Rossing’s argument against the Rapture movement presupposes the primary theological goods are inclusion, democracy, nonviolence, ministry to the poor, and environmental activism. They claim that the Rapture movement, with its priority of life with God in heaven for the selected faithful, fails to support any of these goods, fostering exclusivism and division between believers and nonbelievers, and between creation to be saved and creation to be abandoned. Moltmann and Rossing argue that the very concept of election defies democracy and reeks of empire. The anticipation of God’s wrathful

\(^{268}\) *God’s Unfinished Future.*
destruction of the ungodly and unclean supports war and violence among people and to the earth. An obsession with other-worldliness detracts from the preferential option for the poor. And a heart that longs to live in heaven cannot be bothered to nurture or restore this world. Hence, according to this ethics, the chief fault of the Rapture movement lies in its misdirected priorities that exacerbate, rather than ameliorate the very troubles that the coming God aims to heal. Those who propagate and fall under the spell of the *Left Behind* ideology pervert and impede hopes to address greatest concerns of the world today.

The second great fault of the Rapture movement, according to the Moltmann and Rossing critique, is that it encourages exciting feelings but little human agency. Rossing deplores the persuasive attraction of Rapture anticipation that counts on God's angelic forces to do the work. Hopeful and responsible resurrection life (Moltmann) or anti-empirical healing life (Rossing) calls for rational action based on sound biblical scholarship and on theological reasoning that reflects the sensibilities of this age. The Rapture movement, these speakers argue, encourages believers to sit back, focus on personal salvation, and leave the condition of the world to God, who will soon set all things right. An uninformed and literal reading of Revelation supplies these believers with the assurance that a wrathful God comes to judge, saving the godly and destroying the rest, leaving little for the faithful to do in the meantime. In contrast, Rossing reads Revelation from a larger perspective that interprets the Armageddon passages of Revelation as hortatory persuasion, in the service of the most important message of book: Jesus the Lamb comes to establish the New Jerusalem on this earth. Drawing on her exegetical determination of the original
connotations of the Greek, Rossing explains that God intends to dismantle empirical structures, not to destroy the earth or the rest of the world apart from those unhealthy power structures. Moltmann counters the Rapture movement and eschatological hope that expects punitive divine judgment with corrections based on his own scholarship: Christian eschatology needs to be freed from the corruptive influences of ancient Egyptian and Roman beliefs; from the mistaken Christology of artistic representations; from outdated doctrines of God; from a static sameness of eternity (toward an open-ended continuation of unfinished time); and from notions of the Kingdom of God apart from this world, inhabited by God. True Christianity, they argue, rejects *Left Behind* and embraces God’s good creation.

1.7.4.2 **The God of Love and Moltmannian Hope**

The God of Moltmannian hope is the God of love, whose love is so great that God the father suffers in the godforsaken experience of his crucified Son. In resurrection life, God, the godforsaken and godforsaking, will come to this recreated earth, this time, these bodies, this creation, and in and with us for ever. Moltmannian hope is universally inclusive not only because it is for all of creation, but because it is about the inclusion of God in the universe and the universe in God. Hope in God’s unfinished future rests on God’s coming to bring the end of all divisiveness, including the divisions between creation and the Creator.

Moltmannian hope offers a liberating spirit and a power that can be tapped into in order to prepare this creation for the new creation God promises. It is bold, relying on God’s promises of future fulfillment to make sense of the present and to determine how to proceed. And, this hope is positive, trusting in God’s negation of
all that is negative to produce an undefeatable positive future in which everything
dlife-affirming is affirmed by God, and everything that is not life-affirming is rendered
dlife-affirming.

The Moltmannian hope of God’s Unfinished Future matters, its proponents
argue, because with this hope, we can begin to establish the New Jerusalem here and
now. This Moltmannian hope seems better for the planet than more traditional
doctrines of hope, because it focuses on the earth as the future home of God, and
therefore worthy of preservation and care. It is better for humans, because it does
not exclude anyone from God’s just and merciful future, but instead anticipates that
God will cleanse and heal as necessary in the recreation of the cosmos at God’s
coming. No one will be left out, and the world will not be left out. Heaven will be
renewed life here on the earth we know, and the earth and all of creation will be
created anew, filled with God’s presence. This hope contrasts with the hopes of
escapists who put the health of the earth in peril while yearning for a false heaven,
the hopes of the judgmental who divide this world the way they imagine God will
divide the world to come, and the hopes of the optimistic who think things are
getting better for them and their empire every day — but at the expense of others.
This hope matters because suffering needs to be relieved now, the environment needs
to be saved now, and society needs to be rescued from the evils of empire and
fanatical — and charismatic — leaders.

Moltmannian hope tries to correct the problematic aspects of both Rapture
theology and traditional Christian theology. Traditional doctrine does not pay
sufficient attention to God’s love and mercy; Moltmannian theology claims nothing
is more primary than that God is love, and love necessarily means suffering with. God loves the world so much that God will come to the world, recreate it, and dwell within it and within its continuing time. Just as God will come, God did enter into human history on the cross in love and suffering. Because God will come to renew and participate in this world, rather than end it or abandon it, Moltmannian hope promotes the care for and preservation of this world. Because God will come to heal and unite everyone in merciful love, people should love and live without division now. This future of life with and in God's love, made available to us through Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection, is what we should rightly hope for; and that hope carries a power that can help us prepare ourselves and all the world for the coming fulfillment of all hopes.

1.7.5 Marshall's Moltmannian Responsible Hope

Ellen Ott Marshall was not one of the participants in the Trinity Institute conference, but she reflects and builds on a Moltmannian theology of hope, in her book, *Though the Fig Tree Does Not Blossom: toward a Responsible Theology of Christian Hope*. She is an ethics professor who draws from Moltmann’s incorporation of the new and the not-yet into history, in order to establish Christian hope within the priorities of social justice activism for the life of the earth and its inhabitants. Marshall identifies herself with a feminist and process theology of God, in which humans share power with God and focus their hopes on this life. She considers the categorization of hope as a virtue, in conversation with Aristotle and Aquinas; she

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appreciates contemporary objections to eschatological hope that precludes adequate attention to tragedy, but she balances those objections with a more positive hope; and she charges hope with the task of generating and sustaining moral agency and activity.

Marshall feels that the traditional view of hope as a theological virtue does a disservice to hope, humanity, and the world.\textsuperscript{270} Traditionally, as a theological virtue, hope (along with faith and love) receives a divine infusion of grace which helps humans direct their hopes toward their true end in God. Marshall finds the idea of infused grace to be a distracting and disempowering move that hands over to an overbearing God the power that rightfully belongs to responsible human agents. She wants to free hope from its glorified position in Christian tradition, where it “assumes an air of royalty” and where its “status as a theological virtue has overshadowed its everyday employment, such that we treat it like a show horse rather than a workhorse.”\textsuperscript{271} Marshall argues that hope, as a theological virtue, merely serves as a one-way conduit for power that flows from a commandeering God to a puppet-like human. In the process, that theological hope narrows the gaze of the those who hope, turning them away from the world and their responsibilities to the

\textsuperscript{270} Moltmann has expressed no interest in joining the discourse of theological virtues. When he does mention theological virtue, it is in the context of his delight in curiosity (which is decidedly not a virtue, theological or otherwise, in the Thomistic account from which Marshall dissents. “Right down to the present day, theology (curious search for God) has continued to be for me a tremendous adventure, a journey of discovery into a, for me, unknown country, a voyage without the certainty of a return, a path into the unknown with many surprises and not without disappointments. If I have a theological virtue at all, then it is one that has never been recognized as such: curiosity.” Moltmann, \textit{Coming}, xiv.

\textsuperscript{271} Marshall, \textit{Fig Tree}, xiii.
needy. In contrast, Marshall proposes a hope that is more responsible and ethical, because it recognizes and accepts the work of hope. “Hope has a job to do. In the continuous and far-reaching labor of the moral life, hope is the sense of possibility that generates and sustains moral agency.” The work of Marshall’s responsible hope must be done by humans who claim this responsibility by exercising their freedom, and by sharing power with God and others in mutuality.

Marshall’s account of hope looks to the basileia tou theou, which she identifies as the Christian tradition’s highest good. She claims the basileia tou theou as a vision of faith constructed both by interpretations of its descriptions in scripture and by present desires for the future. As a faith claim, this basileia does not rest on evidence (on scientific or social-historical terms) to establish its contents nor its plausibility. Instead, the basileia both shapes and is shaped by hope for what might be, and Marshall explains that she is able to “construe a source of hope through the lens of this faith claim.” Marshall does not feel she can ground her vision of the basileia tou theou on concrete examples of documented manifestations, because she sees more lived experiences of suffering, oppression, and injustice than glimpses of actualized basileia communities. Therefore she wants hope to be grounded on and governed by practices that will bring about the social changes necessary for the eventual basileia. She shares with Moltmannian hope the importance of the changes humans need to make so that the new kingdom will be appropriately constituted.

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272 Marshall, Fig Tree, xiii.

273 Marshall, Fig Tree, 7.

274 Marshall, Fig Tree, 8.
The violence, displacement, disparity, degradation, disease, and oppression that mark our world demand steps toward conflict transformation and reconciliation, guarantees of protection and freedom from persecution, social change and economic restructuring, sustainable ecological practices, scientific research and affordable health care, active opposition to authoritarian regimes, and movements to create space for freedom. The depth of destruction and sandness caused by these historical conditions should give pause to anyone who speaks of hope today, and the concrete steps necessary to address these problems should serve as a corrective to abstract references to the basileia vision.275

Her account illustrates priorities Moltmannian hope: recognizing suffering, avoiding other-worldly distractions, and taking steps to address systemic injustice.

With the basileia in place as the end of hope, Marshall designs a framework for hope that nods to the virtue ethics of Aristotle and Thomas, but makes significant alterations to both. Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* describe the virtues of a man who occupies a position of privilege and prestige in his world and strives toward the good of ultimate happiness. In order to reach the excellence of virtue and happiness, Aristotle’s ethical subject aims both for a balance of all virtues (x without y or a without b benefit little) and for a balance, or mean, of each virtue. The Christian engagement with ethics narrates a different list of virtues than Aristotle’s, since the goods of disciples of Christ differ from the goods of the Nicomachean man of excellence. In addition, Thomas Aquinas describes the scriptural attributes of faith, hope, and love as theological virtues, which aim beyond that which can be attained naturally, with one’s own human resources. In the theological virtues, God draws humans into a glimpse of the supernatural end Christ has prepared; in faith, hope, and love, God helps humans aim toward and approach, however partially, the end of eternal happiness with God. Most Christian virtues aim toward that which

275 Marshall, *Fig Tree*, 8.
leads to God, and as measures of human capacities and effort they are tempered by means, as are Aristotle’s virtues. The theological virtues, however, aim toward God, whose possibilities are endless, whose power is unlimited, and whose goodness exceeds far beyond human finitude and imagination. Thus the mean does not apply to theological virtues. It is impossible to hope in God too much, since “too much” does not apply to God. Hope in God is not constrained by human limitations, and it is defined by the unconstrained breadth of possibility that is God.

Marshall appreciates the open possibility of Thomas’s theological virtue of hope. Responsible hope is strengthened by increased awareness of possibilities for change and by increased assurance that the difficult good is possible to attain. Yet, Marshall does not accept the essential distinction between God and creatures, between Gods infinite power and the finite capacities of humans, that Thomas and his tradition assumes. She is more persuaded by a theology of shared power between God and creatures, neither of whom can claim a limitless power, since each must depend on cooperation from the other to effect change. In this scenario, the measure of a mean still applies, and Marshall asserts that “hope does indeed observe a mean between optimism and despair. Thus, we cultivate hope by preserving the tension between promise and sobering experiences.”276 Further, she argues, regarding hope as virtue of mean [a la Aristotle], balanced between the two potentially excessive extremes of optimism and despair, offers a broader vision of hope than afforded by the theological hope that claims infinite possibilities in God. According to Marshall, hope rooted in a God differentiated from creation, narrows the possibilities for hope

276 Marshall, Fig Tree, 30-1.
by looking to God alone and not to creation. Where Aquinas describes the role of persons as instrumental agents of hope, secondary to God the primary agent, Marshall perceives an unfortunate denial of resources for hope in creation.\textsuperscript{277} In this way, Marshall claims the primacy of human freedom from God and the importance of this-worldly, rather than other-worldly hope.

With Aquinas, Marshall names the object of hope as “a future good, difficult but possible to attain.”\textsuperscript{278} However, Aquinas distinguishes between hope as “contending emotion”\textsuperscript{279} and hope as a theological virtue, while Marshall would like to name the emotion, appetite, or affect of hope as theological, using a different definition of “theological” from the one shared by Thomas and traditional Christian teaching about hope.\textsuperscript{280} Marshall makes this shift because she prioritizes human agency, which she understands to be disempowered by a reliance on the infused grace of (traditional) theological virtue. “Classifying hope as an act of appetite is essential because of the connection between hope and [human] agency.”\textsuperscript{281} Since hope’s job is “to generate and sustain moral agency,” Marshall needs human hope to be motivating human efforts for social change.\textsuperscript{282} She observes that both Aquinas and Augustine

\textsuperscript{277} Marshall, \textit{Ftig Tree}, 32.

\textsuperscript{278} Marshall, \textit{Ftig Tree}, 17.

\textsuperscript{279} Marshall, \textit{Ftig Tree}, 17.

\textsuperscript{280} Philip Alan Munztel’s study of Thomistic hope offers an affective and more divinely participatory hope that perdures, with love, and might provide the sort of basis for an ethics of hope to match Marshall’s theology of hope. “Hope and the Moral Life: A Study in Theological Ethics,” Dissertation, Yale, 1984.

\textsuperscript{281} Marshall, \textit{Ftig Tree}, 19.

\textsuperscript{282} Marshall, \textit{Ftig Tree}, xiii.
distinguish between God and creation when discussing the attainment of hope and its ends. Augustine makes clear, in *City of God*, that hope must rest with God and not with human efforts. Aquinas names theological hope as a theological virtue because it looks to its end in and through God, with persons as instrumental agents rather than competing or comparable ends. Marshall agrees with Aquinas that God’s help helps us realize possibilities we otherwise might not imagine. God’s help points us toward the highest good, which Marshal names as the *basileia tou theou*, and with God’s help, we are able to “expand our sense of possibility.”283 However, Marshall’s commitment to autonomous human agency and shared power leads her to reject the notion that God’s help is necessarily different or more important than human help. “Because I understand God’s help to be relational, I do not make a substantive distinction between divine and human helpers.”284 Here, Marshall is using the particular connotation of “relational power” common among contemporary process theology and some feminist theology, a connotation that emphasizes cooperation and mutuality. The argument that God’s power is relational grows from a perception that much of traditional theology teaches that God’s dominates creation with a detached and iron will, from far away and from outside of history. This domineering God denies humans the comfort of divine companionship and shared suffering, while simultaneously denying humans of their own freedom, agency, and power.

Marshall, who has already defined hope in terms of human ethical action, finds little hope in God-driven Creator-creation dynamic. “With many feminist and

283 Marshall, *Fig Tree*, 24.

284 Marshall, *Fig Tree*, 33.
process theologians, I assert that God acts with creation, rather than upon it, as though from a distance, or even through it, as though creation were a passive vessel.”

Instead, Marshall champions a dynamic that more evenly distributes power, and thereby more evenly distributes the source, activity, and ends of hope. She argues that relational power “is shared and persuasive rather than controlling and coercive. There is consequently no substantive distinction between God’s power and human power; I cannot mark a line that separates them from one another, let alone place trust in one and not the other.”

Relational power supports Marshall’s understanding of hope as an aspect of human freedom and capacity to effect change. The proper end of hope is the basilea tou theou, a vision of a community of peace and justice for this creation; the work of hope is the ethical task of expanding possibilities toward the basilea tou theou; and God and creation cooperatively exercise their powers to perform the work of hope and effect the hoped-for change.

This understanding of power respects the freedom of each member of a relationship. Marshall champions shared power to forms of domination and control, in which on party remains a passive participant. In models of shared power, no one is a secondary or instrumental agent passively carrying out the will of another. There is always the freedom to refuse the job, to resist the order, to say no. In process theology, God lures and influences, but does not exact a tyrannical will. Human beings have the freedom to say no, as well as the propensity of misunderstand or misappropriate God’s influence. So, we cannot hope for change without hoping in

285 Marshall, Fig Tree, 33.

286 Marshall, Fig Tree, 33.
human ability to discern God’s influence accurately and in human will to respond appropriately. When the power that effects change is cooperative in nature, we must hope that all necessary parties will perform their functions well in order for that power to be realized.287

Marshall’s presentation of a hope fueled by relational power places God and humans on the same playing field, sharing similar categories of freedom, will, responsiveness, and interdependence. God and humans together contribute to the fulfillment of hope with comparable resources. “If we understand God’s power to be relational, to be shared with creation, then one hopes in God by hoping in creation also.”288 God as relational encourages care for others and for the earth.289

The hope of relational power also locates the end of hope here, in the midst of this creation that we know, rather than somewhere beyond our experience and imagination. Marshall explains that a hope oriented toward God does not call for us to distinguish between hope for God and hope for history or creation. Affirming God’s presence within creation, as I do, dissolves such a distinction. One hopes for the reunion of the separated, the flourishing of creation; this is the beatific vision and sumnum bonum.290 God’s presence within creation renders eschatological hopes for another life, somewhere other than here, contrary to the aim of hope, distracting us from the proper focus of hope: “hope for this life.”291 In fact, Marshall worries that the very

287 Marshall, Fig Tree, 33-4.
288 Marshall, Fig Tree, 33.
289 Marshall, Fig Tree, 52.
290 Marshall, Fig Tree, 32.
291 Marshall, 45, citing Cone, Black Theology, Black Power, 123.
discussion of eschatology risks drawing our attention away from “this world and its problems.” 292 “We cannot talk about hope without talking about eschatology, but this turn to ‘the last’ things threatens the very possibility of a responsible hope, one that generates and sustains moral action on behalf of this planet and people.” 293 Marshall thus aligns herself with those who feel that the church has overemphasized the otherworldly character of our ultimate end in God, 294 and she supports the assertion that hope in a future life beyond this one leads to irresponsible neglect (or even outright harm) to the known created world and its inhabitants. She rejects “otherworldly visions that direct our attention away from this world and its problems, and I insist in a ‘hope for this life.’” 295 She worries that eschatology’s vision of future life elsewhere “displaces our identity as ‘earthlings’ and undermines care for this planet, the only home we and future generations as living, historical beings actually have.” 296 With Rosemary Radford Ruether, she deplores the dualism “reinforced by an eschatological understanding that severs the tie between history and nature and thus envisions the culmination of human history in one salvific point at the end of a linear process.” 297 Having established that eschatology distracts from the reality of lived experience and inhibits appropriate engagements with that reality,

292 Marshall, Fig Tree, 45.

293 Marshall, Fig Tree, 46.

294 Marshall, Fig Tree, 44, referring to Moltmann, Coming, 50.

295 Marshall, Fig Tree, 45, citing James Cone, Black Theology and Black Power, 123.

296 Marshall, Fig Tree, 46, citing Elizabeth Johnson.

297 Marshall, Fig Tree, 46, citing Reuther,
Marshall explains that responsible hope sustains the tension between the way things are and the way things might change to become.\textsuperscript{298} Marshall places the tension of hope between her claims that God is good and her realization that tragedy calls that claim into question. She asserts that God is “good and loving,” and she points to God’s activity in the world as evidence of the “particular moral quality” we can know about God.\textsuperscript{299} In what stands out as her strongest assertion about God, Marshall argues that “in this world of absolute horror, God must be good to be worthy of worship,” and we can know God’s goodness because “God is at work in the world clearing space for freedom.”\textsuperscript{300} Marshall justifies her claim that “God is neither absent, malevolent, nor utterly unknowable,” but acting for good in the world now, on similar claims made by “countless liberation theologians.”\textsuperscript{301} The fact that she feels compelled to defend God’s goodness indicates the depth of her commitment to give an account of suffering, violence, and tragedy to those who challenge Christian claims of divine goodness in the face of human suffering. Marshall describes Wendy Farley’s objections to Christianity’s story of suffering explained by sin through the Fall and ending with eschatological harmony: that story locates God and hope in the future, while providing insufficient justice and compassion here and now.\textsuperscript{302} According to Farley, a more tragic — and therefore

\textsuperscript{298} Marshall, \textit{Fig Tree}, 56.

\textsuperscript{299} Marshall, \textit{Fig Tree}, 53.

\textsuperscript{300} Marshall, \textit{Fig Tree}, 53.

\textsuperscript{301} Marshall, \textit{Fig Tree}, 53.

\textsuperscript{302} Marshall, \textit{Fig Tree}, 58-9, citing Farley, \textit{Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion}, 1990.
more appropriate — theology resists the tendency to presume the explanation or atonement of suffering.\textsuperscript{303} Marshall adds to the importance of tragedy Kathleen Sands’ rejection of eschatological assumptions that good can triumph over, or at least be separated from, evil: such narratives of God’s goodness distract us from the reality of tragic existence, where there is no divine participation or clarity among the messiness of suffering.\textsuperscript{304} For Sands, hope comes from compassionate presence with us as we resist evil and stand in solidarity with those who suffer. Sands trusts that God stands with us in suffering, and that faith moves her to claim that we can stand with others who suffer. Her hope rests not so much in relief from suffering, but from companionship in suffering.\textsuperscript{305} Like Sands, Farley finds hope in the sharing of pain: “Hope, therefore, rests not in a future salvation, but in the copresence of God and other persons within lived painful experience. In those moments, one learns that evil is not absolute.”\textsuperscript{306}

Like Farley and Sands, Marshall argues that hope must not ignore suffering, and that suffering can be resisted with the notion of an accompanying God who shares in our suffering as we share each others suffering. Unlike Farley and Sands, however, Marshall presents a hope that moves beyond resistance to suffering and motivates moral action.

\textsuperscript{303} Marshall, \textit{Fig Tree}, 53, citing, Farley.

\textsuperscript{304} Marshall, \textit{Fig Tree}, 61, citing Kathleen Sands, \textit{Escape from Paradise: Evil and Tragedy in Feminist Theology} (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994).

\textsuperscript{305} Sands, \textit{Escape from Paradise}.

\textsuperscript{306} Marshall, \textit{Fig Tree}, 62.
Hope must not only enable resistance to suffering but also empower one to work for change. That is, hope must draw on the immediate strength offered through acts of compassion and on the prophetic visions that insist that real change in circumstances is possible. We must resist what we know and also envision something else.\footnote{Marshall, \textit{Fig Tree}, 63.}

In order for hope to be responsible, according to Marshall, it must both attend to present realities and effect future change. “We must remain accountable to the way things are and envision alternatives that cultivate a revolutionary disposition.”\footnote{Marshall, \textit{Fig Tree}, 64.} Hope, as the mean between despair and optimism thus acknowledges suffering with compassion and looks to improve the conditions that cause suffering, without succumbing to disconsolate paralysis or naive presumption.

Marshall’s responsible hope relies on a present God who shares our suffering and our power, and on the human capacity to develop ethical practices in response to God, but without the assistance of divinely infused virtue. Examples of this hopeful practice abound, and Marshall calls us to “insist that such goodness reflects human potential and outlines human responsibility rather than humbly celebrating a momentary appearance of the Divine.”\footnote{Marshall, \textit{Fig Tree}, 86–7.} If we mistakenly attribute demonstrations of responsible hope to the infusion of divine virtue, Marshall argues, we are denigrating human potential and failing to hope in humanity.

We need a theological anthropology that celebrates these figures as individuals who chose to collaborate with god on behalf of the flourishing whole rather than questionable creatures whom God managed to utilize in spite of themselves. In order to survive and resist, we need a theology that affirms human potential to engage goodness and holds us responsible for doing so. We also need a theology that affirms God’s unfailing and unbounded...
presence with all of creation such that the theological virtue of hope deepens and broadens our vision instead of redirecting our gaze.\textsuperscript{110}

1.8 Conclusion

Moltmann defends hope from superficial selfishness and from a spiritual, otherworldly escapism, with his theology of hope, born of a revelation of God’s presence in his experience of godforsakenness. Moltmann narrates his theological hope with help from Bloch’s philosophy of future possibility, which he uses to extend God’s promises toward their fulfillment in the future of coming God’s Kingdom. Hope rests on the presence of God who suffers with the suffering, thereby promising relief from suffering with God in the new creation. Jesus Christ’s crucifixion brings God to the suffering; his resurrection opens up this life to God’s future. Moltmann articulates the tension of crucifixion and resurrection, of the uncertainty of death and the certainty of the future; in his latest work, his dialectic subsumes crucifixion and uncertainty into resurrection and the certain future of new creation. The people of this hope are justified in Christ’s reconciliation of all. Their lives of care for each other and all of creation help prepare for God’s arrival with the new creation of love and freedom.

Moltmannian hope reflects Moltmann’s theology and highlights, especially the assumption of a passible, compassionate God, and the value of investing in on-the-ground improvements to social injustice and ecological preservation. Freed from the distractions of Rapture, apocalyptic, and heavenly bliss eschatologies, Christians can

\textsuperscript{110} Marshall, 86-7.
hope for God’s new creation of God’s good creation and express that hope through responsible practices that make a difference in a world of suffering.

Moltmannian hope performs a theological response to doctrines that do not seem to fit with today’s constructions of identity and agency, contemporary sensibilities about the character of God, and current life circumstances. The benefits of that response come with losses that might not be recognizable to adherents of Moltmannian hope. Exclusive dependence on Moltmannian hope detaches Christians from a wealth of resources within the broad river of tradition’s doctrines of hope and deprives Christians of a theological hope sturdy enough to survive through and beyond the devastation and death of the world we know. Chapter 2 names some of the costs incurred by Moltmannian hope’s dismissal of apparently irrelevant doctrines; these losses call for a reconsideration of resources for hope now discounted and forgotten.
2. The Costs of a Moltmannian Theological Hope

The legacy of Moltmann’s theological hope abides as a contemporary doctrine, loosely articulated and broadly accepted. This Moltmannian theology of hope has been adopted and developed by other theologians and absorbed by non-academic clergy and lay Christians as a general approach to hope. Moltmann charges some long established Christian doctrines with error and inappliciability for today’s church and world. Those challenges, and Moltmann’s alternatives, now serve as the foundation for Moltmannian hope and its practices. This hope reflects Moltmann’s work, at least indirectly, while not necessarily tied to the particulars of his theological scholarship. When this Moltmannian doctrine constitutes the exclusive resource for theological hope, the costs are great.

Moltmann’s theology of hope offers Christians fresh access to theological hope, timely reconsiderations of hope in the midst of suffering, and an eschatology that embraces the future new creation of this world. Moltmannian hope funds and supports ecclesial commitments to inclusivity, care for the suffering, care for the environment, resistance to broken structures of the world, and active reconstructions of social structures. Moltmannian eschatological hope inspires efforts to rescue and sustain this world in preparation for God’s transforming arrival. This hope frees people from the constraints of closed hierarchical instutions and systems, it releases people from the distractions of apocalyptic and other-worldly end-times speculation, and it authorizes detachment from doctrine that seems inappropriate for today. It affirms a priority of action over theory, coordinates well with secular social activism, and provides an appealing and relevant way to make
sense of eschatological hope in today’s world. Moltmannian eschatological hope
draws the life of the resurrection and the trinitarian God into the future version of
the known world.

At the same time, an exclusive embrace of Moltmannian hope renders many
classical theological resources, the reasons for their dismissal, and possible rebuttals
to dismissal—largely invisible. Almost fifty years into the era of Moltmann-
influenced hope, many have largely lost track of those aspects of hope that
Moltmann drops to make room for his construction of a relevant hope for the post-
Auschwitz twentieth century. Moltmann’s negative appraisals of church teachings
about hope are now so ideologically established a reconsideration of his critiques
seems unnecessary. And yet, his critiques do not all stand up to examiniation. His
readings of doctrine are at times uncharitable, innattentive to systematic theological
context, and narrowed by his modern and ecclesial investments.¹ When Moltmann’s
challenges to conflicting streams of tradition are accepted and promoted uncritically,
the cost to theological hope is great and not necessary. Responses to Moltmann’s
challenges and Moltmannian hope’s presuppositions abound within Christian
tradition and doctrine; but those responses (and potential constructive theological
work in relation to those responses) are not accessible as resources if they are not
acknowledged or consulted.

¹ I readily confess to the anglo-catholic sensibilities which shape my own theology
and ecclesiology; and I make no claims to have escaped modernity. Moltmannian
theologians could certainly charge that my position is similarly narrowed and
unappreciative of free church priorities. The ensuing discussion would be lively, and
possibly productive.
Methodologically, Moltmann challenges and leaves behind the theological positions with which he disagrees, without attending to the possible benefits to sustaining connection in difference. All Christian theologians interpret and reconstruct previous doctrine, to lesser and greater degree, in relation to present circumstances. No theologian can address all topics at once; selectivity is part of theological study. Many theologians work to sustain narratable connections between their constructive work and pre-existing doctrine, demonstrating doctrinal coherence, even in difference. Moltmann does not invest his efforts in doctrinal continuity in difference. Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson comment that

By his own confession Moltmann intends his theology to be “biblically founded, eschatologically oriented, and politically responsible.” However his methodology is somewhat more complex. In fact, there is reason to doubt whether he has a coherent theological method in any traditional sense. This lack of systematic approach arises partly from his lack of interest in correct doctrine. “I am not so concerned with pure theory but with practical theory.” He sees the task of theology not so much as to provide an interpretation of the world as to transform it in the light of hope for its ultimate transformation by God. 2

The question at hand is not about the definition of “correct” or Moltmann’s proposed split between “pure theory and practical theory,” although there is much to be said about both topics. Rather, by declining to consider the possible value of the doctrine he identifies as incorrect, and by disregarding the possible value of narrating the continuity/discontinuity with that doctrine, Moltmann encourages those who

2 Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, 20th Century Theology: God and the World In a Transitional Age. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 175. Grenz and Olson add to their observation about Moltman’s method that Moltmann’s disinterest in systematic methodology relates to his attention to the limitations of human knowledge before the arrival of the Kingdom of God (175-76). I would argue that Moltmann’s account of limited knowledge stands in tension with his confidence that God’s new creation will come here, when this world is transformed by God’s presence.
like the content of his arguments to accept the method. Thus, the first cost of a Moltmannian theology of hope is the interest in making connections with previous and differing claims taught and received by vast numbers of the church across time and geography. Other costs include: a transcendent God, ideologial self-criticism, fluency in the native grammar of speech about God, the fully human and fully divine natures of Jesus Christ, hermeneutical accountability, a theocentric anthropology, the imitation of Christ through servant discipleship, and the evangelical witness of reconciliation.

In a time when hope is difficult to sustain and when Christians find it difficult to discern distinctly Christian theological narratives of hope, renewed access to forgotten resources for theological hope might enrich ecclesial offerings of hope and encourage new engagements with hope. This chapter offers a brief selection of what is lost when Moltmannian hope becomes commonplace and normative and hides from view the theological responses to and that conflict with. Chapter Three will examine in more detail prospects for reclaiming a portion of classical theological hope. Chapter Four will explore possible contributions to theological hope from discourses not conventionally consulted.

2.1 The God of Hope

2.1.1 Lost: Divine Impassibility

Moltmannian hope claims that God is compassionate and near, changeable, and actively sharing in human suffering. The cost of this claim is the loss of a grammar of language about God based the ways that God is not like creation. Moltmannian theological hope loses the perfection of God, including God’s perfect
compassion, and the undauntability of God in the face of the worst disasters, devastation, and despair.

Moltman’s hope requires divine passibility. Moltmannian hope presupposes that God’s identity is determined by God’s adoption of suffering into God’s self. For many, the God of hope needs to be “a God I can believe in,” God who shares with humans, at some level, love, responsiveness, feelings, and experiences. Moltmannian hope rejects Christianity’s classical grammar and narrative of speech about God, the real difference between creator and creation, the analogy of being, and Christ’s two natures.

Moltmannian hope (which includes some partial overlaps with the hopes of Open Theism and Process Theology) grows from and remains rooted in the passibility of God. Moltmann’s personal discovery of hope comes through a revelation of God’s suffering presence with him, through Jesus Christ. Moltmannian hope assumes that only a passible and changeable God is relevant. It believes that God shares human suffering in loving compassion and in response to human need and prayer. This hope assumes that God must be capable of changing emotions and actions in order to be a caring, comforting, God; hope depends on a God who experiences what we experience and brings relief from those sometimes overwhelming experiences. This hope expects God to be in a non-hierarchical relation to creation; the fulfillment of hopes involves God and human collaboration, and God needs creation for ultimate, eschatological fulfillment.

Moltmannian hope is so determined by belief in a changeable and passible God, that it categorically dismisses divine impassibility and immutability,
understanding them to present a distant, unsympathetic, cold, God who cannot offer hope to creation. The dismissal of a classical grammar of God makes possible the suffering God of Moltmannian hope, the God that seems so necessary to many Christians.

A number of social and historical factors through the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the West contributed to the need for a directly responsive and personally involved God. The World Wars, the horrors of the Shoah, the Depression, and the post war uncertainties left Christians, Jews, and atheists wondering how God could allow so much suffering, death, and despair. A God who did not prevent or relieve the pain and death of so many millions did not seem to be a God of hope. Increasing doubt in the capacity of God to address the world’s evil accompanied increasing confidence in the capacity of (some worthy) humans to attain prosperity and comfort. National spirit during the World Wars, the Cold War, the Korean War, the police action in Vietnam, and various threats of war, provided the most intense feelings of hope. The aftermath of war and the decline of economic prospects decreased hope. Throughout, the terms of hope shifted from eternal life with God to living conditions here and now, especially those conditions produced by hardworking, upstanding U. S. citizens. It became increasingly difficult for Christians to feel a connection with the God of heaven, unchanged by time and disaster; and a companion God who understands and reacts to pressing, this-worldly events became more appealing.

To be sure, eschatological hope apart from this world has continued in some streams of Christianity. Mainstream, middle to upperclass, white Christians have
tended to associate enthusiastic hopes in an otherworldly heaven with sectarian, less educated, ethnically and racially other Christians. When oppressed peoples use biblical themes of God’s rescue and saving intervention to hope for heavenly rescue, liberal Christians grant them that hope, with the assumption that improved worldly circumstances would allow for more hope in the possibilities for justice in this world.

When Moltmann discovers and produces a future-determined reconstitution of eschatological hope that affirms both mainstream Christian concerns with the centrality of this life and a God who accompanies and shares in that life, his theology of hope meets with ready appreciation. Moltmann retains, in his work, a God who is constant in love and ultimately undaunted by death; and Moltmann’s God opens a future of possibilities that exceed what human effort could produce. However, the suffering of God has been the most popular theme of Moltmann’s work, and the nuances of his argument do not always carry over into Moltmannian hope.

One of the ways that Moltmannian hope frequently describes the God of hope is “not like the God of Aquinas.” Most adherents of Moltmannian hope assume that the other sort of hope, the one that Moltmann and contemporary sensibilities have rejected, depends on an unfeeling God who does not care about creation. This God is equated with the God that Thomas Aquinas writes about. Aquinas’s work on the attributes of God and the grammar of human speech about God articulate the character of the God of hope common to a large stream of theology throughout the life of the church, a stream that Moltmann calls “classical theism.” Aquinas situates

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his account of what can be said of God and how in relation to scripture and a wealth of Christian theologians up to his day, in the thirteenth century. Interpretations of Aquinas’s work and of his authority in relation to church doctrine vary, even among those ecclesial families of the church who claim him as a doctor of the church. Contemporary advocates of a markedly different understanding of and grammar for speaking of God often refer to Aquinas’s presentation of God as the best articulation of what they object to. Here, I will briefly note the grammar that Aquinas presents as part of a grammar for how to speak and not speak of God, in order to show some of what is lost when this grammar is dismissed. A more in-depth discussion of Aquinas on God and hope follows in Chapter 3.

This grammar of God appears in Aquinas’s *Summa Theologica*, Part 1, Questions 3 through 11, in the midst of the first 43 questions about the essence of God and the nature of the Trinity. Aquinas presents six words that point toward God by starting with what we know about ourselves. These words are often referred to as “attributes,” but it is important to clarify that these are not attributes that God could add or subtract, but the markers of a grammar that guides speaking about God. The grammar could also be described as an apophatic language, not a practice of silence before God, but an acknowledgment of what God is not. Although God is not limited by sequential order, the six are listed in an order that demonstrates how the words work together. The first is simplicity: God is not made up of various parts. The second is perfection; God’s simplicity is not a lack of complexity or multiplicity, but the whole of perfect goodness. God’s simplicity and perfection not in limited in size or breadth or extent, because of, thirdly, God’s infinity. Fourthly, God’s infinity,
perfection, and simplicity, do not change, cannot be depleted or added to; God’s
immutability and impassibility affirm that — in simplicity, perfection, and infinity —
God neither needs more nor experiences loss. Fifthly, God’s simplicity, perfection,
infinity, immutability and impassibility are not bound to a particular time or place, as
described by God’s eternity. And, lastly, God’s unity affirms that God’s attributes are
inseparable. God’s oneness is completely perfect, limitless and endless, unchanging
and unmoveable. Hope for eternal life in the company of this God is hope in a life so
complete and limitless that nothing created could provide it and no creature could
imagine it.

Moltmannian hope receives these attributes without their shape as a grammar
and without their unity. Moltmannian hope understands these attributes in relation
to modern and anthropocentric accounts of the good. Thus, simplicity seems less
than complexity; perfection seems to cut off possible growth and improvement;
infinity seems to downplay particularity; immutability and impassibility seem to
separate God from human change and feelings; and eternity seems to downplay the
importance of the historical here and now. Immutability and impassibility cause
those formed by Moltmannian hope the most offense. These are frequently referred
to without the other five, and identified under the umbrella of impassibility, the
correction to which is passibility.

Hope that depends on a passible God and rejects Aquinas’s six attributes loses
contact with a traditional grammar for God without establishing an alternative
grammar to use in its place. Descriptions of God abound, of course, but the primacy
of passibility and the inattention to the other five attributes have not yet led to a
comparable guide to reasoned speech about God. The loss of fluency in the grammar of attributes makes communication between that grammar and different accounts of God all the more challenging. Translation without overlap is challenging.

Eschatological hope that is defined by divine passibility trades divine companionship for the possibility of hope in a life with God that is undeterred, undiminished, and undercut by the crises, failures, disasters, and sins of this world. If God is subject to suffering, God is not perfect, and hope must depend on an imperfect God. If God changes in response to creation, then God is neither perfect nor simple, God cannot be infinite or eternal, and unity is impossible as well, since the substance of unity is variable and inconstant. Moltmannian hope of a possible God displaces the sovereignty of the Creator God with a God like us, and therefore with an eschatological end of our own making.

Theologians who favor the impassibility of God often do not so much dismiss divine passibility as cast it within the attribute of impassibility. Nancy Bedford notes that that Moltmann resists this account, claiming instead the primacy of God’s passion. She explains that the Christian tradition has struggled with various ways to reconcile the impassibility of God understood as a safeguard of God’s transcendence and “wholly other” character, and the fact of God’s necessary involvement in the passion of the Son, in order to safeguard the soteriological dimension of the cross. This led to formulations such as the ‘suffering of the impassible God.’ Moltmann believes that this sort of paradoxical formulation concedes too much to natural theology, particularly because in his view the more weight given to the axiom of God’s impassibility, the weaker becomes the ability to identify God with the Passion of Christ. This fundamentally Trinitarian rationale (that is, the conviction that in the cross “God was in Christ reconciling the world into Godself”) is what pushes Moltmann to recast the “axiom of impassibility” (Apathieaxiom) into the “axiom
of God’s passion” (*Axiom des leidenschaftlichen Gottes*), in the double sense of “suffering” (*Leiden*) and of “ardent love” (*Leidenschaft*).⁴

These two divine attributes of suffering and love do not suggest paradox, but provide Moltmann with a double response to impassibility: God cannot love without suffering; suffering expresses God’s love. The resulting Moltmannian theology of hope embraces these tenets and loses the possibility that the God of hope suffers in love without diminishing Godself in simplicity, perfection, infinity, impassibility, eternity, and unity. Hope in God’s perfect compassion fades as hope in God’s contingent suffering becomes the single, established truth.

The best known proclamation of God’s suffering comes from Bonhoeffer, written while he was in prison. His phrase, “only the suffering God can help,” has become the definitive marker of Moltmannian hope, broadly understood as: there is no hope in God who does not suffer; God suffers and therefore God is worthy of our hope. Bonhoeffer presents this claim with the specification that it is Jesus who is suffering, but both he and Moltmann understand God to be participating wholly in the passion, in abandoning and being abandoned on the cross, and in weakness. Moltmann underscores Bonhoeffer’s phrase: “A God who by reason of his essence cannot suffer, cannot suffer with us either, or even feel sympathy. The *Deus impassibilis* is a God without a heart and without compassion, a cold heavenly power.”⁵

Moltmannian hope accepts as its foundation that the God of hope must suffer, that hope depends on the suffering of God. In the process, hope provided by a God who

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⁵ Moltmann, *End*, 70.
is compassionate and greater than the limitations of suffering and death, is set aside as woefully inadequate.

### 2.1.2 Lost: Jesus Christ the Perfect Hope

Moltmannian hope relies on Christ to bring God to suffer with humanity, to affirm that God’s promises will be fulfilled in the coming future, and to open the door to that future. Moltmannian Christology sets aside the two natures of Jesus Christ and downplays the efficacy of Christ’s death and resurrection. Christ is no longer the hope, but the affirmation of God’s promises, extended into the future.

Moltmann’s work on the Trinity has helped stir up a renewed attention to trinitarian theology in the last few decades. His particular contributions present the Trinity as an open set of relations, into which creation will be drawn. Moltmannian eschatological hope thus looks toward God’s indwelling of creation and creation’s participation the perichoretical relations of the Trinity itself. In the meantime, the Trinity longs for its completion through the inclusion of creation in its multiple and unified identity. The God of this Trinity shares in the human condition directly; Jesus’ role on the cross is to bring God to human suffering, and Jesus’ resurrection marks the resurrection of all to come.

Moltmann’s trinitarian theology presents a social Trinity that directly engages with creation. God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit share all, and Jesus’ suffering and death are trinitarian experiences. Moltmann declines a Christology of two natures, wherein Jesus Christ is fully human and fully divine and suffers as fully human and remains fully divine even as the incarnation of God. Instead, Moltmann prioritizes God the Father (while claiming non-hierarchical trinitarian relations) and places
shared human suffering chiefly in the person of God. Richard Bauckham observes that, “[e]schewing two-natures Christology in favour of Jesus’ being-in-relation and being-in-history, Moltmann seems to see Jesus as a human being whose relationship to the Father in the Spirit makes him the unique Son of God.” Moltmann is more comfortable with dialectic than with paradoxes, which helps explain his rejection of a two-natured Christ. He narrates the two-natures Christology as a ramification of the problematic influence of Hellenistic philosophy on Christianity that separates an inaccessible God from the incarnate God. He acknowledges that early church liturgy did attend to the passion and the cross,

but theological reflection was not in a position to identify God himself with the suffering and the death of Jesus. As a result of this, traditional christology came very near to docetism, according to which Jesus only appeared to suffer and only appeared to die abandoned by God: this did not happen in reality. The intellectual bar to this came from the philosophical concept of God, according which God’s being is incorruptible, unchangeable, indivisible, incapable of suffering and immortal; human nature, on the other hand, is transitory, changeable, divisible, capable of suffering and mortal. The doctrine of the two natures in Christ began from this fundamental distinction, in order to be able to conceive of the personal union of the two natures in Christ in light of this difference.

Moltmann traces attempts to resolve this challenge through history and their failings. His own resolution establishes the passion as primarily a divine event and Trinity as the agent and participant in the cross.

If the cross of Jesus is understood as a divine event, i.e. as an event between Jesus and his God and Father, it is necessary to speak in trinitarian terms of the Son and the Father and the Spirit. In that case the doctrine of the Trinity is no longer an exorbitant and impractical speculation about God, but is

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nothing other than a shorter version of the passion narrative of Christ in its significance for the eschatological freedom of faith and the life of oppressed nature.  

Salvation requires the complete absorption of Jesus’ suffering, which is the suffering of all creation, into God, as the content of the Trinity. “Only if all diaster, forsakenness by God, absolute death, the infinite curse of damnation and sinking into nothingness is in God himself, is community with this God eternal salvation, infinite joy, indestructible election and divine life.”

Moltmann’s narrative of the salvific trinitarian passion divinizes Jesus’ suffering and death and defers Christ’s role in redemption to the future fulfillment of God’s promises. The key players become the suffering God and the human individual who is abandoned and unloved. “[I]f the believer experiences his freedom and the new possibility of his life in the fact that the love of God reaches him, the loveless and the unloved, in the cross of Christ, what must be the thoughts of a theology which corresponds to this love?” Moltmann’s answer involves the love of God who draws the individual into God’s inner life, through the cross of Christ.

He is in fact taken up into the inner life of God, if in the cross of Christ he experiences the love of God for the godless, the enemies, in so far as the history of Christ is the inner life of God himself. In that case, if he lives in this love, he lives in God and God in him. If he lives in this freedom, he lives in God and God in him. If one conceives of the Trinity as an event of love in the suffering and the death of Jesus—and that is something which faith must do — then the Trinity is no self-contained group in heaven, but an eschatological process open for men on earth, which stems from the cross of Christ. By the secular cross on Golgotha, understood as open vulnerability and as the love of God for the loveless and unloved, dehumanized men, God’s

8 Moltmann, *Crucified*, 246.
9 Moltmann, *Crucified*, 246.
being and God’s life is open to true man.\footnote{Moltmann, \textit{Crucified}, 249.}

Moltmann opens the Trinity to include creation in salvation, but he also narrows the Trinity by rendering the humanity of Jesus and the efficacy of Christ’s salvation secondary to the assumption of suffering into God’s experience. In Moltmann’s account, the end of hope for humanity is full participation in the Trinity. God has taken on human suffering in order to bring humans into fellowship with God. Jesus Christ serves that end. This presentation of salvation through God’s suffering to unity with the Trinity loses touch with hope that looks to Jesus Christ as the model of human unity with God. Moltmann’s theology of hope emphasizes God’s suffering and God’s need for humanity to join the Trinity, at the expense of a Christology that sees the fulfillment of humanity in the incarnation. Kathryn Tanner posits that God becomes human in Christ, who is the manifestation of the perfect relationship of humans with God. “Jesus is the one in whom God’s relationship with us attains perfection.”\footnote{Kathryn Tanner, \textit{Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity} (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 9.} Moltmannian hope relies on God to assume the experience of humanity; the Christology Tanner describes offers hope in the perfection of humanity. Eschatological hope thus looks to fulfillment of humans as humans, rather than as members of the divine Trinity.

By way of this perfected humanity in union with God, God’s gifts are distributed to us—we are saved—just to the extent that we are one with Christ in faith and love; unity with Christ the gift-giver is the means of our perfection as human beings, just as the union of humanity and divinity in Christ was the means of his perfect humanity. United with Christ, we are thereby emboldened as ministers of God’s beneficence to the world, aligning ourselves with, entering into communion
with, those in need as God in Christ was for us in our need and as Christ was a man for others, especially those in need.  

Christ is the demonstration of humanity in perfect relationship with God, and Christ's death and resurrection establishes that perfection for humanity, as already accomplished and not yet completed. When God’s changing identity in suffering is not the focus of hope, then Christ’s identity comes into focus as the end of human hope.

Tanner counters Moltmann’s assumption that God’s experience of Jesus’ experience of abandonment by God is the determinative event of salvation, with the claim that Jesus’ oneness with God is never broken, even by death. Through the divine perfection of humanity which is Jesus Christ, humanity drawn into constant and eternal connection with God, through all suffering and death and beyond.

“United with Christ, we too are inseparable from God.” Nothing can separate us from the love of God. Rom 8:38. Jesus’ human life funds hope that full humanity, life with God, is possible. Jesus’ death and resurrection accomplish that possibility, and hope looks toward the completion of that accomplished human life. Tanner writes:

The perfect correspondence of identity that is Christ’s life remains our hope. Already achieved by Christ, who as the very same one is both the Son giving and the human being receiving, we aim toward this unity or identity by efforts, never completed in this life, to eradicate sin and match the life intended for us by Christ’s assumption of us. Not simply a future yet to be for

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13 Tanner, Jesus, 9.

14 Tanner, Jesus, 15.

15 Tanner, Jesus, 59.

16 Tanner, Jesus, 107.
us and not simply the past achieved by Christ but not by ourselves, our future is present in us as Christ shapes us in accordance with himself.\footnote{Tanner, \textit{Jesus}, 59.}

Moltmannian hope loses the perfection and efficacy of Christ’s incarnation, life, death, and resurrection, and thus loses Jesus Christ as the anchor of hope, the priest and sacrifice who leads the hopeful through the veil to God’s heavenly kingdom. Moltmannian hope bypasses the already/not yet identity of the ecclesial body of the two-natured Christ, and looks instead to God’s shared experience with humanity and God’s dependence on humanity for God’s own completion. In these circumstances, human hope loses any anchor but its own limited resources.

In order to sustain the primacy of God’s suffering over the two-natured Christ who suffers as human and is fully divine as well, Moltmann attributes to the two-nature doctrine the dualism it was designed to avoid.\footnote{Daniel Castelo, \textit{The Apathetic God: Exploring the Contemporary Relevance of Divine Impassibility} (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), 119-120.} Moltmann dismisses out of hand any positive possibilities of Chalcedon’s engagement with the identity of Christ. He further rejects any Christology that does not accept the primacy of the suffering of God.\footnote{Castelo, \textit{Apathetic}, 120.} In so doing, Moltmann separates himself and his theology of hope from any connection with the many strands Christian theology which differ with him. His hope, and subsequently, Moltmannian hope, lose fluency in the Christological grammar that is not defined by the suffering of God. Castelo finds this singlemindedness of Moltmannian doctrine a lost opportunity for a closer conversation and sharing of wisdom with differing and alternative accounts.
Quite simply, the theological implications stemming from the identity of the one called Jesus of Nazareth are absent from Moltmann’s program as it is articulated in his speculative doctrine of God; an account of the incarnation that would have created greater coherence and exchange between divinity and humanity within Christ’s person is sorely missing in his project. In this instance, as in others, Moltmann has lost an opportunity to claim and be claimed by the tradition with its original parameters and warrants.\(^\text{20}\)

Hope that draws its strength from an emphasis on God and the Trinity, could be strengthened further with increased attention to Jesus Christ, beyond what he provides to God.

Moltmannian hope that hinges on God’s suffering has difficulty making sense of scriptural claims about Jesus Christ and the salvific efficacy of his death and resurrection. Christ’s death and resurrection stand as promissary notes to the redemption to come, the redemption that God, in passibility, is bringing. Thus theological hope loses the challenge and assurance of passages such as Paul’s words to the Romans about redemption through Christ Jesus:

\begin{quote}
But now, irrespective of law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. (3:21-25a)
\end{quote}

Similarly, Paul reminds the Ephesians that Christ’s gifts of prophecy and teaching are intended to bring the body of Christ to its true identity in Christ, “until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (3:10-13). The Letter to the Hebrews names hope in Jesus Christ, who is pioneer, mediator, high priest and sacrifice, who

\(^{20}\) Castelo, *Apathetic*, 120.
leads us into the sanctuary and through the curtain which is also his flesh (10:19-22), through judgment, to the throne of God. The hope of Hebrews is “a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul,” that follows where Christ leads the way (6:19).

### 2.1.3 Lost: Coherent Hermeneutics

Moltmannian hope supports its characterization of God with an incoherent hermeneutical practice of selective literalism. The God of Moltmannian hope is affective, loving, sometimes moved to anger and disappointment with creation, but primarily responsive, compassionate, and restorative. This characterization of God comes from specific biblical passages, interpreted literally. Of course, no biblical literalism is consistently literal; readers always need to make the same sorts of discernments they make every day with spoken and non-spoken interactions. Concurrently, no biblical interpretation avoids some degree of plain-sense assessment. Moltmannian readers of scripture, like most other readers, make sense of what they read through combinations of plain sense, metaphor, allegory, community formation, and pre-existing expectations. Moltmannian readers, like most other readers, claim the authority of their interpretations based on “what the text says.” As noted in the previous chapter, when Barbara Rossing argues for the authority of her interpretation of Revelation, in correction of Rapture eschatology’s interpretation, she claims that, “It’s all there in the Bible. I’m not making it up.” She does not, however, offer an explanation for the fact that her opponents authorize their interpretation the same way. An academic scholar’s position does not, in and of itself, 

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determine the soundness of exegesis; and a scholar who attempts to cancel out one literalism with another reflects an ill-considered hermeneutics.

Moltmannian hope follows Moltmann’s appreciation of those Old Testament passages that speak of God in anthropomorphic terms, acting and responding to the people of God; and it takes these indications of God’s character to mean that God feels, changes, emotes, and is moved.22 Jesus’ words on the cross seem to indicate that Jesus’s expression of godforsakenness means that Jesus Christ, fully divine, and God, and the whole of the Trinity, are godforsaken. Biblical passages that describe God bringing a new creation to this earth, evince literal interpretations. At the same time, biblical passages that suggest God’s unmoveable covenantal constancy, God’s awful judgement, and God’s almighty holiness carry less literal weight for a Moltmannian theology of hope; and descriptions of the destruction of the world should be taken entirely metaphorically. Theological hope based exclusively on this Moltmannian interpretation of the character of God lacks coherence and integrity.

Moltmann began his theological work in the midst of a firmly established historical critical engagement with scripture. His writing career coincides with the explosion of biblical interpretation methods: from textual, form, redaction, and literary criticism to structural, narrative, feminist, and postmodern criticism; but he does not claim involvement in or debt to any particular method. In keeping with a liberal discomfort with conservative Christian literal interpretations of some biblical passages, particularly about law, gender, final judgment, and eschatology, Moltmann

22 Adherents to Moltmannian hope offer varying accounts of God’s passibility; for some, God is moved in response to creation, and for others, God causes Godself to be moved.
exercises theological discernment to claim the real meaning of texts in support of his
theology of hope. He adopts (without claiming) a literalist translation of many
passages of the Old Testament that use anthropomorphic descriptions of God’s
feelings and actions in time, and in responsive relationship with God's people; and he
understands God in the Gospels to take on human suffering. Moltmann argues that
the passionate and compassionate God feels the pain of a father abandoning his son
on the cross, feels the pain of the son abandoned by his father, and then feels the
suffering of humanity as well.

Moltmannian hope that follows Moltmann’s hermeneutics and ties itself to
his particular interpretation of the character of God retains hope in a largely
anthropomorphic image of a God of love, who is frustrated, irritated, challenged,
suffers with and is comforted by the people God loves. Even with the caveat that
God's feelings are not felt as precisely human feelings are, this literal account of
God's anger and delight gives most people the sense that God is moved by feelings
the way people are and that God is buffeted by emotions the way people are.23

Moltmannian hope appreciates scriptural presentations of God that describe
God as loving, kind, merciful, fair, and gentle. This hope rejects understandings of
God as sovereign and almighty, preferring instead God who shares power and
weakness with humanity. John Sanders is an Openness theologian, strongly
influenced by Moltmann. He advocates a God who takes risks, who exposes Godself
to vulnerability for the sake a particular kind of give-and-take relationship with
humans. Sanders describes

argues against impassibility as Greek and unbiblical.
a personal God who enters into genuine give-and-take relations with his creatures. Neither an impersonal deity nor a personal deity who meticulously controls every event takes risk. The portrait of God developed here is one according to which God sovereignly wills to have human persons become collaborators with him in achieving the divine project of mutual relations of love. Such an understanding of the divine-human relationship may be called “relational theism.” By this I mean any model of the divine-human relationship that includes genuine give-and-take relations between God and humans such that there is a receptivity and a degree of contingency in God. In give-and-take relationships God receives and does not merely give.24

He argues that we learn about what God is like and how to speak of God through metaphorical and anthropomorphic language of the Bible.25 Sanders objects to the metaphorical understanding of God as sovereign (impassible and immutable), because a God “never responds to us or does anything because of our prayers because this would imply contingency in God.”26 In support of his position, Sanders cites James’ exhortations to submit to God, rather than to internal conflicts and external disputes: “You do not have, because you do not ask” (4:2). According to Sanders, this passage makes no sense within a model of the sovereign God who does not listen and change course in response to prayers: “if the God of specific sovereignty wanted you to have it, then he would ensure that you asked for it.”27 James’ next sentence could be understood as clarifying the previous: “You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures” (4:3). However, Sanders reads that to mean that “we sometimes petition God from wrong motives


25 Sanders, God Who Risks, 15.

26 Sanders, God Who Risks, 270.

27 Sanders, God Who Risks, 271.
and so we do not receive,” 

but his primary sense of God remains: God listens, responds, and changes in response to prayers. This interpretation supports Sanders’ critique of the “no-risk model of sovereignty” in which “there is no place for imprecatory prayer.”

Sanders sees different interpretations of scriptural passages about God in terms of different models of God: the best model affords the best interpretation, and scripture supports the best model. Sanders’ hermeneutical approach presents a portrait of God similar to the God of Moltmannian hope, and Sanders provides a more explicit narrative of his method of interpretation. However, while Sanders recognizes different interpretations, he does not accept the possibility that scriptural passages about God may point to divine characteristics and actions through radically different metaphors.

Without a framework, or a grammar, for making sense of scriptural assertions about God and God’s actions, Moltmannian hope relies on an unarticulated and unaccountable determination of what scripture “really means.” The authority of the Moltmannian God of hope rests on an idiosyncratic hermeneutics determined more by ideology and preference than by a narratable connection with the rest of scripture and the rest of scriptural interpretation. Accordingly, hope based on biblical images and stories of God’s sovereignty is dismissed in favor of hope based on a compassionate, responsive, inclusive God, more like the personal and political sensibilities of the interpreter. I am not, here, criticizing the particularities of

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hermeneutical situatedness. The problem is rather that the God of hope available through Moltmannian hermeneutics discounts or deletes all images and interpretations of God that do not support the preferred presentation; and, those people who have found hope in the discarded passages are discounted along as well. A hermeneutics without a grammar for making sense of apparently conflicting scriptural assertions about God makes no room for the memory of communities who have adopted scriptural passages and claimed them as own, through interpretations specific to their immediate crises — interpretations that may not be the primary understanding of the same text in different circumstances and for different communities.

For example, Moltmann cannot make sense of Matthew’s description of the last judgment. The idea that the Son of Man would send some people to eternal punishment and others to eternal life does not fit his theology of hope, in which the coming future brings new creation to humanity without punitive judgment; so he cannot accept the plain sense. He cannot discern a metaphorical sense for this separation, either. As a result, Moltmann downplays the sheep and goats image and Jesus’ pronouncement of separation, in favor of the exhortation to care for the needy, in whom Christ is present.

Practitioners of Moltmannian hope share with Moltmann the desire to cut this passage and other similarly incomprehensible passages from their scriptural canon. The idea of a punitive and divisive judgment at the end of time contradicts both hope for the inclusion of all in the new creation and hope that expects God to be

more gentle and merciful than punitive. I recently heard an Episcopal preacher set aside the Gospel reading from Matthew 24, by explaining to the congregation that it did not belong with the truths about the God he knows. He was unhappy with the images of God gleaning the people from the fields, entering homes like a thief in the night, causing weeping and gnashing of teeth. He pronounced: “This is not a God I can believe in.” He continued with a description of the God he can accept, who is gentler, more inclusive, less judgmental. The preacher who detached the Gospel reading from his scriptural canon—and encouraged the congregation to do so as well—relinquished some hope along with the verses. A passage that seems inappropriate today might seem a welcome resource in radically changed circumstances. God's constant presence continues to provide hope regardless of the limits of human perception and imagination.

A shared theological grammar of God and for eschatological hope provides Christians with framework for persevering through scriptural passages and passages of life that are not what we think we can believe in. If the lectionary offers an image of God that seems ill suited for the congregation’s present circumstances, a theological grammar can give guidelines for how to sit with what seems untenable. The God who judges is the same God who selects a chosen people, sustains a covenant with those people, and redeems those same people with God's own son. God’s ways are unfathomable and constant, knowable (to the best of our ability) through the manifestation of God in Christ. A grammar that can hold the life and death of Jesus Christ together with senseless suffering and death also holds open a chance for hope that is not yet perceptible.
2.2 Hope

The costs of Moltmannian hope: Primary focus on this world and its continuity limits eschatological hope to that which can be imagined now, in present earthly circumstances. Hope in a future new creation lodged in this world (with divine improvements), deprives those in utmost agony and facing certain death of hope for the release and relief that this world cannot give.

2.2.1 Lost: Heaven

The Moltmannian hope in a world saved and created anew by God limits hope that reaches beyond the life and death of this world and all that we know. Moltmannian hope rejects both an end-time devastation of this world and a heavenly life apart from this world. Its eschatology assumes a continuity between this world and the next determined more by the potential goods of this creation than by God’s constant, unwavering, relationship with God’s creation. This hope anticipates God’s judgment as merciful without destruction or rejection and God’s new creation as a universal and inclusive re-creation of that which already is. Moltmannian hope counters a restoration view of eschatology with a future-based eschatology, arguing that God promises and will bring a new creation that preserves, protects, and reconfigures what we know now into a better version of what we know now. This reconfiguration of Christian hope turns away from misdirected creation-nostalgia and heavenly escapism; in the process, hope for a kingdom of God beyond the limits of human imagination is lost, as is hope for a kingdom prepared by God in methods beyond our imagination. An eschatological future that depends on the material substance of this world, out of which God will fashion a world suitable for God’s
indwelling, limits both God and creation to that which can be projected from current human knowledge.

Moltmann’s writing foreshadows this constraint of hope in the tension he cannot resolve between the open-ended future of Bloch and his own confidence in the universal salvation of the world without any end-time cleansing fire or final judgment of sin. While Moltmann does not explain his engagement with this conflict, his work leans increasingly toward the assurance of a recognizable future, in which God comes to join world and the Trinity opens up to include creation in its divine perichoresis. The legacy of this tension plays out in a Moltmannian hope that prioritizes the future divine embrace of all creation to the extent that the depths and breadth of God’s kingdom to come can be fit into the creation — albeit new and improved — of human imaginative construction. Bloch’s startling and unsettling open future of infinite potentialities that excited Moltmann in his early work loses its ominous possibilities in favor of assured universal conservation. Moltmann still sustains some sense that God’s future — which is the future of creation — cannot be fully grasped by humans now; but Moltmannian hope has settled firmly into the conviction that a God worth paying attention to will provide an end that encompasses and perpetuates the life we know, albeit with some significant improvements. The eschatological promised land foretold and foretasted by the people of God loses its divine design in favor of a human design, to be completed by God.

The timing of God’s coming remains unknown, but it is crucial that people work now to improve physical circumstances, social structures, and environmental
conditions so that God has sufficient material to work with when God comes. This hope criticizes those who expect God to wipe the creation slate clean through annihilation or a cosmic battle of good and evil, because God would not destroy that which God has created. It dismisses the eschatological anticipation that some will be rescued from this life before the rest are purified in divine judgment, because God rescues all of creation, without any exclusion or final judgment. And, it downplays eschatological other-worldly visions, because God needs people to be responsible caretakers of this world instead of irresponsible pie-in-the-sky dreamers who neglect the needs of the world around them. While this Moltmannian hope in a world saved and created anew appeals to, motivates, and reassures those primarily invested in practical and accessible hope, it dismisses an eschatological hope that reaches beyond this this world and all that we know. Hope that depends on the continuation of what we know displaces hope that depends on God more than our own efforts and imaginations.

As we have seen in Chapter 1, Barbara Rossing fights against eschatological hopes that assume a chronologically imminent end involving the violent destruction of the world. She tries to defuse the appeal of Rapture theology’s end time visions of apocalyptic diaster, cosmic battles between good and evil, and everlasting torment for some and heavenly rescue for others. Her eschatological hope asserts an end characterized more as continuity with familiar understandings of existence, time, and eternity than as an abrupt transition from present perceptions to a reality radically different and unknowable. She interprets Revelation in terms of God’s presence with healed, renewed creation on earth in the coming future. This continuity resonates
with the continuity of being, divine and human, that Moltmann presents: God participates in human suffering so that creation can participate in the open Trinity, and that ultimate trinitarian life will be with creation on earth in a new world that includes and completes the world we know now.

Miroslav Volf illustrates this expectation: Hopes for continuity between the present and future orders are theologically inseparable from the Judeo-Christian belief in the goodness of divine creation (which is a rededication not only of the original but also of the present creation, the reality of evil in it notwithstanding). It makes little sense to affirm the goodness of creation and at the same time expect its eschatological destruction.31

The persistent expectation that God will come to this world, bringing new creation to that which God has created, assumes a continuing future for this world in the face of much apparent evidence to the contrary. A creation-long lifetime of human efforts toward repentance, reconciliation, and recuperation from sin has not reversed brokenness and alienation among humans and between humans and God. A wide variety of efforts by humans to live with and care for the rest of creation has not led to a healthier planet. A broad range of polis constructions and governance has not corrected social disparities or cured humanity’s dedication to violence and war. Ongoing medical advances and discoveries have not stopped illness, aging, or death.

When eschatological hope is so focused on a conceivable future in which God comes to this improved creation, the assurance of God’s forgiving, transforming grace can seem more comfortably certain than does the uncertainty about how God will right the wrongs of this life and establish the just and righteous life effected by

Christ's death and resurrection. Confidence in the inclusive coming kingdom can lead to confidence that humans are capable of preparing themselves and the world for God; eschatological hope then expects a tamer and more domesticated future than much of scripture and the witness of the saints claims. In these ways, Moltmannian hope overestimates human knowledge of and readiness for life eternal with God, while underestimating God's wondrous gift of life “beyond that which we can ask or imagine,” and while downplaying God's awe-ful gift of merciful judgment to prepare creation for that life.

Moltmannian hope has lost touch not only with an unlimited future of God’s design, but also with contemporary human knowledge about the limited future of the world we know. The knowledge to which Moltmannian hope clings is one of familiarity; we know what our lives are like right now, and we hope for a future that includes and perfects the lives we know. However, that on-the-ground focus of hope insufficiently attends to contemporary scientific expectations for life as we know it. Current scientific assessments of global prospects expect an eventual end to the world, solar system, and universe that we rely on for the continuity of this life. As Kathryn Tanner observes, hope in the continuation of this world flies in the face of the world’s knowledge:

The best scientific description of the day leaves little doubt that death is the end towards which our solar system and the universe as a whole move. Our sun will one day exhaust its fuel, annihilating life on this planet. The universe will either collapse onto itself in a fiery conflagration or dissipate away its energy over the course of an infinite expansion. If the scientists are right, the world for which Christians hold out hope, the world they hope to minister to as the agents of divine beneficence, ultimately has no future. Hope for an everlasting and consummate fulfillment of this world, a fulfillment of the world that would imitate the fullness of the triune life through incorporation
into it, seems futile since destruction is our world’s end. Because of its cosmic scope, this last failure of hope would bring with it all the others.\(^\text{32}\)

Tanner notes that Moltmannian hope appears to be undaunted by such predictions, as it claims instead a continuity granted by God greater than “purely natural processes.”\(^\text{33}\) This hope asserts confidence in God to surpass the limitations of material finitude, and at the same time limits God’s surpassing power to the continuity of the known world. Thus, creation depends on God’s grace to continue life by moving the world “without any great interruption to its consummation,”\(^\text{34}\) but that consummation is determined by human constraints on God’s power, imagination, and possibilities.

Advocates of a this-world oriented hope may find it relatively easy to condemn theologies of hope that anticipate global destruction in preparation for eternal life with God; but they may find it more challenging to sustain a world-based hope in the face of the persistent decline of resources on which the desired continuity depends. Gradual global devastation becomes increasingly hard to ignore when its effects begin to reach the affluent north west. Moltmannian eschatological hope has cut its ties with other-worldly visions of heaven and has limited God’s role to human imaginations of a continuous, new, and improved future. This hope falters in the face of a faltering earth.

When a tsunami or earthquake strikes, a hope based on the continuity of creation as we know it dims, even if that continuity is to be provided by the grace of

\(^\text{32}\) Tanner, *Jesus*, 98.

\(^\text{33}\) Tanner, *Jesus*, 99.

\(^\text{34}\) Tanner, *Jesus*, 99.
God in the future. When genocide, oppressive poverty, or widespread illness and starvation persist, despite valiant human efforts to counter them, hope that counts on the present to be the foundation for the future fades. When glaciers melt, species become extinct, forests shrink, and sea life dies, hope based on the preservation of the earth wavers. And, when fuel costs rise, jobs disappear, houses are foreclosed, infrastructures collapse, and clean water cannot be found, hope for our own lives to get better, on our terms, reels.

Moltmannian hope highlights material circumstances, social structures, environmental conditions, and relevance to this world. It downplays hope that looks toward divine possibilities of physicalities and relationships not bound by the limitations and frailties of this world. The latter hope does not fit neatly within the former’s priority of relevance, but Christian eschatology has long included both concerns, despite their apparent contraction. Moltmann’s efforts to resolve theological claims traditionally held in tension and Moltmannian hope’s tendency to attend only to earth-bound hopes lose eschatological hope in life with God that exceeds human imagination.

Moltmannian eschatological hope relies on the future to grant the present an uninterrupted forward continuity. This emphasis on the life we know as the focus of hope and on God’s coming future as the source of hope limits divine and human relationships to a very human-oriented timeline. While Moltmann at times describe a break between this world and the new creation, the predominant image of Moltmannian hope involves the completion of this creation in a future that will meet our trajectory and support some variation of continued direction onward. Thus
eschatological hope is constrained by human imagination and conceptions of time.

Tanner counters:

At the most fundamental level, eternal life is ours now in union with Christ, as in the future. It is therefore not directly associated with the world’s future and not convertible with the idea that the world will always have a future or further time. Here the eschaton cannot be primarily understood as what comes from the future to draw the time of this world ever onward. It is not especially associated with any particular moment of time (past, present or future) and therefore such an understanding of the eschaton has no stake in any reworked, theological account of temporal relations in which a coming future is given primacy over present and past times.35

Moltmannian hope draws on the knowable goods of location, materiality, and time. Hope built on this foundation loses the vision of life grounded in divine possibility and unbound by human experience or imagination.

2.2.2 Lost: Non-Modernity

Moltmann develops his theology of hope from his particular situatedness in Western twentieth and twenty-first century modernity. Moltmannian hope continues to rely on the presuppositions, conceptual structures, and imaginary of that specific ideology. Consequently, hope that draws on ideologies that precede, counter, or develop apart from that situatedness falls to the wayside and is difficult to recognize.

In Moltmann’s earliest work, he sets out to establish connections between secular modernity and the contemporary church. He tries to legitimize each one to the other, so that theological hope can be relevant and recognizable in the twentieth century. In his later work, he presents his theology as more resistant to and critical of modernity, while continuing to sustain a hope that addresses the current circumstances of Christianity. Throughout his theology of hope, Moltmann exhibits a

35 Tanner, Jesus, 111.
quintessentially modern project, which is completely understandable for a theologian of the late twentieth century (and beyond), located in Germany and the United States. However, Moltmannian hope depends so much on modern ideologies, that it loses access to alternative and supplementary Christian sources of eschatological hope, in text and person, in the past, present, and, potentially, future.

The concept of modernity means a variety of things, to different people in different discourses. However enthusiastically the demise of modernity and the establishment of postmodernity may be proclaimed, it is still impossible to stand completely clear of modernity, and there is little agreement about other options. The modern aspect of Moltmannian hope pertinent to this project involves the framework of imagination and what that framework excludes.

For the purposes of articulating the losses of modernity hope, I will refer to the profile of modernity outlined in A. K. M. Adam’s *Making Sense of New Testament Theology*, particularly as described in Chapter 1. The four identifying features of modernity in Adam’s account are: 1) newness, 2) an urgency of time, 3) a correct method legitimate scholarship, and 4) the need for an elite expert to explain the knowledge to the non-experts.36

2.2.2.1 Newness

Moltmannian hope embodies the priority of the new with its claim to contemporary relevance and its concomitant disdain for wisdoms of the past. While other eras looked to the past for affirmation and authorization, Moltmannian hope detaches itself from what it understands to be outdated and mistaken theology.

of hope offered by the classical tradition. Instead, mid-twentieth century historical critical scholarship, philosophy (Bloch and the Frankfort School), and his own revelation and experience justify the new hope. The particular character of the modern new embraced by Moltmannian hope entails an ever-developing new-improved version of the present: things are getting better every day. As Moltmann's thought develops, he moves from hope in a completely other eschatological newness to a more continuous development of new upon new, and Moltmannian hope reflects his later emphasis. In his early work, Moltmann emphasizes the discontinuity between history and the new creation: “If, for the sake of this God, Christians hope for the future, they hope for a novum ex nihilo.37 In The Future of Creation., 1977, Moltmann argues for a balance of eschatological otherness, distinct from history, and a continuum of history and the eschatological completion of history, since either extreme leads to resignation.38

The more faith interprets Christian transcendence eschatologically, the more it will understand the boundary of immanence historically and give itself up to the movement of transcending. But the more it interprets this eschatological transcendence in Christian terms—that is, with its eyes on the crucified Jesus—the more it will be come conscious that the qualitatively new future of God has allied itself with those who are dispossessed, denied and downtrodden at the present day; so that this future does not begin up at the spearheads of progress in a “progressive society,” but down below, among society’s victims. It wil have to link hope for the eschatological future with a loving solidarity with the depressed. 39


38 Moltmann, Future of Creation, 16.

39 Moltmann, Future of Creation, 17.
In *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, 1996, Moltmann demonstrates his gradual progression toward a continual progression from history to its end (which is its beginning): “Raising is not a new creation; it is a new creating of this same mortal life for the life that is eternal.” Throughout, Moltmann prioritizes the new in his readiness to dismiss the old at will; only those doctrines that support his theology of hope warrant attention. Moltmannian hope elides eschatological hope with the modern, secular model of hope in steady improvement. Eschatological hope thus manifests as the expectation of a continuing trajectory from new improvements on the ground to an even newer and divinely improved version of this creation.

Modernity’s newness depletes the supply of resources for eschatological hope, by downgrading the past presentations of theological hope from the cumulative wisdom of the church to unnecessary preambles. The priority of new hope turns God’s fulfilled promises to the people of Israel and Christ’s resurrection into affirmations that God will fulfill the promises, thereby removing God’s faithfulness as promise keeper as a basis for hope. The continually progressing, upward trajectory of hope displaces the circular, cyclical ecclesial year, in which the hope of the resurrection is celebrated on Easter and in every eucharist, and the hope of eternal life of Christ is nurtured by the repetition of participation in the Year of our Lord. The ongoing progression of the new toward the even newer, also loses hope in an

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40 Moltmann, *Coming*, 75; Neal, *Theology*, 211.

41 David Billings explains that, for Moltmann, “[i]n a strictly cyclic notion of time, nothing new is possible because everything (significant) is a return.” Moltmann, *Future*, 142; *Coming*, 30.
eternal life beyond human progression, outside the human imagination of new and improved, and entirely of God, for whom nothing is new or old.

2.2.2.2 Urgency of Time

Moltmannian hope’s priority of the future illustrates an extreme form of modernity’s focus on time and its life-determining force. The future establishes hope and gives the past and present meaning. God’s past fulfillments of promises become divine affirmations of promises to be fulfilled. History gains importance through its incorporation into the future; the present is empty without the presence of the future. This future is not detached from current time; Moltmann corrects the “understandable misconception” of the Apostles’ Creed, that imagines Christ in heaven, “waiting for a time when he will all at once ‘come again’ to judge the living and the dead. That is the picture behind the saying about Christ’s ‘coming again.’”\(^{42}\) Instead, Moltmann argues,

But if we talk about “Christ’s coming,” then he is already in the process of coming, and in the power of hope we open ourselves today with all our senses for the experiences of his arrival. By arrival we mean a future which is already present, yet without ceasing to be the future. “Jesus is in the process of coming.”\(^{43}\)

Barbara Rossing reflects Moltmannian hope’s commitment to a particular understanding of time, when she argues against the end-time theology of Rapture movements, in favor of God’s continuing time. Sermons that stress hope for the future—in our children, social service, or care for the environment—often cast that hope in the context of an eschatological future, such that human efforts now will


\(^{43}\) Moltmann, *End*, 89.
facilitate the arrival of a future that elides historical future with eschatological future. Throughout a Moltmannian theology of hope, the future claims priority as the end (although it does not itself actually end), the beginning, and the agent of change for God and for creation.

Future-determined hope suggests that the God of hope is defined by the future and God's participation in time. The understanding that God is out of time and yet works within time thus gives way to an understanding of God bound by time who brings the future to a future-oriented humanity. Hope loses the assurance of a God not driven by time’s limitations, not daunted by current events or future catastrophe, and not pressured by the ticking clock of earth’s demise. Hope loses the open possibilities and unknowable mysteries of an eschatology shaped by the imagination of God, the creator of time who is therefore not contained in time.

2.2.2.3 Expertise

Modernity assumes a narrowly conscribed method of the attainment of knowledge. Because the new trumps the old, and (future) time orders the present, only some people are able to determine relevant meaning. Modern Moltmannian hope recognizes revelation and experience as the criterion for discerning eschatological wisdom, although it does not necessarily use the term, “revelation.” Modern scholarship is authorized by its participation in the accepted methods of a particular group (rather than by the author herself or by its capacity to convince readers with opposing presuppositions). Moltmann certainly meets the requirements for a modern assessor of eschatologically, as he came to certain revealed knowledge of God, suffering, and hope during his war and prison camp experiences. His
expertise increases as the appeal of his books identify him as the theologian of hope.

Moltmann uses experience to mean a unique and personal internal event that connects one to an objective reality outside oneself. An experience of God is an experience of transcendence not because one has the capacity for self-transcendence, but because one has been open to receive God’s transcendence within oneself. Moltmann’s definition becomes more complex when he explains that God’s own experience authorizes human experiences of reality; and this particular claim of authorization places Moltmann’s experience basis for hope firmly within the realm of modern expertise.

Experiences of God undergird much of theological hope, and such experiences are described and authorized in many ways. Personal experiences are unique and impossible to express completely. Shared group experiences balance personal particularity with shared narrative. Moltmann claims personal experience of God, through the presence of God in others and through the presence of God’s immanence, as narratable through God’s experience. This claim risks leaning too far toward gnosticism; if one needs to experience God’s transcendence, in relation to knowledge about God’s own experience, in order to have theological hope, only a very few people with specialized knowledge will have that kind of hope. More importantly, Moltmann’s prioritization of the experience of hope becomes far less
complicated in its manifestation in Moltmannian hope, especially in a general social context that highly authorizes personal experience.\footnote{44}

The modern character of a Moltmannian narrative of hope looks to experiences to supply hope, with a narrow understanding of experience. Countless people of God have sustained some degree of hope while experiencing no authorizing hope events whatsoever. Much of the doctrine of hope emphasizes the lack of affirmation for hope: hope is unnecessary with the attainment of one’s hopes, and theological hope that relies on experiences may be relying more on good feelings than on the possibility of radical transformation. Hope founded on internal experiences of objective reality leads those who have not had that experience to wonder how they can have theological hope.

2.2.2.4 Experts

Moltmannian hope espouses universal salvation and non-hierarchichal equality of creation; all will be included in the embrace of the coming God, and all should be included now in the preparation for that coming. However, the mediation of this hope to the world still relies on experts in the know to explain the appropriate understandings and experiences of hope to the rest. Barbara Rossing is one such expert, who uses her professorial, authorial, and ordination status to discount those who hope to be saved by God in the midst of global annihilation. She worries that mainstream Christians might be taken in by the apocalyptic eschatology of popular

\footnote{44 Gerhard Sauter cautions against an account of hope that relies on one’s experience of hope. \textit{What Dare We Hope? Reconsidering Eschatology} (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 222. I would caution against expecting that experiences can be narrated outside of a particular shared grammar, and even then, the spoken/written account will likely be expressed more fully in nonverbal actions and character.}
books. And she strives to protect the Book of Revelation from false interpretation, by explaining what it really means. A broader version of this expert elitism manifests in those Christians who feel somewhat superior to other Christians involved in fundamentalist churches, those who read the bible literally and base their childrearing, social relationships, and voting practices on those readings. Many Protestant Christians may feel similarly about Roman Catholics who attend to the teaching authority of priests and bishops, and whose participation in theological hope manifests in specific sacramental and ecclesial practices.

This elitism follows a logic peculiar to modernity. Knowledge of appropriate hope comes from revelation and experience. The content of that hope must be mediated by experts, but because revelation and experience establish the authority of expertise, any individual can hold and mediate Moltmannian hope. The individualistic and egalitarian character of expertise could lead to a chaos of contradictory claims, with no common ground. However, the unspoken criterion of Moltmannian hope is the affirmation of this world. Right hope is the revealed experienced hope that feels like the already familiar hopes of daily life in this world. Adherents of Moltmannian hope eschew hierarchical impositions of hope doctrines by established ecclesial authority, in favor of a more democratic and inclusive process of describing hope. At the same time they exclude from the discourse of theological hope those whose imminent eschatological hopes do not support the priorities and narratives of Moltmannian hope. An invisible process of inclusion and exclusion allows for feelings of equality and independence while enforcing boundaries through unarticulated ideology. In this model, the intended recipients of expert knowledge
are those predisposed to be persuaded and are in a position to become experts themselves.

Christianity has long relied on the authority and guidance of those especially gifted by the Holy Spirit with faith and wisdom. A theology of hope based on the authority of modern experts forgets the context of ecclesial teaching authority, which includes conversation with previous teachers, the arguments and agreements of church councils, the witness of saints and martyrs, discerning openness to the Spirit, and shared regular worship. Moltmannian hope that follows modern experts and their mediation of knowledge to non-experts trades one hierarchy of knowledge for another, and, in the process, loses the benefits of ecclesial accountability, communal discernment, and the myriad of faithful examples of eschatological hope. Hope that is predominantly assessed by contemporary relevance to particular social structures loses the expressions of those with spiritual gifts, including the wealth of images, in visual art, hymnody, and mystical visions, that point toward the fulfillment of hope, and that, together, suggest an eschatological future far exceeding individual or communal imagination.

2.3 The People of Hope

2.3.1 Lost: Transcendent Human Flourishing

Moltmannian hope prioritizes this-worldly concerns and the continuation of this world in terms recognizable to its inhabitants. Moltmannian hope focusses on human flourishing in this life, and it imagines the new creation as an immensely improved version of this life here. That focus greatly depletes the importance of a
theocentric anthropology and, in the process, loses humanity’s utter dependence on God as well as theological hope in human flourishing beyond this world.

Shortly before the Trinity Institute Conference featuring Moltmann, “God’s Unfinished Future,” Moltmann participated in an interview to promote the event. At one point, the interviewer asked Moltmann how he might explain eschatology to his 11 year old son. Moltmann considered, and then said, “Eschatology is the . . . name for the life-power of hope. The life-power of hope is to stand up after defeat.” Moltmann then showed the interviewer a “stand-up man” children’s toy, a Stehaufmännchen, which is a little person that can be tipped over but always rights itself “to new life, to freedom.”

Moltmannian hope similarly focuses on humans as stand-up figures. Such hope looks toward possibilities for improved physical, social, and environmental circumstances in this world. In the process of directing attention and activity away from eschatological otherworldly visions, hope for human flourishing loses horizons beyond the conditions we aim to achieve here and now (or soon). Within the horizon of earthly flourishing, the highest ends to hope for become the best conditions that can be attained by human design and effort. The actual achievements of human flourishing are unlikely to reach these ideals, and expectations are defined by practical concerns and logistical challenges. Moltmann devotes much of his theology of hope to the new creation of the future that God is bringing and which shapes the nature of hope now; and yet, as new as that creation will be, it carries this world

forward into the new, along with its inhabitants, its social and physical structures.

While Moltmann emphasizes the radical newness of the creation within which God will reside, Moltmannian hope tends to count on the continuity of this world into the next, the new and improved version of what we know and the way we know it. Certainly the resurrection has generally be understood to be a bodily resurrection; the distinction here is between hope for human flourishing in this world and in the one that is like this one only better, and hope for human flourishing in a world to come not defined in terms of this world or its improved future. An emphasis on human flourishing in this world can lead to the loss of hope in human flourishing in the fullness of resurrection.

Moltmannian hope presupposes a theological anthropology that emphasizes independence from ecclesial authority and reliance on the independent human agency in the secular social order. Hope based on this understanding of the human de-emphasizes the character of hope funded by utter dependence on God, salvation through Christ, the sustenance of the Holy Spirit, and sacramental worship. Moltmannian hope champions non-hierarchical relations between people and with God, and yet a certain elitism is at work in this hope based on individuality and independence. An enlightened Moltmannian hope, freed from out-of-date doctrine and outdated notions of individuation, understands a distinction between ideas and practices that is imperceptible to the less enlightened practitioners of liturgical and personal piety. The former distinguish the idea of eschatological hope from the range of possible practices, and they select those practices oriented toward on-the-ground social change, to support their aims of improved lives for the needy. The latter
evidently cannot distinguish between ideas and practices, so that they dedicate their lives to prayer, worship, hopes for heaven, and ineffective, unorganized practices of care to various individuals in need. The enlightened needs to bring the unenlightened religious populous into a more appropriately prioritized order, for the benefit of society at large.46

The anthropology that shapes the imagination of Moltmannian hope primarily reflects the humanism that developed in the West, during the turn of the 17th to the 18th century. Charles Taylor narrates the circumstances of the shift from a time in which humans were understood exclusively as creatures dependent on their creator God to a time when the idea of an exclusively secular humanism was ideologically possible. While Christian anthropology has undergone considerable changes between the beginning of the eighteenth century and the twentieth/twenty-first century, Taylor's account of the factors that opened the door to secular humanism highlights the shape of the secular humanism assumed by Moltmannian, Christian, eschatological hope.

Moltmannian hope presupposes the anthropology of secular humanism, even when that humanism is Christianized to include a present and passible God. Hope for human flourishing thus imagines the goods of secular humanism, supported and facilitated by God. When human flourishing is framed within the context of (Christianized) secular humanism, eschatological transcendence either seems irrelevant and distracting or a not-as-transcendent fulfillment of that humanism, in new beginning, joined by God. A humanism-based hope limits eschatological hope.

imagination, reduces resources for human flourishing to human relationships and social order, and replaces God's transformative resurrection power with human potentiality.\(^47\)

Taylor narrates the process by which exclusive secular humanism became conceivable, after centuries of Judaic and Christian anthropology had understood humans as creatures determined by and dependent on God. He describes how many Western Christians — and, later, partial-Christians and atheists — turned away from a God who was directly involved in their lives and toward the understanding that God was only generally and indirectly engaged with humans. I argue that the humanism of Moltmannian theology embraces much of the earliest secular humanism, with the addition of a God who is directly involved in human lives — only now as a suffering and compassionate companion instead of an omnipotent and impassible God of domination. The operating premises of Moltmannian hope anthropology reject both the unchangeable God of the premodern era and the hands-off God of the early modern era.\(^48\) Taylor marks a shift, early in the development of humanism, in the expectations for human flourishing from God's purposes to human ends. This shift sets up the foundation for the human flourishing of Moltmannian hope.

\(^{47}\) Taylor, Sources, 251.

\(^{48}\) Taylor does not suggest that there was a universal change from one sort of anthropology to another; he recognizes that many Christians continue to understand humans as dependent creatures and critique the claims of secular humanism. He explicitly discounts the idea, common to secular humanism advocates, that the newer anthropology marks an evolutionary development aided by the age of reason (reason in this case defined as distinct from scriptural and theological reasoning).
It had always been thought that God had further purposes as well in his creation; that these were largely inscrutable, but that they included our love and worship of him. So that a recognition of God and our dependence on him places immediately on us a demand which goes beyond human flourishing. But now a striking anthropocentric shift occurs, around the turn of the seventeenth/eighteenth centuries, give or take a couple of decades. We can in fact get a fuller view of this shift, if we discern four directions of change in it, each one reducing the role and place of the transcendent.49

Taylor proceeds to list four changes in the general theological imagination, which he names as “eclipses,” and which, in this context, I identify as losses of resources for eschatological hope.

1. “Eclipse of Future Purpose”50
2. “Eclipse of Grace”51
3. “Eclipse of Mystery”52
4. “Eclipse of the idea that God was planning a transformation of human beings, which would take them beyond the limitations which inhere in their present condition.”53

With these four eclipses, human plans for this life, on human terms, replace any reliance on God’s plans for humans beyond this life, and the character of worship changes radically. No longer does it seem necessary to respond to God’s larger purpose with worship. “Worship shrinks to carrying out God’s goals (= our goals) in

49 Taylor, Sources, 221-222.
50 Taylor, Sources, 222.
51 Taylor, Sources, 222.
52 Taylor, Sources, 223.
53 Taylor, Sources, 224.
the world.”54 Taylor charts the developing possibility of exclusive humanism in the context of social restructuring. Warlords lose their positions of power, obtained by conquering tracts of land and the people of those tracts, and sustained by bloody battles. In the place of violent and somewhat chaotic feudal territorialism, cities set up civil structures of a more peaceful nature. A well-ordered social system serves the interests of the city’s high-ranking leaders, and they begin to establish guidelines for all municipal inhabitants to support that order. Society’s noble elites share social status with “well-placed commoners.”55 Guilds for artisans organize those who produce material goods for the city, and peasants lead lives largely unchanged except for the decrease in injury, death, and crop destruction due to rampaging hordes. The goals for society are now politeness and civility, since these dispositions support the economic interests of the elite and the interests of safety and stability for all the cities population. The virtues of disciplined work and harmony increase productivity which increases economic stability (for the elite) and peaceful security (for the entire community). The priorities of freedom, beneficent order, and the anthropocentric turn made religion that was not geared toward those priorities seem inadequate and threatening.56 Secular comes to mean the ordering of time measured in ages, as opposed to God’s time, eternity. Its meaning expands to include the condition of living in that ordered time of ages, in politically governed states, under regimes of property.

54 Taylor, Sources, 233.

55 Taylor, Sources, 236.

56 Taylor, Sources, 264. Taylor’s narrative corrects the account of the subtraction story in which unbelief comes from the arrival of science and rational inquiry.
Moltmann’s theology of hope comes many centuries after the turn toward secularism that Taylor describes. However, the chronological and cultural distinctness helps highlight the particular priorities of that shift, and these priorities continue to fund the anthropology of Moltmannian hope. Arne Rasmussen offers an account of Moltmann’s anthropology that articulates Moltmann’s version of secular humanism as applied to Christianity; he identifies Moltmann’s understanding of humans as autonomous, individual, free, and eventual members of the Trinity.

We thus find that, just as his history of freedom is an attempt to integrate Christian and Enlightenment understandings, his systematic account of freedom is constructed in a way that makes it open for the Enlightenment ideas of autonomy, both seen (in the version advocated by Moltmann) as personal self-realization and globally as humanity being the subject of history striving to “attain their unhindered humanity.” First, when he criticizes the liberal view of freedom as rule, he associates this especially with property, but not with the idea of autonomy, which he defends. Second, in his account of freedom as community it is first of all a question of accepting and being accepted as one is, not of being formed through the community. Third, in describing freedom as a project, freedom is understood as the striving for the future realization of humanity. Fourth, in his trinitarian doctrine of freedom the concept of friendship with God is the “highest” dimension. The importance of this is that, in Moltmann’s interpretation, it makes it possible to redefine the relation between God and humanity in non-hierarchical terms.57

When theological hope for human thriving is cast as autonomous freedom and non-heirarchical friendship with God, eschatological hope anticipates increasing human independence and intimacy with God in an extended (and improved) version of known life on earth now.

Even though Moltmann champions the poor and needy as the appropriate focus of hope, and even though he underscores the shared and communal character

of hope, the Moltmannian emphasis on the goods of the here and now supports an expectation of steadily improving social conditions for people and through human efforts. Hopes for human flourishing are limited to city and state contexts for economic and social advantages. When humanity’s identity is not grounded in dependence on God, it is particularly difficult to consider the hope of the imitation of Christ’s self-denying, service discipleship. It is hard to what hope there might be for those whose needs are so great that they cannot be fulfilled in this world or in any world we can imagine. Hopes for peace cannot reach beyond trying to support some warring powers over others. Actions of hope that make a difference count more than those that witness to God’s goodness without improving anything. Hope loses its resources in the lives of saints, humble servants, martyrs, and the faithful unsung witnesses to life not constrained by this world.

When João Batista Libânio discusses the hope of Christian Latin Americans in the midst of political poverty and oppression, he describes how effort toward human flourishing in this world is inextricably tied to hope for transcendent human flourishing. These Christians make spaces in which they can resist the powers that be and to suggest the order of a different world, one that can only be hoped for. The space is called a utopia, where the good not yet achieved can be felt as at least potentially real. A utopia “reveals our human capacity to anticipate through imagination things which can become reality.” A utopia allows for the imagination of an “alternative reality,” which, once imagined, can direct liberating action through

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daunting circumstances, and theological hope grants perseverance through the trials of this world with the assurance of God’s complete liberation in a wholly other world. “Whereas the term utopia stresses the horizontal, intra-historical, immanent, worldly dimension, hope points to the absolute future, the divine mystery, toward fulfillment, God’s self-communication.” When the “brutal reality” of daily life constrains possibilities for utopias, hope in God remains.

And as these oppressed people are Christians, their faith drives them to act. The bridge between faith and liberating action is hope in God. So it is not surprising that the most dominant tone in the people’s song and prayers is that of the psalmist crying: “Be pleased O Lord, to deliver me! O Lord, make hast to help me!. . . Thou are my help and my deliverer; do not tarry, O my God!” (Ps. 40:14, 18)

Hope in God who is greater than their untenable suffering in history opens up new ways through otherwise impossible situations, and renewed energy to work for justice. And yet, cast in the context of eschatological hope, those efforts to work for justice on earth do not lead to the presumption of a human-built kingdom on earth. Rather, “the claim to build the perfect city on earth gives way to the hope that only God can conquer all their adversaries, especially sin and death, by giving the gift of resurrection and glorifying history.” The Christians Libânio describes illustrate an eschatological hope that ties human flourishing in history with transcendent human flourishing. Through the constancy of God and the resurrection of Jesus,

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59 Libâno, “Hope,” 718.

60 Libâno, “Hope,” 719.


63 Libâno, “Hope,” 721.
transcendent human flourishing has already been established. Humans may deny or build up flourishing in this life, but true human flourishing depends entirely upon the God of hope. “The last word on history has already been said. No human power, no dictator, no ruling power will decide the final destiny of the poor. God’s love raised Jesus and will raise all those he loves and who love him. And among these the poor have first place.”

Latin American Christians in the 1980s do not have an exclusive claim on theological hope, but hope that loses the connection between flourishing in this world and transcendent human flourishing established on God’s terms loses much indeed.

2.3.2 Lost: Discipleship

Moltmannian hope champions making a difference, through effective and responsible and liberating practices. The cost of embracing Moltmannian hope alone involves devaluation of ineffective, humble, serving discipleship.

Moltmannian hope values on-the-ground ethical practices that address suffering and needs with responsible and effective measures. It expects those who hope in apocalyptic and heavenly visions to be complacent about immediate human and environmental crises. It may well be true that many Christians who anticipate imminent heavenly release are less concerned to redress systemic poverty or rapidly diminishing supplies of clean water. However, the blanket dismissal of

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65 Michael Northcott offers a detailed and nuanced exploration of conservative Christianity’s Puritan history, correlative cosmological assessments, and modern capitalism’s influence that interfere with creation conservation. “BP, the Blowout and the Bible Belt: Why Conservative Christianity Does Not Conserve Creation,” Expository Times 122/3 (2010).
other-worldly eschatology because it inhibits effective ethical action also devalues an impractical hope in Christ that fosters hopeful practices of discipleship, not results.

Moltmannian hope is responsible hope, and the ethics of responsible hope requires independent action for common goods. Ellen Ott Marshall describes this hope as affirming of but not dependent on God.

A responsible hope takes root in a relational concept of power, insisting that human effort is required to realize the possible. This is not a hope that relinquishes agency to the unidirectional control of an omnipotent God. Rather, this hope is born when we feel empowered to act. 66

Marshall’s Moltmannian hope helps remind people that hope is not simply a sentiment, but more importantly a disposition toward particular habitual actions. When the chief agents of hope are humans themselves, the end of hope becomes that which humans can achieve. The emphasis on human achievement loses appreciation for impractical hope, hope that persists regardless of human ability to accomplish change. If hope begins when we feel empowered to act, then it may fade when our empowerment fades or proves to be inadequate to the cause. Those who do not feel empowered to act, those who do not have the independent effort necessary for realizing possible hope, have only themselves and other humans to turn to for hope. Friends and neighbors are essential bearers of hope to the hopeless, but if they can only offer hope based on their capacities, the hope they bear is insecure and partial. Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Pinches argues that claiming and bearing hope in the face of suffering does not depend on human efforts to remove suffering, but on the refusal to accept that suffering and death is most truly defined by Christ’s victory over death:

66 Marshall, Fig Tree, xiv; see also 78.
We can endure because we have confidence that though our enemies may kill us they cannot determine the meaning of our death. Christians have been given the power to overcome oppression, not by retaliation, but by the stalwart refusal to be defined as victims by the oppressor. 67

This means that the role of friends and neighbors of those suffering and hopeless is not to deliver hope on the basis of their capacity to remove suffering; the possibility of hope for the hopeless does not depend on the capacity of others to fix the suffering. Christ provides and effects hope. Christians witness to that hope by being present with those who suffer and by witnessing to the difference Christ’s resurrection makes. Hauerwas and Pinches continue:

We endure because no matter what may be done to us we know that those who threaten our death are powerless to determine the meaning of our lives by killing us. Likewise, our decisive service to our neighbor is to open to her a place where she is no longer a victim, of others or of herself. If we can relieve her suffering, we should, but more importantly we offer her the endurance to live with her suffering, now no longer meaningless, since it is carried by an eschatological hope that is confident in what it has already witnessed, namely Christ’s victory over death. 68

Responsible hope hides possibilities for outcomes beyond the humanly practical when it forgets that it is Christ who accomplishes hope.

Moltmannian hope resonates with the hopes of the Social Gospel movement and of (North American Protestant appreciations of) liberation theology; these hopes focus on conditions in the world around us and they are performed in the sphere of socio-political ethics. A Social Gospel ethics of hope resists what it understands to be irresponsible, end-times, eschatological hope, working instead for responsible this-


world hope manifest in ethical (on-the-ground care for the world around us) human action. James Cone explains: “I situate myself in the trajectory of social gospel and liberation theology because I reject otherworldly visions that direct our attention away from this world ad its problems, and I insist in a ‘hope for this life.’”69 “Hope for this life” requires a frank assessment and acceptance of the constraints of this life. As Marshall clarifies, “We need to cultivate a sense of the possible without glossing over the real losses and limits of life. This is what I mean by a responsible hope.”70

Moltmannian hope tends toward a continuum between humanity and divinity (rather than a line of ontological difference between creation and God); and that continuum excludes an impossible, unearthly, and distant eschatological world. Accordingly, hope in an eschatological life beyond what humans can imagine as possible, undermines and contradicts responsible hope for the world now. Marshall posits that

. . . visions of another and more permanent and desirable existence above and beyond this one devalue this world and all that is in it. The person who subscribes to this view envisions the future — the desired future — as apart from the earth. Since the future rests elsewhere, the future of the planet seems less important.71

Elizabeth Johnson makes the point more emphatically: “By focusing on life to come in a distant place that is considered our true home, eschatology displaces our identity

69 Marshall, Fig Tree, 45, citing Cone, Black Theology, Black Power, 123.

70 Marshall, Fig Tree, 13.

71 Marshall, Fig Tree, 46.
as ‘earthlings’ and undermines care for this planet, the only home we and future
generations as living, historical beings actually have.”\textsuperscript{72}

For Moltmannians, the detrimental effect of heavenly hope on responsible,
creation-valuing hope is an obvious fact: people with other-worldly hopes will not
perform that hope in ways that make the sort of difference in the world that
facilitates the new creation God is bringing to the world. Congregations regularly
hear comfortably familiar exhortations not to be like those other people who really
believe in life in the clouds, or the Rapture, or utopian release from the cares and
struggles of this world. Few preachers or congregants pause to wonder if it is

\textit{necessarily} so that hope for eternal life with God in a world outside human
imagination or accomplishment discourages or disables hopeful care for each other
and this planet. Even fewer consider whether an ethics of hope must choose hope in
earth over heaven, in order to participate in hopeful practices.

Responsible Moltmannian hope resonates with the hopes of the Social Gospel
movement and of (North American Protestant appreciations of) liberation theology;
these hopes look toward conditions in the world around us and they are performed in
the sphere of socio-political ethics. This ethics of hope resists irresponsible, end-
times, eschatological hope, working instead for responsible this-world hope manifest
in ethical actions. Responsible hope moves people to produce visible improvements
in the lives of the people and creation around them.

The discourse of responsible hope loses a strong connection with Christian
discipleship as modeled and taught by Jesus Christ. Moltmann places suffering

\textsuperscript{72} Marshall, \textit{Fig Tree}, 46, citing Elizabeth Johnson, \textit{Friends of God and Prophets: A
Feminist Theological Reading of the Communion of Saints}, 186.
service preeminantly in God’s domain, such that Jesus’ human practices of humility are taken up into God’s identity. But, with a Christology that claims Jesus’ full humanity and Jesus’ full divinity, Christians can demonstrate hope in an eschatological end that exceeds human limitations, while kneeling to wash dirty feet, and while giving up personal possessions, home, and social position. Discipleship practices display hope in God’s kingdom of holy fellowship through irresponsibly generous relationships. When a Christian gives the contents of her wallet to someone who asks her for help, she fails to participate in social programs that provide resources to the needy in an ordered manner. She fails to determine first whether or not the person asking for help will use the money for good and not for drugs, gambling, or undeserved luxuries. She probably will not contribute to the eradication of poverty as planned by responsible organizations, and the results of her irresponsible action will likely not make a lasting difference in the life of the one who asked for help. However, her ready and exceedingly generous response to the request does perform hope in a way that witnesses both to Jesus’ relationships with needy people and to an abundant economy beyond limited resources and the practical distribution of money and care.

Discipleship practices of following and serving others similarly set aside standard responsible social structures. It seems that improvement needs leadership, and Christians are urged to be strong leaders for the goods of the larger community. Discipleship characterized by the acceptance of less-respected positions or the adoption of unnoticed menial tasks does not fit the model of hopeful leadership. When responsibility is defined as leading others toward success, happiness,
independence, and freedom from suffering, then that responsibility is bound to end in failure (on its own terms), and hope for lives that include less lofty accomplishments is diminished. Hauerwas observes that parents often misconstrue their responsibility to their children as preventing unhappiness and suffering. Children who seem to have no chance at participating in that plan, children who seem unable to happy, non-suffering lives, may stir in parents a “responsibility” to spare them from life altogether.

I suspect that many of these children are being allowed to die not because parents reject the role of being parent but because they have a distorted notion of parental responsibility. Many parents seem to assume that they should be responsible to bring children into the world in a manner that can insure their happiness. Parents tend to think that they should not only be responsible for meeting their children’s basic needs, but also must see that they do not have to suffer. Parental responsibility extends to assuring their children a happy and successful life. Convictions like these reduce the options at birth [and, in utero] to a perfect child or a dead child.73

Hope for this world depends on leadership, initiative, and opportunities for success; discipleship expresses hope by anticipatory participation in a realm of the least, the unassuming, the unsuccessful, and the dependent.

The early Christians in Acts illustrate hopeful discipleship lives in their radically irresponsible community of Jubilee justice. They had no long-term budget, no ten-year building plan, no endowment to support their goals. They pooled all of their resources, distributed goods with special attention to the most fragile, they ate together, and “[t]here was not a needy person among them” (Acts 4:34). They were

73 Stanley Hauerwas with Richard Bondi and David Burrell, *Truthfulness and Tragedy: Further Investigations into Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 177. In the several decades since *Truthfulness* was published, understandings of parental responsibility have grown to include more tests and decisions during (and sometimes before) pregnancy, in order to determine the child’s prospects for health and independence.
not aiming to change welfare policies in the Roman government, and they were not working to stamp out poverty. They were practicing eschatological hope in another world, entirely ordered by God’s loving justice. When the church at Philippi faced social persecution and an future of uncertain stability, Paul did not offer them a strategy for improved their economic and social circumstances in the city. He charged them to work on their interpersonal relationships. He urged them to be less selfish, to stop complaining, and to be of one with each other and with Christ Jesus, through whose humility and exaltation they might reach heaven, of which they are true citizens. This discipleship produces no visible results, demonstrates no practicality or responsibility, and asks for no leaders. The results of hope have been and will be fulfilled in Christ, who is the one leader, through humble service.

The Moltmannian hope of practical responsibility and making a difference undervalues hope shaped by the (imperfect) imitation of Christ’s humility and by citizenship in heaven. Castelo argues that

[i]f one is to take the *imitatio Christi* seriously as a way of discipleship, then it is clear that the Son’s taking on the human predicament freely and out of love is a paradigm for Christian existence. As the synoptic verse suggests, the call of discipleship suggests that believers deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Christ.\(^{74}\)

Hope fed by empowerment has a hard time hearing the call to follow Christ in humility.

**2.3.3 Lost: Reconciliation**

Moltmannian hope looks for the reconciliation of all in the eschatological new creation. It counts on a non-punitive justification of all before the new creation.

\(^{74}\) Castelo, *Apathetic*, 145.
The practices of Moltmannian hope for reconciliation include campaigning for international human rights, alleviating suffering around the globe, and righting the wrongs of oppression. The large scale, big picture hopes for reconciliation lose sight of broken relationships of Christians with each other, in person, day to day. Hopes pinned on correcting systemic injustice distract Christians from hoping and working toward reconciliation, themselves, at home.

Christians struggle mightily to be friends with each other. Christians disagree about political parties, economic policies, makes of cars, gun control legislation, school textbooks, and sexuality. Often, these conflicts seem impossible to resolve, and efforts to reach shared understanding seem counterproductive. Currently, many Episcopalians in the U.S. disagree so strongly with others in the Anglican Communion about inclusion and exclusion, that separation from the Anglican Communion makes more sense than continued efforts toward a shared identity. Comfortable agreement among different family members of the Anglican Communion seems difficulty for anyone to imagine, let alone accomplish; concerned parties on all sides are turning away from hopes of reconciliation. Perhaps God will be able to accomplish the unification of churches and the Church in the world to come. Meanwhile, there are more important tasks at hand.

One might ask why hopes for the unification of the body of Christ should warrant much attention when hunger, war, oppression, and a crumbling earth present more urgent problems. The answer reflects the theme of this chapter: theological hope focused on this world and its continuation loses sight of resources for hope focused on life with God, in this world and in the life beyond today we cannot fully
imagine. By all means, the life of this planet and the survival of its inhabitants matter. Hope in life as the reconciled body of Christ exceeds hopes bound to this world and feeds this-worldly hope with ideas for hopeful practices not bound by logistics or an economy of lack. Moltmannian hope looks toward eschatological reconciliation between oppressors and those they cause to suffer; Christian activism works for justice home and abroad. Moltmann wrote that “whenever people’s dignity is recognized and the right restored, there this service of reconciliation takes place. Reconciliation is nothing less than justifying justice.” A more difficult practice of eschatological hope calls for Christians to reach out toward those with whom they are least inclined to seek reconciliation: Christians who do not share the same interpretations of scripture, doctrine, and inclusivity. Eschatological hope in reconciliation does not expect human agency to accomplish universal reconciliation, or even reconciliation with the annoying person who sits at the other end of a pew on Sunday mornings; but, small-scale human efforts toward reconciliation can witness to a hope that eternal life with God is life beyond the brokenness and devisiveness that defines our life anow.

Moltmann’s engagement with the particulars of reconciliation illustrate gap in his theology of hope, a gap which in some ways helps make Moltmannian hope appealing. While Moltmann emphasizes throughout his work the priority of solidarity with the poor and the urgency of environmental care, Moltmann does not indicate many details about how to act out this priority and urgency. A significant portion of the problem may be his move away from hope as classically-defined

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theological virtue. Moltmannian hope relies on a suffering God and an appreciation of God's creation, which will preserve and transform in the new creation. It encourages ethical behavior that supports needy people and an ailing environment; it criticizes hopes in a heavenly escape that distract people from this world. But the primary events in Moltmann's theology of hope are God's embrace of suffering and God's reconciliation of the abandonment of God by God. He pays little attention to the actual daily practices of the people of God and the grace of God required for people to learn and sustain those practices. As a result, the Moltmannian theology of hope champions human efforts to improve the conditions of creation here and now, without requiring the people of God to do anything in particular. And, as a result, theological hope loses track of particular exhortations and guidance for living in ways that reflect the reconciling practices of Jesus' life and point toward God's kingdom.

Nancy Victorin-Vangerud observes that Moltmann addresses reconciliation as the work of the Holy Spirit, who establishes what God makes possible in Jesus' abandonment, death, and resurrection. The spirit justifies both the oppressed, through solidarity with Jesus on the cross, and the sinful oppressors, as God takes their sin onto Godself. This pneumatologia crucis serves Moltmann as a connection to Liberation Theology and the pressing needs and hopes of people suffering right now; and he narrates liberation with the same singular focus on God's suffering that permeates his theology of hope. Victorin-Vangerud argues that

76 Marshall explains how and why she understands the virtue of hope in a different way from Aquinas’s presentation of the theological virtue of hope, in Fig Tree. Moltmann does not engage with hope in a discourse of theological virtues.

. . .his *pneumatologia crucis* shifts the locus of struggle away from human history toward a God viewed apart from history. Rebecca Chopp is correct to suggest that Moltmann makes God the measure and context of all suffering. Thus, God’s pain and God’s atonement become the focus of the Spirit’s labor, rather than the pain of the oppressed and the accountability of oppressors. The Spirit as Judge and Reconciler relates to victims and perpetrators, but the struggle for justice and reconciliation is made a work of the cross, and not a labor between victims and perpetrators themselves. Like an enabling, well-meaning parent, God serves as the intermediary, taking care of the situation and then expecting the family members to live in peace. 78

Followers of Moltmannian hope often perform hope in justice by contributing to funds for the homeless and needy, tutoring disadvantaged children, helping to build homes for the poor, working for just legislation. Others rely on civil law and international aid groups to strive toward reconciliation until God comes to bring the new creation in which justice and reconciliation have been resolved by God’s justice of non-judgmental mercy for all. Moltmannian hope less frequently inspires one-on-one attempts at reconciliation. Nancy Victorin-Vangerud critiques this gap in Moltmann's work as an avoidance of necessary human interaction in history.

Missing from Moltmann’s model is the direct confrontation, struggle and transformation between estranged people. In addition to God speaking privately in the perpetrator’s guilty conscience, perpetrators must also face directly the words of their victims. In addition to God restoring the rights of victims/survivors, restoration must come through human responsibility taken for concrete personal and institutional changes. Reconciliation cannot be applied abstractly or before the fact from outside of the disrupted relationship. Justice, forgiveness, love, and reconciliation all have historical

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78 Victorin-Vangerud, “Spirit’s Struggle,” 100. Richard Bauckham defends Moltmann from charges that he leans too far in the direction of political detachment, on the one hand, or too far in the direction of human accomplishment. But he does note “that there is something in the liberationists’ charge that Moltmann’s political theology is relatively lacking in concrete proposals.” “Jürgen Moltmann,” in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers: 2001), 160.
and institutional dimensions incorporating the transformed relations of victims and perpetrators.”

Although Victorin-Vangerud assumes a distinction between God’s application of justice and human responsibility that downplays the possibilities for graced human activity, she reveals the way in which Moltmann’s emphasis on universal justice bypasses the hard work of working through conflict in the hopes of reconciliation. In large scale political circumstances, Moltmann sets aside practices of reconciliation in favor of more practical and effective strategies, thereby relinquishing the possibility of witnessing to hope in eschatological reconciliation through abundant — if ineffective — vulnerability and forgiveness, or through attempts toward reconciliation between victims and perpetrators, face to face. Moltmann’s hopes for political justice do not rely on practices of nonviolence that might witness to the reconciliation to come; he finds the realm of politics to be so corrupted by power that power may well be the way to work for justice.

Moltmannian hope often manifests in developing policies to protect victims from perpetrators, plans to bring perpetrators to justice in legal systems, and anticipation of the future of creation when God will have brought all of creation to a life of justice. The reconciliation that receives the least attention is that between family members, people who work together, people who claim to be Christians but can find no way to share their lives and worship with each other. Eschatological hope in reconciliation needs to be informed and shaped in reconciling relationships with each other, however imperfect that reconciliation may be.

79 Victorin-Vangerud, “Spirit’s Struggle,” 100.
In order to hope for reconciliation, Christians need community formation, correction, and witness. The experiences of working toward reconciliation will not likely feel transcendent, or even good. The Moltmannian hope that proclaims universalism and inclusivity of all people and all of creation has a blind spot of particularity: lives of eschatological hope of reconciliation in Christ need relationships of trust, challenge, and perseverance. Hope can be shaped and shared by trusting in the hope of faithful friends. Closely aligned communities in Christ can narrate reconciling lives of the hopeful people of God of the past, in scripture and beyond. Accountability to such a community situates Christians in narratives that claim the possibility of reconciliation, imperfectly possible now through the grace of God, and perfectly possible in the life we cannot imagine but can only hope for. Moltmannian hope tempts Christians to set reconciliation aside, because of the limitations of time, energy, and patience. And yet, when two members of one congregation cannot work toward reconciliation with each other, there is not much hope for ecumenical efforts toward reconciliation. And when the Christian church cannot even find reason for reconciliation among its members, Christian theological hope has little to offer the rest of the world.

Many have observed that personal conflict caused by physical or emotional abuse, or by systemic practices of dehumanization and genocide clearly stands outside the realm of imaginable reconciliation. Others argue that victims must not be called upon to forgive the perpetrators of injustice without the perpetrators having first demonstrated significant change and recompensatory action—and not necessarily even then. Compassion and pastoral wisdom dictate gentle care,
solidarity, and staunch advocacy in these circumstances; but the abandonment of hope in reconciliation, however impossible it may seem now, indicates a sharp detachment from the Gospel message to offer and receive the impossible reconciliation modeled in Jesus’ life and performed in his death and resurrection. Hope that embraces human particularities, apparently impossible people and relationships, and God’s comprehensive justice makes room for tiny glimpses of eschatological reconciliation.

2.4 Conclusion

Moltmannian hope provides alternatives to areas of theological doctrine that may seem outdated or irrelevant today. The cost to Christian theological hope is great, especially to the doctrine of God, to the expectations of theological hope, and to the anthropology and ethics of the people who hope. Moltmannian hope sets aside God's perfection and impassibility, Christ's full divinity and humanity, and the efficacy of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. In the process, it loses fluency in the biblical and theological grammars for speaking of God coherently with continuity-in-difference. Moltmannian hope dismisses the possibilities of eschatological heaven, and of freedom from modernity’s ideological constraints. Moltmannian hope disregards theocentric anthropology, servant discipleship, and the difficult priority of working toward reconciliation with those closest in proximity and identity. Moltmannian hope assumes that aspects of theological hope that it has replaced are disposable without further engagement. Chapter 3 challenges that assumption and engages with some of the rejected doctrines to reevaluate their disposability.
3. A Thomistic Grammar of Hope

Jürgen Moltmann introduced a theology of hope, almost half a century ago, that captured the imaginations of many theologians looking to respond to atheist dismissals of God after the holocaust while developing an up-to-date theological hope for modern Christians. As Moltmann continued (and continues today) to write about theological topics, his theology of hope has developed and shifted along with his developing positions. Concurrently, a version of Moltmann’s hope has emerged and now grounds the theological presuppositions of a large body of American Christians. This Moltmannian hope approximately reflects the work of Jurgen Moltmann and the wider secular concerns about hope in the face of contemporary crises; and it currently functions as normative for many theologians and those whom they influence. Chapter 1 describes the distinctive characteristics of Moltmann’s theology of hope and the subsequent Moltmannian hope. Chapter 2 examines some of the costs of an exclusive reliance on a Moltmannian theology hope. This chapter reconsiders the theology of hope that Moltmannian hope misunderstands and dismisses,¹ in order to assess the ramifications of its rejection, in order to reclaim

¹ Adherents of Moltmannian hope do not necessarily specify the source of the theologies of hope they reject. The assumption that theological history and past doctrines are disposable contributes to some confusion about whether the objectionable doctrines of hope are Thomistic, versions of those doctrines within Roman Catholicism, Reformation churches, or millenialism (Dispensational Premillenialism, Amillenialism, Postmillennialism, or Historic Premillennialism), or the Left Behind novels. I will address Thomas’s theological virtue of hope and the doctrine of God on which it depends, because it articulates widely embraced church doctrine since the earliest church, and because it provides a grammar for hope and God that most of Christian theology since has drawn on, positively or negatively.
possible resources for contemporary theological hope. Chapter 4 will investigate resources for hope from less conventionally considered discourses.

Moltmann’s primary approach to theology is constructive. He identifies six of his books as “contributions to systematic theology,” but he does not claim to be producing a systematic theology himself.² He aims to provide a theology of hope for today; in the process he engages with prior Christian teachings that seem particularly relevant, and he attends to some of the ramifications his constructive claims might have on a comprehensive grammar of theological language. However, Moltmann does not advocate or model a priority connecting with a comprehensive systematic theology or sustaining relationships with alternative currents of the tradition of hope.³ This prioritization of colloquialized theology in a modern and secularized time reflects Moltmann’s commitment to theology that suits contemporary concerns and terms, and helps explain much of the appreciative response to his theology of hope. At the same time Moltmannian hope participates in the overriding presumption of contemporary society that what has been need no longer be considered. In its rejection of the content and shape of central streams of Christian theology, Moltmannian hope cedes some of the distinctiveness of Christian hope to contemporary secular hope. Christian theology that knows no alternative to Moltmannian hope faces a similar risk. The costs to an exclusively

² The Gifford Lectures, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, comes the closest in structure to a systematics.

³ The connections and engagements mentioned here refer to the narrative connections between streams of theology, as studied, preached, and considered. Performances of theology may or may not participate in discourses of theological study. Saints, martyrs, and Christians unrecognized or forgotten live lives of theological hope without participating explicitly in the conversation of this project.
Christian hope include the impassibility of God, the two natures of Christ, the
efficacy of Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection, and a coherent grammar and
hermeneutics for a doctrine of God; heaven beyond earth, ideological imagination
beyond modernity; theocentric anthropology, \textit{imitatio Christi} discipleship, and
intimate practices of reconciliation.

This chapter adds to contemporary theological hope an exploration of some
resources dedicated to the distinctiveness of Christian hope within a systematics
discourse which closely engages the first two-thirds of the church’s theological
wisdom, and with which much of theology since has connected (with appreciation,
de/reconstruction, and objection). I offer this exploration as a response to the
current tension between two approaches to the theology of hope, perceived as new
and up-to-date, vs older and more traditional,\footnote{I do not endorse this description of the state of theology; I offer it here because of
the prevalent perception that this is the case. Some of the perception comes from
trickle-down effects of the Reformation-related ecclesial divides. Suspicion and
prejudice born of ignorance can manifest in these labels (each as applied to the
other). Some of the divisive feelings come from the establishment secular reasoning
as the objective basis for state, scientific, economic, and political discernment. And
some reflects the general priorities of modernity, as addressed in Chapter 2.}
and I am indebted to Kathryn Tanner’s argument in support of such a response:

To uncover an interpretive context for the coherence of traditional Christian
theology is to overcome the closure to which a modern viewpoint is
susceptible. Indeed this is the only general way to overcome closure once
finite human understanding renounces the Cartesian dream of an external,
nearlvantage point for self-scrutiny. One overcomes calcified or rigid
prejudgements, not by suppressing either prejudgement or the historical
determination of context, but by continually extending and enriching one’s
point of view. This happens through open conversations and subsequent
understanding of the alternatives for thought presented by other, not least past, traditions of discourse.  

I have argued, in Chapter 2, that Moltmannian theological hope closes off conversations with the presentations of hope with which it disagrees and that those closures are costly. The following engagements with some Moltmannian alternatives to hope may help open conversations and thereby nurture critical and charitable ongoing discourses and practices. My aim is not to demand that all scholarly engagements with theological hope embody the times and customs of eras centuries ago, but rather to call into question Christian hope that does not sustain a lively connection to doctrine as well as to secular ideology. I aim to retrieve doctrines of theological hope currently lost to adherents of Moltmannian hope, so that critical reconsiderations of apparently outdated resources for hope may challenge, clarify, and strengthen ongoing constructions of Christian theological hope.

Moltmannian hope veers away from some of the streams of theological tradition long held to be central to church doctrine, and it veers toward some of the boundary buoys of Christian coherence and continuity. In particular, Moltmannian hope embraces a doctrine of divine passibility that reduces Jesus Christ’s full humanity, fully divinity, and resurrection efficacy. This Moltmannian doctrine of God leads to an earth-bound eschatological hope, bound by modernity’s imagination and an incoherent hermeneutics. It supports a secular humanism, which restricts the imitation of Christ and the possibilities for reconciliation to those practices that do not conflict with secular expectations of identity and agency.

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5 Kathryn Tanner, God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment? (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 7.
The doctrine of God displaced by Moltmannian hope presents a theological hope centered on Jesus Christ and unbound by earthly limitations. In this chapter, I explore a Thomistic presentation of hope founded on the impassibility of God and the two natures of Jesus Christ. I encourage enough fluency in a Thomistic grammar of language about the God of hope to facilitate connections among alternative theologies of hope, as well as the coherence of contemporary grammars. I describe hope defined as a theological virtue whose end is beatitude, and I discuss a theocentric anthropology and its ramifications for discipleship and reconciliation.

I draw from relevant Questions of the Summa Theologica, Pope Benedict XVI’s encyclical on hope, supplemented by arguments from Daniel Castello, Paul Gavrilyuk, D. Stephen Long, Kathryn Tanner, and Thomas Weinandy. Each section begins with the lyrics of a song from the distinctly non-Thomistic canon of old-timey gospel/blues/bluegrass music about hope and heaven. There is not enough room in this project to investigate that canon and the theology it reflects and influences; however, I offer these lyrics as evidence of faithful discourses of theological hope which persevere outside the realm of Moltmannian hope. An exclusive reliance on Moltmannian hope dismisses not only other streams of doctrine, but also the Christians throughout time and geography who have sung and lived out those non-Moltmannian doctrines of hope (explicitly and implicitly).

I intend to complicate a familiar framework for hope with exposure to and correctives from additional expressions of Christian hope that might help invigorate theological hope in daunting times. Kathryn Tanner explains her understanding of Christian complexity in terms of gaining possibilities and resources:
Knowledge of Christian complexity works generally to draw the theologian's viewpoint beyond the narrow confines of the present situation. So much of contemporary academic theology seems blinkered by current common sense and the specifics of a particular location; without availing oneself of a knowledge of what Christians have said and done elsewhere and at other times, what Christianity could be all about thins and hardens, unresourceful and brittle. Knowledge of Christianity in other times and places is a way, then, of expanding the range of imaginative possibilities for theological construction in any one time and place, a way of expanding the resources with which one can work. Placing one's own efforts within this ongoing and wide stream, one grows in appreciation for the two-thousand-year, global history of efforts to say what Christianity is all about, for the theological insights that might be contained within that history or be working themselves out there.⁶

Here follows an effort to place contemporary theological hope within the ongoing and wide streams of Christian tradition that it skirts, to expand the range of possibilities for theological hope beyond the limitations of Moltmannian hope.

3.1 The God of Hope

3.1.1 The Perfectly Compassionate, Impassible God of Hope

Yes God, God don't never change
He's God, always will be God
God in the middle of the ocean
God in the middle of the sea
By the help of the great creator
Truly been a God to me
Hey God, God don't never change
God, always will be God
God in creation
God when Adam fell
God way up in heaven
God way down in hell
He's God, God don't never change
God, always will be God
Spoke to the mountain
Said how great I am
Want you to get up this mornin'
Skip around like a lamb

⁶ Tanner, Jesus, xviii.
Well he’s God, God don’t never change
God, always will be God
God in the time of sickness
God in the doctor too
In the time of the influenza [1918 influenza pandemic]
He truly was a God to you
Well he’s God, God don’t never change
He’s God, always will be God
God in the pulpit
God way down at the door
He’s God in the amen corner
God all over the floor
Well he’s God, God don’t never change
God, always will be God

God’s great compassion depends on the impassibility of God. The grammar of language about God, begun in the earliest conversations of the church, and clarified and practiced throughout many systematic streams of doctrine, identifies the passibility of God within the almighty impassibility of God. Theological hope thus looks to God who is greater than all suffering, unchanged by catastrophe, and constant in goodness regardless of the circumstances of creation.

The conviction that impassibility means an uninterested, uncaring, unloving God stands firm in Moltmannian hope, which counters with a suffering, changeable God to substantiate eschatological hope. A reconsideration of Thomas’s grammar of theological language allows for an examination of common assumptions about how “impassibility” worked in the grammar of the early church when the topic was on the agenda of ecclesial councils concerned about similar apparently conflicting claims. Patristic and Thomistic understandings of language for God grant contemporary

theologies of hope a breadth of wisdom less visible within current narrations of possibilities. Daniel Castelo argues that,

[i]n light of the experiences of older voices within the tradition, the axiom of divine impassibility provides an opportunity for theologians to reconsider basic questions and conventions surrounding long-held tenets of the theological enterprise. Such a reconsideration or reevaluation creates, in turn, a conversation that neither ignores nor dismisses possible continuities and parallels within the area of Christian theological reflection.\(^8\)

Exposure to alternative bases for hope in God may contribute new possibilities for the imagination and performances of hope today. In particular, the divine impassibility rejected by Moltmannian hope reflects a misunderstanding of the early church’s assumptions and concerns about the doctrine of God.

One presupposition of Moltmannian theological hope, and its current companions, blames the influence of malignant Hellenistic philosophy on the true Christian doctrine of God. This premise bears investigation, since it is largely based on particular claims of mid-twentieth century biblical criticism that have not been as predominant in scholarship before or afterward. Paul Gavrilyuk describes the importance of such an examination:

It has become almost commonplace in contemporary theological works to pass a negative judgment upon the patristic concept of the divine impassibility. Superficial criticism of the divine apatheia on purely etymological grounds, without any serious analysis of its actual function in the thought of the Fathers, has become a convenient polemical starting point for the subsequent elaboration of a passibilist position. Such a dismissive attitude towards the patristic heritage is guided far more by the contemporary climate of opinion on the issue of divine suffering than by any serious engagement with the theology of the Fathers.\(^9\)

\(^8\) Castelo, *Apathetic*, 20.

Gavriluk notes that the criticism of divine impassibility often depends on the theory of malign Greek philosophical influence, as mentioned in Ch 2.

A standard line of criticism places divine impassibility in the conceptual realm of Hellenistic philosophy, where the term allegedly meant the absence of emotions and indifference to the world, and then concludes that impassibility in this sense cannot be an attribute of the Christian God. In this regard, a popular dichotomy between Hebrew and Greek theological thinking has been elaborated specifically with reference to the issues of divine (im)passibility and (im)mutability. On this reading, the God of the prophets and apostles is the God of pathos, whereas the God of the philosophers is apathetic.\textsuperscript{10}

The Hebrew/Greek dichotomy theory Gavrilyuk critiques is not socially plausible: coexisting, intermingled, and hybrid communities demonstrate more of a fluid and partial influence of ideological influences than the imposition of opposite concepts from one portion of a community on another. The theory is also contradicted by the ways that early Christian theologians worked to articulate distinctly Christian accounts of available philosophical thought. Certainly early Christian theology and all subsequent Christian theology engage with secular ideas, with greater and lesser degrees of discernment and wisdom; and Hellenistic thought did indeed influence Christian thinking about God. Twenty-first century theological discourse would benefit from a more complicated than dichotomous account of Hellenistic influences. I will leave the detailed narrations of early Christian theological and philosophical discourse to others, and turn my attention to some ways that earlier constructions of divine impassibility challenges a Moltmannian theology of hope. Supporters of divine passibility often support their position with passages from the Old Testament that use words of human affect to describe God. The apparent contradictions between God’s sovereignty and God’s involvement with creation have

\textsuperscript{10} Gavrilyuk, \textit{Suffering}, 3.
challenged scriptural interpretation for centuries. Castelo describes anomalies in LXX translations of Old Testament passages that suggest confusion about whether to interpret descriptions of God as more “anthropathic” or impassible:

Such aberrations within the LXX demonstrate that the ancient Hellenized world had great difficulty in maintaining certain aspects of the biblical witness since these clashed with what was perceived to be proper ways of speaking and thinking about God. One sees this tendency perpetuated among early writers and thinkers of the ancient world, including those who would have a lasting impression upon the early efforts at theologically systematizing the Christian faith. 11

At the same time, Castelo notes, the passages of the Old Testament that seem to support a contemporary passibilist understanding of God do not overshadow the unmoveable, unchangeable God of the Covenant.

For whatever one wants to make of the passibilist passsages in the Old Testament, this strand of testimony makes up only one facet (and a non-dominant one at that) of a more general Jewish understanding of God that tends to privilege God's majesty, glory, transcendence, holiness, and otherness. Yahweh and Israel are two intimately linked covenant partners, but within its intimacy this relationship does not ignore the vast difference that exists between them. After all, it is Yahweh who both initiates and sustains the covenant relationship. Israel, on the other hand, constantly breaches and calls into question the covenant, suggesting that at points in which the narrative reaches a tense and critical moment, God not only is but shows his righteousness, holiness, and mercy. 12

11 Castelo, Apathetic, 28-9.

12 Castelo, Apathetic, 34.
It can be easy for contemporary Christian accounts of the character of God to forget that Old Testament stories assume and do not contradict God’s complete distinction from creation and the passions of creation.\textsuperscript{13}

Even the staunchest supporters of divine passibility today struggle with the nuances of any impassible or passible claim. The tendency is to claim, on the one hand, that God has feelings and changes in ways different from human ways, and yet on the other hand, to lapse into elision between human and divine natures. Gavrilyuk observes:

One important thing to be grasped from the very beginning is that the choice between an unrestrictedly impassible and an unrestrictedly passible God implied in the modern theopaschite consensus presents a false dilemma. This becomes more or less obvious if we realize that all the contemporary advocates of theopaschitism would agree that significant qualifications apply to their assertion that God suffers and has emotions.\textsuperscript{14}

Contemporary passibilists may be surprised to learn that these questions of language about God have been a topic of Christian discussion for two millenia, and along the way, the cumulative wisdom of the church has come up with some consensus about a grammar for the discussions.

\textbf{3.1.2 A Grammar of God}

\textsuperscript{13} “At the risk of oversimplification, the limits and possibilities of God-talk within modern, conventional sensibilities and those detected in \textit{Tanakh} can be illustrated by the adjective of choice used in describing God. When pushed, modern Christians would tend to conclude the phrase ‘God is...’ with the predicate adjective ‘love.’ This tendency is largely due to the contemporary favoring of the Johannine witness as well as certain cultural presumptions about viable and healthy relationships. One could argue quite convincingly, however, that the Old Testament portrayal suggests different adjectives, many of which are difficult for interpreters to understand today. Certainly, one finds the theme of ‘love’ in the Old Testament, but it is not as prominent as in the New Testament in that it is usually accompanied with other notions when used.” Castelo, \textit{Apathetic}, 34.

\textsuperscript{14} Gavrilyuk, \textit{Suffering}, 5-6.
Often times we get discouraged and we think that no one cares. It’s hard to find somebody just to sit down to talk and share about the things that God has promised and the things that He will be. In the song that I am singing, this is what He means to me.

He’s my lighthouse, He’s my bridge over troubled waters. He’s the old ship of Zion out on the raging sea. He’s my cornerstone, He’s the one I’m leaning on. He’s the Man who conquered Calvary, He’s the Rock I’m standing on.

Let us lift our hearts toward heaven and thank Him for His love. He showed a new beginning on the wings of a dove. For He brought us through our dark nights, and He’s helped us through our sorrows, I’m excited in the spirit. I can sing about His love.

He’s my lighthouse, He’s my bridge over troubled waters. He’s the old ship of Zion out on the raging sea. He’s my cornerstone, He’s the one I’m leaning on. He’s the Man who conquered Calvary, He’s the Man who walked on Galilee, He’s the Man who set my spirit free. He’s the Rock I’m standing on.  

The earliest Christians struggled to find a language to name and to describe God, “the Lord your God”; God the Father; Jesus, the man in history, the Son of God, the messiah; Christ who lived died, was resurrected, and ascended; God the Trinity of perfect relations; the Holy Spirit who fills Christians with the presence of the resurrected Christ. The vast majority of theologians before, during, and after the Councils of Nicea and Chalcedon assumed and asserted the impassibility of God. There were disagreements about how to make sense of the relationship between the impassible God and the human Christ who suffered and died, but they did not imagine that God might be subject to suffering and change that would deny divine impassibility. Their efforts to articulate (but not necessarily resolve) the paradox of

passibility and impassibility developed into a grammar of divine transcendence and immanence: God’s impassibility includes, but is not superceded by, God’s passibility, manifest in Jesus Christ, fully human and fully divine. Some 5th century articulations of this grammar illustrate divine passibility which is at the same time impassibility:

“He that was impassible was nailed to the cross, and He who was by nature immortal died, and He that is the giver of life was buried.” Apostolic Constitutions, VIII. 12. 33.16

“[W]ithout changing Thou has emptied Thyself, and impassibly Thou has submitted to thy Passion.” Lenten Triodium., p. 593.17

“Abroad the regal banners fly./Now shines the Cross’s mystery:/ Upon it Life did death endure,/ And yet by death did life procure. [...] That which the prophet-king of old/ Hath in mysterious verse foretold,/Is now accomplished, whilst we see/ God ruling the nations from a Tree.”18

The doctrine and grammar of the impassible God and the two natures of Christ developed through a few centuries of theological arguments, debates, and conciliar. The following very cursory survey of representative conversations offers a glimpse of the early historical proceedings.

The Jewish Philo of Alexandra (20 BCE - 50 CE) argues for attention to the concept of unchangeableness, by positing God is unchangeable, especially in the ways


17 Gavrilyuk, “Select Quotations.”

18 Gavrilyuk, “Select Quotations.”
that humans are inconsistent and unconstant, but he also allows for God’s mercy. In this understanding, God’s mercy does not detract from God’s unchangeableness, because God’s constancy is not bound by the limitations of human efforts at constancy. Ignatius of Antioch (2nd century martyr) names the apparently impossible connection by embracing God’s impassibility and the passibility of God in Christ who is passible and impassible. Justin Martyr and the Apologists (also 2nd century) insists that God cares for all of creation while maintaining that God is “unchangeable and eternal,” “unbegotten and impassible.” God’s care for creation exceeds the greatest care that humans can imagine. The Apologists in general try to use Hellenistic philosophical resources to explain to their Hellenic audiences how God is both transcendent and enfleshed in Christ, and how God is not the same as speculative philosophy or the wide array of deities available for worship. Irenaeus of Lyons (late 2nd century) countered Gnostic claims to human potential for degrees of divinity, when the spirit is freed of the body, with an emphasis on God as creator. Irenaeus underscores God’s transcendence and creation’s dependence on God; and he presented the divine and human Christ as a unified person. Tertullian (2nd to 3rd c) claims that God is impassible and passible, through a shift in metaphorical

19 Castelo, Apathetic, 29-30.

20 Castelo, Apathetic, 47.


22 Castelo, Apathetic, 52. Note that their engagement with Hellenistic philosophy is a pedagogical and evangelical one.

23 Castelo, Apathetic, 53.
direction, such that people can be described in the ways that they (imperfectly) resemble God, rather than describing God in human terms.\textsuperscript{24} Origen and his student Gregory Thaumaturgus (3rd century) give mixed signals, stating sometimes that God is impassible and at other times that God is passible. Gregory Thaumaturgus explains that God demonstrates God’s impassibility by taking on “the crippling effects of the passions,” and yet remaining passable.\textsuperscript{25}

In the 4th century, the Arians argue that Christ and the Father have different essences, because Christ’s body suffers and dies, and the Father, the High God, is impassible: impassibility and passibility can thus co-exist, through the distinct separation Christ and the High God. The first Council of Nicea constructs a grammar to account for both the unity of the persons of the Trinity and divine impassibility that includes passibility. The Nicean Creed demonstrates the Council’s response that the Father and the Son are one, and that the human suffering of the Son does not compromise the impassibility of God.\textsuperscript{26} Nestorius and Cyril continue the argument through their writings: Nestorians wants to save the impassible God from any attribution of suffering; he understands Cyril to be degrading God by claiming that the impassible God suffers. Nestorius claims that impassibility excludes any suffering, by definition, so the impassible God and the passible Christ must be separate. Cyril claims that God is one, so that the passion of Christ must be one in

\textsuperscript{24} Castelo, \textit{Apathetic}, 54–5.

\textsuperscript{25} Castelo, \textit{Apathetic}, 57, citing \textit{To Theopompus}, 9.

\textsuperscript{26} Gavrilyuk, \textit{Suffering}, 132–4.
the impassible God.\textsuperscript{27} The Council of Chalcedon (also in the 5th century) affirms the consensus it perceives up to and including the gathering that Christ is fully human and divine. The Confession of Chalcedon articulates the two natures of Christ, thereby establishing a grammar for narrating divine passibility within divine impassibility. This consensus demonstrates how the early church addressed questions about (im)passibility and the nature(s) of Christ, and this wisdom remains authoritative in many streams of Christian tradition.

The Confession of Chalcedon on the human and divine nature of Christ:
We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach people to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body; consubstantial [co-essential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; (ἐν δύο φύσεωι ἀνθρώπου, ἀποθέτῳ, ἀνθρώπῳ, ἀνθρώπῳ, ἀνθρώπῳ - in duabus naturis inconfusa, immutabiliter, indivisa, inseparabiliter) the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person (prosopon) and one Subsistence (hypostasis), not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten God (μονογενὴς Θεός), the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning Him, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.\textsuperscript{28}

Cyril of Alexandria and Nestorius, bishop of Constantinople (4th-5th c.) articulate their theology in two distinct grammars. In order to sustain the impassible divinity of

\textsuperscript{27} Gavrilyuk, \textit{Suffering}, 135-171.

God, Nestorius needs to keep Christ’s humanity separate. Cyril’s grammar demonstrates the paradoxical oneness of God that includes impassibility and passibility, without diminishing either one. In this way, their disagreement is not an argument about whether or not God is impassible, a claim which they both assume to be true, but a conflict of grammatical narration: how to articulate God’s impassibility with Christ’s passion. Contemporary claims about passibility and impassibility have much to gain from attention to the grammar the early church established, as well as the related conflicts and agreements. If contemporary conflicts about the nature of God were framed in terms of differing grammars, the points of overlap and contradiction would be clearer: How does “passibility” work in relation to each language about the creator God? How does each language about one person of the Trinity apply to the other persons of the Trinity? The ramifications of theological hope doctrines would be more visible: Does God’s passibility weaken God’s convenental relationship with God’s people? Further, grammatically-oriented discernments of doctrines of God would facilitate a critical review of resources for a theology of hope, beyond the presently presupposed frameworks for speaking of God’s identity. Thomas’s grammar for a language of God represents a consensus of God doctrine that a wide body of the church has embraced for most of the life of the church. Renewed attention to this grammar will grant contemporary theologians the means to articulate connections and conflicts with previously constructed grammar, while clarifying present interpretations, adaptations, and applications of doctrines of God and of theological hope.
In Thomas’s theological grammar, hope seeks the attainment of the good with the assistance of the good. God is good and the source of all goodness. Creatures cannot know God’s goodness perfectly, but humans can know something of goodness in God’s creation and can analogously signify the goodness that preexists in God more perfectly than creatures can imagine or comprehend. Humans know God by recognizing perfections flowing from God to creatures and forming conceptions proportionate to those creature-scale perfections. “The perfections pre-exist in God unitedly and simply, whereas in creatures they are received, divided, and multiplied.”29 Humans assert, analogously and imperfectly, that God is simple, perfect, infinite, impassible and immutable, eternal, and one—all of which humans are not.30 Each of these cataphatic names for God affirms an apophatic negativity: God is not complex, God is not incomplete, God is not limited, God is not temporal, God is not changeable, God is not divided. These names for God are often called “attributes,” although they are not the attributes of creation that can be acquired or disregarded, improved or depleted. None of the attributes creatures know can apply to God in ways that creatures can comprehend. At the same time, since all the goods that creatures know flow from God, humans can speak of God using a kind of relational grammar, in which words analogously—and truthfully—name God. “Whatever good we attribute to creatures, pre-exists in God, and in a more excellent

29 I, 13, 4.

30 There are several ways to narrate and encapsulate Thomas’s explanations of the names of God. I am here listing “simple, perfect, infinite, impassible and immutable, eternal, and one”; but variations in translation, order, and number abound.
Aquinas is not here positing an ontological relatedness between the created world humans can describe and the existence of God; he is demonstrating how to participate in the order of creation God has created, by recognizing human limitations and praising God's lack of limitation, even when human imagination cannot fathom what that means. These expressions fulfill certain roles in the grammar of analogy, thereby showing, indirectly, that God is beyond logic and createdness.

God's simplicity signifies that God is not composed of various parts; it is not the case that portions of God pertain to portions of creation, or that God has conflicting feelings that manifest in inconsistency. Theological hope does not appeal to a God of power in times of war and a God of generosity at harvest time (or at end of year salary bonus time). God is not complicated as are humans and idols.

God is simple and perfect; there is nothing about God that might be improved, fulfilled, or completed. Theological hope does not anticipate a better God who has grown and developed since the old days.

God is simple, perfect, and infinite. Space, quantity, and shape do not apply to God. Hope need not be tempered by the frameworks of mathematics, science, reason, or conceivability that human understanding relies on.

God is simple, perfect, infinite, and eternal. God does not begin or end, and God is not defined by or limited by time.

God is simple, perfect, infinite, eternal, and impassible, immutable. As not-compound, not-improveable, not limited, and not in time, God is not moved or

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31 I, 13, 4.
diminished, weakened or changed. God does not become more or less, God does not move from here to there, God is not daunted, surprised, or constrained.

Finally, God is simple, perfect, infinite, eternal, impassible, and one. God cannot be divided. God the Trinity is not separable into three individuals; Jesus Christ who is fully human and fully divine is one God. Hope in Christ, infused by the Holy Spirit, is hope in God, the one God, the Trinity.

This grammar establishes a narrative of hope that embraces but does not explain away a number of paradoxes, the most challenging of which today may be the paradox of impassible passibility. Hope for divine compassion rests in God's perfect compassion; God is already and forever complete compassion. Therefore God's perfect compassion in no way contradicts or undermines God's simplicity, infinity, impassibility, eternity, or oneness. Moltmannian hope prioritizes God's passibility and worries that claims of divine impassibility prevent or detract from God's compassion and God's suffering in solidarity, not understanding that the grammar of language about God described above renders unintelligible any suggestion that God does not care for humans.32

Castelo recommends the definition of divine impassibility that claims, God “cannot be affected against his will by an outside force. Castelo also offers G. L. Prestige's observation that, “Impassibility means not that God is inactive or uninterested, not that He surveys existence with Epicurean impassivity from the shelter of a metaphysical insulation, but that His will is determined from within

32 It is possible that the impassible God rejected by Moltmannian theology represents an perversion of the doctrine presented here. If so, fluency in the grammars as established and as modified would allow a for distinctions and discernment.
instead of being swayed from without.” As perfect, God’s compassion cannot be increased, lessened, or improved upon; God’s perfect compassion exceeds all limitations, and certainly human imagination. The Thomistic grammar of God posits that God is merciful, God does indeed care for creation, but not in the passionate way that humans are passionately merciful. While people express sorrow with mercy when others are sorrowful, God does not participate in that lack which sorrow and misery represent. For humans, and empathy and compassion is the best we can do, since we cannot remove the misery of others. God, however, is greater than sorrow and misery, overflowing in grace and mercy. Hence, God’s “response” to sorrow is to dispel it. This is not a response on human terms, since God does not change from unmerciful to merciful. God already knows our misery and already meets that misery with goodness and mercy.

To sorrow over the misery of others does not belong to God; but it does most properly belong to Him to dispel that misery, whatever be the defect we call misery. Now defects are not removed, except by the perfection of some kind of goodness, and the primary source of goodness is.

Thus in eternally constant and complete compassionate care for creation, God does not suffer, which is to say, God’s impassibility, is not diminished or nullified by God’s compassion or passibility.

A theology of hope that retains no connections with this grammar of language about God, either directly or indirectly, lacks the tools for communication with other theological accounts of hope. D. Stephen Long argues for a strict adherence to Thomas’s grammar for God, asking for Christianity to retain and to teach the

33 Castelo, *Apathetic*, 16-17.

34 I, 21, 3.
“traditional” Thomistic grammar for God, even as it considers “alternative ways of speaking about God.” He worries that the beliefs most Christians share (or at least engage with) may become divisive, instead of uniting, if Christians can no longer share a language about God. In the context of a seminar entitled, “The Sovereignty of God Debate,” Long writes:

[T]o my knowledge, every presenter in this debate adheres to the basic confessions of the Christian faith, that Jesus is the incarnation of God; fully divine and fully human, united in one Person; that God is Triune; that God raised Jesus bodily from the dead and that God is love. We have so much upon which we agree.

He then argues for a common language that reflects these agreements:

[My] concern is that what we hold in common will be lost if we neglect the traditional language in which it was forged. If we lose this language, we will lose one of the Bible’s greatest gifts to all of humanity — the demythologization of God. Language that speaks of God’s suffering and death and that demands a necessary relationship between God and creation can only finally remythologize God and turn him into a creature who needs us for his own intelligibility.

The question of God’s impassibility determines the character and possibility of theological hope. A Thomistic systematic grammar shows that God is the end of hope and the means to hope. If God is passible without impassibility — less than perfect and susceptible to suffering, diminishment, and limitation — then hope looks

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36 “While others who adhere to the various theologies presented here may not confess these basic doctrines, all those invited to participate in Garrett’s debate on God’s sovereignty by the forum for evangelical theology adhere to them.” Long, “Reponse,” 183.

to an eschatology provided by a God solely constituted by imperfection, suffering, diminishment, and limitation, and the means to hope is likewise constrained.

Anselm provides one of the paradoxical claims about God that points toward what cannot be known or spoken about God: “God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived.” Long adds Robert Sokolowski’s interpretation of Anselm: “this means that God plus creation is not greater than God alone.”38 This mind-boggling assertion reflects some of the earliest language instruction received by the people of God. Long claims that Anselm’s assertion was the logical articulation of a basic Christian (and Jewish) understanding of God that comes through the Bible and the Church Fathers. We find it in the first two commands revealed to Moses: 1. I am the Lord your God; you shall not have strange gods before me. 2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.... If anything is placed before God, it becomes greater than God and thereby sets us up to worship that thing instead of God.39

In Long’s argument, language about God that works within the grammatical guidelines of divine simplicity, perfection, infinity, impassibility, eternity, and unity helps the people of God speak of what can and cannot be known about God, in ways that are intelligible in relation to scripture, the wisdom that precedes us, and each other. This language also demonstrates a grammar for biblical interpretation that Moltmannian hermeneutics lacks. Any scriptural descriptions of God as diminished or changed stands in relation to these commandments. There is no other god greater than the Lord God, who is greater than than limitation or change. Any claim to the contrary is to misrepresent, lie, about God.


Long worries that the suffering of God might define God and become greater than God. An application of Long’s concerns to a theology of hope suggests that a language about God apart from a comprehensive grammar of systematic theology risks becoming idolatry when it holds God's impassibility or the suffering of the forsaken God outside a grammar that takes into account the debates, wisdom, witness, and scriptural interpretation that precede us and continue now.\textsuperscript{40} The interpretation, translation, and application of grammars of God never stand alone, in closed systems of people and meaning, set apart from other systems, people, and grammars. Fluency or familiarity with one grammar does not exclude fluency with others, but instead allows for hybrid languages and critical connections among discourses. A grammar for God language that discounts the grammatical discernments of the church to date effects closure and risks idolatry, as well as incomprehensibility to the those in relation to the grammars outside the closure.

The theological grammars theological articulated by the early church and by Thomas gather and express ecclesial wisdom God's passibilty/impassibility, with appreciation of Christian theology’s long-term confession that human language for God needs to be apophatic as well as cataphatic: divine mystery and paradox cannot be resolved by human reason. Moltmannian hope relies on the resolving many paradoxes that have been and could be resources for eschatological hope: divine judgement is absorbed into mercy; salvation includes justice for all without painful reconciliation; divine forgiveness subsumes human repentance (God claims

\textsuperscript{40} Of course if a particular systematics does not include the commandment about idolatry, the grammar would work differently, and the theology would be hard to narrate as Christian.
repentance for God’s ownself, along with suffering); the goodness of creation takes precedence over a heavenly life that does not affirm that goodness by including it largely as it is; divine passibility rejects divine impassibility; God’s love eliminates the possibility of a real difference between God and creation; interpretive homogeneity censors interpretive complexity; divine suffering overrides divine perfection.

An appreciation of the limits of human imagination to grasp how it is possible for God to do or be seeming opposites leaves opportunities for eschatological hope in the spaces where we can not see the connection. Paradox opens the window of hope to God’s possibilities beyond human imagination, after Moltmann closes it in favor of a certain future of in the universal salvation of this world, in this world. Christian paradox places the impossibilities of God’s life and God’s fulfillment of our lives in the window of hope in God’s infinite goodness that far exceeds our capacities to reason or imagine.

Narrations of paradox and mystery can seem impossible or unnecessary. The monastic traditions of silence in the presence and to the glory of God illustrate one performance of hope in God without the presumption of humanly reasoned resolution of God’s nature. Daniel Castelo describes one such strategic narrative that sets suffering within God’s eternal love:

Divine impassibility points to God’s power, wisdom, and love that are prior, contemporaneous, and subsequent to moments of humanly embodied suffering. Although affirming divine impassibility does not explain away the mystery of evil, which ultimately requires eschatological resolution, it does affirm by faith the mystery of God in whom the former will be resolved. Since

41 This is Bloch’s open future, only placed in God’s hands.
pain and suffering surround us while it is in God that creation lives, moves, and has its being (Acts 17:28), the two mysteries must be maintained.42

Jon Sobrino offers another expression of the God who suffers impassibly from within the context of Latin American Liberation Theology, and he addresses questions about the suffering of God from the perspective of the poor and oppressed. Sobrino describes God as powerful and close to the suffering of the neediest; he identifies salvation as dependent upon the mystery of God as unimaginably transcendent and wholly immanent.

Some theologians are reluctant to speak of God as suffering; others are not. In my opinion, the different theoretical views of such a serious problem are less important than how the world’s poor and victims think about it...The poor turn to God to save them with [God’s] power, and in that they see God’s effective love. But they also turn to God when they find [God] close to their own suffering, and in that they see credible love. ...Those who do not declare God dead must bear the burden of [God’s] mystery. In my opinion, the mystery is that human salvation presupposes a God with alterity (a different, omnipotent and therefore distant God) and a God with affinity (like us, crucified, close by). 43

Theological hope that ignores the grammatical ways that the church has narrated the paradox of paradoxical God’s passibility and impassibility risks incoherence as Christian theology. A Christian theology of hope fed by an awareness of previous ecclesial struggles about the nature of God and the ways that God provides hope for creation has resources for discerning what is distinctive about Christian theological hope. The addition of patristic and Thomistic determinations about the God of hope grants contemporary theological hope tools for critically evaluating

42 Castelo, Apathetic, 145.

evaluating familiar Moltmannian themes, and for faithful discernment in modifying and establishing new grammars.

### 3.1.3 Christ, the Perfect Hope

May my spirit be a ransom on your behalf, and my bonds as well, which you did not despise, nor were you ashamed of them. Nor will the perfect hope, Jesus Christ, be ashamed of you.

Ignatius of Smyrna 44

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus’ name.

**Refrain.**

On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand; all other ground is sinking sand.

When Darkness veils his lovely face, I rest on his unchanging grace. In every high and stormy gale, my anchor holds within the veil.

**Refrain.**

His oath, his covenant, his blood supports me in the whelming flood. When all around my soul gives way, he then is all my hope and stay.

**Refrain.**

When he shall come with trumpet sound, O may I then in him be found! Dressed in his righteousness alone,

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faultless to stand before the throne!45

The account of the impassible God who is nevertheless passible relies on the person of Jesus Christ. Moltmannian hope emphasizes the cross and resurrection of Christ, one of three persons who unite perichoretically in eternal relation; Christ’s affirmation of the promise of the new creation; and Christ’s role in bringing God to the the neediest to share their suffering in solidarity. The theology presented in this chapter emphasizes Jesus Christ, the incarnation of God, who is fully human and fully divine. Jesus Christ, through his death and resurrection, effects the transformation of humans into the fullness of their creatureliness in eternal life with God. In this way, Christ is the perfect hope.

Thomas names Christ as one of three persons within the one Trinity. The persons are equal, one and three, and coeternally in a relationship of generation and inspiration46, while at the same time the mission of the Son sends him as incarnate gift to humanity for its salvation. In order to be perceived by humanity, the Son is sent as the visible author of salvation.47 The Holy Spirit, in accordance with its mission, is sent as the sign of sanctification, a gift proceeding in love.48 As a sign of sanctification, the Holy Spirit appears visibly as needed.49 Jesus Christ, Son of God,  


46 Summa I, 43, 2.

47 I, 43, 7.

48 I, 43, 7.

49 I, 43, 7; “in the confirmation and propagatino of the faith by such visible signs.”
remains fully and eternally divine and one with the Trinity, while living, suffering, and
dying as fully human in created time.

Thomas’s presentation of Christ as the foundation of hope makes clear that
hope rests in Christ and in Christ’s salvific acts. In Thomas’s commentary on
Hebrews, he explains that the transcendence of Christ is the subject matter of the
Epistle; and in his discussion of Heb 6:18-19, Thomas explains that Jesus places the
hope set before us, the anchor of the soul, firmly where he has gone, behind the veil.
“Christ has entered for us, into the inner sanctuary of the tent and has there made
firm [fixi.] our hope.”\textsuperscript{50} Christ grounds, fixes, and sustains the hope of believers, as
the one through whom fulfillment has been effected (the “already,” as professed in
faith) and will be perfected (the “not yet,” as professed in hope).

The hope of beatitude rests in Christ, who makes possible the fulfillment of
those blessed by God: “God alone makes souls blessed through participation in him;
but Christ is the one who leads us to beatitude.”\textsuperscript{51} Christ leads by virtue of his
complete participation in human life, suffering, and death, and by his completion of
humanity in his resurrection, which already and not yet effects the resurrection of all.
Romanus Cessario describes Thomas’s claim that Christ establishes the efficacy of
human hope:

Since God communicates His redeeming mercy through the sacrifice of
Christ, the mystery of the Incarnation grounds every exercise of theological
hope. Aquinas recognized that the New Testament explicitly points to Christ
as the one who guarantees hope’s efficacy: “But I am not ashamed, for I know
whom I have believed, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that Day
what has been entrusted to me” (2 Tim 1:12). At the same time, the virtue of
\textsuperscript{50} Josef Pieper, \textit{Faith, Hope, Love}. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 106.
\textsuperscript{51} III, 59, 2.
hope enables each believer to participate already in the promised eschatological salvation.\textsuperscript{52}

Thomas identifies Christ as the foundation and the motivation of the virtue of hope. Moltmannian hope downplays Christ’s identity as the efficacy of hope by emphasizing Christ’s crucifixion suffering — and its facilitation of God’s participation in that suffering — and by recasting Christ’s resurrection as an affirmation of God’s promises yet to be fulfilled, instead of the cause of salvation.\textsuperscript{53}

Moltmannian hope further downplays hope in Christ by narrating human participation in trinitarian perichoretical relations as a higher good than Christ’s triumph over death and sin. Tanner, countering Moltmann, writes that

\begin{quote}
The idea that human relations should take on [the character of the persons of the Trinity] becomes an end in itself, apart from any more concrete consideration of what those relations among divine persons are actually doing for us in the economy—for example, bringing about the end of death, sin, and suffering in human lives.\textsuperscript{54}
\end{quote}

Thomas argues that while the principal agency of salvation is God’s; the instrumental agency of salvation is Christ’s. “

[S]ince Christ’s humanity is the instrument of the Godhead, as stated above (Q. 43, A. 2), therefore all Christ’s actions and sufferings operate instrumentally in


\textsuperscript{54} Tanner, \textit{Christ the Key}, 234.
virtue of His Godhead for the salvation of men. Consequently, then, Christ's Passion accomplishes man's salvation efficiently.\textsuperscript{55} And, consequently, hope rests on the efficiency and efficacy of Christ's death and resurrection.

Thomistic christological hope sees hope even in Christ's judgment. Moltmannian hope rejects images (biblical passages, and doctrine) of Christ’s final judgment that suggest punishment of sinners, preferring instead, images of justice obtained through the righting of injustice itself. Christ’s judgment becomes a way of clearing out the problematic aspects of humanity, while leaving the rest of humanity intact, as though sin were an addition to one’s persona that can be deleted. Pope Benedict VI, in his encyclical, \textit{Spe salvi}, narrates Thomistic hope in Christ as the creation of justice in a way we cannot conceive, but can begin to grasp through faith.\textsuperscript{56} “Yes, there is a resurrection of the flesh. There is justice. There is an “undoing” of past suffering, a reparation that sets things aright. For this reason, faith in the Last Judgement is first and foremost hope.”\textsuperscript{57} God cares so much about creation that God deems it worthy of judgment and grace. God does not simply gloss over the world's pains and wrongs with a grace that ignores injustice. Human sin and error, the horrors of historical conflict and abuses of power, the woundedness no one else notices, and the disparity of goods no social program can resolve — all this and more is made right — has been made right — in Jesus Christ, “the Judge and

\textsuperscript{55} III, 48, 6.


\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Spe salvi}, #43.
Saviour,” “the fire which both burns and saves.” Christ brings justice to the Psalmist, the martyrs, the victims of genocide, and all those deprived of the goods and benefits of others. Christ imposes a punishing justice on the oppressors, torturers, the powerful, and the wealthy. And Christ draws the people of hope through lives of virtue, through suffering and death, through resurrection, judgment, and to beatitude. “Christ Jesus our hope” is perfect in divinity, the perfection of humanity, and the perfector of humans, to the fullness of their creaturly identity.

3.2 Hope

Moltmannian hope rejects those doctrines which seem to rely a God who is distant, impassible, and indifferent to the needs of a suffering creation. Moltmannian hope proclaims the God who suffers in order to correct hope in the God of distant indifference of the needs of creation: only a suffering God can be compassionate God, and there is no hope in a God who neither suffers nor is compassionate. A Thomistic theology of hope that predates this bipolar understanding casts the compassion of God within a grammar of the perfect compassion of divine impassibility, and the end of human hope beyond the known limitations of this-worldly life and its imagined extension. This hope requires God’s grace, manifest in the practice of theological virtues, to imagine and attain life with God through Christ.

3.2.1 Virtue and Beatitude: Here and Now, Then and There

I believe my steps are growing wearier each day

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58 *Spe salvi*, #47.

59 1 Tim 1:1.
Still I’ve got a journey on my mind
Lures of this old world have ceased to make me want to stay
And my one regret is leaving you behind.

If it proves to be his will that I am first to go
And somehow I’ve a feeling it will be
When it comes your time to travel likewise don’t feel lost
For I will be the first one that you’ll see.

Refrain:
And I’ll be waiting on the far side banks of Jordan
I’ll be waiting drawing pictures in the sand
And when I see you coming I will rise up with the shout
And come running through he shallow waters reaching for your hand.

Through this life we’ve labored hard to earn our meager fare
It’s brought us trembling hands and failing eyes
I’ll just rest here on this shore and turn my eyes away
Until you come, then we’ll see paradise.

Refrain.

Thomistic systematic theology, and some of the theologians in conversation with Thomas, identify hope as a theological virtue, a particular category of virtue which is infused by divine grace and directed by God toward God. The end of this hope is beatitude — the blessed vision of God. The certainty of this hope rests on God’s past and present activity in history and as incarnate in Christ. God’s goodness — not creation — is the continuity of this world to the next.

3.2.1 Theological Virtues

I’m pressing on the upward way
New heights I’m gaining every day
Still praying as I’m onward bound
Lord, plant my feet on higher ground

Refrain:

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Lord, lift me up and let me stand
by faith on Heaven’s table land
A higher plain than I have found
Lord, plant my feet on higher ground

My heart has no desire to stay
where doubts arise and fears dismay
Though some may dwell where these abound
My prayer, my aim, is higher ground

Refrain.

I want to scale the utmost heights
and catch a gleam of glory bright
but still I’ll pray ’til heaven I’ve found
Lord, lead me on to higher ground

Refrain.

Thomas names hope as a theological virtue directed toward God, by God, and fulfilled in eternal happiness, beatitude. He uses the terminology well-established by his time to identify as theological those virtues which adhere to God. Theological virtues are gifts by grace, from within, that guide toward God, and manifest—in this life—as habitual practices to perform. The Discipleship section below explores the practice of the theological virtue of hope. This section describes the category of the theological virtues, how they fit together, and what the virtue of hope indicates about the end of hope.

Thomas interprets Aristotle’s discussion of virtue (in Nic. Eth. ii. 6) in terms of the one God of Christian scripture and tradition. Thomas rewrites Aristotle’s

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observation that, “the virtue of a thing is that which makes its subject good, and its work good likewise,” claiming instead that the good of a human act is the extent to which it “attains [God’s] reason or God Himself.”63 God’s grace transforms the human act of hope into a theological virtue, a habit of mind that “flows from grace alone.”64 These virtues are not emotions, universal human traits, or an exercise of will power: they are the divine assistance necessary in order for humans to surpass the limitations of their own nature and in God’s nature as perfected creatures, “as kindled wood partakes of the nature of fire.”65 Peter of Poitiers defines a theological, infused, virtue as “a good quality of mind by which one lives righteously, of which no one can make bad use, which God works in us without us.”66 Theological virtues draw humans through their natural state into the supernatural possibility prepared for them by Christ.

Theological virtue is an ennobling of man’s nature that entirely surpasses what he “can be” of himself. Theological virtue is the steadfast orientation toward a fulfillment and a beatitude that are not “owed” to natural man. Theological virtue is the utmost degree of a supernatural potentiality for being. This supernatural potentiality for being is grounded in a real, grace-filled participation in the divine nature, which comes to man through Christ (2 Pet 1:4).67

Unlike the other virtues, which aim for that which leads to God, the Thomistic theological virtues of faith, hope, and love aim for God. While moral

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63 II, II, 17, 1.
64 I, II, 62, 1.
66 I, II, 55, 4
virtues try for a mean between extremes of human practice in the natural order, the theological virtues progress toward the divine end of humans in the supernatural order, an end which has no mean. In faith, hope, and love, believers approach God, Godself, by God’s agency. The theological virtues provide the possibility of participation in the reality of Christ. Faith, hope, and love do not simply offer a glimpse of the truth about reality; they allow believers to receive the revelation of reality itself. According to Thomas, some knowledge of God is possible for all humans within created nature, without the assistance of grace, but humans frequently do not make good use of this innate ability. Through the gift of grace, God “imparts” reality to wayfarers turned toward God, the just, incomplete, human creatures on their way to fulfillment. In this way, a human “actually or habitually knows and loves God, though imperfectly; and this image consists in the conformity of grace.” Faith, hope, and love help humans participate in God’s procession of Word and Love to the extent that the object of human knowing and loving is the same as the object of God’s knowing and loving: God. In this life, human participation is still imperfect, manifested as conformation and as analogy. In beatitude, the blessed attain the image of God in the “likeness of glory.” In faith, hope, and love, believing wayfarers participate in the reality of Creator and creation, while they are still on the way to the perfection of creatureliness in the beatific

68 II, II, 12, 11 ad 3.

69 II, II, 93, 4.

70 II, II, 93, 4.

71 Pieper, Faith, 113.
vision. The theological virtue of hope provides the wayfarer with a foretaste of beatitude and guidance for this life. Thomas explains:

These virtues, which flow out of habitual grace and perfect (at least inchoately) the powers of the soul not only orient the justified to God as end but also provide a foretaste of the enjoyment of God that will have come for others in the next life. One walks by faith now; in the next life, one will have the direct vision of God. One hopes now for union with God; in the next life, the beatified partake of that union. And one loves now, aspiring to the fullness of charity’s expression that will come in the immediate presence of God, the ultimate good.72

Hope witnesses to beatitude through partial, imperfect participation in the reality of God.

3.2.1.2 The Theological Virtue of Faith

Oh Lord, I’m strivin’,
tryin’ to make it through this barren land,
but as I go from day to day,
I can hear my Savior say,
“Trust me child, come on and hold my hand.”

Refrain:
I’m comin’ up on the rough side of the mountain,
I must hold to God, His powerful hand.
I’m comin’ up on the rough side of the mountain,
I’m doin’ my best to make it in.

Refrain

I’m comin’ up Lord,
Though my burdens, sometime they press me down,
But if I can only keep this faith,
I’ll have strength just to run this race;
I’m lookin’ for my starry crown.

Refrain

This old race will be soon be over,
There’ll be no more race for me to run.

And I will stand before God's throne,
All my heartaches will be gone,
I’ll hear my Savior say, “Welcome home.”

*Refrain.* 73

Faith, hope, and love mutually support and build up each other, such that it is difficult to determine which comes first. Thomas begins with faith, because faith provides the foundation for hope. Faith precedes hope, because in order to hope, one needs to know for what to hope. “Now the primary subjection of man to God is by faith, according to Heb. xi. 6: He that cometh to God, must believe that He is.” 74

The act of faith, then, means to accept someone else’s witness, to trust, and to participate in someone else’s knowledge. 75 A believer retains some uncertainty, because the believer does not see or know for him/herself; “rather, the mind, insofar as it believes, is operating not on its own but on alien soil.” 76 Faith pertains to participation in the testimony of a witness, by identifying with the witness and seeing the witness’s reality as if it were one’s own. The theological virtue of faith pertains to belief in the reality whose witness and content is God. 77 Theological faith asserts the certainty of God’s identity, guaranteed by the testimony of God. God moves people inwardly, by grace, such that they can rise above that which is possible

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74 II, II, 20, 1.

75 II, II, 20, 2 ad 2.


77 II, II, 21, 2.
to human nature alone and then think and assent to the reality of God.  

In this way, the true end of humans in God resides first in the intellect, by faith. Once the end is present in the intellect by faith, the end can be present to the will, which “has no inclination for anything except in so far as it is apprehended by the intellect.” Yet, even though an act of faith comes from the intellect and the will, the virtue of faith resides in the intellect, because of the object of faith, “the true, which pertains properly to the intellect.” Faith establishes the possibility for hope and love which uphold and sustain faith. Faith adheres to God as the source of the knowledge of truth.

The infusion of grace moves faith to this knowledge of God’s truth, and faith claims certainty of this knowledge about God, because of the witness, who is God. Faith is certain of the Trinity and the Incarnation, and of God’s omnipotence and mercy, even though the wayfarer does not know the fullness of God’s truth. The certainty of faith grounds hope and love and continues to build until the fulfillment of faith in beatitude, at which point faith is no longer necessary, since the object of faith—God—stands eternally present. Certainty pertains to the faith in God that sustains a wayfarer not yet in the presence of God. Certain faith no longer applies to those who have reached the beatific vision, who have attained the completion of...

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78 II, II, 21, 2.


80 II, II, 21, 2.

81 II, II, 23, 3.

82 II, II, 24, 2.
createdness and no longer reside in a state of “not yet.” Faith is fulfilled and therefore voided in, or subsumed in the love of, beatitude. Thomas interprets Hebrews 11:1: “Faith is the substance of things to be hoped for, the evidence of things that appear not,” or, in the form of a definition: “faith is a habit of the mind, whereby eternal life is begun in us, making the intellect assent to what is nonapparent.” He explains that the object of faith is the First Truth, which is as yet unseen and unattained, and therefore hoped for. The substance, the assent of faith, contains what is to be hoped for, and the evidence, or conviction, commits the intellect to the truth.

### 3.2.1.3 The Theological Virtue of Hope

In this world we have our trials  
Sometimes lonesome, sometimes blue  
But the hope of life eternal  
Makes all old hopes brand new  

And I don't want to get adjusted to this world, to this world  
I've got a home so much better  
And I'm gonna go there sooner or later  
And I don't want to get adjusted to this world, to this world  

Lord, I'm growing old and weary  
There's no place that feels like home  
Saviour come, my soul to ferry  
To where I nevermore will roam  

And I don't want to get adjusted to this world, to this world  
I've got a home so much better  
And I'm gonna go there sooner or later

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83 II, II, 23, 2 ad 1.

84 II, II, 23, 6.

85 II, II, 25, 1.
And I don't want to get adjusted to this world, to this world
And I don't want to get adjusted to this world, to this world

Thomas explains that the theological virtue of hope anticipates the fulfillment of creatureliness in God that faith proposes as a certainty: “...the act of hope presupposes the act of faith. . . Hence an act of faith is experienced in an act of hope.”\(^87\) Natural hope (hope as a passion) aims toward a future good that is difficult to obtain.\(^88\) The theological virtue of hope (hope as a grace-infused habit of the mind) aims toward eternal happiness in God, and it enjoys divine assistance in obtaining that eternal happiness. In other words, the object of hope is God, and the means of obtaining the object is God’s assistance.\(^89\) Natural hope reaches toward goods in general, “toward the arduous ‘not yet’ of fulfillment.”\(^90\) The theological virtue of hope reaches toward the Good, which is God, toward the arduous not yet of fulfillment, which has already been inaugurated by Jesus Christ. This hope is “a steadfast turning toward the fulfillment of man’s nature, that is, toward good, . . . it has its source in the reality of grace in man and is directed toward supernatural happiness in God.”\(^91\) The impossibly arduous goal of human perfection in God has

\(^86\) Iris DeMent, “I Don’t Want to Get Adjusted to This World,” *Lifeline*, Flariella, 2004, 1004.

\(^87\) II, II, 17, 6 ad 2.

\(^88\) II, II, 26, 13 ad 3.

\(^89\) II, II, 23, 1.

\(^90\) II, II, 23, 1.

\(^91\) Pieper, *Faith*, 236; I, II, 2, 7 ad 2.
become possible through Christ’s suffering, death, and resurrection, and has been rendered attainable through the graced infusion of hope.

Thomas explains that the reality of grace which supplies the virtue of hope in humans also reveals the reality of Creator and creature. Hope reflects the true identity of humanity as wayfarers, creatures directed toward, drawn toward, and eager for the rest that will only come in beatitude. Pieper explains: “In the virtue of hope more than in any other, man understands that he is a creature, that he has been created by God.”92 Hope both accepts the reality of the incompleteness that accompanies the creature’s wayfarer status and expects the resolution of wayfaring, the completion of creation in the eternal enjoyment of God. This expectation does not suggest divine delay or lack for not yet having effected perfection. Hope’s expectation refers to the necessity of divine assistance, and therefore points toward the additional dimension of the supernatural, rather than simply to a chronological timeline.93 Similarly, the image of wayfarer suggests less a sense of geographic travel and more the true character of created nature in itself.94 The reality revealed in hope, and in all three of the infused virtues, far exceeds the limitations of finite existence; through hope that reality reorders the lives of believers toward God. Hope orders the lives of believers radically differently from the familiar priorities of daily life. Hope claims eternal happiness in God as its primary object, instead of physical comfort, gratification of all desires, or financial success. God’s assistance provides theological

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93 I, 23, 4.

94 I, 22, 2 ad 3 and 4.
hope, and appropriately proportioned hope must aim toward the infinite good of enjoyment in God. “For we should hope from Him for nothing less than Himself, since His goodness, whereby he imparts good things to His creature, is no less than His Essence. Therefore the proper and principal object of hope is eternal happiness.”

Thomas explains that the virtue of hope also extends to that which contributes to those goods that contribute to the creature’s end in the Creator; these constitute the secondary object of hope. No person or creature can replace God as the first cause of happiness, and hope should not be directed to a person or creature as if to God; still, others can hope for and help to provide those things that support wayfarers along the way to happiness in God. Thomas argues that it is “lawful to hope in a man or a creature as being the secondary and instrumental agent, through whom one is helped to obtain any goods that are ordained to happiness. It is in this way that we turn to the saints, and that we ask men also for certain things.”

Cessario elaborates on the secondary secondary objects of hope that are important to the acquisition and sustenance of theological hope:

Theological hope relates the Christian directly to God, so it includes among its material objects all of the good things that the Christian believer lovingly looks forward to receiving: the vision of God, the accompanying bliss, the resurrection of the body and its glorification, and fellowship with the blessed. Theological hope also entitles the Christian to expect the secondary objects, that is, create instruments of hope that form part of the Christian dispensation for salvation. This means above all the instrumental causality of Christ’s humanity; however, it also includes spiritual goods, such as grace, the

95 I, 23, 4 ad 2.
96 I, 23, 1.
97 II, II, 17, 4.
infused virtues, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the maternal mediation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the intercession of the saints, and the forgiveness of sins (especially mediated through the sacraments of Penance and Holy Anointing). Furthermore, one can rely on theological hope for temporal goods, such as holy friends, good health, psychological equilibrium, at least to the extent that these things conduce toward beatitude.98

Thus, hope recasts every relationship in terms of the end revealed by grace, and hope ranks all goods in relation to the one true good in God. A multiplicity of secondary goods assist the goods of hope of eternal life with God. These secondary goods indicate some of the ways that Christians can facilitate and support hope in those who are hopeless.

3.2.1.4 The Theological Virtue of Love

When God dips His pen of love in my heart
And He writes my soul a message He wants me to know
His spirit all divine fills a sinful soul of mine
When God dips His love in my heart

Refrain:
Well I said I wouldn't tell it to a livin’ soul
How He brought salvation and He made me whole
But I found I couldn’t hide such a love as Jesus did impart
Well He made me laugh and He made me cry, set my sinful soul on fire
When God dips His love in my heart

Well sometimes though the way is dreary, dark and cold
And some unburdened sorrow keeps me from the goal
I go to God in prayer, I can always find Him there
To whisper sweet peace to my soul

Refrain.

He walked up every step of Calvary's rugged way
And gave His life completely to bring a better day
My life was steeped in sin but in love He took me in
His blood washed away every stain

The theological virtue of love is generally listed after faith and hope, but it holds first place as “that which attains God most.” Thomas explains that faith and hope adhere to God for the sake of the one who believes and hopes, and faith and hope find their completion when in eternal happiness with God. Faith, the assertion and assurance of the reality of God, no longer pertains once fulfilled in the presence of God. Hope, the anticipation and expectation in the “not yet” of the “already” accomplished redemption, through Christ and in the Holy Spirit, no longer applies once perfected in beatitude. Therefore, faith and hope do not perdure in beatitude. Love, however, adheres to God for God’s sake, unifying human minds to God by the emotion of love. When the union of lover and beloved is effected in beatitude, love then perdures for ever. In this life, love manifests itself most fully in friendship between humans on the way to friendship with God; in such friendships, enabled by the infusion of the Holy Spirit (“who is the love of the Father and the Son”), humans participate in divine love. Love affirms the reality of God and God’s good creation that faith asserts and hope anticipates, by moving toward union with God according to the example of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ models love through


100 II, II, 83, 15 ad 3.

101 II, II, 83, 3 ad 3.

102 II, II, 83, 15.

103 II, II, 83, 15 ad 2.
friendship with all sorts and conditions of people. By imitating Christ’s friendships recorded in scripture and the friendships of those saints who are exemplary imitators of Christ, believers can learn to participate in divine love. “Thus, in the order of generation, love follows faith and hope, which proclaim and point toward the love of God. In the order of perfection, however, love is the most excellent of virtues, and without love, neither faith nor hope can be perfected.”  

Love affirms the goodness of God’s creation, by loving the other for being. Thomas observes that what believers should love in their neighbors is precisely that their neighbors might “be in God.”

Creation-affirming love includes self-love, which, as a theological virtue, loves oneself as a form of loving God. As the source of and reason for love, and as the entirety of good, God leads believers to love themselves: “in the order of love man should love himself more than all else after God.” God also leads believers to love others and God in friendship that participates in God’s love. Love between two people that wishes good, each to the other, constitutes charitable friendship, friendship that communicates mutual love. Love that communicates God’s love for those of Christ’s body constitutes friendship with God.

104 II, II, 23, 6.
105 II, II, 25, 1.
106 The inclusion of self-love in the theological virtue of love opens the possibility of distortion and delusion, which underscores the importance of keeping love closely tied to faith and hope, as well as the importance of other supporting moral virtues (including humility and prudence).
107 II, II, 26, 13 ad 3.
Accordingly, since there is a communication between man and God, in as much as He communicates His happiness to us, some kind of friendship must needs be based on this same communication, of which it is written (1 Cor. i.9): God is faithful: by Whom you are called unto the fellowship of His Son. The love which is based on this communication, is charity: wherefore it is evident that charity is the friendship of man for God.\textsuperscript{109}

Love guides hope in friendships toward hope in friendships in Christ.

Thomas’s theological virtues depend on the connection between God’s knowledge and human knowledge, assisted by grace. Present-day understandings of people who do not possess the cognitive capacities to participate in that knowledge challenge the necessity of cognitive knowledge for theological hope. This concern pertains to the hope the church might have for the very young, the very old, and those who have cognitive disabilities; and it pertains to the hope of the very young, the very old, and those who have cognitive disabilities. These questions deserve ongoing work. In Chapter 4, I will suggest some initial approaches to the connection between knowledge and hope.

### 3.2.2 Beatitude, The End of Hope

Oh they tell me of a place and they tell me of a day  
Where the saints shall be gathered to stay  
They shall come from the east they shall come from the west  
When we gather on that roundup day

When it’s roundup time in heaven and our travels on earth are o’er  
All the friends that death has severed shall gather on that golden shore

’Twill be sweet when we meet at Jesus feet  
With no heartaches no pains no sigh  
When they comb heaven’s plains will they find your name  
At the great roundup in the sky\textsuperscript{110}

\textsuperscript{109} II, II, 23, 1.

3.2.2.1 Heaven

Twelve-hundred miles, its length and breadth
That four-square city stands
Its gem-set walls of jasper shine
They’re not made by human hands

One-hundred miles it’s gates are wide
Abundant entrance there
With fifty miles of elbow room
On either side to spare

Refrain:
When the gates swing wide on the other side
Just beyond the sunset sea
There'll be room to spare as we enter there
There'll be room for you and room for me
For the gates are wide on the other side
Where the fairest flowers bloom
On the right hand and on the left hand
Fifty miles of elbow room

Sometimes I’m cramped and I’m crowded here
And I long for elbow room
I long to reach for altitude
Where the fairest flowers bloom
It won’t be long before I pass
Into that city fair
With fifty miles of elbow room
On either side to spare.

Refrain.111

All language about the end of theological hope depends on analogy. Efforts to avoid images of heaven, so as not to be distracted from the here and now, fail to recognize that Christian hope of resurrection life cannot be expressed without

analogy. Since humans have no access to direct or indirect knowledge or experience of life that is not this life, we are left with silence, language of what God (and life with God) is not, and language that suggests something more, better, and beyond human thought and expression. Ample images from scripture and the lives of the people of God feed our imaginations with ways to point beyond what we know.

Gregory of Nyssa speaks of this world and the world of beatitude with the analogy of a city: “Let us take as head not the Jerusalem below, but the mother City above; not the one that at this very hour armies are trampling underfoot, but that which the angels glorify.”112 Benedict, in Spe salvi, cites Augustine, who wrote to the widow Proba that the end of prayer is “the blessed life,” the life of “happiness.”113 Benedict describes this blessed happiness as joy beyond measure: “This is how Jesus expresses it in Saint John’s Gospel: ‘I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you’ (16:22).”114 On the one hand, endless joy sounds wonderful; on the other hand, endlessness distresses our familiarity and comfort within time. Even the most positive and celebratory claims about the goodness and potential of creation hesitate to promise endless futures outside history. Benedict notes that the phrase “eternal life” stretches our imaginations beyond capacity, since we are so bound by and reassured by the frame of time.

To imagine ourselves outside the temporality that imprisons us and in some way to sense that eternity is not an unending succession of days in the calendar, but something more like the supreme moment of satisfaction, in


113 Spe salvi, #11.

114 Spe Salvi, #12.
which totality embraces us and we embrace totality — this we can only attempt. It would be like plunging into the ocean of infinite love, a moment in which time — the before and after — no longer exists. We can only attempt to grasp the idea that such a moment is life in the full sense, a plunging ever anew into the vastness of being, in which we are simply overwhelmed with joy.

Benedict argues that the many attempts by the people of God to describe the indescribable end of hope have given to the people of God the gift of perseverance in faithful hope.

Thomas sketches a grammar of what can be said about the divine beatitude that cannot be known except by God and the blessed, “who are called blessed by reason of the assimilation to His beatitude.” He determines that beatitude belongs to God, because it is “perfect good of an intellectual nature,” beatitude belongs to God as also to the blessed who are assimilated to God’s beatitude; beatitude is God and therefore uncreated, while it is a created thing in creatures; and the beatitude of God includes all other beatitudes. In keeping with his recognition of the ontological distinction between God’s knowledge and human knowledge, Thomas does not attempt to solve the mystery of beatitude; however, within the guidelines he presents, we might imagine an existence, outside the time and place we now understand, that participates as fully as creatures can participate in the perfect

115 Spe salvi, #12.

116 Spe salvi, #13.

117 I, 26, 2.

118 I, 26, 1.

119 I, 26, 3.

120 I, 26, 4.
goodness that is the knowledge of God. The object of this theological hope pertains to body and soul, exceeds and absorbs all other partial beatitudes we might hope for, and assimilates the blessed to God's own beatitude.

Gregory of Nyssa describes the means of assimilation to God's beatitude with an image of bubbles of air in water:

For as air is not retained in water when it is dragged down by some weighty body and left in the depth of the water, but rises quickly to its kindred element, while the water is often raised up together with the air its upward rush, being moulded by the circle of air into a convex shape with a slight and membrane-like surface, so too, when the true life that underlay the flesh sped up, after the Passion, to itself, the flesh was also raised up with it, being forced upwards from corruption to incorruptibility by the Divine immortality.\textsuperscript{121}

Kathryn Tanner proposes that eternal life consists of existence in a new identity, in an inseparable relation to God, as modeled by the incarnate Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{122} “The very meaning of this new identity is that our dependence upon God for our existence is now complete: in Christ we essentially \textit{are} that relationship to God in a way that simply being creatures of God does not entail.”\textsuperscript{123} Hope that anticipates the relationship with God that we are in Christ might manifest in human relationships that look toward radically irresponsible, economically unpractical, communally ordered friendships, modeled on the friendships of those whose lives illustrate the imitation of Christ.

\textbf{3.2.2.2 Certainty}

Standing on the promises of Christ my King, Through eternal ages let His praises ring,

\textsuperscript{121} Tanner, \textit{Jesus}, 117, citing Gregory of Nyssa.

\textsuperscript{122} Tanner, \textit{Jesus}, 110.

\textsuperscript{123} Tanner, \textit{Jesus}, 110.
Glory in the highest, I will shout and sing,  
Standing on the promises of God.

Refrain:  
Standing, standing,  
Standing on the promises of God my Savior;  
Standing, standing,  
I’m standing on the promises of God.

Standing on the promises that cannot fail,  
When the howling storms of doubt and fear assail,  
By the living Word of God I shall prevail,  
Standing on the promises of God.

Refrain.

Standing on the promises I now can see  
Perfect, present cleansing in the blood for me;  
Standing in the liberty where Christ makes free,  
Standing on the promises of God.

Refrain.

Standing on the promises of Christ the Lord,  
Bound to Him eternally by love’s strong cord,  
Overcoming daily with the Spirit’s sword,  
Standing on the promises of God.

Refrain.

Standing on the promises I cannot fall,  
Listening every moment to the Spirit’s call  
Resting in my Savior as my all in all,  
Standing on the promises of God.124

The theology of hope explored in this chapter claims a certainty based on God’s work in history and the unknowable reality of beatitude. The focus of Moltmannian hope has developed from the exciting, open and somewhat uncertain future, to a certain future salvation, imagined as the transformation of this known

life with God’s arrival. Moltmannian hope prioritizes care for the people, systems, and condition of the earth now, and secondarily prioritizes the future new creation which determines and supports present hopes and actions. Moltannian hope rests not on God’s fulfilled promises of the past, nor on God’s speculations about an other-worldly eternal life, but on the future of the earth, which future gathers God’s future into the knowable and imaginable prospects for this earth. The importance of human efforts to sustain the creation for God’s coming is certain, despite the sinful limitations of humans. In contrast, the hope Thomas describes relies on God’s constant and eternal certainty, despite the uncertain present and future of this life.

Thomas assumes the primary priority of eternal happiness in God and the concurrent secondary priority of those earthly goods that support that end, because they support the end of eternal happiness in God. Through faith, God provides knowledge that extends beyond current conditions and offers a faint glimpse of God’s reality, which far exceeds current human experience. Through hope, God provides a confident expectation of the fulfillment of that which is known by faith and accessed through participation in Christ. Through love, God provides friendships that anticipate friendship with God and that incite concern for the current conditions of others, that they might share in such friendships now and that eternal friendship later. In this context, hope and addresses the approach to eternal beatitude and the earthly conditions that support that approach. The two concerns are distinct and inseparable (just as the two natures of Christ are distinct and inseparable).
The goods of creation are not radically opposed to the infinite good of enjoyment with God; rather, in hope, one can participate in a taste of God’s goodness to come, through those material goods which help to lead toward beatitude. Hope calls believers not to withdraw from the world, but to so direct their lives toward the ultimate enjoyment of God’s reality that they might be sustained in anticipation of that fulfillment by the spiritual and temporal goods God provides along the way. At the same time, Thomas reminds believers that hope rests in God’s reality. The continuity of goods does not mean that the ultimate goals of hope are those goods of earthly life, only bigger and better. As soon as the goods of health, friendship, or even the sacraments, become ends in and of themselves, they no longer support the true end of beatitude, and they no longer manifest the virtue of hope or its foundation in faith. Christians continually struggle to discern the legitimate goods of hope, in faith and love, through Christ and the Holy Spirit. The apparent goods of independence, wealth, control, comfort, and independence all compete powerfully for positioning as primary objects of hope. The goods of liberation, justice, and improving the lives of the oppressed — the secondary goods of Thomas’s language — vie for position as primary goods, especially given the urgent needs those in unbearable suffering. Thomas argues that the natural passion of hope looks toward future, difficult-to-attain goods which might — but do not necessarily — support and sustain perseverance in the theological hope that looks toward the fulfillment of God’s reality revealed in faith. Temptations abound to confuse natural ends with supernatural ends, to rest one’s hopes on the more readily attainable and imaginable goods of human capacity.
The anticipatory, not-yet aspect of the wayfarer’s hope might suggest heightened uncertainty about the attainment of the goods hoped for, both temporal and spiritual, but Thomas explains that certainty is indeed found in hope, both essentially and by participation. Hope draws its certainty essentially from faith, which is located in the intellect, and the gift of divine grace provides human intellect with a glimpse of God’s intellect. This cognitive certainty adheres to the truth of God incarnate by grace and presents that truth to hope as solid and unshakable. The affective certitude particular to hope is “a form of practical knowledge that directs any operation to its proper end, viz, either as realized or as tending toward an end.”

This means that faith’s cognitive power moves the will toward the attainment of its end; and in the process, the intellective certitude of faith becomes the willed, affective certitude of hope, the domain of the tending-toward God. The divine intellect moves nature to its end with divine certainty, and therefore the divine intellect moves human creatures to their end in beatitude with divine certainty. Reason moves the moral virtues, as a kind of second nature, to their end with certainty. Faith moves hope to its end in eternal happiness with certainty, by sharing its cognitive certainty and by prompting its affective certainty. The secondary goods of hope remain essential, but their value is not assessed in degrees of visible improvement, because the certainty rests in God’s certain ends for creation.

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125 Romanus Cessario, The Virtues, or, The Examined Life. (New York: Continuum, 2002), 47.
126 II, II, 18, 4.
127 II, II, 18, 4.
Individual effort and accomplishment do not affirm the virtue of hope, but the knowledge of faith undergirds hope to its certain end, as designed and moved by the divine intellect. The certainty of theological hope that Thomas presents pertains to God’s sure, true, unchanging, and omnipotent nature, rather than to the hopeful believer, the particulars of the believer’s life, or the social programs developed to relieve and then eliminate hopelessness. Contemporary versions of hope frequently look to human knowledge, effort, or accomplishment as the basis for the certainty of their hope. Thomas (with the Council of Trent) places the certainty of hope in God, and not in those who hope. Some political agendas stir up and confirm hope when their policies seem possible and effective. Upstanding Christian community leaders inspire hope when their acts of generosity and dedication improve the quality of impoverished lives. Christian lives of unselfish charity seem bound for the fulfillment of hopes in eternal life. “Even though all should place a most firm hope in God’s help and rest in it, let no one promise himself with absolute certainty any definite outcome.” The exemplary figures of Christian hope place their confidence in God, without personal knowledge of God’s plans for the future and without expectation that their own agency will determine particular outcomes. Faithful hope does not presume to know what will happen, but only that God is good and that the fulfillment of hope rests in God. Hope participates partially in the certainty of God, while living the life of the created, finite, limited, uncertain human, moving toward beatitude; but the imperfection of humanity in no way lessens the certainty that is of God.

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Benedict proclaims the certainty of hope that stands strong in the face of human failure to make the world better. The hope that is redemption in Christ does not diminish in the face of disappointment or falter in the face of disaster. Christ has redeemed us by his love, and “through him we have become certain of God.”

The certitude of this hope rests entirely in God, who has shared God's love with us through Jesus Christ, and who provides “the great hope that sustains the whole of life (cf. Eph 2:12)”

“Man's great, true hope which holds firm in spite of all disappointment can only be God — God who has loved us and who continues to love us ‘to the end,’ until all ‘is accomplished’ (cr. Jn 13:1 and 19:30).”

The saints and martyrs and the models of faith in Hebrews lead lives of hope characterized by hypomone (10:36): patience, perseverance, constancy. “Knowing how to wait, while patiently enduring trials, is necessary for the believer to be able to “receive what is promised” (10:36).

Benedict argues that in the religious context of ancient Judaism, this word was used expressly for the expectation of God which was characteristic of Israel, for their persevering faithfulness to God on the basis of the certainty of the Covenant in a world which contradicts God. Thus the word indicates a lived hope, a life based on the certainty of hope. This life of certain hope in God focuses on Christ in the New Testament: “in Christ, God has revealed himself. He

129 Spe salvi, #26.
130 Spe salvi, #27.
131 Spe salvi, #27.
132 Spe salvi, #9.
133 Spe salvi, #9.
has already communicated to us the ‘substance’ of things to come, and thus the expectation of God acquires a new certainty.”\textsuperscript{134} Hope gains certainty because it is grounded in the certain faith granted by Christ’s already/not yet presence. ” [Hope] is the expectation of things to come from the perspective of a present that is already given. It is a looking-forward in Christ’s presence, with Christ who is present, to the perfecting of his body, to his definitive coming.”\textsuperscript{135}

In contemporary culture, Benedict claims, faith and hope are widely understood to be tentative and provisional when they refer to matters spiritual, and certain only when supported by material, tangible, provable facts. His presentation of Christian hope claims certainty based on faith in Christ’s presence, which cannot be proven except by the gift and witness of faith and hope. The hope that Benedict describes looks to both an eschatological end and to the ends of improved lives now. He declines to endorse disputes that posit two opposing ends. He declines to accept that hope in the Kingdom of God in heaven and hope in God’s peace and justice effected in practical reality here on earth are mutually exclusive options. Benedict’s account reflects his embrace of paradox, and it features a sacramental connection between present life and eternal life: life transformed by baptism in Christ through the Holy Spirit and sustained through the eucharist.

\textbf{3.2.2.3 Continuity}

\textit{Refrain:}
Are you ready for the great atomic power?
Will you rise and meet your saviour in the air?
Will you shout or will you cry when the fire rains from on high?

\textsuperscript{134} \textit{Spe salvi}, #9.

\textsuperscript{135} \textit{Spe salvi}, #9.
Are you ready for the great atomic power?

Well have you heard this man's invention that they call atomic power? Are we all in great confusion, do we know the time or hour? When a terrible explosion may ring down upon our land Bringing horror and destruction, blotting out the works of man

Refrain.

There is one way to escape it, be prepared to meet the Lord Give your heart and soul to Jesus, he will be your shielding sword He will surely stay beside you, and you'll never taste of death For your soul will fly to safety and eternal peace and rest

Refrain.

There’s an army who can conquer all the enemy’s great plans It's a regiment of Christians guided by the Saviour’s hands When the mushrooms of destruction fall in all its fury great God will surely save his children from that awful, awful fate

Refrain.\(^{136}\)

While Moltmannian hope envisions a continuity of this creation and the new creation that preserves the goods of this creation in God's future coming; a more Thomistic hope claims continuity of God's relationship with creation, such that the creature/creator difference remains even through the assimilation into beatitude. Humans may obtain their perfection through Christ, as creatures in the presence of God, regardless of the condition of the known world. At the same time, continuity may be described by means of an analogy of being that enables speech about God and life with God, drawn from the knowable and pointing toward the unknowable.

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This certainty of hope does not provide a certain knowledge of the location, content, or time of beatitude. Descriptions of beatitude, at their best, suggest the beyond-imagination character of recognizable and impossible goods of heaven: a city floating above the sky, wild creatures coexisting peaceably, poverty becoming true wealth. Imaginative use of known images to point toward the unknown suppose some sort of continuity between present knowable life and the unknowable life eternal, while acknowledging the ultimate distinction between this life and that life, a gap which humanity can never bridge on its own.

Benedict argues that

[t]he term “eternal life” is intended to give a name to this known “unknown” that cannot accurately be expressed. Inevitably it is an inadequate term that creates confusion. “Eternal,” in fact, suggests to us the idea of something interminable, and this frightens us; “life” makes us think of the life that we know and love and do not want to lose, even though very often it brings more toil than satisfaction, so that while on the one hand we desire it, on the other hand, we do not want it. Instead of an interminable extension of the life and time we know, the “eternal life with God” for which we hope indicates something greater than this life, set somehow outside the boundaries of time we currently rely on to make sense of our lives. Although we cannot grasp what this might be like, we can catch small glimpses that hint at the character of this “known unknown.”

Benedict suggests that eternity might exceed temporal progressions in the way that the ocean exceeds compartmentalization.

To imagine ourselves outside the temporality that imprisons us and in some way to sense that eternity is not an unending succession of days in the calendar, but something more like the supreme moment of satisfaction, in which totality embraces us and we embrace totality — this we can only

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137 _Spe salvi_, #12.

138 _Spe salvi_, #12.
attempt. It would be like plunging into the ocean of infinite love, a moment in which time — the before and after — no longer exists.\textsuperscript{139}

The joy of this life with God is thus not the exhausting continuation of calendar days, nor the endless “do-overs” of a Groundhog Day existence, but a joy that overwhelms, beyond the limitations of capacity, quantity, quality, and duration that define our current lives.

This is how Jesus expresses it in Saint John’s Gospel: “I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you” (16:22). We must think along these lines if we want to understand the object of Christian hope, to understand what it is that our faith, our being with Christ, leads us to expect.\textsuperscript{140}

Tanner points toward the continuity of this life and eternal life with a focus on the transformed identities and relationships of creatures who share in Christ’s resurrection life.

So for us, life in Christ brings not just created goods but divine attributes such as imperishability and immortality, which are ours only through the grace of Christ in the resurrection of our bodies. When the fire of our own lives grows cold, we come to be burn with God’s own flame.\textsuperscript{141}

This understanding allows for “a more spatialized than temporalized eschatology.”\textsuperscript{142} Tanner holds the paradoxical already/not yet character of life that participates in Jesus’ incarnation and Christ’s bodily resurrection. The end of hope is not over, and it is not in the future as a promise as yet unfulfilled. The end of hope, eternal life, is life in Christ, now and outside time.

\textsuperscript{139} Spe salvi, #12.

\textsuperscript{140} Spe salvi, #12.

\textsuperscript{141} Tanner, Jesus, 101.

\textsuperscript{142} Tanner, Jesus, 101.
The future-oriented eschatology of a future-oriented society here gives way to an eschatology in keeping with the present epoch, which, as Michel Foucault describes it, is “the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity; we are in the epoch of juxtaposition...of the side by side, of the dispersed...[O]ur experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein.” Eternal life is not the endless extension of present existence into an endless future, but a matter of a new quality of life in God, at the ready, even now infiltrating, seeping into the whole. Eternal life is less a matter of duration than a matter of the mode of one’s existence in relation to God, as that caliber of relation shows itself in a new pattern for the whole of life.¹⁴³

Moltmannian hope argues against apocalyptic visions of in which God dramatically sweeps away this world, in order to establish a new kingdom of the just. Instead of this discontinuity of creation, Moltmannian hope advocates confidence that this world will not end, but God’s future will bring a new beginning here.

Continuity rests on God’s creation, and the condition of this creation determines the possibilities for God’s new creation. Tanner supplies an alternative to the end of the world vs new beginning of the world dichotomy with a continuity that depends on creation’s relationship with God. If relationship, rather than beginnings or endings, defines salvation, then eschatological hope looks to “a new level of relationship with God”¹⁴⁴; and that relationship with God in no way depends on the destruction or preservation of the world we know. This continuity releases us from concerns about the effectiveness of our efforts to solve

¹⁴³ Tanner, Jesus, 101–2. When he wrote the essay from which Tanner draws, in 1986, Foucault could not yet have experienced the possibilities for transformed relationships among people with access to the communication technologies of texting, twittering, internet chatting, and skype. Much analysis of recent communication possibilities underscores the risks of technological relationships. Additional analysis may well indicate the ways that these new patterns of communication add possibilities for strong, sustained, faithful relationships that can witness to lives transformed in and toward God.

¹⁴⁴ Tanner, Jesus, 104.
the problems of corruption, suffering, and environmental collapse; while at the same
time it requires immediate and unceasing action that addresses the problems of
corruption, suffering, and environmental collapse. Hope thus responds with
affirmation, witness, and thanksgiving to the resurrection life already accomplished
in Christ and to full participation in the perfection of creation in Christ.

3.2.3 A Non-Modern Hope

Refrain:
’Tis the old time religion,
’Tis the old time religion,
’Tis the old time religion,
And it’s good enough for me.

It was good for our mothers.
It was good for our mothers.
It was good for our mothers.
And it’s good enough for me.

Refrain.

Makes me love everybody.
Makes me love everybody.
Makes me love everybody.
And it’s good enough for me.

Refrain.

It has saved our fathers.
It has saved our fathers.
It has saved our fathers.
And it’s good enough for me.

Refrain.

It will do when I am dying.
It will do when I am dying.
It will do when I am dying.
And it’s good enough for me.

Refrain.
It will take us all to heaven.
It will take us all to heaven.
It will take us all to heaven.
And it's good enough for me.

Refrain.\(^{145}\)

Christian hope need not be confined to the teachings, imaginations, and particulars of any one country in any one epoch. The circumstances and experiences of hope in Thomistic twelfth century Europe should not dictate the particulars of contemporary hope. Similarly, hope need not be confined to twentieth/twenty-first century Moltmannian theology. A theology of hope today that embraces exclusively the either construction risks denying God who is I AM, God the creator of all, “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb 13:8); the ever present Holy Spirit; the one Trinity. Theological hope bound to one time, place, and set of images risks dismissing God’s transcendence, while hope detached from its physical context risks dismissing God’s immanence in history, God’s direct relation to God’s creation. hope detached from its physical context risks dismissing God’s immanence in history, in relation to God’s creation.

A Moltmannian theology of hope shares with much of contemporary theology the sense that older, “traditional” language and teaching is simply no longer intelligible or relevant today. That assumption justifies inattention to earlier considerations of current theological concerns, and it questions the claim of this chapter, that Thomistic systematic theology has contributions to make to a 21st century theology of hope. Kathryn Tanner, in explaining her methodological

approach to *God and Creation*, addresses common criticisms of older theology, with a reminder of the ideological presumption of exclusive normativity that grounds contemporary dismissals of past theology.

From a modern standpoint, it is traditional Christian accounts of God and creation that seem recondite and unfamiliar, disquieting in their attempts to bring together obvious incompatibles. This very charge of unintelligibility will become for us an odd fact to be accounted for, when that modern standpoint loses its fixity as a ‘natural’ given for thought.¹⁴⁶

A theology of hope today cannot exit its modern roots and ties, but it can sustain a discerning connection with previous iterations of Christian hope and remain open to insights to come.

Thomas exemplifies a premodern ideology, and his systematic theology, as illustrated here, assumes contrasting authority markers than those of the modern aspects of Moltmann’s theology. Instead of highlighting the new, Thomas starts with the wisdom of previous and cumulative theological discernment, such that newer engagements work in deferential conversation with older teaching. Thomas demonstrates this practice in the format of the *Summa*. Each Question begins with what has been said on the topic. He responds with charitable consideration and then presents his own nuanced and recalibrated articulation for an answer. He does not claim a priority of the new, and he embraces older teaching (and that of his peers) as an appropriate source and support for his work.

Thomas, in his characterization of theological hope, does not suggest an urgency of time or a primary time schedule into which hope must fit. He describes those who hope as wayfarers on a road to beatitude, and he situates wayfarers in the

midst of a history of God’s activity and Christ’s presence. Past, present, future, and
timelessness stand as contexts for transcendent God’s care for creation. In created
time. God’s power, compassion, and trustworthyness has been proven in the past;
God’s incarnation, Jesus Christ, has effected the salvation and transformation of
God’s people, now and in the future; the Holy Spirit accompanies wayfarers toward
beatitude, which, with God, is not bound by time. Theological hope draws on,
participates in, and anticipates God in time who is God out of time.

There is no new event or experience or idea that constitutes the expertise of a
Thomistic theology of hope. The resource for hope is the living scripture, and the
reliable authorities of hope are the men and women of faith, hope and love. These
witnesses demonstrate their hope through lives and deaths marked by citizenship in
heaven and the performances of that citizenship in their relationships with others.
Thomas and multitudes of witnesses grow, are grown in, hope in the midst of
communal worship. There they learn the practices of devotion and grammar,
discipline and faith, so that, through the grace of God, they might participate in the
ordering of all things to God.

### 3.3 People of Hope

The chapter so far presents theological hope based on the impassible God,
whose incarnation in Jesus Christ suffers and dies most passibly, without changing
the one God. A complementary anthropology identifies human as dependent
creatures, free to participate in Christ’s resurrection through the imitation of Christ,
discipleship. Discipleship hope is expressed in the theological virtue of hope and in
prayer, the expression of hope. The end of theological hope is the reconciliation of beatitude, which is the creaturely fulfillment in Christ, by Christ. Attempts to live lives of reconciliation witness to the fulfillment of hope.

3.3.1 Theological Anthropology

Blessèd assurance, Jesus is mine!
O what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.

Refrain:
This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Savior, all the day long;
This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Savior, all the day long.

Perfect submission, perfect delight,
Visions of rapture now burst on my sight;
Angels descending bring from above
Echoes of mercy, whispers of love.

Refrain.

Perfect submission, all is at rest
I in my Savior am happy and blest,
Watching and waiting, looking above,
Filled with His goodness, lost in His love.

Refrain.147

Thomas’s presentation of hope as a theological virtue names humans as wayfarers, who will never rest until in death they find themselves completely in the presence of God.

It would be difficult to conceive of another statement that penetrates as deeply into the innermost core of creaturely existence as does the statement

that man finds himself, even until the moment of his death, in the status viatoris, in the state of being on the way.\textsuperscript{148}

Thomas narrates the hope of the wayfarer in the context of God’s providence and predestination. God’s providence includes God’s predestination of all humans toward their eternal and natural ends. God, in God’s abundant goodness, draws creatures to their end in God. God’s providence grants hope to humans and supplies the way toward hope’s fulfillment. God predestines both the grace that humans receive in this life and the glory hoped for in the future life.\textsuperscript{149} \textsuperscript{150} A creature can only attain naturally what is proportionate to its created nature. Humans, as rational creatures, are created for an end beyond natural life, the end of eternal life, which is beyond its own power to attain and dependent upon God’s direction.

Now if a thing cannot attain to something by the power of its nature, it must be directed thereto by another; thus, an arrow is directed by the archer towards as mark. Hence, properly speaking, a rational creature, capable of eternal life, is led towards it, directed, as it were, by God. The reason of that direction pre-exists in God; as in Him is the type of the order of all things towards an end, which we proved above to be providence. Now the type in the mind of the doer of something to be done, is a kind of pre-existence in him of the thing to be done. Hence the type of the aforesaid direction of a

\begin{footnotes}
\item[149] I, 23, 4 ad 2.
\item[150] Providence and predestination have been understood in a wide variety of ways over time, before and after the Reformation, and I am not here offering a history of the relevant doctrines. I introduce the Thomistic connections between hope and prayer, providence and predestination, in order to illustrate a less familiar way to imagine the relation between God, creation, and theological hope. Contemporary constructions of theological hope that narrate this connection differently might consider the questions that Thomas’s theology of providence and predestination asks and answers in order to chart how the grammatical pieces fit together for Thomas and to evaluate the grammar of newer constructions.
\end{footnotes}
rational creature towards the end of life eternal is called predestination. For
to destine, is to direct or send.\textsuperscript{151} Hope that embraces the human identity as created wayfarer also recognizes that God
directs and sends the wayfarer on the way toward the end of eternal happiness in
God. Hope looks to God not only for certainty and support on the way to
fulfillment; hope also looks to God to propel and to aim the arrow toward its mark.

Just as Hebrews urges believers to “seize the hope set before us,”\textsuperscript{152} and to
“cling to the confession of our hope without wavering,”\textsuperscript{153} Thomas’s imagery suggests
that believers must cling to the hope that is an arrow, shot toward its end by God on
its path of predestination. Sure hope flies toward the target with the arrow; faithful
hope follows the path predestined by God's love, to God. Predestination indicates
God’s will to love and elect God’s people to eternal happiness. As God’s will,
predestination resides within God rather than in the creature predestined by God.
Humans do not contain programs of destiny, installed by God, that move them
through motions automatically. God contains predestination in God’s mind, and God
actively executes the ordering of humans towards eternal salvation by calling the
elect and by magnifying the responses of the elect to that call. Thus, hope can be
seen as cooperative anticipation of the predestined to their target of eternal
happiness. Hope as cooperation with God’s eternal plan for humans in history seems
to nullify freedom, will, and even the purpose of hope. However a post-
predestination account of hope might look for alternative ways to express God’s

\textsuperscript{151} I, 23, 1.

\textsuperscript{152} Heb 6:18.

\textsuperscript{153} Heb 10:23.
infinite and loving provision for all of creation. An emphasis on creaturely
dependence on God acknowledges God’s all encompassing care while accounting for
free will and free hope. The freedom God gives is not a freedom from God, and God
does not release those who turn away from God to a life in some part of creation
outside God’s purview; there is no such place. Freedom is not a choice to opt in or
out of God's creation. The freedom of hope in God needs God's direction and
design; God determines how and when God’s goods granted and received.

Such an unfathomable difference between human perceptions of good (and
forgiveness and mercy) underscores the radical difference between God and creation
that Thomas argues can only be connected by means of analogy. God’s ways are
clearly not our ways, and even with an acknowledgement that human ways do not
effect a more just distribution of creation’s goods, it is difficult to understand why
these ways of God make sense to today’s hope. Thomas reminds his readers that
God’s reasons are God’s alone, and he adds Augustine’s reminder, “Why He draws
one, and another He draws not, seek not to judge, if thou dost not wish to err.”

This claim about the inaccessibility of God’s reason may well provoke profound
frustration and move one to ask, “Why should anyone hope if God has already
predestined some to eternal happiness and some to reprobation and eternal
punishment?” Were Thomas here to reply, he would likely begin by observing that
the question assumes a mistaken premise. Thomas is not talking about or to
“anyone,” in the Summa. The Summa is a primer for Christian believers those who

154 I, 23, 5 ad 3.

155 Prologue.
hope, the faithful who do not wish to err, those who have already received sufficient grace to posit some faith, claim some hope, participate in some love. Thomas's is, at least in part, a circular argument; there is no one, identifiable, point in time at which the theological virtue of hope begins, and there is no way to discover the line between God's will and the will of the believer infused with theological hope.

Thomas does point toward scripture's encouragements to hope within the divine promises, “for he who promises rewards to them that obey him, by that very fact, urges them to hope: hence all the promises contained in the law are incitements to hope.” Beyond the Law itself, scripture offers additional encouragements, by way of promise, warning, and command, as evidenced especially in the Psalms. Thomas notes that natural hope inclines humans toward the goods proportionate to the possibilities of human nature. In order for humans to become hopeful wayfarers, in order for humans to hope for the supernatural goods of the eternal life for which they are created, they need divine inducements, and the first inducements were provided by the promises, admonitions, and commands of the divine law. Precepts of scripture induce the faithful to hope, since scripture names it the duty of the faithful to hope in God in order to be saved. Hope in eternal happiness is not based on earthly happiness, but the faithful are blessed with ample assistance to turn toward beatitude while living in the natural world.

156 II, II, 22, 1.

157 II, II, 22, 1 ad 1.

158 II, II, 22, 1 ad 3.
The above account of the people of hope presumes an anthropology that is foreign and unconvincing to Moltmannian theology. Certainly, Moltmannian hope does not accept the validity of this particular presentation of dependent creatures and God’s providential providence. At the same time, the providence and predestination Thomas describes do address some of the ongoing challenges to a doctrine of theological hope. Moltmannian hope risks placing so much responsibility for achieving the goods of hope on human shoulders that the impossibility of the task can cripple hope. Moltmannian hope leans toward over confidence in the human capacity to make a difference (for good), even in the face of corruption and oppression. Moltmannian theology focuses more on the character of God and promise of resurrection life extended through Jesus Christ than on the formation of hope ordered to God’s will.\footnote{Openness theology takes on some of these complexities with some convictions that overlap with Moltmannian theology.} The practices of virtue and prayer, as set out by Thomas, offer contemporary theology examples of the formation of God’s people into members of Christ’s body whose hope is ordered by God. Theologians ready to reexamine Moltmannian hope and might consider what anthropology their doctrine of hope assumes and what practices might shape the hope they teach.

3.3.2 Discipleship: Virtue and Prayer

Oh happy day
Oh happy day
Oh happy happy day
Oh happy day
When Jesus washed
Oh when he washed
When Jesus washed
He washed my sins away!

\footnote{Openness theology takes on some of these complexities with some convictions that overlap with Moltmannian theology.}
Oh happy day....
He taught me how
He taught me
Taught me how to watch
He taught me how to watch
And fight and pray
Fight and pray
Yes, fight and pray
And he'll rejoice
And he'll, and he'll
Rejoice in things we say
And he'll rejoice in things we say
Things we say
Yes, things we say
We'll live rejoicing
Ev'ry day, ev'ry day
Oh happy day! 160

The above considerations of the character of hope, a grammar of the God of hope, and Jesus Christ the perfect hope encourage Christians to shape their daily lives in ways that reflect hope in eternal life, Beatitude. Contrary to concerns that otherworldly hope will detract from this-worldly hopeful activity, this hope calls for believers to follow Christ in identity, action, formation. Discipleship will witness to the reality of another life, service will show more humility than progress, and prayer will nurture friendships that participate in Christ’s incarnation. In this way, Christians can suffer in solidarity with their neighbors, demonstrating sure hope that Christ provides perfect release far beyond what human efforts can accomplish.

This section explores active lives of hope that are not defined in terms of pie-in-the-sky heavenly hope vs responsible on-the-ground hope. Hope, as a theological

virtue and as expressed in prayer, can receive formation and guidance by God's grace and demonstrate the already/not yet presence of the kingdom of God.

### 3.3.2.1 Practicing the Theological Virtue of Hope

Refrain:
There is a balm in Gilead
To make the wounded whole;
There is a balm in Gilead
To heal the sin sick soul.

Some times I feel discouraged,
And think my work's in vain,
But then the Holy Spirit
Revives my soul again.

Refrain

If you can't preach like Peter,
If you can't pray like Paul,
Just tell the love of Jesus,
And say He died for all.

Refrain

“Without the virtues there is no knowledge of God, because there is no conformity to God.” D. Stephen Long

As a theological virtue, hope depends on the grace of God and the perfection of humanity through Christ, but it still calls for particular human activity, despite the divine infusion of grace that enables the virtue of hope. The practice of natural virtues nurtures readiness to receive graces, and the practice of theological hope,

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once received, sustain its presence and growth. Natural hope grows in relation to the natural virtues of magnanimity and humility, whereby acceptance of the limitations of created finitude tempers openness to the breadth of wonderful possibilities to produce properly ordered hope and its true realization. Magnanimity aspires to greatness with confidence, through difficulty. Humility accepts the dependence of creation and faces the effects of sin, as a human facing God. Together, humility and magnanimity order natural hope toward the possibility of godly hope, and together they function as “the most essential prerequisites for the preservation and unfolding of supernatural hope — insofar as this depends on man. Together they represent the most complete preparedness of the natural man, whose existence is ‘postulated’ by grace.”

Once received, theological hope requires fear for perfection. Thomas articulates four forms of fear, only one of which supports hope: filial, or chaste, fear. The Holy Spirit grants the gift of filial fear, which fears separation from God and therefore eschews sin and the possibility of turning away from God. Filial fear reflects the reality of human imperfection, and acknowledges that the certainty of God’s omnipotence and mercy does not change the uncertainty of human action. Hence, filial fear binds to the wayfarer’s hope, encouraging hope’s perfection toward God.

165 Pieper, Faith, 102; II, II, 161, 1.
166 Pieper, Faith, 102.
The second fear, worldly fear, loves worldly goods and fears their loss by way of punishment from God or God’s enemies. Such a fear is evil, since it is directed away from God. In the twenty-first century, this fear might manifest as love of a comfortable — and improving — standard of living and the accompanying panic that any decline in that position might remove prospects for hope. The third, servile fear, turns to and adheres to God out of the fear of punishment and eternal damnation; this fear can move one toward the good, but because the motion is from without, instead of from within, as a work of love in freedom, servile fear is evil precisely in its servility. The fourth, initial fear, turns to and adheres to God out of the fear of committing a fault and then being punished. The fear of punishment, although secondary, diminishes the good of initial fear, but the concern about committing a fault marks it as a potential beginning to filial fear, an imperfect filial fear.

The filial fear that Thomas describes is moved by love, from within, and fears committing a fault, as a child fears offending a parent. Filial fear turns toward God in love and fears God, out of a recognition of the reality of God’s perfection and power. Filial fear sustains and perfects theological hope, because it upholds the reality of God to which faith witnesses and hope aspires. This hope-supporting fear does not fit within Moltmannian hope, which claims a love without fear and a divine power shared with creation. Further, much of current theology recognizes the difficulty of regarding God as a divine parent for those who have been abused or neglected by human parents. It is possible, however, that theological hope might be strengthened

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167 II, II, 19, 3.

168 II, II, 19, 4.
by a renewed consideration of the fear characterized by awe of God whose goodness and sovereignty far exceeds capacities of human parents and sinful systems of torture and oppression. When the people of God were enslaved by the Egyptians and could see no way out, God rescued them from Egypt and challenged them with many demonstrations of God's awe-fulness, so that their hope might reach beyond immediate comfort. Jesus' demonstrations of God's power in healings and the removal of demons helped prepare his followers toward a hope that could persevere beyond his death. Today, images of God as infinitely more powerful than the economic and military powers that govern global society might offer those suffering pain and death at their hands a more certain hope for release than that offered by the image of a companion God.

Thomas continues his description of theological hope with two primary dangers to hope, despair and presumption. These gravely misconstrue God's mercy and judgment, by underestimating God and disordering anticipation: “against all reality, they transform the ‘not yet’ of hope into either the ‘not’ or the ‘already’ of fulfillment.”

In despair, one assumes that God cannot effect his/her salvation and thereby gives up hoping to participate in divine goodness. One might despair because lust has rendered spiritual goods no longer appealing, or because sloth has diminished one's spirit so that the attainment of spiritual goods appears impossible. Either way, according to Thomas, despair entails claiming an untruth about God.

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170 II, II, 20, 4.
Now the true opinion of the intellect about God is that from Him comes salvation to mankind, and pardon to sinners, according to Ezech. xviii. 23, I desire not the death of the sinner, but that he should be converted, and live. . . Therefore, just as the movement of hope, which is in conformity with the true opinion, is praiseworthy and virtuous, so the contrary movement of despair, which is in conformity with the false opinion about God, is vicious and sinful.\textsuperscript{171}

Pieper observes that Thomas’s understanding of despair addresses an intellectual act of the will, in which one actively decides for a disordered determination about God.\textsuperscript{172} Thomas speaks of “the despairing” as those who can see what God offers but deliberately turn away from God as their hope, having decided that “there is no hope of Divine mercy.”\textsuperscript{173} This decision denies both God and the longing for God granted all creatures. “In despair man actually denies his own desire, which is as indestructible as himself.”\textsuperscript{174} The despairing turn to goods which have no capacity to save them, thereby inhibiting their ability to receive the grace that supplies hope.

Moltmann’s hope of the future coming of God aims to counter the despair of the experience of divine abandonment, despair inhabits people who do not know God’s mercy or who feel that God has turned away from them. To these despairing people, Moltmannian hope provides the suffering God, the ultimate companion who offers divine solidarity and the promise of relief from despair. However, when suffering and abandonment are so powerful and pervasive that they define the nature of God as well as of sinful creatures, a theology of hope might risk the despair of

\textsuperscript{171} II, II, 20, 1.
\textsuperscript{172} Pieper, \textit{Faith}, 114.
\textsuperscript{173} II, II, 20, 2 ad 2.
\textsuperscript{174} Pieper, \textit{Faith}, 116.
untruth about God. Possibility without imposibility risks stripping God of almighty goodness by attributing to God change (such that God be less or more than God’s perfection), motion (such that God might withdraw, arrive, or move away), and pain (such that God might be diminished by sickness, suffering, despair). An exclusively possible account of God offers God’s solidarity and presence to the desperate, but could misrepresent God by downplaying God’s power and God’s perfect compassion.

Both Thomistic and Moltmannian hope would benefit from more attention to the factors that inhibit those in despair from receiving the truth of God’s capacity to remit sin, effect salvation, and grant hope. Many of those who now despair suffer debilitating mental illness or impaired cognitive and physical capacity to the extent that they cannot on their own know of hope; they cannot deliberately turn toward or away from hope. Others have never known the unconditional love of parents that allows hope to grow. Still others face constant threats to their survival, with no conceivable relief except death and no ability to process any exposure to eschatological hope in God they might receive. Thomas does allow that the goods ordained to happiness include sufficient health and well-being so that the intellect and will can function freely and hope is possible. Cessario describes the Thomistic connection between hope and material objects in terms of that which hope includes and entitles:

Theological hope relates the Christian directly to God, so it includes among its material objects all of the good things that the Christian believer lovingly looks forward to receiving: the vision of God, the accompanying bliss, the resurrection of the body and its glorification, and fellowship with the blessed. Theological hope also entitles the Christian to expect the secondary objects, that is, created instruments of hope that form part of the Christian dispensation for salvation. This means above all the instrumental causality of Christ’s humanity; however, it also includes spiritual goods such as grace, the
infused virtues, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the materna mediation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the intercession of the saints, and the forgiveness of sins (especially mediated through the sacraments of Penance and Holy Anointing). Furthermore, one can rely on theological hope for temporal goods, such as holy friends, good health, psychophysical equilibrium, at least to the extent that these conduce toward beatitude. [[111a q.56, a. 2]] This text illumines Aquinas’s strategy for overcoming the apparent tensions between future and realized eschatology, and for avoiding the modern propensity to dichotomize the material and spiritual worlds.\textsuperscript{175}

Thomistic theological hope reconsidered today would benefit from exploring further the specific inhibitions to and gifts of theological hope in our world today. Moltmannian hope might increase attention to the emotional, physical, and spiritual illnesses that feed despair and keep hope at bay. In both cases, attention to health and friendship might help build hope through and beyond the moment, especially for those who cannot see beyond the moment.

In Thomas’s narration, despair’s partner in pride, presumption, also resists reality by claiming a disordered and unbecoming truth about God’s power to remit sin, either by relying on human power apart from God or by relying on God’s mercy without any repentance assisted by the Holy Spirit. Both forms of presumption demonstrate an appetitive movement conformed to a false intellect,\textsuperscript{176} as does despair; both presumptive independence and presumptive reliance willfully adhere to hope in what God is not. Thomas explains, “for just as it is false that God does not pardon the repentant, or that He does not turn sinners to repentance, so is it false that He grants forgiveness to those who persevere in their sins, and that He gives

\textsuperscript{175} Cessario, “Theological Virtue,” 236.

\textsuperscript{176} II, II, 21, 2.
glory to those who cease from good works.” Presumption leans too heavily on the “already” and not enough on the “not yet” of salvation. It rejects the role of wayfarer and downplays the arduous character of hope, settling instead for false comfort in personal merit and a merciful and nonjudging God.

In other words, presumption destroys supernatural hope by failing to recognize it for what it is; by not acknowledging that earthly existence in the *status viatoris* is, in a precise and proper sense, the “way” to ultimate fulfillment, and by regarding eternal life as something that is “basically” already achieved, as something that is “in principle” already given.

The danger of presumption for Moltmannian hope is the risk that confidence in the “not yet” of salvation might downplay both the “already” effects of divinely fulfilled promises and Christ’s death and resurrection and the need for divine grace to navigate the arduous, (humanly) impossible character of hope on the way toward salvation. This presumptive confidence risks limiting the scope of hope to mercy without judgment, forgiveness without repentance, and good works over systemic sin. It further risks losing the necessity of Christ’s redemption, in the face of non-judgmental universal salvation.

### 3.3.2.2 Prayer

*Refrain:*

As I went down in the river to pray
Studying about that good old way
And who shall wear the starry crown
Good Lord, show me the way!

O sisters let’s go down,
Let’s go down, come on down,
O sisters let’s go down,

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177 II, II, 21, 2.

Down in the river to pray.

Refrain.

O brothers let’s go down,  
Let’s go down, come on down,  
Come on brothers let’s go down,  
Down in the river to pray.

Refrain.

O fathers let’s go down,  
Let’s go down, come on down,  
O fathers let’s go down,  
Down in the river to pray.

Refrain.

O mothers let’s go down,  
Let’s go down, don’t you want to go down,  
Come on mothers let’s go down,  
Down in the river to pray.

Refrain.

O sinners let’s go down,  
Let’s go down, come on down,  
O sinners let’s go down,  
Down in the river to pray.

Prayer is the primary action of the theological hope that Thomas presents.
Prayer is the expression of hope, and the shaping of desire toward God. Prayer names hope for the known/unknown end of life with God, and, in prayer, one receives the formation necessary to live all of one’s life in that hope.

Benedict introduces this prayer of hope and his critique of the popular wisdom that hope should be based on visible signs of improvement and effected by responsible human efforts:

If we cannot hope for more than is effectively attainable at any given time, or more than is promised by political authorities, our lives will soon be without hope. It is important to know that I can always continue to hope, even if in my own life, or the historical period in which I am living, there seems to be nothing left to hope for. Only the great certitude of hope that my own life and history in general, despite all failures, are held firm by the indestructible power of Love, and that this gives them their meaning and importance, only this kind of hope can then give the courage to act and to persevere.\textsuperscript{180}

Benedict argues that the gift of hope flourishes even when our actions fail to alleviate suffering through social programs, scientific improvements, and the pursuit of justice. Benedict explains the right use of this gift of hope and its end, the Kingdom of God, involves aligning our wills with God’s, without presuming to take God’s place. Thus, in hope, we can pray that our hearts might be stretched, the better to desire and receive the goodness of God, and the better to hope for and with others. In hope, we can pray the prayers of the saints and the liturgy that help shape us and sustain us when we cannot muster prayerfulness ourselves. And in hope, we can learn from the martyrs who give themselves to suffering for the sake of truth, buoyed by their great hope. Throughout, the certitude of hope flows from the love of God in Jesus Christ, sustains us through suffering, and delivers us, in the end, to the fulfillment of hope in God’s Kingdom.\textsuperscript{181}

\textsuperscript{180} \textit{Spe salvi}, \#35.

\textsuperscript{181} \textit{Spe salvi}, \#35-\#40.
The inseparability of eternal and immediate concerns does not mean that the connections are necessarily visible to humans. In the Letter to the Hebrews, the exemplars of faith prior to the coming of Christ did not necessarily receive visible benefits in their lifetimes. Some saw fruits of their faithfulness, some didn’t, and none of them attained the perfection not available until now, through Christ.\footnote{Heb 11:1-12:2.} The Letter calls for those who know Christ to imitate faithful leaders, and to remember that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today.”\footnote{Heb 13:7-8.} Hence, the faithful should persevere in the imitation of the righteous, regardless of the apparent results of their efforts, because the truly effective agent of divine purpose is Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today. Thomas likewise emphasizes that the efficacy of hope and prayer depends on God’s grace, mercy, and justice. Efficacy in prayer comes from the grace of God to whom we pray and who instigates us to pray. Prayer (and all virtuous act) is meritorious because of sanctifying grace, not human will or intention; even prayer for sanctifying grace proceeds from grace. Prayers themselves do not remove suffering or institute the kingdom of God, any more than soup kitchens eliminate poverty on a neighborhood or global scale. The importance of praying and sharing lies not in any human capacity to change the world but in the graced opportunity to participate in God’s work in the world.

Thomas urges the faithful with that capacity to hope and pray to do so for themselves and for others, including the just and sinners. Charity leads to the desire for good things, for oneself and for others.
Therefore charity requires us to pray for others. Hence, Chrysostom says (Hom. xiv, in Matth.): Necessity binds us to pray for ourselves, fraternal charity urges us to pray for others: and the prayer that fraternal charity proffers is sweeter to God than that which is the outcome of necessity.\textsuperscript{184}

The effects of hopes and prayers for others will depend on factors outside the purview of those hope and pray.

Regardless of effect, charity directs hopes and prayers for the just, for sinners, and for the damned, even and especially because of that which lies beyond the knowledge of those who hope and pray. The faithful should hope and pray for themselves and others, not based on visible results or reasonable prospects for success, but because they hope for the salvation of all in Jesus Christ, which salvation is ultimately fulfilled through God’s agency, on God’s terms.\textsuperscript{185}

Prayer performs the theological virtue of hope by participating in God’s good providence. Thomas asserts that God’s providence orders all things and, at the same time, charity provides a channel for our individual prayers to reach God. This relationship is further emphasized by St. Thomas Aquinas, who explains that prayer is a means for us to cooperate with God in the achievement of His will.

\textsuperscript{184} II, II, 87, 7.

\textsuperscript{185} Even the eternally blessed play a role in the dynamics of divine providence and human hopes. The eternally blessed have no hope for their own happiness, because happiness is a present, not a future, good for them. Nothing, not death or space or time, can separate God’s people from God’s love, or the wayfarers from the blessed.
time, allows for contingency and secondary causes within that divinely established order.\footnote{186}

Thomas narrates an account of prayer that coheres with his account of hope. Hope moves toward God: its is eternal happiness in God, and God's assistance provides the means of obtaining that end. Prayer's object is God, and God's grace instigates prayer. Faith establishes the basis for hope and its articulation in prayer. Love moves the faithful toward God in hope and prayer, and love motivates hopes and prayers for others in godly friendship, that they too may be drawn toward God. Hope reflects and shares in God's reality through anticipatory readiness for fulfillment and the divine assistance that will bring it. Prayer reflects and shares in God's reality by asking for fulfillment and for the divine assistance that will bring it. Humans, as rational creatures, receive grace to pray to God as rational creatures. As

\footnote{186 "All things are subject to divine providence. God knows all things and orders all things to their ends, by ordaining all things to happen either by necessity or by contingency" (II, II, 23, 6). "Providence orders universal causes and all of the particular causes included within the universal. God directs the order of things toward their ends, and God grants power to intermediaries for the execution of that order: God's goodness abounds such that "the dignity of causality is imparted even to creatures" (I, 23, 4). "Events that seem ordered by humans and those that seem random and accidental all fall within the sphere of divine providence, as do human sin and divine grace. God, as first agent, causes everything, both incorruptible and corruptible; therefore, no exertion of human will, no particular individual, no natural occurrence escapes the provision of God's causality. God is the author of nature and the creator of free will; therefore both move toward their ends under the providence of God, according to their created characters — natural things as directed by another toward an end, and rational things, as directed by themselves toward an end" (I, 22, 2 ad 3 and 4).}
an act of reason, prayer participates imperfectly in the intellect of God, from which it receives, by faith, knowledge of God’s reality.\textsuperscript{187}

Grace-infused love moves hope to its end in beatitude; likewise, grace-infused love move reasoned prayer to the its end in the divine intellect. Prayer, like hope, accepts, with humility, the incomplete and transitional state of the wayfarer, while directing, with magnanimity, all desire toward the already (but not yet perfected) state of beatitude disposed by divine providence. Prayer does not presume to impose on God or to direct God according to human interests.

For we pray, not that we may change the Divine disposition, but that we may impetrate that which God has disposed to be fulfilled by our prayers, in other words that by asking, men may deserve to receive what Almighty God from eternity has disposed to give., as Gregory says (Dial. i.8).\textsuperscript{188}

The assertion that prayer is still relevant if it does not change God runs so counter to current understandings of cause and effect, economies of time and energy, that it seems not only unlikely, but silly. Kathryn Tanner understands this difficulty in comprehension, and she notes that even if one grants that God is not generally changed by prayers, it seems that there must be some extreme circumstances in which God must be changed by the prayer and pray-ers.

Christians do say...that God responds to the prayers of the faithful. Are there not, then, exceptional cases where God’s agency for created effects is determined by what the creature does? We have to say that a statement like “God grants petitions” holds, not because God’s agency is itself altered by prayer, but because prayer is according to God’s will a necessary created condition in particular cases for a created effect or for the alteration of the usual order of created cause and effect. To say that God makes up for the deficiency of created causes to produce the effect for which a person prays is

\textsuperscript{187} See I, 79, 8.

\textsuperscript{188} II, II, 83, 2.
to say, according to our account, that God’s created intention includes the effect and the prayer as its condition but not adequate secondary causes.189

Tanner’s answer does not so much try to reason on the terms of the (hypothetical) question, as it shows a response through participation in a Thomistic grammar of language about God. Prayer performs hope turning toward to God in anticipation, and by asking God for assistance in attaining the end God has prepared.

Hope reorders the desire and purpose of the faithful toward God and eternal life with God first, and toward those people and temporal goods that will contribute to beatitude second. Prayer reorders the lives of the faithful by asking for eternal happiness primarily, and then secondly for those temporal things that assist in tending towards beatitude.190 Prayers that ask for things concerning salvation conform the lives of the faithful to God’s will, thereby exercising hope for the approach to God. The reordering role of prayer operates from within a realistic context of human capacities and tendencies. Thomas expects that the reality of human creatureliness includes an inability to sustain prayerful attentiveness indefinitely.191 Jesus Christ provides the proper content and order of prayer in the Lord’s Prayer, which “teaches us to ask and directs our affections.”192 Prayer interprets human desires before God,193 and the Lord’s Prayer demonstrates how to pray for those desires. The Lord’s Prayer begins with the end of human desire, God,

189 Tanner, God and Creation, 97–8.
190 II, II, 83, 6.
192 II, II, 83, 14 ad 2 and 3.
and continues by ordering everything else in relation to God and the enjoyment of
God’s glory. The first two petitions name the love of God in Godself (Hallowed by
thy name) and then the love of creatures in God (Thy kingdom come). In this way,
those who pray focus their attention on the one, supreme good who is God, first as
Creator alone and then as the one in whom creatures find their end of eternal
happiness. The next two petitions ask for God’s direct assistance in obtaining
beatitude (Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven) and then the secondary goods
which contribute to the attainment of beatitude (Give us this day our daily bread).
Thomas notes here that “daily bread” can apply to sacramental bread and/or bread as
the chief food of sustenance. The temporal things for which it is lawful to pray
(which Thomas mentions earlier) apply here as well: the things that are “the means of
supporting the life of the body, and are of service to us as instruments in performing
acts of virtue”; and (citing Augustine), enough for a livelihood, for the sake of the
body, and clothing befitting one’s station.194 To the church today, Thomas might note
that much needs to be done to share the nourishing provisions of daily bread — and
health, shelter, and friendship — that these secondary goods might support the lives
of the whole body of the church. The last three petitions ask for the removal of the
three obstacles to the attainment of beatitude: sin (trespasses), distractions from
God’s will (temptation), and the “present penal state” which inhibits the sufficiency
of life (evil). The exercise of presenting these seven petitions to God inspires and
shapes human imaginations and wills to align with the will of God.

Prayer is offered up to God, not that we may bend Him, but that we may
excite in ourselves the confidence to ask: which confidence is excited in us

chiefly by the consideration of His charity in our regard, whereby He wills our good — wherefore we say: Our Father; and of His excellence, whereby He is able to fulfill it — wherefore we say: Who are in heaven.¹⁹⁵

God can and does answer prayers to encourage faith, and God’s grace can and does use natural happiness to awaken awareness of possibilities beyond, but the faith and love which ground hope exceed the range of natural hope. Confusion about the ends of hope and prayer can lead to the perception of a sharp distinction between eternal and earthly ends: a pious, prayerful orientation vs. a social, material orientation. This distinction fuels belief in an apparent conflict between the two positions, despite the fact that each is incoherent without the other. On the one hand, there is no access to beatitude except as creatures, through created nature, with the divine assistance of grace. On the other hand, the goods of natural life are not an end in themselves, since all material goods particular to natural life are given by God. As the body of Christ in the world and for the world, the church should look to beatitude for all as the primary aim of its hopes and prayers. The church should hope and pray that all might be released from suffering and that all might receive health, food, clothing, and shelter, in order that all might have the inhibitions to faith, hope, and love removed. The church should tend to the oppressed and depressed in mind, spirit, and body, in order that they might be free to receive the grace necessary for approaching eternal happiness in God. Sharing the body of Christ in the eucharist should lead the church to care for the needy, in order that the needy may come to hope and pray for beatitude. The false division between spiritual and embodied needs rejects the reality of the Creation, Incarnation, and Resurrection, by

¹⁹⁵ II, II, 83, 9 ad 5.
denying the divine truth that precedes, sustains, exceeds the natural capacity of human hopes. The theological virtue of hope steadfastly turns toward the fulfillment of human nature, eternal happiness in God, which has been perfected in Christ. Grace provides the assistance necessary to participate in Christ’s perfection and to attain beatitude, through the gifts of infused faith, hope, love; through the revelation of scripture and the witness of the saints; and through friendships which model God’s love and sustain the hopes and prayers of the faithful.

One common criticism of an emphasis on prayer as a discipleship of hope observes that prayer does not seem to do anything, and lives spent in prayer are not lives spent doing the important tasks that need to be done now, in a broken and wounded world. Two responses illustrate the argument of this section. 1) Prayer is a good in and of itself; and, prayer, as the expression of hope, is also an action of hope. Prayer asks God’s help to shape desires and behaviors into hope aligned with God’s end for creation. The practice of prayer names God as the object of hope, directs hope to the primary and secondary goods of hope, and informs relationships with others based on God’s relationship with humans, established in Jesus Christ. 2) Prayer and hope and lives of servant ministry are not mutually exclusive, just as hopes in eternal life with God and hopes for justice now are not mutually exclusive. The argument that one necessarily depletes the other is defied by the lives of countless people of God. Each informs the other, and the Spirit of God inspires and sustains both.
Rowan Williams writes about keeping ready for the Last Judgement, when we can have no idea when it will come. He observes that the goods of this life remain good, no matter how near the end of this world might be.

We can never use the Last Judgement as an alibi for not doing what is good in itself — caring for each other, making peace, above all, caring for our environment. It is one of the silliest and most unchristian things imaginable to say that we should not care for our material environment.196

Of course, it is equally silly, and unchristian, to use faithful work for the earth and its inhabitants as an alibi for not praying. Prayer helps keep lives of hope in balance and full of discernment about what to hope for and how and when to perform that hope in our world. Williams adds that

St Paul reminds us that we need to do what is required of us here and now; but he also reminds us that if we live in the light of the imminent coming of Christ, we need a profound detachment from the pressures of the here and now; we need a sense of what does matter and what doesn’t in our lives and a freedom from loading all our expectations on the success of our projects and the degree of comfort and stability we can attain. We take our responsibilities with deep seriousness and then we must learn to say, “If we don’t succeed in the way we wanted, so be it; God is still God.”197

God does not change in response to hope and prayer. As simple, perfect, infinite, immutable, and one, God essence and activity do not move toward goods, as incomplete humans do. God is already all goodness, and there is no “better” or more complete good toward God might move. Neither is God constrained by time, such that God must wait for a request and then subsequently respond. Instead, in ways

196 Rowan Williams, Tokens of Trust: An Introduction to Christian Belief (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 98. He continues: “[T]hat is exactly like the people Paul is so cross about who refuse to work because the end is nigh. ... Martin Luther apparently said that if he knew the world would end tomorrow, he would plant a tree — meaning that what is good today is just good: and it doesn’t become somehow unimportant because the time frame is too short” (98–9).

197 William, Tokens, 99.
only partially understandable by the imperfect (human) knowledge of analogy, God’s eternal omnipotence and mercy surpasses and encompasses human need. God even addresses — without changing Godself — the human need to perceive that prayers are answered, in order to foster confidence and recognition that God is the author of all goods: “[T]hat He wishes to bestow certain things on us at our asking, is for the sake of our good, namely, that we may acquire confidence in having recourse to God, and that we may recognize in Him the Author of our goods.”

The fact that God sometimes appears to respond directly to human prayers does not mean that humans have suddenly become other than the creatures of their creator God. People do not direct God’s action, but God does provide graced, faithful, hopeful people who pray in love, answers to their prayers in ways that encourage more faith, hope, and love and more participation in God’s love.

3.3.3 The Hope of Reconciliation

Out on the hills of glory land
So happy and free at God’s right hand
They tell of a place of marvelous grace
On heaven’s bright shore
Pilgrims on earth someday will go
To live in that home forever more
Trusting in Him who died for sin,
And rose from the grave

On heaven’s bright shore (on heaven’s bright shore),
There’s gonna be no more dyin’ (over there)
Not one little grave (not one little grave),
In all that fair land (that wonderful land).
Not even a tear will dim the eye,
and no one up there will say goodbye
Just singing His praise through endless days
on Heaven’s bright shore (on heaven’s bright shore)

198 II, II, 83 ad 3.
When I must cross that rolling tide,
There’ll be someone on the other side
Welcoming me to that fair land, made perfect by love
When I walk up the milky white way,
I’ll see that homecoming in array
How great it must be for angels to see
A pilgrim reach home

On heaven’s bright shore (on heaven’s bright shore),
There’s gonna be no more dyin’ (over there)
Not one little grave (not one little grave),
In all that fair land (that wonderful land)
Not even a tear will dim the eye,
And no one up there will say goodbye
Just singing His praise through endless days
On Heaven’s bright shore

Just singing His praise through endless days
On Heaven’s bright shore

Aquinas names holy friendship as one of the goods of the theological virtue of hope. Friendship builds and sustains hope; hope grants friendship toward the end of beatitude. Formed by grace, virtue, and prayer to be Christ-like, Christians demonstrate their hope in the lives they lead, in the friendships they keep. And yet, friendships are hard to keep. Injury, dishonesty, unfaithfulness all contribute to broken friendships and broken hopes. Hope made possible in friendship nurtures theological hope in beatitude, which is, by analogy, friendship with God. Hope in the eschatological reconciliation of the sinner with God is manifested in the sacrament of reconciliation and in the reconciliation between friends, through penitence and forgiveness.

199 Traditional, as performed by Ralph Stanley, *Saturday Night & Sunday Morning*, Freelands Records, 2003, 9001.
The sacrament of reconciliation grants divine forgiveness for confession of sins, to the end of restored communion, with God and with the church. Eric Luitjen explains that, according to Thomas, “the divine forgiveness of sins should be seen against the backdrop of the restoration of the friendship of grace, which can best be characterized as a relationship of friendship.”\textsuperscript{200} The end of hope is friendship with God, a friendship which requires change on the part of humans, constancy on the part of God. The eschatological end of shared life with God (granting the difference between divine and human friends and the impossibility of equal friendship) requires repentance and conversion, and the sacrament of reconciliation enacts that ongoing process of conversion. Shared lives between humans in human (imperfect) constancy requires humility, confession, forgiveness, and change, on the part of both friends. Friends who can perform such relationships, however partially, toward friendship with God participate in the eschatological hope of reconciliation with God.

Friendships that reflect shared hope in eternal friendship with God share material and spiritual goods with each other, and with those in need. Friends of this shared hope do not claim ownership first and then share selected items of ownership, but share out of God’s abundance, in the confidence of God’s continuing abundance. Three ramifications of holy friendships offer glimpses of shared eternal life with God: 1) work for justice becomes the work of friendship; 2) friendships aspire toward the creaturely possible compassion in impassibility modeled in Jesus Christ; 3) reconciliation of brokenness becomes necessary, not optional.

1) Injustice may be a global, systemic disorder, but it is also a matter of friendships. Christians intent upon providing hope to victims of oppression might consider reaching out in friendship to one person, and making oneself vulnerable to the change, woundedness, confession, and forgiveness that happens in friendship that aims toward reconciliation. An attempted friendship between one who is identified as a victim another who is identified as a benefactor of victims may not accomplish a visibly noticable blow to injustice; but it may participate in the hope of the justice brought by divine reconciliation. In the process, the friends—or potential friends—will be changed in response to each other. The victim/benefactor relationship may even change, and assumptions about the character of hope may change. Paul Wadell observes that friendships can bring hope and possibilities for change.

Friendships give us space to rethink our lives. They offer us a context for reflecting on the habits and patterns of our lives and what they are making of us. They offer us the security we need to risk asking why we really are not happy and to inquire about what might be missing from our lives. Best of all, they invite us to imagine much more promising ways of life and give us the a we need to embrace them.

In the space of friendship, one may offer another possibilities for hope that had previously been invisible; and the one offering may discover, in that space, that too benefactor position is missing much too. Together, hope might be more possible than apart.

2) Jesus Christ, the perfection of humanity through incarnation, and the perfector of humanity through death and resurrection, models perfect friendship by

sharing food, prayer, and lives. He also models constancy of friendship. The fully human Jesus does cry and mourn, but he is constant in friendship, faithfulness, and forgiveness. Castelo argues that a discipleship of *imitatio Christi* includes a (limited, imperfect) performance of the passibility which does not eliminate impassibility.

As Christ “suffered impassibly,” believers too are called to “suffer impassibly” with one another as a way of pointing to the world that sin and suffering do not ultimately determine the value and significance of existence. Rather than lives of fate, peril, and demise, Christians can lead lives of meaning, hope, and eschatological victory. In this regard, impassibility is not simply a divine attribute but a characteristic of Christ’s body wherever the present fallen order is endured, confronted, and overcome. Such is the relevance and hope of divine impassibility.\(^{202}\)

Humans who hope for friendships now that are directed toward friendship with God cannot presume to attain divine impassibility, since they will always remain creatures; but the faint image of divine impassibility might inspire friends to be slow to anger and quick to forgive.

3) Christians living in hope, in friendship, will be faced with brokenness. Thomas writes of the church’s sacrament of reconciliation, in which repentance and forgiveness restore relationships with God and with friends. Bonhoeffer describes the difficult practices of confessing to each other within community. John Howard Yoder describes hopes for restoration of broken relationships through the practices of binding and loosing. Monastic communities, old and new, follow careful steps toward reconciliation within the community and with God. The work of reconciliation is always painful and never easy, and only when it is done well, in the hope of reconciliation with God, is it true reconciliation. However, Christians who live in friendships with each other cannot avoid the need for reconciliation. Conflict

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\(^{202}\) Castelo, *Apathetic*, 145.
avoidance is impossible when friendships reflect hopes for eschatological friendship with God. Even conflicts seem impossible to resolve, and when the reconciliation of a broken friendship seems unimaginable, friendships in God cannot pretend to be stand free of the need for reconciliation. Hauerwas challenges the church to recognize the need for reconciliation at home: “The possibility of reconciled memory between peoples who have wronged and been wronged by one another is but another name for church. To be such a church takes time and in the taking becomes time in God’s very life.”

Humans cannot participate in friendship where there is no friendship or no recognition of the possibility of friendship. Friendship makes brokenness possible. Brokenness calls for repentance and forgiveness, and then perhaps restoration and reconciliation is possible through the reconciliation of God. There may be no greater mark of theological hope than the attempt to be a friend, through brokenness and reconciliation.

### 3.4 Conclusion

Shall we gather at the river,  
Where bright angel feet have trod,  
With its crystal tide forever  
Flowing by the throne of God?

Refrain:  
Yes, we’ll gather at the river,  
The beautiful, the beautiful river;  
Gather with the saints at the river  
That flows by the throne of God.

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On the margin of the river,
Washing up its silver spray,
We will talk and worship ever,
All the happy golden day.

Refrain

Ere we reach the shining river,
Lay we every burden down;
Grace our spirits will deliver,
And provide a robe and crown.

Refrain

At the smiling of the river,
Mirror of the Savior’s face,
Saints, whom death will never sever,
Lift their songs of saving grace.

Refrain

Soon we’ll reach the silver river,
Soon our pilgrimage will cease;
Soon our happy hearts will quiver
With the melody of peace.

Refrain

Thomistic theological hope fits within a theological grammar of God, beatitude, humans, and their friendships. God’s passibility that does not diminish divine impassibility provides hope in God who is mightier than death and perfect in compassion. Christ’s full divinity and full humanity draws humans in hope to creaturely perfection and beatitude, lives of virtue and prayer. Theological hope is not bound by what humans can imagine for this world, nor by the expectations of responsibly productive lives of modernity. Thomistic hope claims an anthropology of

creatures dependent on their creator and formed by prayer, the gift of grace, and virtuous discipleship. This theological hope expects friendships intimate enough to be broken without accepting the possibility of irreconcilable differences, while turning toward eschatological friendship with God.

If adherents to Moltmannian hope cannot find ways to connect with Thomistic hope’s doctrines of God, Beatitude, and Anthropology, Moltmannian hope risks losing a coherent Christian identity. Contemporary hope that draws only on Moltmannian ideology faces the same risks. Christian theologies of hope across the board can use reminders of its distinctiveness, as well as provocations for continuing discernment. Chapter 4 considers five discourses for such reminders and provocations.
4. Expanding the Conversation

4.1 Five Proposals

Resources for a contemporary Christian theology of hope extend far beyond the narratives discussed in the previous three chapters. This chapter glances at five discourses that are not conventionally consulted for input on theological hope. The list could be much longer; this preliminary exploration suggests extra-ordinary resources for challenging, supporting, and clarifying theological hope.

4.1.1 Impossible Hope

4.1.1.1 Nihilism and Indeterminacy

The realm of nihilism and indeterminacy may seem the least likely discourse to consult on theological hope, and yet that realm suggests both cautions and proposals for Christian considerations of hope. Some accounts of nihilism charge that over-confident, positivist hope in absolute truth is itself a nihilism. Discussions of indeterminacy/undecidability leave open a space for possibility in the “perhaps” moment of not quite despair, not quite hope. These philosophical narratives challenge theological hope guard against the risks of positivism and to pause before rushing to resolve moments where hidden hope might lie.

4.1.1.2 Lament

Biblical lament similarly leaves open a space for improbable rescue from suffering. While some accounts of lament focus on its resolution, an examination of the cries to God not yet answered provides a view of unresolved lament, carried on through generations of inconsolable loss and grief. The survival and non-identical
repetition of lament texts over time sustains the particularity of bodies lost and lamented, in an unhopeful hope that resists closure and refuses to stop lamenting until God responds.

4.1.2 Possible Subjects of Hope

4.1.2.1 Dis/Abled Bodies

Theological hope pertains to real, specific bodies; but confusion abounds about which bodies, which subjects, participate in hope and in what ways. Disability theology seeks to include people with disabilities in the lives and hopes of less-disabled people. This concern about including the particularities of all bodies challenges Christians to include bodily particularity in hopes for bodily resurrection.

4.1.2.2 Feminist Theory and Hopes for Subjectivity

Feminist theorists Luce Irigaray and Judith Butler critique the myths of subjectivity based on stability and independence, pointing instead to the fluidity of identity, the limits of self-knowledge, and the role of the divine and systems of power in constructions of subjectivity. Irigaray and Butler model an investigation of subject ideology that might provoke a theology of hope to cut its ties to conventional constructions of gender, freedom, and individuality, and then reexamine the identities of Christian bodies. Hope thus reconstructed could look to the power systems of God manifest in Jesus Christ as the basis for present and eschatological subjectivity.

4.1.2.3 Feminist Theology and Hopes for Christian Subjectivity
Some feminist theologians share with Irigaray and Butler an interest in examining the structures that have been supporting their discourses. These feminist theologians consider contemporary feminist orthodoxies alongside reconsiderations of classical Christian doctrines. Their commitment to claiming a subjectivity that reflects both critical gender analysis and the imitation of Christ challenges theologians to look for hope where feminism has set Christian doctrinal continuity—in-difference to the side, with the possibility of renegotiating that relationship.

4.2 Impossible Hope

4.2.1 Nihilism and Indeterminacy: Unhopeful Hope

Christian eschatological hope risks reducing future to an ever-improving perpetuation of the perceived goods of this life when it relies on shared experiences and identity with God without real difference or an appreciation of the analogy—not equivalence—of being. Contemporary Christian and secular accounts of hope assume that nihilism rejects the goods of creation, society, and the natural world; nihilism undermines the positive dispositions that sustain hope and motivate hopeful social action. Similarly, indeterminacy, undecidability, seems to shackle hope and inhibit future possibility. The following Critical Theory narratives of nihilism challenge Christianity to notice the threat of nihilism within Christianity itself. These accounts remind Christians that theological hope is hope because it is not yet imagined or attained and that misplaced confidence dismisses the possibilities for hope among the most desperate.
4.2.1.1 Nihilism

“Nihilism stands as the opposite of hope and presents the greatest threat (along with postmodernism) to truth, God, the church, the nation, and life as we know it.” This (imagined) statement represents the dominant impressions of nihilism held by Christians. Some theologians try to strengthen hope to defend against nihilism; and some think that expressions of nihilism affirmation that not all evil and suffering can be sites of hope. From any position, discourses of nihilism in critical theory pose daunting — and relevant — challenges to theologies of hope, beginning with the unsettling fact that there is no one definition of nihilism. The following discussion describes some approaches to nihilism, drawn from a range of loosely-related studies in theory and theology, in order to suggest that nihilism is as much about hope as it is about nothingness, and that uncritical claims to theological hope may have more in common with nihilism than generally assumed. This cursory survey points toward the dangers to Christian theological hope of misplaced confidence, erased differences, and premature resolution; and it raises again the relevance of intentional grammar for speaking of the God of hope.

Theodor W. Adorno addresses the peculiar ways in which “nihilism” is used to designate that which is bad and offensive to truth, whether the truth in question is a belief in nothingness or a belief in absolute somethingness.205 He describes how a word originally used in the in political contexts became a philosophical category, reversed by Nietzsche to apply to those perceived to be the defenders against nihilism, and then re-reversed to become a means of derogatory dismissal: it “is

simply moral defamation — by mobilizing a word generally loathed and incompatible with universal good cheer — of the man who refuses to accept the Western legacy of positivity and to subscribe to any meaning of things as they exist.” Adorno charges that the assertion of positivity that frequently claim to be a bulwark against nihilism is itself nihilism: he argues that assertions of absolute truth embody true nihilism. Believers in absolute truth claim an essentialist universalism, which they promote and defend vigorously. The good is a universal truth, and the universalism itself is a good. Material, national, religious goods are goods worthy defending because they are the goods of the asserted absolutism. The uncritical acceptance of self-serving goods diminishes the possibility for criticism, nuance, or outright difference, and it constrains hope to more of the same. Hence, Adorno writes,

The true nihilists are the ones who oppose nihilism with their more and more faded positivities, the ones who are thus conspiring with all extant malice, and eventually with the destructive principle itself. Thought honors itself by defending what is damned as nihilism.

Adorno notes that Nietzsche seized the term from its political use to use it as a critique of Christianity, “to denounce Christianity as the institutionalized negation of the will to live.” As Nietzsche’s description of Christianity became more widely known, and possibly widely misunderstood, the backlash of anti-nihilism reasserted precisely the absolute, self-duplicating and self-authorizing that Nietzsche has been criticizing, but his point has not been generally absorbed into popular consciousness.

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207 Adorno, *Negative*, 381.

208 Adorno, *Negative*, 379.
or much of theology. Adorno narrates the ways in which that which is labeled nihilism (that which in his account would be a good, an affirmation of truth) provides the hope that true nihilism (that which claims to be against nihilism) cannot.

One contemporary version of nihilist absolutism (true nihilism according to Adorno) posits that “religions” are varied expressions of a universal truth. There is one divinity, and the myriad of religious, sacred, and philosophical expressions of an ultimate good all refer to this one. Everyone hopes for an ultimate end that illustrates some version of this universal unity and truth (transcendent or otherwise). Any counter claims hold no weight to believers in universal divinity, because the universality of the claim excludes, by definition, any alternatives. This universalism avers that assertions and practices of distinctly particular narrations of the divine and truth cannot be true; thus the universally inclusive claim about the divine either excludes those who do not accept it or includes those non-acceptors as not-yet-enlightened believers. Adorno’s critique of the concept of universality describes its power to occlude the individual, by allowing for no alternatives, a power which can be (at least somewhat) undone by recognizing universality as a concept, rather than as the only reality.

Experience and consistency enable the individual to see in the universal a truth which the universal as blindly prevailing power conceals from itself and from others. The reigning consensus puts the universal in the right because of the mere form of its universality. Universality, itself a concept, comes thus to be conceptless and inimical to reflection; for the mind to perceive and to name that side of it is the first condition of resistance and a modest beginning of practice. 209

This all-inclusive-or-nothing belief denies (attempts to deny) hopes for in both more particular and less knowable possibilities, and thereby reveals the exclusivity of universality, which accepts only sameness.  

Another example is the nation-state's belief in the universal good of global democracy: hope for the world equals hope for a democratic world. That hope justifies a variety of methods of persuasion, including violence, employed by the forces of democracy. Any regime, separatist movement, or community of faith that resists democracy — as determined by the U.S. and its supporters — is wrong and vulnerable to imposed participation in the universal truth of democracy.

Coercive evangelism presents a familiar example of limits of absolutism. There have been and still are Christian missionaries who force, rather than persuade and witness to the truth of salvation through Jesus Christ. These acts are fueled by belief in universal salvation in Christ offered to all who receive it, as documented in scripture and teaching, and as interpreted to see all difference as threat to truth. When missionaries impose their beliefs without attention to the means of evangelizing or to the systems of power and ideology that frame evangelism, their positivism performs a violent nihilism of erased difference and imposed identity. The contemporary companion to coercive evangelism is systemically coercive secularism that tries to ward off the dangers of evangelical coercion. The widespread confidence in non-religious reason and objectivity reveals a belief in the universal truth of secularism. Even those who profess belief in specific faiths and religions expect representative legislators, the justice system, and presidential leadership to be free

210 I suggest that the present interest in Dual Belonging (especially Christian/Buddhist) reflects the universality that Adorno critiques.
from any allegiances above secular reason. The separation of secular state and religion effects a separation of two two “religions,” one more powerful than the other. To those who would argue that a number of politicians reflect powerful Christian influences (via direct divine revelation or church special interest groups) I observe that no politician with faith allegiances that trump national commitments can remain in office; and those who claim to be led by God rarely promote policies that challenge a popular American national ideology. American absolutism has no room for Christian beliefs and practices that contradict the primary identity of Americanism.

Adorno argues that that this absolutism claims a fullness of life that actually reflects nihilism and hopelessness, because there is no possibility of difference, and therefore no possibility of hope. According to Adorno, those who are conventionally declared and condemned as nihilists are, instead, the truth-tellers. They unmask the nothingness of the absolute, allow for the possibility of alternative thoughts. and try to make space for an object, instead of asserting the subject alone.

Christians who promote absolute truth might understand themselves to be positive, forward thinkers, supporters of progress, facilitators of unending possibilities; and yet the positive, progressive, possibilities they promote all perpetuate the same, which is all that can be imagined. They might scorn those they

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211 Moltmann, in his early writings, appreciates Adorno’s contributions along these lines, and he tries to escape the absolutism trap by naming the open future possibilities as a hope freed from the perpetuation of the same. However, his dialectical subsumption of already into the not-yet and the coming future into the imaginable next; his commitment to universal salvation (on God’s part anyway), his rejection of apocalyptic, and his confidence about the coming of God here to this earth all compromise an opening to real change and diminish possibilities for hope in real difference.
call nihilists, because anyone who does not endorse the one true position must be an en
emy of all that is. Absolutism that occupies the subject position, and acknowledges
no object not subservient to the subject, sees all difference as a threat to that subject po
sition; hence, the claim to absolute truth leads to death. Adorno names Auschwitz
the confirmation of this connection between absolutism and death, noting that
efforts to overcome difference are always worse than whatever those efforts seek to overcome.

The current war against terror illustrates Adorno’s account of nihilism,
because the universal good of US safety and stability authorizes any and all means to
eradicate terrorism. Any questions about the aims or methods of anti-terrorism are
seen as threats, as are all allegiances, actions, and potential actions that threaten
homeland security. The costs, in lives and integrity, do not factor in to the economy
of this war, because the positivism accepts no resistance. One cause of death need
sitates another cause of death, and there is no end, because there is way to
eliminate the possibility of threat.

Adorno’s critique of continues with the observation that the all and the
totality of the absolutist position relies on the principle of single identity.
Identitarianism clings to a single identity, which it conceives as universal, and which
it maintains through force. The only alternative to the one identity is non-identity,
difference and threats to identity which must be eliminated. Identitarian unity
believes itself to be producing reconciliation by erasing difference, when instead it
enforces sameness, at the cost of particularity and possibility. The hope of difference
is crushed before it begins, and the hope of identity can only imagine like for like, more of the same.

Adorno’s response to absolutist nihilism arises from his negative dialectics, a system which does not find its rest in itself, but outside itself, in thought outside the system’s thought. The concept of universalism does not tolerate contradiction, but even naming this state of affairs can begin the first stop out of the circle of identity. Negative dialectics opens up the possibility of something outside the system, of hope in potential change and in something other than the non-identical.

Adorno explains that idealism constitutes the antimony of bourgeois society, whose very existence depends on that which it cannot accept. In order to survive, the society must expand, grow, change; and yet anything new or different, anything that does not reproduce the recognizable sameness on which the society’s identity is based, must be eliminated, often by way of violence. Unity is always conceived as unity over and against something different, such that unity always means suppressed division and suppressed particularity. Dedication to the protection and perpetuation of variations on the same blocks from view those who lack comfort, food, and peace, because the unified, closed, society only has limited resources of material, energy, and imagination. Hunger, suffering, and death cannot be addressed within a closed system of resources. Confident affirmations of closed unity eliminates hope.

Christian theological hope risks collapse into nihilism when it places too much confidence in the present and in the present’s re-presentation as new and improved. When Christians proclaim eschatological hope with certainty based on an expectation of more of the same (only better), they reveal the closed system that
constrains and strands them. Within the affirmation of the same, there is no need for dependence on God, except to the extent that God sustains and supports the known and knowable. There is no room for hope for a relationship with God in which God’s power and love for creation surpasses human forecasts and conceivable futures. The affirmation of the same that Adorno casts as nihilism resembles the presumption that Aquinas presents as a danger to hope. Presumption excludes the possibility of eschatological transformation at the same time that it shores up its defenses against perceived threats of doubt and change. Theological hope chastened the critique of nihilistic presumption might revisit a more apophatic grammar for God and hope in God, such that proclamations of certain salvation (identified as the survival of the same, as the same) would be checked by acknowledgments of what God and God’s salvation are not. For example: God is one in a way that creation is not; the unity of eschatological salvation is not the unity knowable now. Theological hope in reconciling unity looks toward a unity unlimited by human frailty and error. Chastened theological hope might also reconsider its dismissal of hopes in an other-worldly heaven as escapist avoidance of reality. At the very least, hope that stretches past responsible projections within a closed system of imagination opens up a possibility for God’s radical transformation. The greatest threat of “escapist” eschatology may be its insistence that God is not limited to human imagination.

Many a church reform movement is based on a nostalgic hope for familiar sameness, as a defense against encroaching difference, thereby suppressing gifts and activities of the spirit in the community that might offer hope in a way otherwise imperceptible. The church has succumbed to this approach to unity far too often,
rejecting difference in the name of inclusive unity. This imposed unity has manifested as physical violence, ideological suppression, and schism. Unity through rejection is as effective as peace through violence. Fading hopes and efforts for reconciliation now diminish hopes for eschatological reconciliation. The Anglican Communion currently illustrates the nihilism of its hopes for ecclesial unity through the rejection of and separation from disagreeing families of the church.

Another account of nihilism describes a spiraling increase of will against will that has grown out of Christianity: humans project upon God a superhuman amount of their own will and then fight against it by ever more forceful assertions of human will. A Feuerbachian projection of humanity’s desire for power creates an omnipotent God, against whom humanity competes for more and more power. In the reversal of a comfortable Christian narrative against nihilism, this account would mean that Nietzsche’s proclamation of will is not the alternative to Christianity, but the epitome of Christian will to power. One might use this model to describe the powerful—if futile — desire of a [Christian] democratic nation to transform the countries of the world into dependent, controllable democracies, through violence (directly imposed by U.S. military and indirectly facilitated by U.S. weapons). Hopes for individual and national safety and development rest on the nation’s capacity to protect and dominate international and terrorist threat.

212 Michael Allen Gillespie, Nihilism Before Nietzsche (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). Gillespie narrates the historical development of nihilism as the result of and the primary characteristic of Christianity’s obsession with will. He ascribes to William of Ockham a prioritization of God’s omnipotence, which, in turn, leads to the human defensive response of increased will.
The most popular alternative to the nihilism of unending war suggests exiting Christianity, or at least deflating the over-powerful God of Christianity.\footnote{213} If Christians would allow their God to be less omnipotent and more weak and vulnerable, then Christians would feel less need to either prove their might or be victimized by God. Hope would then rely on what humans and their companion God can accomplish together, with a shared and gentler power.\footnote{214}

The critique Christianity’s over-willing nihilism might serve as a corrective to some effort- and works-based versions of Christian hopefulness. Christianity has its own critiques of attempts to will the fulfilments of hope through human accomplishment, but those critiques can be hard to hear over the loud cultural cries for effectiveness. The loss of a real difference between God and creation presents an even more pressing challenge to hope that depends on or rejects God’s omnipotence. God whose power is of the same order as human power, such that competition or sharing is possible. Belief in, or the presumption of, a super-human God who does power or weakness the way humans can (only better), confines theological hope to


\footnote{214}{Caputo and Keller. This position is similar to Moltmann’s reliance on the passibility of God and to Moltmannian assumptions about God’s shared, if enhanced, human attributes of grief and compassion.}
what humans can effect (only better). God the Trinity occupies the same plane as other powers, including human powers.

Kathryn Tanner’s account of the non-competitive relation of between God and creatures offers one manifestation of a Christian narrative that resists the nihilism of sameness by underscoring the divine-human difference. She argues against both comparisons between humans and God and conflicts between humans and God. These comparisons and conflicts are incoherent, because they assume a single plane of existence. “A non-competitive relation between creatures and God means that the creature does not decrease so that God may increase. The glorification of God does not come at the expense of creatures.”

Because God creates the creature, the creature in its giftedness, in its goodness, does not compete with God’s gift-fulness and goodness because God is the giver of all that the creature is for the good. This relationship of total river to total if is possible, in turn, only if God and creatures are, so to speak, on different levels of being, and different planes of causality — something that God’s transcendence implies.”

This non-competitive relation rules out a spiraling battle of will between humans and God and human claims of absolutism that contain God within creation. It also rules out the shared experiences of a weakened God in mutual relations with creatures. The hope of the creature who is the gift of the giver relies on the utter transcendence of God, and issues in a divine-human relationship of closeness that can only come from difference.

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215 Tanner, Jesus, 2.

216 Tanner, Jesus, 3.

217 Tanner, Jesus, 3.
A contemporary theology of hope that relies on a non-competitive account of God and creation deflects the potential charges of nihilism and orders its alternative claims about God into a coherent grammar that resists deflating God into humanity or inflating humanity into God.

4.2.1.2 Indeterminacy and Undecidability

Critical theory conversations about the possibly nihilist ideas about indeterminism, or undecidability, might also contribute some challenges and resources to Christian theological hope.218 One version of postructuralist indeterminacy, narrated by Shane Weller’s analysis of Beckett’s plays, declines to settle with either the ultimate abyss, on the one hand, or the vanquishing of nihilism, on the other. This indeterminacy resists resolution and fulfils no promises; even a broken promise, by virtue of its repeatability, includes the possibility of its fulfillment, alongside the absence of fulfillment. The moment of neither possibility nor impossibility is difficult to sit with. The abyss of nothingness, of no possibility for hope, ever, can seem preferable to “perhaps,” and the moment can last forever.219 There is no assurance of a positive or negative resolution, and there is no assurance that the moment of indeterminism will end. The condition of being “in no position to


219 Elizabeth Grosz, “The Time of Violence: Deconstruction and Value,” in Violence and the Body: Gender, Race, and the State, Arturo J. Aldama, 134-47. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003). Grosz’s discussion of undecidability complements this indeterminacy. She argues that that Derrida “seems to suggest an alternative economy [than that of violence], which exceeds the very notion of economy,” an alternative he calls “the Other,” or “the gift, hospitality, donation, generosity, or ethics” (Grosz, Time, 143). The gift gives time, and therefore a future distinct from the present, “a temporality in excess of the present and never contained within its horizon” (244).
“know” can be characterized as the ultimate (or nadir) of nihilism, in perpetuating a nothingness that cannot even be claimed. Contrariwise, I propose that indeterminism identifies a circumstance narrated in scripture and suggests a possibility for theological hope when possibilities cannot be found.

Jesus’ disciples often find themselves in no position to know or state what is going on. Not long after witnessing two occasions when Jesus produced ample food for the crowds from meager supplies, the disciples talk amongst themselves in confusion about Jesus’ words about the dangerous leaven of the Pharisees and the Saducees. They wonder if he meant that they forgot to bring bread on the boat trip (Mark 8: 4-21; Matt 16:5-12). After witnessing the Transfiguration, the disciples talk among themselves, bewildered about what Jesus could possibly have meant when he talked about the Son of Man being being raised from the dead (Mt and Mark). While sharing their last Passover meal with Jesus, the disciples argue amongst themselves about which of them is greatest (Luke 22:24). And on the road to Emmaus, a disciple and his companion talk about what has happened in Jerusalem, not able to make sense of anything at all. In each of these cases, the disciples stand in a space where they can neither reject nor affirm that Jesus truly is radically other than what they think they already know. And, in each of these cases, they remain in no position to state anything coherent, until clarification comes from God, by way of the resurrected presence of Jesus Christ, or, perhaps, the presence of the Holy Spirit among them, or, perhaps, the conversion of Cornelius’s household, or at the still-to-come-resurrection of all the members of the body of Christ. Their hopes for understanding and their hopes for participation in that which they do not
understand are partially resolved in their life times, with the promise of perfect fulfillment still open to a future outside of time. And the disciples themselves are not the resolvers.

A present connection between theological hope and indeterminacy can be drawn to those trying to survive in the midst of unspeakable suffering; uninterrupted cycles of abuse, murder, and genocide; or global devastation. Efforts to survive may well involve the exquisite agonies of seeing no grounds for hope and yet recognizing that freedom from suffering has not been ruled out by the fact of its absence so far. Of course, Christians watching from a distance can not narrate precisely what the agonies of the suffering are; nor can they compose a truthful explanation for these horrors. Narrations may come later, in conversation with survivors and by remembering those who do not survive. However, Christians of privilege who understand themselves to have a connection with or responsibility for those who are in no position to hope or not hope, can join in that indeterminate position by resisting premature closure in their assessments and actions. Paul’s reminder about the imperfect, faint knowledge of God that is possible now, offers a caution against presuming to be able to explain God’s truth. “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.”²²⁰ Christian theologians trying to make sense of unspeakable devastation might sit longer with the painfully uncomfortable condition of being in no position to speak and in no position to assert either the affirmation nor the negation of hope.

²²⁰ 1 Cor. 13:12.
Theological hope that accepts the seemingly unending moments of radical indeterminacy might then find itself in a position to recognize that hope comes from without that moment of impossible possibility. Christian hope rests in Jesus Christ, whose death and resurrection opens the unprecedented possibility of eternal resurrected life, a survival that embraces and exceeds the inability to survive. In a hope that recognizes both indeterminacy and the promise of an entirely different life, Christians might see opportunities for creative and compassionate demonstrations of their hope in ministry to and in company with those trying to survive.

Indeterminacy and undecidability remind theological hope not to close off space and time for God's space and time, which is radically other from economies of the powers of the world. Creating openings for the gift of God's time and space, in liturgy, relationships, and re-narration, can allow Christians to receive the gift of hope; and that hope might offer a foretaste of full participation in the resurrected life of Jesus Christ. Such foretastes shape and direct actions in the economies of today, with the hope of God's economy in the real future.

4.2.1.3 From Nihilism to Hope

Conor Cunningham, a Christian theologian and philosopher, argues that nihilism promotes dualisms that turn out to be an ontic monism, grounded on the univocity of being. Cunningham grants that nihilism does involve provenance and, therefore, a kind of hope, promise, and expectation, but it issues only in nothing. His account of Christianity and its hope posits difference as prior to change, so that creation is not simply a change, but a real difference. Nihilism provides nothing (as

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221 Conor Cunningham, Genealogy of Nihilism: Philosophies of Nothing and the Difference of Theology. London: Routledge, 2002

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something) out of nothing; in creatio ex nihilo, the unity-in-difference Trinity creates substantial something, that remains different from its creator.

Cunningham makes an ideological critique not unlike Adorno’s negative dialectics, Weller’s indeterminacy, or Grosz’s undecidable. Adorno’s negative dialectics looks for the possibility of difference and hope in the breaks in structure. Weller notes the position of “perhaps” in Beckett that does not preclude or posit an unforeseen difference. Grosz sees in Derrida’s undecidable, the creation of time for an uncertain addition or gift. Cunningham sees difference and hope in the analogy of being. The creator God has created all that is, in a creation that illustrates likeness and not-likeness simultaneously: likeness in that creation is of the abundance of God’s goodness; unlikeness because creation is not God, or on a plane of existence with God, or competitive with God. All that is, therefore, is only analogically. Claims about God can only be made analogically, pointing toward God’s unimaginably perfect difference with words from human knowledge. Even the idea of analogy is analogical itself. This means that while Adorno’s negative dialectics assumes a non-closed system, with space for difference, and therefore hope, Cunningham’s Christian account of creation assumes a non-closeable real difference of Creator and creation. The openness does not extend into a space beyond or other than God, and God is not finite. Creation is not God, created from nothing other than God. The analogy of being is a human strategy for trying to narrate this paradox in a grammar which resists collapsing God into human imagination. The analogy of being sustains hope, in faith and love, until the perfection of creatures—the beatitude—which places humans eternally face-to-face with God (while eternally creatures).
Cunningham does make claims about truth, and he does not sit in a time and space between nothing and something; but his affirmations are not bound to the continuation of the same, and his resolution is one of difference.222 He suggests the possibility of hope in the absolute truth of God, understood and articulated through the analogy of being, which connects human knowledge to divine knowledge with the very partial human knowledge of analogy. Hope is a gift from God and rests in God; but in real difference, creation does not share a substantive relationship with God except through the analogy of being. Theological hope thus affirms what it cannot know, through analogies it can imagine, looking toward an unimaginable fulfillment in real difference.

Moltmann is not interested in debating real difference or analogy of being; although he sometimes argues for the possibility of real difference in creation, in the new creation, his emphases on eschatological panentheism and human participation in the relationships of the Trinity renders real difference and the analogy of being unnecessary. Michael Scott Horton observes that “[d]espite his intentions, real difference is surrendered to a final synthesis in Moltmann’s account.”223 Moltmann’s priority is “relationality,” and by that he means a very specific kind of relations, that excludes any God-creation relations that seem hierarchical, uneven, unequal. Relationality transcends the absolutism of a single identity and the totality aspect of relativism. God shares with creation an open future, that God, as well as humans, hopes for. Although Moltmann’s future claims a new openness, his reduction of the

222 Cunningham, Genealogy, 264–6.

difference between God and creation suggests the univocity of being that Cunningham critiques. The Moltmannian version of difference, openness, and possibility, manifests as the primacy of relationality between God and creation.

Theological hope looks to full human participation in the perichoretic relations of the Trinity and full divine participation in the connectedness of the new creation. Resting in the shared identity of God and humans, Moltmannian theological hope has little use for “perhaps” moments, for “not being in any position to say,” or for an unimaginable eschatological future.

Theological hope that is bound neither to a closed system of the same nor to an imaginable open future that extends the same looks to God’s transcendent difference as the source and end of creation’s possibilities. The eschatological identity of humans who are “citizens of heaven” even while citizens of earth makes possible a life of witness to an unknowable but nonetheless hoped for eternal life transformed by Christ. Graham Ward exhorts Christians “to practice an art of living in the name of a transcendental hope which breaks free of the vicious circularities of the same.”

Theological hope that persists through the impossibility of human certainty witnesses to the eschatological difference of the already/not yet resurrection.

4.2.2 Lament: Hope Without Hope

The biblical genre of lament offers several accounts of hope. One focuses on the resolution of lament through repentant acceptance of God’s punishment of sin.

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Hope rests in God who provides, guides, and maintains the covenantal relationship through and beyond human failure. Another account encourages participation in scriptural lament in order to express and work through present-day crises in relation to God. A third account interprets the biblical and extra-biblical tradition/genre of lament with a focus on loss without reassurance or restoration, making room for hope that cannot see and does not accept the certainty of relief. This lament narrates the absence of any basis for hope, cries out to or implicates God, and carries the lament through and beyond its lack of resolution. Lament expresses the experiences of grief, pain, loss, and death that are too overwhelming to understand, bear, or survive. All three interpretations of lament highlight aspects of hope often overlooked in favor of more appealing and more comforting accounts: repentant reliance on God’s judgment and mercy; walking through, rather than bridging over, the pain of (temporarily) inaccessible hope; the faint and undauntable hope of persistent lament to God that accepts no response but restoration.

Jože Krašovec illustrates the first interpretation of lament with his account of Lamentations as God’s call to conversion through punishment. He argues that the great suffering should turn God’s people to repentance: “Everything comes from God; the present situation cannot be an exception. And yet the covenanted people have no right to complain against the Almighty.” The fact of God’s covenant relationship should reestablish right relations with God and underscore the true foundation for hope in God’s constancy; but first, the people need stern reminders of


226 Krašovec, Source, 232.
their relationship to God. Relief comes with repentance and a recommitment to their one God. Krašovec explains that, "...the consciousness of their election and the superiority of God's benevolence and mercy provides a basis of the hope that God had not rejected them for ever. This hope is, of course, inseparably linked to the desire for conversion." Krašovec's interpretation is not appealing to those current theologians who see hope for a less punishing restoration of divine judgment, on the one hand, and more hope for the appropriateness of complaints to God. However, Krašovec's account reinforces the covenant relationship between God and God's people that cannot be broken by turning away from God; no sin or devastation separates people from their ever merciful God. Lament thus demonstrates God's steadfastness, even when humans cannot detect it, and grounds hope in God's restoration broken relationships that humans cannot mend.

Another engagement with lament nuances the punitive aspects of God's righting of the unrighteous by highlighting the therapeutic possibilities of lament for congregational worship to provide comforting hope in desperate circumstances. While lamenting may be seen by some as inappropriate behavior in church (expectation of emotional expressions vary among denominational, racial, social, and ethnic traditions), a therapeutic understanding of lament encourages congregants to express their emotions and be open to the hope available in practices of lament. Shortly after September 11, 2001, Dr. David A. Davis preached to the congregation of First Presbyterian Church in Princeton, NJ, a community greatly wounded by the deaths of friends and families. Davis drew the congregation into Psalm 137, to help

them express and narrate their feelings into a form of biblical lament. He did not rush them to speedy hope, but he affirmed their anger and grief and encouraged them to direct those feelings to God:

Guided by a profoundly pastoral purpose on the one hand and the raw out-cry of Psalm 137 on the other, Davis entered with his congregation into the welter of soul-shredding emotion precipitated by the events of September 11, allowing the biblical lament to mirror and articulate inchoate anger and grief through the images of tears and displacement. Yet, guided hermeneutically by biblical lament, Davis allowed the psalm not only to give grief a voice, but to invoke a boundary on the human impulse to multiply evils in the face of evil. Like sufferers of old, we trust our broken, angry hearts to the God who weeps with us and will not abandon us or the world.228

Participation in biblical lament offered a community reeling from unprecedented tragedy a way forward, where there had seemed no way.

Peter Paris describes the ways that songs of lament sustained African slaves with fortitude and hope in the face of suffering and oppression. He notes that the slaves shaped their experiences into lament songs as a way of narrating their circumstances in light of God, resurrection, and heaven.

Singing about sadness helps one overcome the loneliness of suffering. Consequently, enslaved Africans composed and sang countless songs celebrating Gods’ liberating presence in the midst of suffering, for the purpose of strengthening a people to keep hope alive when it is threatened by terrible circumstances in life. The songs that have enduring value in such situations are those that tell the truth by critiquing their situation in light of a transcendent theological principle. African slaves equated that principle with God, the resurrected Jesus, and heaven. All three symbols constituted injustices to endure.229


In this way, lament both expresses and feeds hope in divine freedom from suffering, in the eschatological inclusion of their bodies into Christ’s resurrected bodies. Lament performs eschatological hope in the ultimate transformation of abused bodies into Christ’s resurrected bodies. The slaves’ songs of lament sustained their hope in a heaven constructed entirely of God’s justice, completely free from the oppression that fills every moment with suffering.

While Davis leads the people of First Presbyterian through lament toward the faint hope of recovery, and the slaves Paris describes sustain each other with laments that look to hope in heaven, Kathleen O’Connor claims the Book of Lamentations as Zion’s explicit “act of hope,” fulfilled in Second Isaiah.230 In O’Connor’s account, Zion finds comfort in the narrator of Lamentations231; and the strongman receives a hope in God when he least expects it, and then clings to it.232 O’Connor sees hardy hope in the characters of Lamentations, hope that stands up to their suffering and to God.

Speakers in Lamentations tenaciously persist in trying to engage God. They make claims on God, demand attention, and beg for a future. They do this even as God walks away and silently closes the door on them. God may be unfaithful, but they are faithful. God may hide, but they stand in plain view.


231 O’Connor, Lamentations, 43.

232 O’Connor, Lamentations, 57, 113.
They berate God, protest God’s work, and dare to ask for more than patent cruelty. Lamentations is a bare act of hope and a plea for life.\textsuperscript{233} Lamentations ends without a response from God to Zion’s hope and plea for life. However, O’Connor finds the response in Second Isaiah, where, through a variation of the account in Lamentations, God relieves and restores Zion, fulfilling the hopes she expressed in lament. “Second Isaiah’s sequel to Lamentations revivifies Daughter Zion on her hill of weeping and changes God’s character from abuser to comforter. In Second Isaiah God is present, vocal, and repentant.”\textsuperscript{234} In this way, Zion, the city and the woman, represents the results of persevering lament and unflagging hope, and her example encourages those in exile to return to her and find their hopeful lament fulfilled as well.

God acknowledges, addresses, and reverses her sufferings. Her guilt virtually disappears, and God, not she, is on the defensive. She has named her world in Lamentations, and now God responds on her terms, using her language, and giving her what she needs and more.\textsuperscript{235}

These illustrations remind contemporary Christians that lament can show a path forward, and it can seek (and ultimately find) God’s comfort through hope in God’s response. Theological hope that claims the practices of biblical lament as present, not simply ancient, and potentially therapeutic may find ways to live out hope that embraces, rather than dismisses or represses, suffering.

\textsuperscript{233} O’Connor, \textit{Lamentations}, 127. She continues: “even in the face of God’s silence, the speakers persevere. Their hope resides in the strongman’s words for whom, at least briefly, God’s mercies are ‘new every morning’ (3:22-23). Hope resides in the broken, desperate pleas of Daughter Zion, who begs God to see (19c, 11c, 20; 2:2e); in the urgings of the narrator, who tells her to weep day and night (2:18-10); and in the voices of the community, who plead with God to ‘return us to yourself’ (5:21).”

\textsuperscript{234} O’Connor, \textit{Lamentations}, 140.

\textsuperscript{235} O’Connor, \textit{Lamentations}, 147.
A third contribution to theological hope lies in a reading of lament that emphasizes the persistent, desperate cry for help without resolution, across lifetimes of impenetrable loss and pain. This approach connects scriptural stories of figures who lament in desperation without relief with the stories of those who continue to lament centuries later.

This lament refuses to release God from responsibility for restoration. Unimaginable possibility characterizes the hope of this lament without apparent end; it is a hope without optimism or prospects, but with confidence that God should be listening. Tod Linafelt reads lament in terms of survival.236 Linafelt draws on the work of Walter Benjamin, Jacques Derrida, and Jean-François Lyotard, to argue that the survival of the Book of Lamentations texts, through translations, creates a space for the possibility of the survival of the dead children.

Linafelt argues that Lamentations is written by and for survivors, in an attempt to persuade God to allow for the survival of Zion’s children.237 He focuses on chapters 1 and 2, which begin with a sense of dirge/elegy and move thoroughly toward lament and survival, from the (paradoxically) easier interpretation of pain and death as punishment for sin to the presentation of pain as (also) the inexplicable and unreasonable act of God. Although YHWH (as both the cause of affliction and the possible alleviator) does not respond, the poet, thoroughly persuaded and won over to Zion’s plight (2:11-12), tries to speak the response that it seems should come from YHWH: How could I possibly find the words to comfort you in your inexplicable

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suffering! (2:13). Then, when YHWH does not step in or take on the role of comforter, the poet urges Zion to try the most powerful persuasion imaginable: the rhetorical move imagined by the poet is for Zion “to affront YHWH with the intolerable suffering of children, precisely on behalf of the children.” Zion fulfills this directive in the last three lines of chapter 2, naming the horrific state of affairs in which mothers eat their children, the Lord has killed everyone, and the Lord invites the enemies to celebrate. Zion’s declaration that “none survived or escaped,” illustrates Linafelt’s claim that the question of the survival of the children in the key theme of Lamentations.

Although at the end of chapter 2, none survive, and although God never steps into save Zion, Linafelt argues that the end of the Book of Lamentations remains open to alternative possibilities. Here, he describes openness as something other than optimistic hope, but also other than a decisively negative divine response. His translation of the last line of Chapter 5 ends with an ellipsis: “For if truly you have rejected us, bitterly raged against us ..., in order that the book might be left open both to God’s non-response and to an alternative. That alternative might encourage the reader, “for a moment, to imagine the possibility of a different ‘then,’ and therefore a different future.” Thus, Linafelt opens the door to the ongoing survival

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239 Linafelt, *Surviving*, 56.
240 Linafelt, *Surviving*, 58.
241 Linafelt, *Surviving*, 60.
literature of this literature of survival, as subsequent readers step into the incomplete space left by the absence of YHWH’s response.\textsuperscript{243}

Linafelt joins O’Connor in exploring Second Isaiah as a part of the survival of Lamentations by paralleling and continuing Lamentations’s “drive for survival.”\textsuperscript{244} He notes that Second Isaiah’s presentation of YHWH as mother responds to Lamentations’ theme of Zion as the mother who pleas for her children’s survival.\textsuperscript{245} While the poet of Lamentations could only partially and insufficiently effect the embrace and alleviation of Zion’s anguish desired of YHWH, in Second Isaiah, YHWH miraculously restores Zion’s children, above and beyond their former life.\textsuperscript{246} Second Isaiah provides survival that Lamentations longs for, but cannot imagine.\textsuperscript{247}

Linafelt differs from O’Connor by not subsuming Lamentations into Second Isaiah’s resolution. Even though Second Isaiah provides a comforting answer from YHWH to fill Lamentations’ gap, Lamentations remains, and therefore, other possible survivals of Lamentations remain.\textsuperscript{248} He observes that Targum Lamentations also emphasizes Lamentations as a literature of (about) survival, by highlighting chapters 1 and 2, withholding divine comfort, and intensifying the figure of Zion.\textsuperscript{249} Targum Lamentations effects the survival of Lamentatinos through more explicit

\textsuperscript{243} Linafelt, Surviving, 61.

\textsuperscript{244} Linafelt, Surviving, 63.

\textsuperscript{245} Linafelt, Surviving, 75.

\textsuperscript{246} Linafelt, Surviving, 76–7.

\textsuperscript{247} Linafelt, Surviving, 78.

\textsuperscript{248} Linafelt, Surviving, 82.

\textsuperscript{249} Linafelt, Surviving, 96.
descriptions of the desolation of Zion’s children and a bold Zion who challenges the non-responsive God to restore her children.\textsuperscript{250}

In Elleazar ben Kallir’s Middle Ages liturgical poems (4th to 8th c), Linafelt finds the survival of Zion’s lament in Lamentations through the shared themes of lost children. Kallir picks up threads of Zion’s lament and narrates some responses, but the effect is to continue both the loss of her children and the absence of a response from God addressing her loss. “By gathering together the fragments of these previous responses to the accusations of Zion and using them to construct new responses, Kallir calls attention to the fact that these erstwhile answers were finally inadequate.”\textsuperscript{251}

Linafelt marks the continuation of lament through a short story by Cynthia Ozick. “The Shawl” tells the story of a mother who sees her small daughter murdered in a Nazi concentration camp. Again, a story reflects and participates in Zion’s loss of her children, with echoed phrases that repeat the absence of God and resist closure.\textsuperscript{252} Again, the survival of texts of lament allows the lament of survival to help the lamenting survive.

These Jewish laments will survive until the messiah comes, returning the children to their mothers. For Christians, the adopted members of the community of lament, what constitutes the survival of lament? Hope for the survival of lost children — lost through hunger, war, abuse, and tsunamis — is kept from extinction

\textsuperscript{250} Linafelt, \textit{Surviving}, 96.
\textsuperscript{251} Linafelt, \textit{Surviving}, 130.
\textsuperscript{252} Linafelt, \textit{Surviving}, 133-142.
by lament that extends the mourning and the hope. Jesus’ crucifixion sustains those who suffer and die through the already of his resurrection until the fulfillment of hope in the resurrection of all. The retelling of Jesus’ death and resurrection, and participation in that death and resurrection in liturgy, extends the survival of loss in the already salvation which is not yet experienced in full. In the Letter to the Hebrews, the faithful who have died wait for the resurrection of all. Christians who share in Lamentations and the other laments of scripture remember and sustain the lost and those who have lost them, as they are all incorporated into eschatological hopes for restoration and joy.

Linafelt’s interpretation of Lamentations underscores the inadequacy of this world as the source of present or eschatological hope. The world and its creatures, on their own, cannot prevent or heal tragedy. God heals the suffering and death of tragedy that stands outside of imaginable hope; although God works within time and space, God is not limited to time and space. God incorporates those who continue to lament within biblical lament and lamenting to come, thereby rendering more audible the cries of those whose suffering cannot be healed by humanitarian efforts and has not been resolved by God. Children lost to genocide and starvation, women who are raped and mutilated, men forced to kill and be killed, will not be restored in this life. Their laments and the laments of those who have lost them will survive, and that survival reminds theologies of hope that both resignation and blind confidence rush in too quickly to close the opening that lament creates.

The survival of lament depends in part on practices of remembering, practices including and exceeding the particular form of the lament. The forces of nationalism,
capitalism, oppression, and war establish and sustain their positions by renarrating the lives of those they seek to control. Murder becomes collateral damage or peacekeeping; torture becomes a penal system, or military intelligence gathering; degradation and expulsion becomes homeland security; stealing becomes market improvement. Each of these narrative transformations erases the memories of those who are suffering and dying at the hands of the narrators; and each renarration increases the powers of domination while diminishing the relevance of alternative stories. When the people of God remember suffering, and when they narrate those memories in the particular narratives of God’s relationship with God’s people, the power structures which claim to remove suffering can be resisted and undermined. Johann Metz articulates the memory of God’s people as “dangerous memory,” that tells history from the side of the people who are suffering at the hands of the those who benefit from their suffering.253 “In this perception, history — as the remembered history of suffering — has the form of a dangerous tradition.”254 The hope of dangerous memory, like that of lament, asserts that those who suffer and die outside the history of heroes remain God’s people. The forgettable will not be forgotten while their history — even when still unresolved — is claimed by the story of God’s redemption of each and every one. Flora Keshggegian builds (critically) on Metz’ account of hope with an exploration of alternate narratives of time.255 She reverses


254 Metz, Faith, 196.

the future-determined Moltmannian hope by giving time to memories and by carrying forward memories of joy, promise, grief, and trauma. She argues that true hope does not come from leaping ahead to a tidy resolution of these memories; rather, hope comes when we take time to remember, recognize, and share the messiness of loss and celebration. Like lament, Keshgégian’s time for remembering trusts that even the worst experiences possible are included in God’s life for creation. She suggests that “[t]he prescription for hope is living,” and that practices of hope—including taking time for remembering—strengthen hope.256

Lament that extends into the future affirms the displays faith in the impassibility of the passable God, by presuming God’s unchanging perfection, despite the paucity of evidence. Lament cannot survive if the God to which it cries lacks the capacity to answer and bring restoration. Lament performs what hope can lose track of: trust that God can, should, and will sometime accomplish the unimaginable, and return the lost children. The hope of lament sustains, without resolving, hopes for reconciliation and transcendent human thriving, from the midst of unabating suffering.

Lament that persists and sustains the fragile possibility of hope in despair challenges Christian theological hope to embrace lament and the lamenters without presuming to diminish either the reality lamented or the hope maintained. Desires to fight injustice and desires to discount the hopes of people who have no reason to hope both exclude the people who lament and their distinctive hope. Christians who attend to the distinctive hope of lament might begin to claim that hope beyond its

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Old Testament and Jewish identity and claim it within a Christian eschatological hope as well. The New Testament, the lives of saints and martyrs, and the survival beyond death of the laments of the suffering all illustrate impossible pain, not yet relieved in Christ. This is a hope much needed today.

4.3 Possible Subjects Who Hope

4.3.1 Disabled Bodies and the Hope of Bodily Resurrection

Recent disability theology shares with disability studies the goal of including people with disabilities in the full range of life’s opportunities. Theologians explain that the people of scripture and of many centuries since have viewed people with disabilities in prejudiced and misinformed ways, based on medical misinformation, fear, and the perceived connection between sin and physical brokenness and demon possession. Disability theologians argue further that contemporary ideals of athletic, youthful, and beautiful bodies discount the bodies and minds that do not meet that ideal now and those that do not have the potential to strive for it. Inclusion theologies aim to include all, regardless of capacity.

One approach to inclusion draws on the discourse of human rights. This effort includes people with disabilities into the larger set of people who have been deprived of rights universally due all people. Christian support for this movement adds its narrative of humanity created in the image of God and therefore entitled to full participation in creation. Further, Christian hopes for the gathering of all bodies
into the body of Christ can underscore work toward international human rights for all those excluded because of disabilities.  

Another approach to inclusion observes that no one truly is perfect; some disabilities may be more obvious than others, but all humans share vulnerability. Thomas E. Reynolds argues that 

disability is part of the fragile character of human existence in general, wherein we can find genuine good in relationships of mutual vulnerability. Wholeness comes through mutual dependency; and dependency marks vulnerability, which involves disability. Our weaknesses open us to each other.  

Mary McClintock Fulkerson cautions against defining the subjectivity of people based on their disabilities. “All of us are persons with degrees of dis-ability, and the supposed clear line between the abled and disabled is a social fiction.” Disability is not a universally understood, essentialist category of human subjectivity. When disability is recognized as a construction, additional accounts of shared identities become possible.

257 Moltmann illustrates this approach through his involvement with international human rights work. In “The theological basis of human rights,” written for Semper Reformanda: World Alliance of Reformed Churches, Moltmann asserts that “[t]he inalienable and irrelinquishable dignity of all human beings is rooted in their creation in the divine image. Irrespective of sex, race, age, health, abilities or disabilities, all human beings have the same dignity and share the same hope: having been created in the image of God, they all are destined for the kingdom of God.” http://www.warc.ch/where/21gc/study/09.html, accessed March 19, 2011.


Deborah Beth Creamer has recently written about a “limits” model for disability theology, that resembles Reynold’s shared vulnerability model.\textsuperscript{260} Creamer critiques the themes in disability studies that she names as medical and minority models. The former, medical, model identifies disabilities in terms of bodies that cannot do everything “normal” bodies can do. “This model is closest to the commonsense idea that a disability is what someone has when his or her body or mind does not work properly.”\textsuperscript{261} The latter, minority, model identifies disability as exclusion based on socially dominant prejudices about difference and worth: “Under the minority group model, ableism, rather than any physical impairment, becomes the cause and the problem of disability.”\textsuperscript{262} Instead of these models, Creamer proposes a model of limits that acknowledges that all creatures are limited. God pronounces the limited creation good\textsuperscript{263}; limitations are not confined to people customarily identified as disabled.

Some disability theology extends limitation and disability beyond creation, arguing for a disabled God. Since humans are created in God’s image, and since humans are limited, then God must be limited, even disabled, as well. Nancy Eiesland shows God’s disability through Jesus’ resurrection disability of wounds.\textsuperscript{264}

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\textsuperscript{261} Creamer, \textit{Disability}, 31.
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\textsuperscript{262} Creamer, \textit{Disability}, 26.
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\textsuperscript{263} Creamer, \textit{Disability}, 94-5.
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\textsuperscript{264} Nancy L. Eiesland, \textit{The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability} (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994).
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Wayne Morris recounts the way that God is understood to be culturally deaf by many deaf people. These constructions of God who shares disabilities with people with disabilities offers affirmation of inclusion in God’s arms, rather than the feelings of exclusion or neglect sometimes experienced when God is wholly claimed by people who do not claim disabilities.

Disabled God theology has yet to engage extensively with what hopes beyond present survival, comfort, and social inclusion might be. While hopes for resurrection transformation frequently include the healing of all disability and infirmity, the eternal condition of the disabled God has yet to be narrated. Humans and God could share disabilities eternally, but that scenario does not relieve resurrected people of their disabilities. One could speculate that God needs the transformed presence of people in order to be healed, a proposal that needs additional narration to account for the agency of healing. Or, the transformation of disabled people and God might rely on a healing force other than God and people, a suggestion that also needs radical reordering of theological grammar.

The human rights model of disability theology urges local and international action now, to improve and save lives now. Working toward the goal of equal opportunity for those with disabilities can redirect the attention of less disabled people from self-comfort to the needs of others easily forgotten, and it can hold Christians accountable to Jesus’ call to continue his work with the people in need. A human rights model of disability hopes for full inclusion of all people in this life and

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the next, although it does not necessarily examine how hopes for this life might
differ from hopes after the life we now know.

The limited people/limited God model asks all Christians to be mindful of
their imperfections and vulnerabilities. No one can claim superiority based on a lack
of disability, and everyone shares in the human condition, which is flawed and yet
still created in God's image. Present theological hopes pertain to fuller lives for
everyone; eschatological hopes look to freedom from limitations and accompanying
suffering.

I propose a third way toward inclusion that calls on less-disabled people to
ask, humbly, for inclusion in the lives of people with disabilities. This approach
recognizes differences — physical, cognitive, emotional, social — without investing
in normalcy, equality, or limitation; and it challenges common presuppositions about
that in which one might want to be included. Disability theology that hopes for the
inclusion of disabled people in a society shaped by the ideology of autonomy
reinforces, without questioning, the value of autonomy. William Gaventa observes
some of the problems with the ideal of including people with disabilities in normal,
autonomous life:

It is often said that persons with intellectual disabilities should live “as
autonomously as possible” or “as normally as possible” or “as much included in
the community as possible.” This way of putting things clearly exposes a
normative anthropology that, in confrontation with persons with severe
intellectual disabilities, sees itself more and more pushed back. Eventually,
this anthropology cannot explain in a positive sense that the value of life with
intellectual disabilities — or even human life in general — can be based on
other human characteristics than the ones that are highly appreciated within the framework of the dominant concept of individual autonomy.\textsuperscript{266}

A human rights approach to disabilities reinforces the goals of independence, and a theology of shared limits risks downplaying differences and the ramifications of those differences.

The limitations of cognitive disabilities present distinct challenges to discourses of theological hope. The Thomistic hope discussed above assumes the importance of the knowledge of God to feed hope and to draw those hope closer to God’s knowledge. Current understandings of physical, psychological, and psychiatric disabilities (and the ways they interconnect) afford richer theological possibilities for considering a hope of and for people that exceeds the limits of particular cognitive standards. And yet, if hope is not reserved only for those without disabilities, then the church is challenged to address concerns about what hope it might have \textit{for} the very young, the very old, and those who have cognitive disabilities; the church is also challenged to addresses concerns about the hope \textit{of} the very young, very old, and those who have cognitive disabilities. The church already has locations for the inclusion, formation, and appreciation of hope not reliant on particular standards of cognition. Perhaps Christians can look again at the spaces and times of church life open to sharing non-cognitively-specific theological hope. One such place is communal worship, where participation in the hope of the Christ includes sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch, and the simple presence of bodies. James K. A. Smith argues that capacities for conceptual and abstract thought do not determine hope for

participation in Christ. He considers the limited cognitive capacities of children mentally challenged adults in relation to Christian worship.

Does [the fact of such cognitive limitations] mean that they cannot achieve fullness in Christ? Do the limits of their cognitive abilities impair the hope of their ever “growing up” into Christ (Eph 4:13)? Does their inability to traffic in concepts preclude them from being educated? ...[B]ecause we are more fundamentally creatures of love and desire than knowledge and beliefs, our discipleship—our formation in Christ—is more fundamentally a matter of precognitive education of the heart. And Christian worship that is full-bodied reaches, touches, and transforms even those who cannot grasp theological abstractions. 267

If the subject/object relation of inclusion were shifted away from the abled inclusion of disability, those who are not primarily identified as people with disabilities might present themselves as available for possible inclusion in the lives of people who understand themselves to be people with disabilities. Perceptions of normalcy and priorities of autonomy would not disappear, but the chief end of inclusion would be relationships not governed by dominant expectations of individual capacity. These relationships, however awkward and fragile, might perform a theological hope in the perfected relationships of the eschaton, rather than in (confused and disordered ideas about) perfected bodies.

Mary McClintock Fulkerson describes her experiences as a participant in the worship and fellowship of Good Samaritan, an United Methodist Church, whose members are female, male, black, white, richer poorer, and differently-abled.268 At their best, the leaders and congregants of Good Samaritan witness to the possibility of shared community in difference, without trying to erase difference through

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268 Fulkerson, *Places*. 
equality of class, capacity, or theology. In times of struggle, Good Samaritan demonstrates the difficulties of establishing and sustaining relationships in a community not primarily identified by similarities of appearance, preference, or social location outside of the Good Samaritan community. People argue and leave, accept and disapprove. Shared worship among people with profound disabilities and those without has not yet seemed possible. Fulkerson joins in with Good Samaritan, and she is included in the sharing of struggles and joys.

Good Samaritan stands out among Christian communities because it tries to be a community of integration, of resistance to the segregation that marks the vast majority of congregations. Fulkerson stands out in the discourses of disability, difference, and theology, because she went to a community of difference and allowed herself to be received on the terms of the congregation. Those terms vary: she is a visitor/observer at special needs services, a participant in the non-special needs worship, and a leader/participant in Bible study. Her engagement with Good Samaritan provides an opportunity to share with the church beyond Good Samaritan some of the non-academic, non-clerical, theology of the congregation. The accounts and performances of hope in particular contribute to this chapter’s consideration of less-familiar resources for theological hope.

At one of the special needs worship services, Fulkerson describes the minister’s version of a sermon: an interactive engagement with the 10 Commandments. He draws the tablets on an erase board and asks the worshippers to name the commandments. Those who are able to participate eagerly raise their hands, but few can produce specifics. What might have been a rehearsal and
reinforcement of the content of the commandments instead develops into an animated enjoyment of the numbers.

A couple of participants look at their bibles, but it is the job of enumerating the commandments that is taken most seriously. Several hands shoot up with fingers raised triumphantly in the air. “First!” then “Two!” “Second,” call out several of the men. Getting the “next number” seems more important than getting the content of the commandment...

Several of those who were not able to participate in the sermon join in the singing that follows, by singing, clapping, or moving their bodies. Some do not appear to be participating, but sit still or rock and squeal. Worship in this context expects and accepts a wide range of participation.

The minister and the liturgical components are the primary connections between this portion of the congregation and the less-disabled congregation; and the performance of worship differs significantly. There is no goal of bringing the people with disabilities to a physical and cognitive norm before they can worship; and the minister leads the special needs service based on the capacities of most of those present, with the understanding that those who cannot participate actively are nonetheless present.

Another practice of fellowship at Good Samaritan provides time for congregation members (not those with serious disabilities) to share stories and concerns. One gathering includes a couple of people who care for family members with severe injuries and disabilities, and they share their stories and their hopes with the group. A mother narrates her son’s series of illnesses, recoveries, and more

269 Fulkerson, Places, 111.
illnesses, in the context of his visions of heaven and of reassurance from Jesus.\textsuperscript{270} The father of a son with severe autism responds appreciatively to her story by sharing his hope:

I want to believe that our children can be healed and their suffering ended — that God will respond. “Everyday,” he says, “I look at Carl and only hope that someday he will look at me and say, ‘Hi Dad, here I am.’ I just have to hold out hope that there might be a possibility of a miracle for us.”\textsuperscript{271}

The people gathered in the room recognize the truth of these stories, even if their own experiences and convictions do not support these accounts.

The special needs service and the conversation between two parents of people with disabilities (in the context of group fellowship) illustrate a theology of disability not primarily based on mainstreamed inclusion in normative society. These two events show that the particularities of disabilities and caring for people with disabilities are at home in church; church can be a space constructed within and for a community whose identity does not conform to the norms of general social structures.

L’Arche communities create communal homes for people with disabilities and those who care for them and are their friends. The members of a L’Arche community eat together, pray together, share their lives — with celebration.\textsuperscript{272} Unlike many institutions that provide care for people with disabilities, L’Arche prioritizes friendship over a care-giver/care-receiver relationship. Live-in and Live-out

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{270} Fulkerson, \textit{Places}, 135.

\textsuperscript{271} Fulkerson, \textit{Places}, 135–6.

\end{footnotesize}
Assistants are paid to be part of L’Arche communities, to support and attend to the residents with disabilities, but L’Arche encourages friendships among the community, and the friendships define the character of the communities. Jean Vanier, the founder of L’Arche, explains that, “[t]he heart of L’Arche is to say to people ‘I am glad you exist.’ And the proof that we are glad that they exist is that we stay with them for a long time. We are together, we can have fun together. ‘I am glad you exist’ is translated into physical presence.”

L’Arche community members, those who are officially caregivers and those who are ostensibly care receivers, nurture and sustain each other. These relationships embrace particularity and help those with disabilities to grow and thrive in ways that accept individual gifts and challenges. Some are able to live interdependently in flats adjacent to the community house; others remain in the community house. Others are able only to receive care. Many others participate fully in the life of the community, with fullness defined by their capacities as dependent and contributing members. Live-in/out assistants are employees and people who are present for years on end and ready to be included into the lives of members with disabilities in friendship, when and as invited.

Jean Vanier corrects those assumptions about people with disabilities that consider them to be partial, incomplete, or less than human subjects; he explains that human identity does not depend on a particular degree of strength or autonomy.

The weaker members of the society are total human persons, children of God. They are not misfits or objects of charity. Their weaknesses and special needs demand deep attention, real concern and support. If we listen to their call and to their needs, they will flourish and grow. If we do not, they will sink in

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273 Hauerwas and Vanier, Living, 69.
depression, sandess, interior revolt and a form of spiritual suicide. And we who carry responsibilities will have closed our beings to love and to strength, which comes from God and which is hidden in the smallest and the weakest.274

Vanier’s account can remind Christians that relationships between differently-abled people are relationships between people, not between a “total human person” and a not quite human person. Good Samaritan and L’Arche communities suggest a hope for this-worldly relationships that reflects hopes for the eschatological reconciliation of people divided by dis/ability. In small-scale, partial ways, these communities illustrate the possibility of a radically transformed, shared life — not-yet possible, not-quite imaginable.

The possibility that these communities illustrate might challenge a theology of hope to consider disabilities and resurrection hope. Since New Testament scripture, Christians have talked about and hoped for bodily resurrection. Throughout many centuries and many disagreements, the church has repeatedly affirmed that bodies — not just souls, minds, spirits, or Platonic forms — persist in the resurrected life, albeit transformed. While no definitive explanations of how bodily resurrection works are available, the content and context for such questions continue to reveal Christianity’s hopes. Within a discourse of disability theology, questions include: Does resurrection remove all suffering, weakness, handicaps, and limitations? Does the resurrection retain the personality and particularity of

transformed bodies? What difference does it make to our lives now which sort of resurrection bodies we imagine and hope for?

As we have seen, some might argue that engaging in eschatological speculation distracts speculators from the very urgent practical theology of improving the lives of needy people now. People with disabilities require care and respect; and the systemic problems of human rights, economic disparity, social ignorance, and segregation can only be improved through persistent effort. However, Christian hopes for this life and the next cannot be separated. Eschatological hopes shape and order present identities and practices; hopeful practices today expand possibilities and imaginations beyond limitations of current existence.

Contemporary concerns about how the resurrected bodies of people with disabilities will be different and the same present a variant of ancient concerns about the particularity of the resurrected bodies of all people. Recent accomplishments of medical science and social anti-discrimination movements re-introduce the idea that people might be freed from disabilities, physically and/or socially, if not in this life, perhaps in the next. This increased confidence about ultimate healing intensifies the risks of imagining heaven without the particularity of bodies. If disabilities are removed — and a theology of limits points out that everyone is limited with some category of disability — particularity is removed, unless the claim is made that bodies are irrelevant to identity. On another hand, if handicaps are sustained through the

\(^{275}\) Aquinas speculates that resurrected bodies will be not too old, not too young, but just right, at the age Jesus was when he was crucified: early thirties. This seems to be one of the areas in which Thomas’s theology overlaps with contemporary ideals of this-worldly perfect bodies; both need modification in relation to current wisdom about bodies, aging, and capacities. *Sup.*, q. 97, art. 3 (Leonine ed.), 241.
bodily resurrection, then suffering and the hierarchies of difference will persist as well.

People who care for family members and friends with severe disabilities often find comfort in eschatological hopes of relief, for the afflicted person and for themselves. The parents at Good Samaritan who shared their stories of life with children with disabilities narrated their stories through hopes for relief from God, in the next life if not now. Amos Yong notes the relationship between images of heaven as a free of disabilities, images of heaven as free of people with disabilities and images of churches as free of people with disabilities. Hopes for resurrected bodies shape, and are shaped by, hopes for bodies now.

Yong participates in a discourse of bodily resurrection that claims the continuity of particularity through the transformation of resurrection. Physical disabilities cannot be deleted from a subject without radically changing the subject; likewise, cognitive disabilities cannot be removed from a subject, as if they are an unfortunate add-on to an otherwise fully functioning subject. Eschatological hope in the erasure of disability particularity risks hoping that someone will be someone else altogether. Transformation might then become the replacement of one subject with another. Frances Young speaks of her son with severe cognitive disabilities,

There is no “ideal Arthur” somehow trapped in this damaged physical casing. ... I find it impossible to envisage what it would mean for him to be “healed”

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276 Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disability in Late Modernity (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007).
because what personality there is is so much part of him as he is, with all his limitations. “Healed” he would be a different person.\footnote{277 Yong, \textit{Down Syndrome}, 269; Frances Margaret Young, \textit{Face to Face: A Narrative Essay in the Theology of Suffering}, (London: T & T Clark, 1990), 61-62.}

Accordingly, this theological hope anticipates that resurrected bodies might retain some particularity of subject, while bodies and their disabilities are transformed into the body of Christ in the kingdom of God. In a grammar that reflects the practice of naming God by how God is not like limited creation, Yong argues that life in heaven will not be governed by the exclusion of differences but will display the perfection of the embrace of differences.\footnote{278 Yong, \textit{Down Syndrome}, 291.}

Objections to Yong’s arguments about the resurrection of bodies include concerns that an emphasis on continued particularity means an insufficient appreciation of the difficulties and pains of disabilities now and an insufficient appreciation of the benefits of medical and, ultimately, divine healing. I am grateful to Ryan Mullins for articulating three unfortunate misunderstandings of the Amos Yong argument in a set of questions similar to the puzzles the teachers of the temple posed to Jesus: If Yong is right, 1) will surgery to correct disability erase subjectivity particularity?; 2) will pain with continue along with disability through the transformation of resurrection; 3) if an otherwise healthy adult is severely injured in an accident, will the healthy or the disabled person be resurrected?\footnote{279 “Some Difficulties for Amos Yong’s Disability Theology of the Resurrection,” at “Theology, Aesthetics, and Culture: Conversations with the Work of David Brown,” University of St. Andrews, Sept 6-8, 2010.}
As I have been claiming throughout this project, eternal life with God in Christ remains beyond what we can imagine; and the specifics of how God heals, resurrects, preserves, and transforms bodies remains impossible for humans to imagine. And, just as I do not accept that faithful speculation about heaven denies the possibility of caring for creation, I do not accept that hoping for some eschatological (unimaginable) continuity of bodily particularity denies the possibility of appreciating the pain of people with disabilities now. I am arguing that the opposite is the case. Small gestures and long-term commitments of friendship both reflect and suggest a heavenly reconciliation of difference, in hope. The ecclesial practices of Good Samaritan United Methodist Church, and the practices of daily life performed by members of L'Arche communities witness to ways that less-disabled people might be included into the lives and hopes of people with disabilities—in these bodies and in the transformed bodies of the resurrection.

### 4.3.2 Feminist Theory and Hopes for Subjectivity

Some recent feminist theorists explore ramifications of dependent and transcendent relationships outside the canonical priorities of gender equality, self-knowledge, and the stability of identity. These explorations are as unsettling to 20th/21st century feminism as they are to contemporary Christianity; yet the same explorations that unsettle may also provoke Christian theology to reevaluate some of its foundations for hope. Theologians of hope might learn from these theorists by investigating the ways that hope is tied to ideological constructions of gender and identity, as well as the ways that Christian identity is defined as membership in the body of Christ. Attention to the fluidity and dependence of individuals may resonate
with some pre-modern understandings of the transcendent human flourishing, discipleship, reconciliation of theological hope.

Luce Irigaray and Judith Butler each examine the limitations for identity and self-knowledge, from within their (overlapping) psychoanalytic, philosophical, political, and feminist theory discourses. Their proposals about possibilities of self-narration, self-imagining, and relationships-in-difference feature the role of human and transcendent others/otherness. While Irigaray and Butler do not write from or for Christian theology, they present insights that challenge some presuppositions of contemporary theologies of hope and might remind Christians of traditions of theological hope that have faded from view. In particular, they offer analyses of the subject that could help Christian theologians recast the identity of the one who hopes and the character of hope in terms that both resonate with pre-modern understandings and suggest reconfigured embodiments of hope today.

4.3.2.1 Luce Irigaray and the Possibilities of Autonomous Subjectivity

Irigaray’s writing did not make much of an impact in the United States until a significant portion of her work had been translated into English. Now that her previous work has been translated and her ongoing work is promptly available in English, Irigaray is classified in the subset of Continental, complicated, contrary feminist theory. Her earlier work is generally received as supporting constructions of the feminine that allow for lesbian love and for women’s relationships outside of masculine subsumption. Her explorations of sexual difference that seem to essentialize sexual difference and undermine challenges to heterosexual normativity have met with a more mixed response. Even more unsettling are her writing that
address sexual difference and the divine. Elizabeth Grosz, in 1993, observes that Irigaray's interest in the divine greatly frustrates those who have worked to free women from the oppression of religion.

Irigaray's recent writings on the divine have evoked shock, outrage, disappointment, and mystification in her readers. To many, she seems to have succumbed to the most naive essentialist reliance on religion to overcome or to provide solutions for women's socio-political and psychical oppression.280

One defense of Irigaray could point to her life-long commitment to European politics, which demonstrates no decline in commitment to the social circumstances of women. Another might note that Irigaray has never shaped her work to cohere with the priorities and imaginations of American feminism. Grosz explains Irigaray's explorations of the transcendent as one strategy among many to open up space for women's autonomy, for women's identity not established as the other of the one, true, masculine, identity of man and God.281

When Luce Irigaray considers women's subjectivity and desire in connection with gender difference, she is not attempting to reinscribe first wave feminist essentialism. She makes no universal claims about biological or social difference. She is interested in difference and in relation; relationships between men and women capture her attention because of the ways those relationships demonstrate both difference and relation. She recognizes the constructed nature of gender difference, yet she does not claim that that construction in any way diminishes or erases difference: gender difference is real. (One could argue that this claim also critiques


281 Grosz, “Irigaray,” 214.
the assumption that constructions are somehow not real.) Attempts to redress gender difference through inclusion or universalism tend to erase and deny real difference, and what remains is the primary — masculine — gender, leaving no possibility of feminine subjectivity. As the subject, men share their identity with the Subject, the divine, who is necessarily masculine in the dominant system of identity relations. Women are defined as the other to men; there is no possibility of woman except as a nurturer and shadow, except as not-man. Women are thus marked as objects, regardless of what they do. Women cannot obtain subjectivity (the one, masculine subjectivity) by grasping for it; women’s own subjectivity becomes impossible to imagine; and there is no connection between women and the masculine divine Subject.

When Irigaray explores transcendence and God, she is not advocating a return to the patriarchal oppressions of Christian ideology and institution feminists have been resisting for decades. Nor does her return to the divine [earlier and on different terms from the much hailed recent turn to religion throughout a broader swath of philosophical and psychoanalytic theory] indicate an adoption of Christian identity.\footnote{Grosz, “Irigaray,” 214.} Irigaray argues for the necessity of the divine feminine, the non-masculine Subject, in order to establish the possibility of a woman subject. Elizabeth Grosz explains that Irigaray is interested in the divine as part of her interest in creating an ideal self-image for women.\footnote{Grosz, “Irigaray,” 202.} The God to which she refers is a vaguely Judeo-
Christian God, as claimed in the symbolic and metaphorical grammar of her version of neo/post-Lacanian psychoanalytic theory.

In this exploration of bodies and difference, Irigaray notes that God provides the basis for identity; the type of God allows for the type of human, which to date has been masculine.

Man can exist because God helps him to define his genre, to situate himself as a finite being in relation to the infinite.... To set up a genre, a God is needed.... Man did not let himself be defined by another genre: feminine. His only God was to correspond to the human type which we know is not neutral as far as the difference of sex goes.²⁸⁴

With out their own God to define the genre of their existence, women cannot exist, communicate, or become.²⁸⁵ Irigaray’s use of the language of God here reflects something of a merging of Feuerbachian and psychoanalytic understandings of the divine.²⁸⁶ God provides the image for constructing a subjectivity of position, an identity not subsumed by another before it can be named. This God does not act in the lives of humans, but establishes the possibility of human existence. Grosz describes Irigaray’s concept of God:

God represents being positioned in a place: social, natural, interpersonal. God, then, is not a personage regulating, governing, or judging these positions nor one’s mode of occupying them. God is a name to describe the possibilities of awareness, and transcendence, of these positions.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁷ Grosz, “Irigaray,” 205.
Irigaray does not use a language of hope in this discussion of the divine, but she could be interpreted to be naming hope as the desire for subjectivity, for the possibility of identity in difference. Her account names God as the means of transcendence, the way to imagine — and therefore claim — subjectivity.

Irigaray suggests that Christianity might be a model of human/divine identity worthy of attention. She sees in Christianity “the respect for the incarnation of all bodies (men’s and women’s) as potentially divine: nothing more or less than each man and each woman being virtually gods.” The virtual divinity of women with a feminine god establishes the possibility for truly autonomous subjectivity. The fact that this presentation of divine incarnation overlaps little with most Christian theology of Jesus Christ — incarnate, wholly divine and wholly human — or of humans, sin, and the life of redemption and resurrection matters little for Irigaray’s purposes. She is tapping into available symbols and using them to the end of creating space for women. The imaginary creates possibilities for change.

Irigaray often describes identity as fluid, unstable, touching itself. If these images seem contradicted by the real gender difference of divinely constructed subjects, that might be because Irigaray is not building a manifesto of the feminine.

288 Grosz, “Irigaray,” 204.

289 Amy Hollywood critiques Irigaray’s argument about the divine feminine and female subjectivity in, Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002. See in particular: 217-219, on Irigaray’s reliance on Feuerbach. While I agree with Hollywood on this point, I would also argue that Irigaray’s heavy emphasis on autonomous subjectivity in this argument reflects her practice of strategic shifts in emphases for specific arguments. In this case, she is working to create a possibility for identity that otherwise appears impossible, by shifting one dependence (on a subjectivity-denying masculine identity) toward another, subjectivity-granting feminine divine identity.
She is acutely aware of the power, limitations, and possibilities of language, and she stretches and disrupts images in order to imagine changes that otherwise seem impossible. The divine feminine is one strategy to empower women to find and claim subjectivity outside the power structures that determine and sustain dominant masculine subjectivity.

Whether or not Irigaray’s strategy accomplishes the subjectivity she hopes for, a contemporary theology of hope might consider what power structures are determining and sustaining the subjectivities of those who hope and the content of their hopes. Persuasive images of the person who hopes abound, and Christian theological discernment about which images reflect and support Christ-like identities may not be making such a strong impression. Variation and conflict within Christian theological discernment about the character and image of Christ-like identity complicate the topic further. In order to recognize and share distinctly Christian hope, subjects who hope need ways to imagine subjectivity in Christ differently from and in relation to subjectivity in civic responsibility, patriotism, gender construction, and fiscal solvency. Subjects who hope in Christ through and beyond this life need ways to narrate a certainty and continuity of identity that engages with, without depending on, conflicting social, political, and economic constructions.

Irigaray finds the means for subjectivity freed from subjugation by looking to (constructing) a feminine divine. If divine identity provides hope for humans in need of liberating identities, in the narrative of a non-Christian theorist, how much more should Christians remember that liberating identity comes through the participation
in and imitation of Jesus Christ. Irigaray’s strategy of creating the possibility of an evidently impossible, culture-resisting subjectivity challenges Christian theologies of hope to develop strategies for discerning and embodying the possibility of an evidently impossible, culture-resisting subjectivity of eschatological hope in Christ.

4.3.2.2 Judith Butler and the Impossibility of Autonomous Subjectivity

Judith Butler has questioned norms of masculinity and heterosexuality, opening up possibilities for gendered identity much appreciated by feminists and non-heterosexually-identified women and men. She has also questioned the categories of gender itself, challenging the very identities she was perceived as having made possible earlier. Butler describes some of the shifts mentioned above in Irigaray’s work, and how she understood and participated in the transitions of French feminist theory, as a young American scholar. She notes the thrill of discovering a discourse of gender that name the relationship between sexual difference and language. With the claim that sexual difference and its culture produce the conditions for language came with an awareness that “the possibility of communication itself” depends on the terms of the operating system of gender difference.

To understand the exhilaration of this theory for those who were working with it, and for those who still do, one has to understand the sea-change that took place when feminist studies turned from being the analysis of “images” of women in this or that disciple or sphere of life to being an analysis of sexual difference at the foundation of cultural and human communicability. Suddenly, we were fundamental. Suddenly, no human science could proceed without us.290

As Butler participated in this sea-change, she began to ask questions that challenge both heterosexual normativity and the developing normativity of feminist claims about cultural production. In *Gender Trouble*, she considers whether butch and femme relationships simply reproduce heterosexual relationships in different bodies.\(^{291}\) Does the symbolic inscribe an alternative, but equally restraining framework for identity? Butler looks at drag culture as a way to question assumptions about real and false gender performance.\(^{292}\) She proposes that these questions about what can and cannot be imagined pertain directly to the pressing physical needs of real people for real survival.

> [T]here is a normative aspiration here, and it has to do with the ability to live and breathe and move and would no doubt belong somewhere in what is called a philosophy of freedom. The thought of a possible life is only an indulgence for those who already know themselves to be possible. For those who are still looking to become possible, possibility is a necessity.\(^{293}\)

Butler’s work since *Gender Trouble* continues to consider the necessity of possible life and the practices that fund possibility. After further engagement with Butler, I will argue that a theology of hope could benefit from adopting a call to address the necessity of possible life and the practices that fund possibility.

Butler’s *Undoing Gender* is a collection of essays that follows *Gender Trouble* and continues her critical explorations of gender norms. In *Undoing Gender*, she wonders if the “I” comes before or after sexuality,\(^{294}\) leading a discussion that affirms  

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\(^{292}\) Butler, *Undoing*, 219, describing *Gender Trouble*.


\(^{294}\) Butler, *Undoing*, 16.
Foucault’s claims about the inseparable relationship between knowledge and power. Any narrative of knowledge — including self-knowledge — depends on the systems of power that supply and constitute knowledge.\textsuperscript{295} In the first essay, “Beyond Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy,” she argues that the “I” is more vulnerable, and less contained, than it is generally comfortable to imagine. These are the issues she focusses on in \textit{Giving an Account of Oneself};\textsuperscript{296} in which she asserts the impossibility of complete self-knowledge and self-narration and how recognition of that human condition grounds the possibility of moral action.

Butler draws a picture of the “I” who comes to self-knowledge through self-narration. Contrary to common assumptions of subjectivity, the “I’s” knowledge can only be partial, and it can only be narrated — incompletely — through interaction with others. One cannot access the beginnings or endings of self-narration, and the process of narration only begins in response to another. An individual other who prompts one’s narrating and one’s context of social norms and regulations initiate and shape one’s narrative possibilities; one becomes a subject in the process of self-narrating.

One criticism of this theory of limited self-knowledge and dependent, partial self-narration charges that it embodies irresponsibility and inhibits moral action. Such a criticism makes sense within a construction of the “I” that assumes autonomy, self-awareness, and independent self-narration, in which the “I” decides who to be,

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\textsuperscript{295} Butler, \textit{Undoing}, 27,
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\textsuperscript{296} Judith Butler, \textit{Giving an Account of Oneself} (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2005). The book was originally the Spinoza Lectures that Butler gave for the Department of Philosophy at the University of Amsterdam, in 2002.
\end{flushright}
what to do, and how to do it, based on individual (self-) determination. Accordingly, someone without access to autonomous individuality, knowledge, and narration, lacks the capacity for ethically choosing and willing right action. Butler names the challenge: “Does the postulation of a subject who is not self-grounding, that is, whose conditions of emergence can never fully be accounted for, undermine the possibility of responsibility and, in particular, of giving an account of oneself?”

Echoes of this question might arise in legal discussions about whether children and mentally handicapped persons are culpable for their actions. Similarly, murderers sometimes receive lessened sentences if they are determined to have committed the murder in a temporary state of diminished mental capacity. These legal scenarios illustrate the presuppositions Butler identifies: subjectivity precedes moral action; adequate self-knowledge and self-narration are prerequisites for responsible behavior. She continues: “If it is really true that we are, as it were, divided, ungrounded, or incoherent from the start, will it be impossible to ground a notion of personal or social responsibility?”

Butler’s answer to both questions is, “No,” and she presents the reverse — the presence of a prior morality allows for the possibility of the subject and agency — through an examination of the personal relationships and power systems that participate in the self-narration of the “I.” The claim that full, autonomous, self-knowledge is possible and can be narrated in completion reflects a presumption of disembodiedness, or perhaps of identity not dependent on embodiedness. In order


to give an account of one’s own beginnings, one’s boundaries and borders, and one’s knowledge, one would need an eye-in-the-sky view of one’s own body — the capacity to be in and out of oneself at the same time. That multi-positioned identity is impossible and unnarratable (unless one has an infinite number of perspectives, each situated beyond the previous); but it is a familiar foundational myth of identity and agency. Butler argues for identities and narrations fully attached to bodies, and that means accepting the limitations of bodily capacities.299

Butler’s reminder of the limitations of self knowledge and the necessity of interdependent and incompletable narratives of identity suggest possibilities for non-cognitive considerations of hope, as well as cognitive delusions of knowledge and hope. If no individual can fully know herself or narrate her identity, then the difference between the cognitive limitations to hope of people with mental handicaps and those of people who do not consider themselves to be mentally handicapped would be one of scale, rather than category. And no one would be able to claim for their own the fullness of the knowledge of hope. The theological hope of someone with severe cognitive limitations would be constructed by the shared presence, care, and friendship of others—as would be the case for those without severe cognitive limitations. The absence of theological hope in and for someone with severe cognitive limitations might be caused by abandonment and alienation, when no such friends are present. And contributions to the possibility of theological hope where there seems to be none could take the shape of friendships between otherwise divided by cognitive capacity. Eschatological hope is for the reconciliation

299 Butler, Account, 38ff, 81ff, 111.
of God with creation, and creatures with each other. Christians who strive for reconciliation with each other in spite of capacity-difference witness to a hope greater than cognitive reasoning and broader than individual self-narration.

Irigaray and Butler explore possibilities for subjectivity beyond the familiar—if deceptive—comforts of individuality enmeshed in ideologies of autonomy. Irigaray imagines a feminine divine that might help women discover and claim an identity not defined by the masculine, the masculine God, and the perpetuation of both. The feminine divine offers a distinct identity that is inconceivable within the dualism of masculine and feminism, which is actually the same of the masculine. Butler discounts the knowability and narratability of the I, apart from relationships of self-narration, and even then, self-knowledge and self-narrative can never be fully attained. Both Irigaray and Butler look beyond the body while at the same time resisting the normative dismissal of (women's) bodily particularity and limitation.

This complex imagination of subjectivity might raise some questions for Christian theological hope about the subject who hopes and the subjectivity one hopes for. Neither Irigaray nor Butler asserts any commitment or investment in Christianity. If Irigaray argues that the divine is necessary for human subjectivity, a Christian theology of hope might want to review what it claims is necessary for human subjectivity. Theological hope based solely on the creation of humans in God’s image can lean heavily on the character of humans as created (with or without attention to subsequent affects of sin and brokenness). The end of hope for humans may then settle for an enhanced version of humans as created, without turning to the
image of subjectivity given by God in Jesus Christ, who demonstrates and effects the fulfillment of human identity.

Complementarily, Butler’s reminder that individual bodies are not, by themselves, capable of knowing themselves or telling their own stories, challenges a theology of hope to remember that the fulfillment of eschatological hope is completed membership in the body of Christ — with all the other members of that body. Daily life that reflects that hope acknowledges ultimate interdependence by accepting and embracing the limitations of human autonomy and the necessity of mutually dependent relationships for knowing and narrating any one particular life.

4.3.3 Subjects and their Hope: Unorthodox Feminist Theology

Some feminist theologians who appreciate the kind of work Irigaray and Butler engage in also share with Irigaray and Butler an interest in examining the structures that have been supporting their discourses. These feminist theologians consider contemporary feminist orthodoxies alongside reconsiderations of classical Christian doctrines. Their method provokes theologies of hope to construct narratives and performances of hope from a broad range of theological resources, with sharpened discernment.

Feminist theologians who are reconsidering the orthodoxies of their discourse and proposing alternative constructions offer theologies of hope windows for reconsidering the relevance of submission, freedom, and flourishing bodies. A theology of hope influenced by this family of feminist theology might gain a renewed critical access to earlier the identity and practices of the people of hope and the nature and end of their hope.
4.3.3.1 Challenging Orthodoxies

While feminist theologians continue to call for renewed critical analysis of Christianity’s well-established cultural assumptions and strategies, Susan Frank Parsons calls for feminist theology to reconsider its own commitments. She asks feminist theologians to “think anew in what is our hope,”\textsuperscript{300} and to reconsider some of the tenets on which feminist theology has come to rely most comfortably. Parsons asks for this unsettling self-examination as a way of challenging that which has become orthodox to feminist theologians, and in an attempt to highlight grounds for hope. Feminists’ reputation as revolutionary, disruptive, and creative does not free them from the risk of establishing their own orthodoxies, both implicit and explicit. Parsons reminds feminist theologians to attend to these orthodoxies with an ongoing readiness to revise and reclaim intentionally.

Challenging women’s orthodoxies in the context of faith is a moment for such speaking in hope, for attending to the beginning and end of faith, a moment in which there is a turning to reflect upon the established orthodoxies of what have become feminisms and feminist theologies, and a turning into new forms of discourse that become challenging orthodoxies for our time.\textsuperscript{301}

Parsons embraces two senses of “challenging”: she urges feminist theologians to challenge cultural orthodoxies with critical theological engagement; and she acknowledges that these revised orthodoxies will present challenges, requiring self-criticism, creativity, and patience.


\textsuperscript{301} Parsons, “Accounting,” 4.
The examination and clarification of orthodoxies matters, not because orthodoxies are inherently bad (they are necessary and potentially very good), but because *uncritical* reliance on orthodoxies, ideologies, and social structures encourages idolatry: disordered lives and misplaced hope. Theology reminds us that we are all prone to idolatry, and feminist theology consistently names the idolatries of patriarchy, racism, heterosexism, classism, and colonialism, that permeate culture and the church. Through the identification of idolatry, feminist theologians work to redirect discourse, worship, and community life away from idolatrous orthodoxies and toward rightly ordered relationships with God and each other. Tanner notes that this process includes continually reconsidering that which appears to be normative.

In short, by doing what theologians usually do — rethinking for themselves the meaning and organization of the cultural materials with which Christian theologians work — feminist theologians contest the cultural hegemony of patriarchal forms of theological discourse on the way to constructing new theologies for a new set of interpersonal relations, in which women are finally to be granted their full humanity. 302

Feminists are as subject to ideological blinders as anyone. While feminists’ cultural and critical challenges to the oppressive orthodoxies of theology have certainly not yet transformed Christianity and the world, some of their arguments are gaining familiarity and credence outside self-defined feminist circles — while at the same time becoming orthodoxies within feminism. Parsons identifies the topic of “hope” as a touchstone for assessing the value of these feminist orthodoxies and the resources they offer feminist theology. Tanner aims to revise the particular forms of

anthropology and Christianity that feminist theologians have come to lean on as orthodoxy; Parsons urges us to revise some of the secularly-informed orthodoxies of feminist theology.

Linda Woodhead goes so far as to suggest that there is little Christian hope to be found in feminism at all: “[Feminists] may indeed tell us new and important things about how religion has oppressed women, but their scattered attempts to tell us new and important things about God and about life lived in relation to God are rather less successful.” Woodhead criticizes feminist theology for “abandoning the central tenets of faith as the revelation of God in Christ.” Woodhead’s corrective looks for balance by subjecting cultural claims to the authority of Christian tenets. Woodhead’s critique lacks clarity, nuance (feminist discourses provide extensive and carefully constructed analyses of oppression, and much more), and perhaps charity. She does, however, hold feminist theology accountable to its relationship to broader discourses of theology; and she illustrates with her critique that the particulars of cultural embeddedness shape theology. It is not possible to shed that embeddedness, but attempts to clarify and claim location may help feminist theology to challenge theological orthodoxes, both long-standing and more recently established. That clarification may in turn challenge theologies of hope to notice and articulate some of their own orthodoxies.


305 Of course, there are feminists who find that all of Christianity’s orthodoxies are in need of correction or dismissal, but I assume that they are not interested in this conversation.
4.3.3.2 The Orthodoxy of the Free Subject

For most of its existence as a recognized field of study, feminism has tended to focus on the needs and desires of individuals, as defined in terms consonant with secular culture accounts of identity. Christian feminist theologians have drawn connections between these aims and scriptural texts and themes, focusing especially on the deprivation of freedom for those who are not independent, successful, effective men. Christian and secular feminists alike share the goals of listening to the voices of the silenced, relieving the suffering of the oppressed, and redistributing goods and power. Feminist theologians attend to the dispossessed and to restructuring societies with a view toward honoring the humanity of all people, in order to correct the abusive practices and to bear hopeful witness to God’s will for harmonious and liberative community life. At the same time, this focus reflects a construction of identity particular to a one set of views about personhood, which set does not always connect with the sets of Christian teaching about personhood, or with the sets of ongoing analyses of subjectivity (illustrated by Irigaray and Butler). As feminist theologians continue to challenge the perversion of Christian subjectivity, evident in preferential and abusive ideologies of race, sexuality, class, and gender, they might also continue to examine theologies of personhood. For example, when feminist theologians espouse lifting individuals up to their full humanity, responding to natural needs and desires, and seeking universal and essential rights for everyone all, they frequently rely on an understanding of identity as if it were a package, provided and communicated by God. Here, the ideal human identity of the enlightened, egalitarianly-directed, secular world appears to overlap with a vaguely
Christian view that God wants the best for everybody and therefore creates for everyone a potentially free and liberated identity. According to this view, identities are divinely prearranged and can receive them and live them out faithfully, or not, depending on social and individual particulars. The goal is to help others receive and fulfill their designated identities by redressing inhibiting institutional structures and by championing the virtue of non-idolatrous personhood, personhood that lives out its God-given identity. \(^{306}\) Hope, then, rests on the removal of limitations and the freedom of the subject.

Such an account of identity rests on premises that feminist theorists and Christian theologians alike have questioned. The former critique calls attention to the social constructions of identity that cannot be put on or taken off, but which are embedded in systemic ideology. The latter highlights the distinctive character of freedom in Christ. Parsons notes that gendered thinking does not begin at some point after having already received or developed a more generic sense of self; rather, what and how one thinks about ourselves is already gendered thinking. One might pose a complementary christological critique, noting that people are not persons first and Christians later; rather, the very possibility of personhood is shaped in and through Christ. Gender is not something received at beginning, and then repeated through the expression of identity throughout life, but only one factor in the imagination and performance of beginnings, middles, and ends. There is no identity apart from that created by the triune God; no coexisting collection of “givens” alongside God and God’s gifts. Freedom is then more a matter of freedom to

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participate in identity and relationships in particular ways, rather than freedom from social constructs and oppression.

This understanding of identity in no way diminishes the urgent needs of those suffering from violence, marginalization, desperate need, and gender inequality. The challenge for feminist theology is to articulate what about its liberative efforts reflects a distinctly Christian identity. For example, one might ask about the relation between a Christ-shaped personhood, gender, and hopes for identities that embody both, without oppression, or, “What is the hope of Christian subjects, when subjectivity reflects some recent feminist theory and not so recent Christian doctrine?” In her discussion of a language for hope, Parsons connects a theology of grace with gender theory to suggest a subjectivity in Christ:

Being found in Christ opens up the subject to live in grace, to be revealed as the glory of one made to be godly in an utter generosity of spirit, that puts away the old ways of thinking and brings in the new. The possibility for grace, and thus the place in which hope for a turn from the old to the new, from death to life can be spoken, is what Christian ethics in every age must find a way of saying. Today that demand comes from within gender theory, as it uncovers the ways in which we are subjected and looks for the saying in which that condition is turned into hope.  

Thus the basis for personhood — and the basis for hope — can rest on ongoing interpretations of life in Christ.

Mary McClintock Fulkerson contributes to discourses of subjectivity the importance of the location of subjects. She points to particular communities and the dynamics of those communities that help structure the dynamics of subjectivity. Many feminist constructions of the subject work for more women to be included in the subject position of dominant power structures, as (masculine identified) subjects.

Parson, Ethics, 164
Fulkerson observes that there is more to subjectivity than inclusion in previously identified male subject positions. She considers some communities of Presbyterian and Pentacostal women, observing the subject positions the women take that do not necessarily fit in the domination or submissive positions of subjectivity assumed.

There is no pre-linguistic, no stable, universally recognizable location of a subject. The experience of one’s location depends on the narrative of the community, how it describes and performs what its locations mean. Similarly, the experience of oppression is not the same across the board; careful attention to the identification of women’s social locations and circumstances of oppression, can help keep focus on the ways their subjectivity functions more satisfactorily, powerfully, or faithfully, than we might imagine.

Fulkerson points out that the positions of subjects are completely dependent on community relationships, and these relationships are not stable, but always in flux. The subjects who make up the body of Christ are destabilized subjects in flux. When feminist theology maps these destabilized subjects and relationships on a (likewise fluxuating) graph of life in the cross, possibilities for subjectivity locations appear that might otherwise be obscured.

4.3.3.3 Unorthodox Agents of Hope

Feminists know well the value of learning to become independent, self-possessed, and empowered agents in the world, taking on roles of public leadership previously denied to women, and casting aside assumptions about the natural weakness of women’s bodies and minds. Christians know well that servanthood, obedience, and suffering characterize much of discipleship activity, as described
throughout the life of the church. Kerry Ramsay takes up the challenge of holding canonically feminist activity accountable to theological authority when she asks if feminists might be able to reconstruct a theology of the cross. Feminist theologians have worked to undermine those traditional theologies of the cross which have perpetrated and perpetuated oppressive impositions of suffering in the name of Christ. Ramsay notes appreciatively how feminist theologians have criticized how the suffering servant is used to claim that suffering is good in and of itself, or that abused wives should submit to more abuse on the model of Christ’s suffering. Ramsay notes appreciatively how feminist theologians have criticized how the suffering servant is used to claim that suffering is good in and of itself, or that abused wives should submit to more abuse on the model of Christ’s suffering. Many perverted theological interpretations of suffering result in the perpetuation of women’s suffering, often “seen to be supported and endorsed by a view of Christian love.” In response, feminist theologians have tended to support the elimination of all suffering, across the board; and yet, Christians continues to include Christ’s suffering — and our participation within that suffering — as an entailment of their identity. Ramsay admits that it is risky for feminists to revisit suffering, when so many people still experience theological abuses of the concept and the physical ramifications of those abuses: asking that feminists reclaim suffering might well be asking that they lose their life in order to find it. However, Ramsay takes up this risk, in part to reclaim, rather than avoid, some of the paradoxes of scripture. She affirms Sarah Coakley’s clarification of differences between “abusive suffering and

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308 Ramsey, Losing, 124.

309 Ramsey, Losing, 128.

310 Ramsey, Losing, 122.
empowering pain,” and she endorses Coakely’s call for a reconsideration of Jesus’ vulnerability in relation to gender and agency assumptions. “In rejecting the outworn gender assumption that presumes power and the abuse of power to be a male problem, Coakley identifies the new task of feminist theology as one that is willing to construe forms of weakness or vulnerability as either normatively human or even revelatory of the divine.”

Ramsay is able to risk exploring these provocative claims in large part because of the risk-taking modeled for her by those who have suffered far more deeply than she. Ramsay is a white South African priest, now based in England, who cannot explain, but only marvel at, the response of a black woman in a township outside Natal to a lifetime of suffering. Ramsay visited the elderly woman to administer last rites, while she was working at the Cathedral of the Holy Nativity Piertermaritzburg, in the summer 1993.

Together with an interpreter, a Mothers’ Union worker and a clergyman, we drove twenty kilometers to the smouldering township and eventually abandoned the car on the unmanageable roads. Picking our way past burnt buildings and a police station hidden behind bullet-pierced sandbags, we found our way to the house — newly built. Blind, and in her nineties, the woman told of how she had rebuilt her home three times, buried all her sons and her husband in the struggle. On establishing that I was a white woman training to be a priest, her eyes filled with tears and she said in Zulu: “Now I know that my God and my Redeemer lives. He has saved me, for in my lifetime a white woman has come into my home to bring me healing.”

311 Ramsey, Losing, 129.
312 Ramsey, Losing, 129.
313 Ramsey, Losing, 129.
314 Ramsey, Losing, 133.
Ramsay does not claim the role of (white) savior for herself; nor does she presume to have effected liberation in this woman’s life. Rather, Ramsay takes this unexpected expression of hope as a reminder of the importance of remaining open to scenarios outside familiar expectations — but not outside the Gospel witness to the power of the Cross. She continues:

Thinking about this experience and trying to come to terms with her willingness to conceive of herself as part of another generation’s hope continues to challenge me. A victim of white racism greeted a perpetrator as a sign of hope, found hope at the end of a pain-filled life under the banner of structural violence, and, in it all, identified such an experience with a redeeming God. 315

This dying woman who proclaims God’s presence in an encounter with a perpetrator of her suffering might be modeling for feminist theology unanticipated variations on the feminist themes of active, empowered, independent agency.

With this witness in mind, Ramsay advocates taking up the cross and reclaiming Christ-like suffering. (While Ramsey in no way directly participated in the persecution and murder of South African non-whites, she does not excuse herself from accountability.) She reconsiders the character of suffering, and she warns against the temptation to equate suffering with a privileging of victimization, drawing on Angela West’s description of the romanticization of the scapegoat. 316 Ramsay proposes that we respond to others’ suffering and work through our own suffering, while remembering that God worked through Christ’s suffering in surprising ways. In the process, she provides a means for hope beyond cultural

315 Ramsey, Losing, 133.

concerns about the glorification of suffering (without herself glorifying suffering) and suggests how feminist theology can engage in life lived in relation to God.

The question feminist theology faces in the task of this retrieval is whether we want a world with an essential incapacity for suffering or fateful subjection to suffering, or a willingness to open oneself to be touched, moved, affected by something other than oneself. Above all, we need to ask of ourselves if it is possible to speak of suffering without it leading to martyrdom, abuse, masochism, denigration or further justification for the trivialization of the oppression of women. 317

If the answer is no, if suffering’s full potential is contained in abhorrent negative manifestations, then a Christian theology of the cross represents a perverted identity, clinging to a false hope. If the answer is yes, if there is something redemptive to the accounts of suffering throughout the Old Testament, to Christ’s unique embodiment of suffering, and to the lives of the saints who have witnessed to that suffering — all of which include some degree of hope and trust in God along with their horrific suffering — then feminist theology must struggle with how to reclaim the cross.

Feminist theology critiques the use of Christ’s suffering as a justification for the abuse of women; and it challenges the ease with which those who are not suffering see hope in tragedy. Three discussions meet at the cross here: suffering, tragedy, and dependence. All three terms need complicating and nuance, in order to avoid painting them all with one brush, good or bad. “Suffering” can mean a wide variety of experiences and narrations of those experiences. Wendy Farley notes the importance of resisting with compassion the suffering of injustice and violence, and she counts as inappropriate narrations of suffering as divine punishment, penalty, and

317 Ramsey, Losing, 132.
substitution. Sarah Coakley describes the suffering of pain that led John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila nearer to God. Edward Farley lists the sufferings of vulnerability, benign alienation, ontological alienation, and discontent. The Archbishop’s Council distinguishes between Christ’s reconciling suffering of freedom and the suffering of domestic abuse, which is neither free nor redemptive. Additional sufferings include solidarity with the oppressed, the model of Jesus the Suffering Servant, and suffering for justice. Theology that articulates its language of suffering and its assessment of different sorts of suffering creates possibilities for identifying narratives of suffering that participate in Christ’s suffering on the cross without glorifying suffering in itself or imposing necessary suffering on some while protecting others from suffering.

Tragedy also needs careful narration, and Kathleen Sands challenges the orthodoxy of feminist theology that tragedy is simply a matter of bad winning over the good, such that tragedy is best avoided, along with its victimization;

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hierarchicalism; and natural, divine, and social causes. Sands argues for facing tragedy head on, for recognizing what has been lost and what needs to be recovered. In this context, suffering is neither dismissed, celebrated, nor unattended, but it is understood as a reminder of what to hope for. Tragedy both affects the loss of that memory and hope; and at the same time it enables the revitalization of hope. As a result, feminist theologians might find renewed horizons for hope in the midst of the onslaught of acute suffering in the world today.

Suffering and tragedy are often narrated in feminist theology in relation to problematic understandings of dependence. Feminism often names dependence as a threat to the health, freedom, and subjectivity of women, especially as gendered dependence helps sustain perverse social systems. Feminist theology critiques in particular the endorsement of dependence as necessary (for those already oppressed) and redemptive and the ways that that endorsement draws on theological doctrines of submission, obedience, and service. Sarah Coakley helpfully articulates different sorts of dependence, bearing in mind the holy dependence of contemplation of God, the dependence of torture, and variations in between. She notes that different sorts of dependences always overlap in confusing configurations, but trying to distinguish among them is still important in order to bring to consciousness how easily one fades into another, how the infinitely “subtle” and “obscure” operation of the divine on the dependent creature is entwined with the deepest hopes and fears about family relationships, about sexuality, power and death.323

She names the “absolute dependence” of contemplation; the physical, emotional, and psychological dependences of children; the dependences of prisoners, the tortured,

323 Coakley, Powers, 57.
spouses, lovers, drug users, the sick and the handicapped. She notes the economic
dependence within families and of families on the state or charities. She calls
attention to the dependence of a “failure in critical thinking,” of dealing with events
beyond control, and the dependence of death. By spelling out these distinctions,
Coakley can then avoid the temptation to discount all dependence as unjust suffering
and a tragedy of social malformation, while claiming a specifically Christian narrative
of dependence. She explains that

an “absolute dependence” is indeed at the heart of true human creatureliness
and the contemplative quest. But such right dependence is an elusive goal: the
entanglements with themes of power, hierarchy, sexuality and death are
probably inevitable but also best brought to consciousness; they are an
appropriate reminder that our prayer is enfleshed.

The analysis and evaluation of suffering, tragedy, and dependence opens the door to a
feminist reclaiming of the cross and its hope. Christ’s Passion and death manifests
exquisite suffering, tragedy, and dependence; and Christ’s resurrection redeems
through suffering, reverses — without avoiding — tragedy, and models the absolute
dependence on God of created humanity. Coakley urges feminist theology to
reconsider vulnerability in light of Jesus’ vulnerability, which cannot simply be
explained as weak. It is at least possible that hope in suffering, tragedy, and
dependence might be reconnected with Jesus’ suffering and death, in ways that do
not reinscribe the suppression of women’s thriving, now and in the eschaton.
Feminist theology that engages with this sort of reexamination of orthodoxies may

324 Coakley, Powers, 57–8.
325 Coakley, Powers, 68.
326 Ramsey, Losing, 129.
create renewed narrations of traditional doctrines to contribute to a contemporary theology of hope.

Feminist theology critiques patriarchal structures that limit women’s participation in the life of the church to private piety and supporting roles. The relatively recent acceptance of the ordination of women (in much of the United States) demonstrates efforts to include women in leadership positions in the church. Preaching, presiding at worship, performing sacramental functions are all marks of visibly active and uncoerced agency—agency that for centuries was chiefly exercised by men. Now that ordination is possible for women in a number of churches, some of the lay practices of Christian piety seem less important; women who express an interest in more involvement in the life of the church are often asked early on if they would like to be in discernment about ordination. Non-professional roles of ecclesial participation may be criticized as either gender-oppressing (expecting women to cook for a church celebration) or unproductive personal piety (attending mass every day, praying the Rosary). Work toward women’s ordination has had the side effect of diminishing the appreciation of other ecclesial vocations and gifts.

One of the most compelling voices to address the topic of women’s agency in practices of piety is Saba Mahmood, whose anthropological study of the Islamic Piety Movement in Egypt³²⁷ describes women seeking to find and exercise freedom to participate more fully in the piety practices of their faith. Her observations of women geographically and ideologically different context offer Western Christian feminists some insights about women’s agency.

Mahmood challenges feminist presuppositions about agency. She describes a movement of women who want to know more about the texts and teachings of Islam in order to discern ways to continue piety practices in a secularly influenced world. These women — some of them young teenagers, some grandmothers, many in between — are trying to negotiate their ways through the social forces that inhibit their Islamic identities and practices. “The piety activists seek to imbue each of the various spheres of contemporary life with a regulative sensibility that takes its cue from the Islamic theological corpus rather than from modern secular ethics.”

However, they do not perceive or narrate their efforts in terms of patriarchally oppressive submission and the resistance thereof, and this distinction unsettles the comfortable expectations of Western Christian feminist theology. Mahmood’s account of women, agency, and faithful performance suggests complications and contributions for a Christian feminist theologians and theologies of hope.

The women of Islamic reform in Egypt understand practices of piety to be expressions of faith in ever shifting contexts. Mahmood explains that the women she studied do not desire to return to a previous era’s interpretations of women’s participation in faithful practices, but they want to practice piety in performances that cohere with teaching and can be practiced in the world outside the home. They seek variations in performance to continue their participation in secular society, despite the new challenges that such interactions present. Part of this process involves educating women about the virtues that piety practices reflect and

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328 Mahmood, *Politics*, 47.

encourage. She quotes a woman who has been giving classes at mosques for women for several years, in the midst of a lesson about what it means to wear a hijab.

[Y]ou must remember that a lot of [women] wear it as a custom, rather than a religious duty that also entails other responsibilities. ... What we have to do is to educate Moslem women that it is not enough to wear the veil, but that the veil must also lead us to behave in a truly modest manner in our daily lives, a challenge that far exceeds the simple act of donning the veil.\footnote{Mahmood, \textit{Politics}, 50-1.}

Wearing the veil as a practice of piety thus represents neither submission to men nor resistance to participation in the secular world, but the identity of women performing modesty as a crucial part of their Moslem identity. In order to pursue studies at university, for example, young women use their knowledge of the Quran and their time in discussion (and sometimes debate) with other women to develop strategies for practicing piety as university students.

Mahmood presents an account of women claiming agency and action defined radically differently from the definitions standard to Western feminism. She critiques the notion that freedom, independence, and equality on Western feminist’s terms must be the norm by which women’s agency is assessed.

[D]oes a commitment to the ideal of equality in our own lives endow us with the capacity to know what this ideal captures what is or should be fulfilling for everyone else? If it does not, as is surely the case, then I think we need to rethink, with far more humility than we are accustomed to, what feminist politics really means.\footnote{Mahmood, \textit{Politics}, 38.}

She suggests that attention to nonliberal women’s political action might have something to contribute to liberal feminism.\footnote{Mahmood, \textit{Politics}, 39.} I suggest that the nonliberal women’s
actions of theological performance might have something to contribute to liberal
feminist theology and its present and eschatological hopes.

Mahmood calls Western feminists to account for their ready dismissal of
women whose desires for subjectivity agency do not support feminist orthodoxies of
empowerment and freedom from doctrinal directives. “I hope to redress the
profound inability within current feminist political thought to envision valuable
forms of human flourishing outside the bounds of a liberal progressive imaginary.”333
It is difficult for Christian feminist theologians to hope for human flourishing
outside the liberal progressive imaginary, for Egyptian Moslem women, and for
American Christian women. Mahmood’s challenge might also move Christian
feminist theologians to envision human flourishing not only for their Egyptian
sisters, but also for themselves, not entirely bound by the liberal progressive
imaginary of the United States.

Mary McClintock Fulkerson’s work on women’s subjectivity and agency
predates Mahmood’s, and yet much opportunity for subsequent development of her
argument remains. Fulkerson’s Changing the Subject,334 Mahmood’s work on women of
the Egyptian piety movement, and the Parson (et. al.) priority of reconsidering
orthodoxies, held together in conversation, offer rich opportunities for reconfigured
theological hope, and the relationship between eschatological identity and current
practices. Fulkerson observed the community of Presbyterian Women, an
organization within the Presbyterian church, with members throughout the United

333 Mahmood, Politics, 154.
334 Mary McClintock Fulkerson, Changing the Subject: Women’s Discourses and Feminist
Theology (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994).
States. The self-claimed roles of Presbyterian Women in church, domestic, and mission activity, are not those of feminist Christians. Presbyterian Women are white, middle-class, unemployed (they do not have jobs that pay), and decidedly not feminist. They attend to the care and support of their households, their families, and their churches, in ways that feminists have labeled submissive, passive, and patriarchially oppressed. However, Fulkerson argues that Presbyterian Women do not necessarily inhabit the subjection that feminists might assume; the practices of care and discipleship make spaces for subjects with agency and integrity.

Presbyterian Women transgress the constraints that construct their subject positions. In these positions multiple discourses converge — gender, class, race, consumer, nurturer, homemaker, Christian — that are undermined by the contemporary social formation. Presbyterian Women “remake” their subject positions for global accountability. Their indirect targets, in the social formation, are the sicursive processes of patriarchal capitalism that trivialize the home and de-skill that undermine women. More specifically, even while participating in both, they counter the discourses of romantic feminism/”true womanhood” and the rationalist feminism. Their transgressions are not those of liberation feminists. But they are significant productions of pelasurable, agapic, as well as ambiguous places. The places they produce mark off refusals of the patriarchal capitalist negation of the skills of homemaking and world-making.335

Feminist theology could ask if there is any hope for women if women's agency includes some form of service, humility, and submission in Christian discipleship. Rather than setting practices of piety completely aside because of the ways they have been used to suppress women's agency, feminist theology might continue to explore possibilities for the subjectivity and agency of. There may be constructions of Christian discipleship that include some form of service, humility, and submission in the midst of current powers and pressures of church, state, and culture. Fulkerson

335 Fulkerson, Changing, 237.
demonstrates that non-liberal Christian women can negotiate Christ-like economic, institutional, and personal interactions in connection with scripture, teaching, and contemporary cultural criticism to construct subjects of faith who thrive—and who live in theological hope not wholly determined by corrupted, idolatrous systems of oppression. These women model faithful resistance in ways that might spark ongoing investigations and constructions of theological hopes for eschatological subjectivity that shape subjects and their and agency in the midst of shifting and multi-valent contemporary social contexts.

Eschatological hopes might then inspire new ways to worship God in unimposed humility, and to submit to Christ in ways that are undistorted by violence and victimization. In possession of these hopes, feminist theology might discover ways to live out a radical non-identical repetition of Jesus Christ. Feminist theologians might imagine practices of piety shaped by more fluid subjectivities and reconsiderations of pre-modern and as-yet-unarticulated performances of *imitatio Christi*. The challenges remain: how to embody an identity in flux, participating in the conflicting and overlapping practices of 21st century discipleship and feminism; how to witness to eschatological hope in the non-conflictual resurrected body; and how to narrate subjectivity difference in a world that cannot imagine that difference. The possibilities for present and transcendent human thriving in eschatological hope are great.

**4.3.3.5 Conclusion.**

Feminist Theology reconsidered in light of women’s unorthodox claims to subjentity suggests the possibility of an eschatological hope that exceeds the
ideological boundaries of feminism vs fundamentalism and liberated vs unliberated society. Concern about limitations to subjectivity can include the concerns about the limitations born of reactions to other, imposed limitations. And theologies of hope can reach toward subjectivities in Christ determined by ongoing discerments of the continuity and difference of Christian and feminist doctrines.

4.4 Conclusion

Every body lives in the midst of shifting, overlapping communities of space, time, practice, ideology, and narrative. Christian accounts of theological hope cannot stand apart from the accounts of hope in the overlapping communities every body simultaneously inhabits. At the same time, some hopes contradict others, and the particular distinctness of hopes and the formation that supports them can fade to the extent that it is difficult to be true to any of specific hope at all. Discernments about theological hope, made in conversation with and in accountability to Christian community, can be sharpened and clarified with input from resources that challenge familiar assumptions.

Critical accounts of nihilism and indeterminacy remind theologies of hope not to rush to resolve paradox, impossibility, and moments of “perhaps.” Claims about the certainty of hope’s outcomes might temper confidence with humility about the divine source of that certainty. Calls to sit with and live through lament, disability, and tragedy may remind Christianity of the perseverance, patience, and fortitude of hope exemplified in scripture and in faithful lives. Challenges to familiar constructions of subjectivity, self-knowledge, and independence might encourage theologies of hope to reconsider the subjects of hope and the subjectivity hoped for.
eschatologically. And attention to bodies might strengthen theological hope in and for all sorts of bodies and hope for resurrected bodies. And, finally, theologies of hope ready to gain from a variety of resources might begin to lose the embarrassment of Christian particularity and enter into direct dialogue with discourses like the five mentioned here, in the possibility that Christian theological hope might have something to contribute to disciplines and conversations as well.
5. Conclusion

Moltmannian hope is not enough.

In Chapter 1, I described Jürgen Moltmann's future-determined, creation-focused, ideologically-modern, hope in the passible God who has been brought to suffer with humanity by Jesus Christ's suffering and death. I followed the sketch of Moltmann's theological hope with examples of Moltmannian hope and its humanist, this-worldly, hope in the changes that responsible, hopeful, actions can make. In Chapter 2, I noted some of the costs of an exclusive reliance on Moltmannian hope: divine impassibility, Christ's two natures and efficacious death and resurrection, coherent theological grammar and biblical hermeneutics, heaven, ideological breadth, theocentric anthropology, discipleship, and reconciliation.

Chapter 3 considered Patristic and Thomistic presentations of theological hope and twenty-first century treatments of hope from theologians appreciative of a Thomistic systematic theology, in order to correct some Moltmannian misunderstandings and to suggest contemporary applicability of some doctrinal resources set aside. Chapter 4 briefly addressed five contemporary discourses not conventionally considered as resources for theological hope: nihilism, lament, disability theology, feminist theory, and feminist theology.

When the church pays closer attention to extra-Moltmannian streams of theological hope and to further resources within and without Christian theology, it might be able to clarify and sustain a distinctly Christian theological hope through and beyond disaster, despair, suffering, and death. The source of a distinctly Christian theological hope is Jesus Christ, fully human and fully divine Son of the
compassionate, but ever impassible, God. Jesus Christ is the perfect hope, who exemplifies the perfected life of humanity and its eschatological end. Christian theological hope in Jesus Christ participates partially now in the eternal life which is greater than we can ask or imagine.

Now that I have made my arguments, I will finish with two concerns more suited to narrative than to argumentation. One, hope and friendship, recalls the personal story with which I began the Introduction; the other, hope and apocalyptic, wonders about fragility of hope that cannot survive even fictional accounts of the end of the world as we know it. In the Introduction, I told my story of sitting in church with my baby, struggling with depression and unable to make sense of hope preached in the sermon. And I told of my awareness that Charlotte was sitting near me in the back of the church. At the time, I thought of Charlotte as someone who was also struggling, albeit far more than I; but I was not able to see her as a friend. I said “Hello” to her when we crossed paths, but I assumed that we were too different for friendship to be possible. The severity of her mental illness had cost her her marriage, children, home, career, a place to sleep, food to eat, and friends. My illness, while also life-long, was easier to treat, and I had healthcare, a patient and employed husband who could manage to live with me and help with our three children, a house, food, car, and friends. What I did not have was the imagination to consider being friends with someone whom I assumed could not be friends with me the way I liked to have friendships. I was unable to recognize our shared baptism, worship, and physical location; and I thought only of how Charlotte could be my friend.
Several years later, and after much pondering of theological hope, I can report that I am only a little better at making friends, but I am aware that I was mistaken about friendship. I wish that I had had the resources to consider how to be Charlotte’s friend, how to make myself available to her so that she could see me as a potential friend, on her terms. I wish that I had been able to think of friendship as a small and limited mark of hope for eschatological friendships in resurrected bodies not separated by social, medical, and selfish divisions. Friendship with Charlotte would not have brought the world closer to God’s kingdom of friendship, it would not have made a difference in the world; but might have expressed hope in the possibility of participating in the reconciliation effected by Jesus Christ.

I hope that eschatological reconciliation will draw together friends divided by war, economics, race, national boundaries, ecclesial boundaries, abuse, argument, and physical and cognitive differences. I can imagine that church congregations might be able to claim the hopeful priority of reconciling practices of friendship in presence, prayer, formation, and mutual accountability, as anticipatory performances of that eschatological reconciliation. I know that my feelings of alienation from that sermon about hope, and therefore from the community of the church, would have been at least somewhat relieved by gesture of companionship, recognition, and the possibility of friendship. I am convicted to work with my own congregation to find ways to make friends in hope, by learning from those in scripture and in person who demonstrate excellence in friendships in Christ, and by starting with person next to me in the pew.
As for the sermon about hope (and the many I've heard since), I would now ask of preachers that they focus more closely on theological hope and the ways it overlaps with and differs from the non-Christocentric hopes that we hear most about in daily life. I would ask that they consider the possibility that the sermon message of hope may not be accessible or applicable to members of the listening congregation, and the possibility that preached words alone will not teach and share and shape hope. And, I would urge preachers to expand their current canon of resources for theological hope with early church teaching, discourses outside the explicitly defined doctrines of hope, and a renewed consideration of eschatological images.

The issue of eschatological images brings me to the second of my two ending concerns. Earlier, I presented Moltmannian critiques of the Rapture movement exemplified in the *Left Behind* series of popular fiction. I then criticized the Moltmannian tendency to reject all images of eschaton that extend beyond a focus on this earth and its future new creation with God; and I questioned the ease with which anti-apocalyptic Christians dismiss Christians with conflicting accounts of eschatological specifics. I have not yet offered any proposals for reconsidering the contemporary fascination with devastating apocalyptic images. Recent theological books about eschatology and apocalypse abound. My general contribution (apart from the preceding chapters) consists of three suggestions.

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First, I would caution Christians to be charitable about their fellow Christians who interpret the bible differently. The church has survived for over two millennia through disagreement and debate about scripture; the denigration and rejection of other Christians over exegesis and related practices does not befit the body of Christ, especially before opposing family groups have prayed, worshipped, and conversed with each other, with respect. Second, I would note that there are distinctions to be made between people whose eschatological beliefs grow from their ecclesial identity and those whose interest in the Rapture comes from casual novel-reading. To be sure, there are overlaps, but the distinction still pertains. And, third, I whole-heartedly recommend Fred Clark’s treatment of the Left Behind series. For the past eight years Clark has been writing a chapter-by-chapter, close-reading, critical analysis of Left Behind and now Tribulation Force. Clark draws on his knowledge of scripture, his evangelical ecclesiology, his exceptional critical reasoning, and his wit, to illustrate the scriptural, theological, and literary incoherencies of Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. Any church community wondering how to make sense of the Left Behind series would benefit from starting with Clark’s, very accessible, work.

My particular interest in the popular apocalyptic — pop-apocalyptic — imaginary is not so much the validity of expecting a specific sort of end of the world. In appreciation of the biblical cautions that we cannot know such particulars, I challenge the confident presumptions of both the Rapture movement and Moltmannian hope about the particulars of the fulfillment of resurrection. My

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concern pertains to the difficulty anti-apocalyptic and pop-apocalyptic Christians have in imagining a place for eschatological hope in fictional accounts of the end of the world as we know it. When catastrophe hits and the survival of the remaining few depends on quick thought, perseverance, and luck, no one suggests or sustains theological hopes or practices, at least no one who survives the first scene. I am not invested in converting movie makers and novelists to the doctrine of theological hope to which I aspire; but I am worried that Christians might not even notice this lack. If Christians cannot imagine theological hope in fictional accounts of global devastation, the likelihood of sustaining such hope in real-life challenging times seems dim.

Pop-apocalyptic catastrophe as a genre of novel or movie usually involves unprecedented challenge/disruption/change, and then survival, endurance, overcoming all odds, triumphalism, and superheroism. Sometimes there is lost love and requisite revenge or reconciliation. There may be a degree of tragedy, but at a safe distance. In the movie, 2012, the destruction of most of the world happens below, as the main characters fly above, toward the possibility of safety—a possibility that is actually a certainty, since they are the main characters. Sometimes, as in No Country for Old Men, or the book World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War, the dark and twisty tone plays a larger role, but survival is possible for key characters. Often, the catastrophe begins or precedes the story (The Road, The Stand) or launches the plot (2012). Other times, the plot involves impending world-destroying catastrophe, whose arrival has been calculated down to the precise second; and the clock ticks while the heroes perform last minute superhuman feats to save the
These stories fit the pop-apocalyptic genre because they narrate disasters that are unprecedented in the scale and particular method of devastation. Despite their specific differences, these world-altering catastrophes all disrupt not only daily narratives about who we are and what our world is like, but also metanarratives and even the possibility of sustaining a narrative. Perhaps the most realistic character of pop-apocalyptic movies and novels is their display of the experience of one catastrophe on top of another, each outdoing the previous in intensity, scope, ramifications, on an exponentially increasing scale of disaster. New Orleans' hurricane flooding was followed by the trauma of loss and escape, the subsequent inept government assistance, increased burglary and murder, and inaccessible institutional support for rebuilding, all of which crushed what little strength and hope most of the survivors had left. For a country recovering from civil war, a famine and an inundation of starving refugees can undermine all plans to recover a semblance of health and survival. The accumulating catastrophic events of Japan's earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear crisis — unfolding as I write — affect large-scale death and injury; destroy homes and cities, energy production, food production, economics, transportation, education, communication; and drain people of hope. In these catastrophic scenarios, survival is the goal—to survive the unprecedented, beyond-imagination horrible part until life seems possible or plausible again, even if that plausibility requires radically different expectations of life.

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3 I confess that I have read and seen an inordinate number of such catastrophe-themed books and movies. I like to claim that it is a matter of scholarly research.
Whether or not we claim that “it’s the end of the world as we know it,” the feeling that everything has changed now dominates in a catastrophe, leaving the driving question, “How can we survive when everything is changed?”

There are, of course, scriptural examples. Multiple bible stories anticipate the recent catastrophes — real and imagined — of our lives as well as the lives of those who lived between the days of scripture and the 21st century. It does not seem inappropriate to imagine that Adam and Eve experienced some sort of “end of the world as we know it” moment when they were sent forth from the garden of Eden. We might presume that similar thoughts crossed the minds of Noah and his family on the ark. Egypt was a hotbed of catastrophe for a while, between infanticide, plagues, and death by Red-Sea-submersion. The rescued Israelites viewed their salvation into the wilderness as a catastrophe. The destruction of the Temple, the Babylonian exile, Ruth’s loss of husband and both sons, Job’s inexplicable — and untenable — comprehensive loss and suffering, the dreadful circumstances of the faithful described in the Lament psalms. The prophets Zechariah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zephaniah, Isaiah, and Joel describe fantastical apocalyptical scenarios. The Gospels lead us through to the catastrophic death of the Son of God, while Acts and the Epistles narrate post-catastrophe life, rewriting the narrative of life and death in the process.

Beyond scripture, plagues, wars, the War to End all Wars, more wars, terrorism, famines, massacres, oppression, persecution, slavery, floods, fire, and drought; the Holocaust; epidemics of disease, suicide, homicide, and child abuse; bankruptcy, depressions, recessions, revolutions, genocides, peak oil, global warming
— these are all catastrophes that can seem apocalyptic to those experiencing them.

They rain down without relent on humans who expect otherwise from life. It appears that our expectations are unrealistic.

My concern here is not to argue that we should expect apocalyptic catastrophe: they are, by definition, unexpected. Instead, I am concerned that we are all too ready to take the “everything has changed” feeling, the “it’s the end of the world as we know it” feeling, to mean that who we are and how we respond to events should change when our circumstances change. I am further concerned that we assume God is similarly changed by catastrophe.

To be sure, some timely responsiveness is important in the face of change. It’s important for Christians to be alert and discerning, to be sensitive to changes, rather than sticking our heads in the sand. Radical and previously unimagined change can call for radical and previously unimagined changes in the church that reflect and issue forth in faithful, fruitful discipleship. The hidden Christians of Japan sustained a form of the church in secrecy for a couple of centuries, when Christianity was outlawed. The French Huguenot community of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon adopted a new identity as resisters and protectors, when they absorbed 5,000 Jews in their homes for years, protecting them from the Nazis and the Vichy government. Some Christians today dedicate their efforts and their church buildings to provide safety for migrant workers and illegal aliens who face deportation and separation from their families. When hurricane Katrina washed the building of St. Patrick’s in Pass Christian, Mississippi, out to sea, the congregation responded by establishing a local medical clinic. Catastrophic circumstances can lead some people to new vocations,
new opportunities for ministry for those who are suffering and dying. Practices of faithful discernment can help a community keep its identity while changing its activities.

But, Christians in the midst of catastrophe risk translating the feeling that everything has changed into a conviction that everything has changed. And, if everything really has changed, then the practices and identities of Christians may well shift past the point of adaptation into something altogether different.

If everything has changed, then raiding a neighbor’s home for food, stealing an unattended car, and killing people who threaten us all seem more acceptable actions than they would if everything were normal. In the movies, the good guys set aside their previous virtuous inhibitions, and, since we know they are good guys, we readily forgive them for whatever they do in a time of catastrophe. Those who hesitate, those who fail to grasp that catastrophe has changed everything, simply do not survive. Heroes and survivors do what has to be done, even if what has to be done might otherwise be abhorrent, illegal, dishonest, or violent. In a world where the ends justify the means, there’s not much sense in loving your enemy neighbor if it does not lead to your own survival. When Christians don’t question this reasoning, when we accept that the challenges of life together in discipleship become irrelevant in the face of catastrophe, we reveal the misgivings we’ve had all along about caring for others first, and we demonstrate our doubt about eschatological hope. We reduce survival to the delay of death, and we recognize no continuity of God’s relationship with creation through death and into new life.
The movie *2012* skips over most of the complexities of interpersonal relations in catastrophic times. The main characters fly above the dramatic devastation of most of the world, ending up at the centralized location for global rescue—rescue for a selected few. We see that countless people suffer and die, but we don’t see any of the details. We don’t see long term social disruption, the slow suffering of starvation and untreated wounds, the spread of disease and madness. Only so much can happen in two hours, and the storyline focuses on the main characters’ quest for salvation from certain death during a quick countdown to the *real* apocalyptic catastrophe, the possible death of the characters whose names we have learned.

Stephen Baxter, in his recent books *Flood* and *Ark*, uses the extended length of novels to fill out many of the details that are invisible in *2012*. He chronicles the years between 2016 and 2058 during which time the waters of the earth rise unexpectedly and unprecedentedly quickly, until the entire world is covered in water and no more land is visible. This is a near-future science fiction tale of catastrophe on top of catastrophe.

The oceans begin to rise rapidly, all over the earth. Those scientists who suspect that something new and previously unimagined is happening are initially dismissed by global warming experts as global warming deniers. Infighting keeps responsive and responsible leadership from action. The massive and persistent flooding turns out to be something entirely different from the predicted global warming—a different cause and dramatically different results. As land shrinks around the world, people in lower elevations die trying to move to higher ground. The

formerly advantaged populations of London and New York City, for example, spread into the less urban regions to the north of each city, only to find a hostile population of people, angry at the money and effort their countries put into futile attempts to save the cities. Now that there is no more money and no more effective government, the people with higher land shoot and kill to defend their property. In the mountains of South America, indigenous populations reclaim ancient identities and skills and manage to thrive far better than “first world” inhabitants. In some mountainous regions, those who survive the initial stages of the flood claim to be New Covenanters. New Covenanters claim that

[I]f God had broken the Covenant He made with Noah after the Biblical flood... it could only be because humans had broken it first. But, perhaps God wasn't punishing everyone. Surely those who had been wise enough to move to higher ground early were a kind of elect, raised out of the herd of sinners, and had a duty to preserve themselves for a new post-flood age to come. And conversely those who had not been smart enough to prepare showed their weakness as well as their sinfulness. So the high-altitude elect therefore had a holy duty to stay alive and hold onto their ground.  

This pseudo-biblical narrative provides the New Covenanters with a moral justification for culling (killing the increasing numbers of people in rafts trying to land on dry ground). Baxter explores these and many other social developments throughout the book. Long after the leaders of the nations lose their positions of power, long after all emergency plans have been exhausted, long after whole continents have disappeared and cities are marked only the “scum of garbage and boated corpses,” some people still survive. Not surprisingly, the exceptionally wealthy continue to build wealth and influence in the midst of the ever-changing

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5 Baxter, *Flood*, 281.

6 Baxter, *Flood*, 393.
world. But others survive as well, as the world as we knew it becomes a world of raft communities. Meanwhile, a space ship — The Ark — has been launched with a selection of promising young people, sent to find a planet that might become Earth 2. The physical and emotional limitations of many years of space travel parallel the increasing scarcity that defines life on earth as land and resources vanish.

In *Flood*, in 2012, and in most contemporary pop-apocalyptic stories, the goal is to survive. Killing, hoarding, and protecting resources may once have been subject to limitations and rules. Now, killing, hoarding, and protecting resources are necessary for survival. Neither of these stories mentions the particular challenges that Christians might face when the goal of survival conflicts with the practices of Christ-like discipleship. The New Covenanters kill to sustain their identity as the new chosen few. The space ship project rejected as candidates for the Ark any people who claimed any religious or atheistic beliefs, in the interest of avoiding conflict on board. (That strategy proves unsuccessful.) It is hard to imagine that Christians would last very long — as Christians — in any of these stories. Millions of people die, and the survivors don’t have the time or interest to stop and reach out a hand to anyone. Neighbor-love, enemy-love, preferential treatment for the poor, and eschatological hope are all hard enough to sustain in current, familiar life; in unfamiliar life, they seem completely impossible. In a world in which resources are limited by monumental disaster, trying to live communally so that no one is needy seems nostalgically quaint, or dangerously naive.

For those of us not in a movie or novel, the questions remain, “How can Christians narrate life beyond the ultimate goal of earthly survival, without
downplaying or dismissing suffering and death? When survival requires actions
antithetical to the body of Christ, can Christians claim a different survival more
urgent than murder, greed, or selfishness? What does it mean to persevere in the
hope of a constant God, when everything we know about how to be full of hope, how
to be alive, seems to shift far out of control?”

We do have some witnesses to the possibility of such perseverance — those
who exposed themselves to the Plague centuries ago, in order to care for the dying;
those who risk their own lives today while helping others to safety in flood, fire, and
famine. These people remind us that everything has not changed after all, even in
unprecedented catastrophes.

While the witnesses to discipleship in disaster are few, God is constant and
present, even and especially in the face of radical and unimagined change in our
world. God is still God no matter how how high the waters rise. God was God before
the waters were there to rise. God’s greatness, God’s love, God’s compassion pre-date
and post-date our lives, and God does not retreat in the face of catastrophe, no
matter what the scale. God’s son died a painful and humiliating death and did not
strive for survival in this world at any cost.

When catastrophe of any scale strikes us, we can hope to respond with the
hope of the faithful who precede us, prepared to die with Christ instead of clinging
to survival through the rejection of Christ in those suffering around us. However, our
track record is not good. Most of us are all too ready to claim catastrophe status and
then feel released from discipleship practices. When life gets tough, we are quick to
forget the martyrs and eager to shift allegiance from the cross to the lifeboat. In
financial recession, in unemployment, in discouraging moments, and in weary
disappointment, we can easily convince ourselves that tithing, visiting those in
prison, spending time with the dying — these are all extras, luxuries for other times,
when calm prevails and the pressure has eased. If we can't bring ourselves to care for
our neighbors on difficult days, we are unlikely to care for our enemies when the end
of life as we know it comes and it seems that everything has changed. Fortunately,
whether or not we remember, God who is constant in catastrophe and unchanged by
disaster, remains the same. Christ, who did not survive the catastrophe of the cross,
but died to live anew, draws us back into the pain and suffering of true life lived in
the constant love of God. May our hope persevere through the end of the world as
we know it, until the fulfillment of hope in beatitude.
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Biography

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